
Lexicon and Syntax: Development Cooperation through the Lens of Rawlsian Theory of Justice



*Milindo Chakrabarti**

The realization that time-bound achievement of a development target that “leaves no one behind” is a sufficient condition for sustainable development that has brought issue of justice and inequality to a sharp focus the world over. The recent note of Secretary General of United Nations, released on the 20 July 2018, has also highlighted, in the same vein, the need to consider “right to development” as the fundamental plank for strategizing roadmap for future development to take care of the five P’s: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, Partnership. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) call for efforts to achieve sustainable economy, environmental sustainability and peaceful and inclusive societies through sustainable development by 2030. SDG 16 explicitly calls for peace, justice and strong institutions as prerequisites for achieving sustainable development. Quite expectedly, the note emphasizes and recognizes potential contributions of the South-South Cooperation (SSC) “as a complement to other forms of international cooperations for achieving inclusive and sustainable development across the globe” as “traditional forms of North-South Cooperation have proven insufficient to address global development challenges and asymmetries”. These observations open-up the window to initiate a discussion on the extant theories of justice that help link two distinct methods of development cooperation. We would argue that while solidarity

* Managing Editor, DCR and Visiting Fellow at RIS.

based and partnership-centred SSC conforms largely to the Rawlsian theory of justice, ideas contained in the philosophy of aid-based North-South Cooperation corresponds to the one argued by Robert Nozick (1993).

Rawls and Nozick differ fundamentally in terms of relationship between the self and the society. While the former adduces a superior position to the society vis-à-vis the self, Nozick calls for full autonomy to an individual as a prerequisite for delivery of justice. For Rawls, justice is fairness, while for Nozick, “each person’s talents and abilities belong to them. They therefore have a right to keep (or do whatever they want with) whatever these talents and abilities gain for them. To forcibly redistribute what they earn is to fail to respect their autonomy” (Lacewing, undated).

Rawls’ theory is thus premised on the idea that society is a cooperative endeavour in the interest of its individual members, which can be identified prior to our existence in the society. Thus restrictions on the individual behaviour are acceptable only out of individual interests. As others theorizing collective action would put it, individuals engage in collective action and sacrifice “freedom” by putting restrictions on their own individual behaviour if and only if the cost of such a collective action is less than the cost of collective inaction (Ostrom 2004). Thus, we see the creation of social norms, customs, laws and rules that put restrictions on the self-seeking behaviour, but in clear acknowledgement of self-interests.

A society, according to Rawls, is a system of cooperation among its members seeking mutual advantage for one another.

There exist simultaneously conflicts between individual interests that may differ altogether and may have identity of shared interests. Principles of justice should, according to Rawls, ‘define the appropriate distribution of the benefits and burdens of social co-operation’ (Rawls 1999, p. 4). The principle of justice, Rawls thinks, must be ‘the principles that free and rational persons concerned to further their own interests would accept in an initial position of equality as defining the fundamental terms of their association’ (Rawls 1999, p. 19). However, the initial position of the equality that defines the fundamental terms of association lies at the centre of justice, as propounded by Rawls. For him, society is then like a *chain* where the *chain* is as strong as its *weakest link*. To elaborate further, according to Rawlsian conception, justice generally requires that basic social goods – liberty and opportunity, income and wealth, and the bases of self-respect – be equally distributed, unless an unequal distribution is to everyone’s advantage.

SSC may well be argued to have emerged from this particular orientation of justice. A framework of justice as it emerges out of the Rawlsian framework would require that the ‘bases of self-respect’ are equally distributed. Such a realization was kindled by the ravaging impact of colonization on many of the countries constituting the most of Global South today. Analytical deliberations led by the dependency model and centre-periphery model provided further logical strength to the efforts at pursuing justice among the Southern countries. The fundamental guiding principles of the SSC were clearly formalized in the Buenos Aires Plan of Action (BAPA) for Promoting

and Implementing Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries and was endorsed by the General Assembly in 1978 (resolution 33/134). To quote a UN document, the principles emphasize the need to :

“foster the self-reliance of developing countries by enhancing their creative capacity to find solutions to their development problems in keeping with their own aspirations, values and specific needs;

- promote and strengthen collective self-reliance among developing countries through the exchange of experiences; the pooling, sharing and use of their technical and other resources; and the development of their complementary capacities;
- strengthen the capacity of developing countries to identify and analyse together their main development issues and formulate the requisite strategies to address them;
- increase the quantity and enhance the quality of international development cooperation through pooling of capacities to improve effectiveness of the resources devoted to such a cooperation;
- create and strengthen existing technological capacities in the developing countries in order to improve the effectiveness with which such capacities are used and to improve the capacity of developing countries to absorb and adapt technology and skills to meet their specific developmental needs;
- increase and improve communications among developing countries, leading to a greater awareness of common

problems and wider access to available knowledge and experience as well as the creation of new knowledge in tackling development problems;

- recognize and respond to problems and requirements of the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries, small island developing States and countries most seriously affected by, for example, natural disasters and other crises; and
- enable developing countries to achieve a greater degree of participation in international economic activities and to expand international cooperation for development.” (UNOSSC, undated)

A perusal of the guiding principles cited above would clearly indicate the aspiration of the countries belonging to the Global South to ensure the ‘bases of self-respect’ for themselves – a feature that was almost missing in the prevalent structure of the global order – both economic and political – as were manifested by the global institutions like the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, UN Security Council among others. Thus SSC can well be looked at as an effort to ensure Rawlsian justice to the Southern countries at the global stage. SSC aspires to create a world of reduced inequality among nations in terms of certain basic human needs.

The spirit of solidarity as espoused in SSC is well in tune with the Rawlsian premise that the strength of a chain is measured by that of its weakest link. Global prosperity, likewise, is measured by the prosperity of the country that is lagging behind the most. A Rawlsian global welfare function is thus measured by the welfare function of the worst-off

nation. SSC – in terms of its guiding principles – aims at contributing to the welfare of such worst-off nations.

Nozick, on the other hand, argues that individual rights are all that matter and that there is nothing such as a society or community or collective well-being. Following the arguments of a Benthamite social welfare function, global welfare is the sum of individual welfare functions. Nozick, thus calls for enhancement of individual welfare. According to him, “If the world were wholly just, the following inductive definition would exhaustively cover the subject of justice in holdings. (1) A person who acquires a holding in accordance with the principle of justice in acquisition is entitled to that holding. (2) A person who acquires a holding in accordance with the principle of justice in transfer, from someone else entitled to the holding, is entitled to the holding. (3) No one is entitled to a holding except by (repeated) applications of 1 and 2” (Nozick 1974 p: 149, quoted in Schumaker (eds): p:330). Nozick believes that a person’s holdings are just if acquired through (1) just original acquisition or (2) just transfer or (3) through rectification of injustices in the two senses. Such an idea of justice emphasizes the importance of unambiguous allocation of property rights over resources. As long as such ambiguities are taken care of “justice” is considered to have been done. To elaborate:

- “Justice in acquisition” maintains that a person who acquires a holding justly is entitled to that holding.
- According to “justice in transfer,” a person who acquires a holding justly in transfer from another who is entitled to that holding is entitled to that holding.

- Justice in rectification involves past injustices arising from failure to fairly apply the first two principles properly that can be put right, i.e. failure to apply principle (a) or (b) can be rectified using this principle” (Salahuddin, 2018)

NSC, with its initial emphasis on a ‘two gap theory’ and a commitment to transfer 0.7 per cent of GNI through official development assistance (ODA) from the developed world to the developing world, tried to facilitate a semblance of ‘justice in transfer’. The failure to meet the commitment, on the one hand, and the quest for aid effectiveness in the recent times, on the other, may be construed as an effort from the global North to ensure “justice in rectification” through introduction of institutional changes in the Southern world in favour of a set of Global Standard Institutions (GSI) – as named by Chang (2011), which are seen as maximizing market freedom and protecting private property rights most strongly. The recent emphasis on “Triangular Development Cooperation” and the agreement by the Northern countries to contribute to building a world “where no one is left behind” is perhaps a baby step from the Northern nations to embrace the idea of distributive justice, as espoused by Rawls.

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RWANDA SETS UP ITS COOPERATION INITIATIVE

In Late September, President Paul Kagame announced Louis-Antoine Muhire as the Chief Executive Officer to the newly formed Rwanda Cooperation Initiative (RCI). The RCI is a public company under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and East African Community in close collaboration with the Rwanda Governance Board (RGB), the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, that will manage the marketing and commercialization of the country's home grown solutions. It was established by the Government to manage the exchanges of ideas and experiences with other countries in the interest of South to South Cooperation (SSC).

The RCI is about all about solutions by Rwandans that were built on their values and traditions to address specific problems of the nation. Girinka, for example, is a programme that was based on the Rwandan culture of giving cows to friends and is now being used to reduce poverty, by targeting the most vulnerable people in our society. Similarly Ubudehe, another Rwandan home grown solution for a participatory development approach to poverty reduction. Others include the community mediators (Abunzi), the community courts (Gacaca courts) that were instrumental in processing millions of criminal cases that arose following the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, and performance contracts (Imihigo).

RCI aims to become an entity to coordinate SSC cooperation, give demand from countries from Africa who want to see how home grown solutions work in Rwanda and if possible learn about their replication in other countries.

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