

The Unending Southern Romance

The Conference on South-South and Triangular Cooperation organized by RIS in association with its partner institutions in Delhi on 24-25 August 2017 (popularly called as Delhi-3) once again vividly demonstrated an extremely impressive inter-continental presence of countries of the South to renew their growing faith in SSC. The representation of 41 Think-Tanks from the Global South and the diverse range of 74 eminent speakers from the North and the South, together with presence of more than a 250 registered participants, shared their perspectives from diverse standpoints on how to make SSC more effective and work towards the gains of combining it with Triangular Cooperation, bringing in the experience, expertise and assets of North and South for global well being.

Professor Li Xiaoyun, Director, China International Development Research Network in Beijing and Chairman of the Network of Southern Think Tanks, brilliantly summed up the gains of SSC at the event. He said, “Southern countries have started to set up institutions and institutionalize the developmental learning process”. Dwelling on the plurality of approaches of SSC, he added “We can follow any kind of classic model, whether we look classic development economies, whether we look for labour, agriculture, transformation. This is very different. Looking for this experience is very diversifying. Not only India and China but also for small countries, like the recent changes in Ethiopia. And it’s fantastic, this country Ethiopia it’s going to changes, it is

also very unique situation.” Therefore, the tangible gains of SSC have now starting impacting the existing outdated world order and the its collective voice is being heard with respect and to some extent the advocates of traditional paradigms of international development assistance have started putting faith in the concept of ‘partnership’ from ‘client’ or ‘recipient’ members of Global South.

The growing popularity of SSC, to a great extent, reflects increasing sense of disappointment and unease among the developing countries over the lack of fulfillment of aid commitments made by the North, their shifting priorities and focus on unilaterally restricting the movement of people from the South to the North, safeguarding and promoting the interests of their private sector for greater and unrestricted market access in the countries of the South for trade and investment opportunities, and subjecting grant of assistance to undesirable political conditionalities, including so called standards of human rights, disarmament, nature of political governance and so on. They also shared their increasing disappointment with the discussions on the key issues of development financing and fair trade negotiations and practices at the regional and global level not in the spirit of give and take but as a fait accompli as was done by a group of countries in the case of MDGs framework.

Impressed by equal partnership and solidarity based approach of SSC, which is fundamental to their core philosophy,

the countries of the South, therefore, hailed emergence of South-driven initiatives such as IBSA, BRICS, BIMSETC, MERCOSUR, ASEAN, SACU etc. which represent their aspirations for advancement of their legitimate interests in the field of trade, commerce, investment, finance, technology and innovation.

India itself has fortified the spirit of South-South Cooperation by way of leading its cooperation and collaborative endeavors beyond its immediate neighborhood through Pan-Africa e-Network, Mekong-Ganga Cooperation, BIMSTEC, Forum for Indian Pacific Island Cooperation, India-Africa Partnership Summits etc. SSC now a wide spectrum of activities, including trade, finance, economic, social, cultural, environmental and technical issues. The inherent principles of mutual respect, equality between partners, non-conditionality in developmental partnership, mutual benefits of partners, demand driven approach, collective self-reliance for shared growth and development, and recognition of multiplicity of approaches for the execution of mutually agreed projects makes SSC sharply distinct and unique in its overall development approach than that of the North. The success of SSC is testified by the fact that South-South trade as the share of world trade has grown from 8.1% in 1980 to 26.7% in 2010 while the share of North South trade fell from 46% to less than 36% over the same period. Similarly, the share of southern economies in global FDI flows increased 2.5 times from 20% in 1980 to 50% in 2010. These figures once again reflect the significance of South-South solidarity as well as deepening and widening of their role at the global scale. The economies of South are achieving high scales of economic growth and greater quantum of development partnerships. In addition, innovation and entrepreneurship are leading towards greater technological progress as well as the establishment of new firms in the South. These developments are leading South to become the epicenter of dynamic growth and guiding them to contribute significantly in the global value chains. It proves that South-South Cooperation now has greater impact than ever before. Nowadays, non-government organizations, civil society organisation, academic institutions, scientific community, private sector, philanthropic organizations and other non-state actors are also getting intrinsically linked with it making it participatory in character. The United Nations itself is also closely following the

process of South-South and Triangular Cooperation resulting in amazing development of solutions that are taking place in India, Brazil and many other countries.

India itself has offered to share its own amazing initiatives and technical driven solution experiences for digital identity and digital economy with the countries of the South. Similarly, India's experience with LED and energy efficient technologies is also being talked about among many countries of the South for possible replication. In overall terms, the rise of the South is actually changing the global thinking as well as existing structures.

Explaining how important SSC is and how it is changing the world, Mr. Jorge Chediek, Special Envoy of the UN Secretary General on South-South Cooperation and Director of UN Office for SSC in New York candidly acknowledged at the event by saying that "we have to present South-South Cooperation in a way that makes sense to people. It makes sense eminently to us. Now the South is generating its own knowledge and positions". Hailing the contribution of India to SSC, he added "India which is an example for the world that launched the International Solar Alliance, the Asia Africa Growth Corridor, the more trilateral initiatives that are traditionally of the South also participated in the IBSA."

Talking about the capacity of the South to do its own thinking, Ambassador H. S. Puri, Chairperson RIS, said, "We undertook the exercise for the MDGs which resulted in 100s of millions of people being moved away from poverty largely due to China's efforts. But the intellectual thinking for the MDGs was actually done in the OECD. I mean that is the think tank of the industrialized West. The scheme was cooked up there and then brought to the United Nations and many of us, including my own country, which I have represented for so long. We had difficulties with that, not what was in the thing. We had difficulties with the whole approach that you do the intellectual thinking somewhere outside as if you know what is good for us better than what we know. So, that's why we were determined to change when it came to SDGs. And the SDG was an exercise which was bottoms up from all the stakeholders, the member states, the civil society."

However, some advocates of OECD-DAC international development paradigm continue to question the sustainability of South-South Cooperation

in order to undermine its growing cohesiveness. They also characterize their friendly differences of opinion in terms of “mounting tensions” to create a sense of despondency among SSC partners with a view to weakening its growing solidarity, which is giving birth to new democratic and equitable institutions and world order. Similarly, they have characterized the recent border dispute between India and China as “growing political rivalry” between the two countries, without taking cognizance of the fact that the two neighboring countries of the South have demonstrated their capacity to reconcile their differences and diffuse border tensions through dialogue without the assistance of any outside power. Therefore, it is wrong to believe that the Southern countries are incapable of conceiving and establishing durable regional or global institutions, come up with creative solutions to solve their developmental challenges and that it is only the industrialized world that has the monopoly of wisdom in norm setting or institutions building or running them. The emergence of the New Development Bank by BRICS member states has already shown the world the united strength of developing world in creating democratic Southern-friendly global financial institution.

It would not be wrong to think that the unprecedented unity of the countries of the South at Delhi 3 has enhanced hope for emergence of an alternative international development paradigm. They were, to a great degree, also baffled by the fact that the South was not willing to subscribe to their demand for a single definition of SSC

or compartmentalization of its concepts broadly based on the Northern framework. Similarly, the Southern countries preferred to have multiplicity of approaches on the modalities of SSC with regard to its implementation or study of its projects and their impact on beneficiaries. The Conference also disappointed them to get their prescribed conceptual framework for monitoring or evaluation of SSC adopted under SSC ownership. It is because the developing world believes that the wide spectrum of SSC provides unrestricted freedom of action to adopt their own convenient model for promoting connectivity, trade or investment. As far as the development assistance programs of emerging countries are concerned, they enjoy high degree of freedom for the executing of their projects in different countries without having to come under a single umbrella. There are large numbers of examples of successful development assistance programs by some of the leading Southern development assistance providers in many areas respecting each other contribution for the overall growth of SSC.

In overall terms, the recently held Delhi Conference on South South and Triangular Cooperation held in India and the BRICS Summit held in China reinvigorated SSC process and substantially contributed to the global growth trajectory which would help both North and the South. Both these events constitute major building blocks for the accelerated growth of SSC. Therefore, the romance of SSC is turning to be envy of the North and its own romance with the South is seemingly coming to an end.

About the Author



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