


# BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS FOR DEVELOPMENT OF GLOBAL SOUTH



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I am delighted to note that this commemorative volume is being released to celebrate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS). It is a fitting tribute to one of India's leading policy and development research institutions. Over the last four decades, RIS has steered notable initiatives and dialogue in the fields of international economic development, trade, investment, and technology.

While my formal association with RIS as its Chairman lasted only a few months between March 2017 and September 2017, I have engaged with it for much longer and continue to do so even today as it fosters policy dialogue and builds capacity on various global and regional economic issues. Having observed its work at close quarters, it is no surprise to me that RIS has evolved to become such an esteemed research institution in the development sector.

## **South-South Cooperation**

RIS was one of the first Indian think tanks to undertake comprehensive research and advocacy work for the South-South cooperation agenda, prioritising economic and technical

cooperation in particular. Through its high-quality research, it has distinguished itself as one of the leading forums engaged in strengthening the principle of South-South Cooperation. At a time when India is actively advancing this agenda through its G20 Presidency, the theory-building and background work that RIS has championed for years in this domain has informed the discourse considerably.

## Track 1.5 Dialogue

RIS is an autonomous institute under the Ministry of External Affairs. When I was Secretary (ER) at MEA, RIS took a number of commendable initiatives for various Track 1.5 Dialogue interventions, especially in relation to India's engagements with countries in the Indo-Pacific, BRICS, BIMSTEC and ASEAN. Its exemplary work in compiling information and opinions, producing policy insights, and disseminating knowledge on various aspects of India's cooperation has provided continuity and policy coherence across inter-governmental processes of many regional economic cooperation initiatives. During my stint at Permanent Mission of India a New York, RIS participated in the High Level Political Forum meetings.

Here, I would also like to recall some of the other prominent initiatives that RIS took during my tenure. They included commemorating the 25 years of ASEAN-India Partnership and organising important events such as the Delhi Conference on South-South and Triangular Cooperation, Consultation on

Asia-Africa Growth Corridor, Mid-Term Review of Foreign Trade Policy (2015-2020), Blue Economy Framework for Sustainable Development and the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation, among others.

## **Sustainable Development Goals**

Besides its work programmes on development cooperation, trade and investment facilitation, and regional connectivity, RIS has also broadened the knowledge base through its mainstreaming of gender, technology and inclusion. It was one of the first organisations in India to articulate the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a lever for increased South-South cooperation. In this regard, RIS has worked closely with NITI Aayog, UN office in Delhi, MEA and other government departments both at the central and state levels.

RIS also raised essential dialogue on cooperation in infrastructure financing and the revival of the multilateral agenda for the SDG Agenda. I was honoured to chair a discussion of policymakers and development organisations in India that it held with Professor Jeffrey Sachs on 23 February this year. It was a unique opportunity to deliberate on the ways in which the global stagnation on SDGs could be turned around amidst the prevailing economic uncertainty and the 3F's crisis. Some innovative and actionable recommendations came out of that discussion; most notably, on creating new facilities for development and climate financing.

I want to take a moment to focus on the SDGs. My stint as Chairman at RIS coincided with the global push for the SDGs which had formally been adopted only a year earlier on 25 September 2015 by the UN General Assembly. In my next (and current) role as a Union Minister in the Modi government, I have had the privilege of handling the urban development and petroleum and natural gas portfolios, both of which have a prominent interface with the SDGs. The Modi government's flagship initiatives such as the Ujjwala Yojana, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and Smart Cities Mission as well as policy interventions such as ethanol blending, green hydrogen production, adoption of electric vehicles, and public transport have played a critical role in helping achieve India's SDG targets.

I have always said, "If India succeeds, SDGs will succeed. And if the SDGs are to succeed, India has to succeed." India has shown world-leading progress and is years ahead of many high-income countries on the SDG pathway. NITI Aayog reports that more than 140 million Indians exited multidimensional poverty in the four years since the adoption of the SDGs under the Modi government. Transformative progress in water and sanitation, housing, food, energy access, digital connectivity, and financial inclusion have led to an unprecedented 'saturation of service'. This resonates with the 'leave no one behind' philosophy of the SDGs. India has considerably closed the gap on SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production); SDG 13 (Climate Action); SDG 3 (Health); SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation);

SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy); SDG 8 (Economic Growth); and SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure).

Most remarkably, India has consistently ranked among the best countries in the 'SDG Spillover Index', signalling that our positive movement on the SDG track has not come at the expense of other nations. What this has shown the world is that development does not have to be a zero-sum game; nor does it have to be driven by aid handed out by developed countries and their diktats. Hobbled by the pandemic, developed countries continue to struggle with many aspects of the 2030 Agenda, most notably the decarbonising imperative. India, on the other hand, launched the ambitious Panchamrit Action Plan which aims to make the country 'net zero' by 2070 – the shortest time span a developing country has proposed between peak emissions and net zero. India has emerged even more resilient after the pandemic, and has been applauded globally for its domestic vaccination programme, and its scientific and manufacturing capabilities.

India's development objectives were inherently aligned with the SDGs, and this is why we are succeeding. India's success story is now being replicated in many developing countries. India itself is taking the lead to build bridges and establish a South-South Cooperation model for the SDGs. RIS has contributed significantly to this purpose by building dialogue around this synergy right from the inception of its work programme on SDGs. It has supported the operationalization of SDG initiatives

in many developing countries through its capacity building under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme.

## G20

RIS is also an organising participant in the Think 20 (T20) Engagement Group of the G20 under India's Presidency this year. Given its extensive network of research institutions, universities, think tanks and philanthropic organisations across the globe, I believe it is aptly placed to convey the perspective of academia and civil society in the G20. Initiatives such as NeST (Network of Southern Think Tanks), "Delhi Process", and FIDC (Forum for Indian Development Cooperation) demonstrate the influential role that RIS has played in driving global partnerships for the development of the Global South, led by the Global South.

The advocacy that RIS has undertaken at the G20 this year is only one of its many consequential interventions over the years. Its imaginative work on the Blue Economy is another example. RIS has coordinated various discussions of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), particularly its Academic Group. Senior Fellows have provided crucial recommendations to the Indian government on its engagement. RIS has been a prominent entity in India's efforts to engage with littoral countries, most of which are low-income and Small Island Developing States, by proposing technical cooperation and aiding in capacity building.

## The Faculty

Even though I was Chairman only for a brief time, I was impressed with the wide ambit of research and capacity building work RIS had taken on. Its dedicated team of researchers and senior experts continually proposed new ideas and alternate approaches for policymakers.

I felt a familiar sense of passion and zeal when I recently visited its offices at the India Habitat Centre in Delhi and interacted with various members of the team, including its current Director General Professor Sachin Chaturvedi who has deftly positioned RIS to both anticipate and inform India's cooperation agenda for the years to come. I was also pleased to observe that a number of young researchers have joined the RIS team recently. The institute has put in place a robust programme of Internship at RIS for university students.

I send my best wishes to everyone at RIS on completing a distinguished 40 years, and wish the institution success in all its future endeavours. RIS is well placed to achieve greater successes and to continue burnishing its credentials of producing relevant research for the development sector and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.