

India's Diplomacy of Development

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One of the key objectives of Foreign policy is national development which all countries strive for in their international discourse. Often in the North-South matrix, the developmental assistance had certain strings attached that often served to get the former in pound of flesh from the target partner, whenever needed. But then there is an Indian model which is driven by the fundamental tenet of 'Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam' – encompassing the whole world and working for the capacity building and development of the under-privileged and underdeveloped that account for the majority of the South.

Having worked for the liberation of a large number of countries after her own independence, India in 1964 embarked on assisting the developing world across continents under the rubric of the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) and several other initiatives and scholarship and grant and investment schemes. The founding principle was 'Share and Care' and help others climb the developmental ladder while standing up for their cause at the global platforms and labyrinthine negotiations for Climate Change or for that matter at Doha Developmental Rounds of the WTO during the past six decades. Whenever, New Delhi sought reforms of the multilateral organizations the overall interests of the developing world have been at the forefront.

Even as India chairs the G20, developmental cooperation is a key driver that encompasses the priority for SDGs to socio-economic development to debt relief and restructuring to robust health and digital transformational initiatives so very necessary after the devastation caused by the pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war. Equity and Justice have been the driving force for Indian outreach and developmental cooperation. India's 'Vaccine Maitri' as against the 'Vaccine apartheid' of many is a statement by itself. India has emerged as a first responder in disasters natural or manmade.

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The recent 'Voice of the South Summit' by the Indian Prime Minister to ascertain the priorities of the developing world attest to the inclusive and participatory approach of India. PM Modi's 4R matrix of 'Respond, Recognize, Respect and Reform' urging them to respond to the priorities of the Global South by framing an inclusive and balanced international agenda, clearly underscores the urgent need to address the long pending issues.

India's developmental cooperation assistance, especially in capacity building is indeed unique in its depth and expanse with over 200 high-quality prestigious institutes providing training to thousands of representatives from our development partners which is highly appreciated by the host countries. India's billions of dollars in Lines of Credit and grants for diversified projects have helped rebuild infrastructure and create local capacities employment and a growth story. Pan Africa e-Network upgraded to e-Vidya Bharati and e-Arogya Bharati and Solar mamas reflect the tune of solidarity across the African continent. During the India-Africa Forum Summits, provision of thousands of fully funded Indian scholarships has continued to expand and empower the African youth.

Over 13 leaders in different African countries have been trained in India and hold their Indian experience in high regard. This is true across the 161 countries from Asia to Africa, and Latin America to Eastern Europe to whom New Delhi extends the facility in rendering capacity-building assistance.

My first brush with the ITEC and its training modules happened when I was posted to Mongolia in the early 1990s when the Soviet Union was disintegrating and Mongolians were trying to find their democracy and depth. We only were given two scholarships. But we had a politico-religious leader in Ambassador Rinpoche Kushok Bakula – a Buddhist monk who was highly revered in the country. When I approached him with a proposal that as the Mongols go through this political transition we must help in their capacity building for which many more scholarships and training programmes even in Mongolia if possible will be needed. He wrote to the Indian PM Mr Gujral at the time and we were authorised to nominate as many as we could. This changed the whole dynamic and although India was seen as a spiritual friend and third neighbour (after immediate Russia and China) the initiative created a tremendous reservoir of goodwill among the young and aspiring Mongols. It was also the first country out of the neighbourhood where we extended a \$100 million Line of credit which went a long way in creating capacities, infrastructure and assisted in trade and investment. We have not looked back since then as they continue to become Ambassadors for India and force multipliers.

Another interesting instance I recall was when I called on the State Secretary in Latvia (a European country) who after the meeting escorted me through the corridor and remarked that in every single room of the foreign office, you will find an India-trained diplomat. Imagine the implicit effectiveness. The same evening in

the hotel I met a correspondent from the Financial Times to whom I mentioned this and he was keen to interview me on the story but I said it will be better if he spoke to the Latvians and their experiences and arranged his meetings the next day and which turned out to be an excellent coverage from our point of view.

When I arrived in war-torn Libya, our chips were down as the average Libyan was disgruntled with our UNSC vote when we abstained on US and NATO military action. It was projected as India supporting Gaddafi and not the revolutionaries. Grassroots dissatisfaction is very difficult to handle and overcome, but there again I was fortunate to be helped by many who were exposed to India. One of them was my friend Ali Zeidan from JNU days in the late 1970s and early 80s. Fortunately, he was elected and appointed the Prime Minister and his support to rectify the perpetrated impression against India by Western countries was critical in deflecting. Besides I was also able to offer a large number of slots to Libyans to go and study and train in India under various schemes.

In Jordan too my friend Faisal al Rfouh from JNU was a Minister and well-known academician with extensive contacts and helped us revive and reactivate various initiatives and helped in the outreach for enriching bilateral ties. I also came across something called a "Roti club" which had more than 3000 members who had an Indian connection and were highly influential people. One can imagine the clout compounding such people and informal organisations can provide to an Ambassador or a diplomatic mission.

Traditionally, we have a large number of African and Arab students in India who come under government programmes as well as self-funding mechanisms. It is imperative that they feel at home in India and not subjected to an unpleasant experience for which the whole of government and society approach, as well as screened institutions need to be evolved. In times to come these students will be the active proponents or deterrents for enriching ties with India. Moreover, mere organisation by our missions of the ITEC Day will not be adequate in keeping in touch with them. A concerted effort and outreach is essential on a regular basis.

India's developmental cooperation is its most potent soft power credential which must be evolved and fashioned as per the needs and requirements of our developmental partners.