

South-South Cooperation

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development
Opinion Editor



By Adriano José Timossi *

GENEVA (IDN | SOUTHNEWS) - A Dialogue on South-South Cooperation in the context of the Right to Development discourse and the launch of a new book *India's Approach to Development Cooperation* were held on the side-lines of the 32nd Session of the Human Rights Council at the UN in Geneva on June 27, 2016 on the occasion of the commemorations of the 30th Anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration on the Right to Development.

Adopted thirty years ago, on December 4, 1986, the Declaration on the Right to Development recognized development as a comprehensive economic, social, cultural and political process aimed at the constant improvement of the well-being of all individuals and peoples, on the basis of their participation in development and in the fair distribution of its benefits. The declaration calls upon states to implement effective development cooperation and for the removal of barriers to development at national and international levels.

The event was jointly organized by the South Centre, the Permanent Mission of India to the UN in Geneva, the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS) and the Asia Foundation.

The Dialogue event was aimed at increasing awareness among delegations of UN Member States, experts, academia and civil society of the role of South-South Cooperation in advancing the Right to Development. A particular focus was given to the Indian experience

with regards to development cooperation as the event also marked the launch of a new book entitled *India's Approach to Development Cooperation*, edited by Sachin Chaturvedi and Anthea Mulakala.

In his welcoming remarks, Vicente Paolo Yu, Deputy Executive Director of the South Centre, said that the international outcomes agreed in 2015 on climate change, sustainable development goals and the Agenda 2030, trade, disaster risk reduction, financing for development are going to be implemented in a world with a much greater level of uncertainty.

Yu listed the challenges that developing countries face:

(1) Global economic and financial crises with worldwide impacts, in particular, in their efforts to implement the Right to Development;

(2) Difficulties to implement their development strategies ranging from technology access to difficulties to implement industrial policy due to impediments arising from international trade regimes;

(3) Challenges due to climate change and on the implementation of the Paris Agreement as rules on the implementation of the agreed outcome are yet to be written and to be negotiated;

(4) On the health agenda, new challenges such as those posed by the crisis of antimicrobial resistance;

5) Challenges for sustainable development and how we will implement the Agenda 2030 and SDGs, calling for special attention to the concerns of developing countries particularly the means of implementation which are necessary for the success of the agenda;

(6) Challenges for multilateralism with a greater emphasis on a universal agenda having commitments and obligations to be applied for all and greater pressure, from developed countries, being placed on developing countries to give up on differentiated and preferential treatment which have been longstanding features of international trade and cooperation regimes.

Finally, he called for attention to the rise of more exclusionary economic trade arrangements with potential emergence of new global norms without participation of developing countries and the increasing lack in providing assistance to developing countries by donors either through official development assistance or means of implementation.

Ambassador Shyam Saran, former Indian Foreign Secretary and currently Chairman of the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), spoke on the drivers of Indian philosophy on development cooperation that differentiate from traditional cooperation and lessons to be learned from the Indian case.

He pointed out that *unlike the ODA/OECD's or International Financial Institutions (IFIs)' approach to development cooperation, which is based on a donor-client relationship, Indian development cooperation see it more as a partnership.*

"It is a relationship between equal partners" in which priorities are set by our partners based on their needs and challenges and how India, even with modest resources, could align itself to cooperate, he said. Capacity building has been a strong component with transfer of know-how through trainings and education programmes put at the centre of Indian's development cooperation for decades.

Ambassador Ajit Kumar of the Permanent Mission of India to the UN in Geneva welcomed the dialogue and the new book on India's approach to development cooperation, which is not so well known by the UN bodies. He stressed that two key pillars of Indian development cooperation are partnership for mutual benefit and prosperity and ownership by partners.

Indian initiatives aim at providing adequate and affordable technologies. He gave the example of ITEC – Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation, which provides training programmes based on the sharing of Indians' development experiences and technology with partners with a focus on their own challenges and priorities.

Ambassador Kumar stressed that South-South Cooperation is an important component to support efforts to implement the Right to Development. However, it cannot be interpreted as a substitute to North-South cooperation based on the historical responsibilities of developed countries to development cooperation.

The dialogue was moderated by Anthea Mulakala, Director of International Development Cooperation of the Asia Foundation and co-editor of the book *India's Approach to Development Cooperation*. She said that India has emerged as a key player in development cooperation not only because of the increasing volume and reach of its South-South Cooperation, but more so because of its leadership in development with a distinctly Southern development discourse and knowledge generation. The dialogue, she said, comes at a timely moment with the launch of the new book, being a valuable contribution for the literature on South-South Cooperation.

Sachin Chaturvedi, Director-General of RIS and also co-editor of the book, highlighted that the development discourse based on growth during the 60s and 70s were enriched with the adoption of the Declaration on the Right to Development in 1986 which put human development at the centre stage.

He also spoke on the development compact based on five main elements namely capacity building, grants, lines of credit, trade and investment, giving the example of India's initiative at the WTO Ministerial in Hong Kong in 2005 in which India announced its decision to give Duty-Free Quota-Free (DFQF) for Least Developed Countries.

Speaking on the issues arising over the global discourse on North-South and South-South development cooperation, he stressed that OECD terms for development cooperation cannot be simply implemented in South-South Cooperation. He said that convergence would only come if terms are acceptable for both.

Two contributing authors of the book also spoke. Prabodh Saxena, Principal Secretary to the Government of Himachal Pradesh and former Senior Advisor at the Asian Development Bank, highlighted the importance of Lines of Credit (LOCs) which have played an important

role in past decades and which today reaches already nearly 70 countries. More recently the EXIM Bank of India started to raise money in the international markets, which is contributing to multiply the portfolio of the LOCs, he said.

Taidong Zhou, Manager of the China-UK Partnership Programme on Knowledge for Development at the Development Research Centre of the State Council in China, compared China's and India's experiences in development cooperation which in his view have a more complementary rather than competitive role. While India's focus over past decades is mainly in capacity building and the region, China has greater focus on infrastructure and connectivity in the region and in Africa.

Anita Amorim, Head of the Emerging and Special Partnerships Unit at ILO, highlighted the experiences of IBSA - India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) Development Forum which represents three major democracies of the developing world that have undertaken valuable initiatives in development cooperation including with the ILO in the so-called trilateral cooperation format.

In June 2012, IBSA Ministers signed a joint declaration to reaffirm the India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) commitment to South-South Cooperation and the Decent Work Agenda. Amorim also recalled the efforts by IBSA in promoting social protection guarantee schemes such as the Mahatma Gandhi Public Employment Guarantee Scheme in India and the Brazilian Bolsa Família. An IBSA conference on public employment was also held in New Delhi in March 2012.

More recently in 2015, the IBSA Fund to fight hunger and poverty supported programmes in Haiti focusing on combating child labour and youth employment. The ILO expert said that the IBSA project in Haiti also has a component on recycling of residues, which benefited from Indian transfer of technology on this field. As a longstanding organization supporting cooperation among developing countries, ILO will hold for the first time this year the South-South Academy with climate change, SDGs, child labour, the social dimension and labour migration as key issues, Amorim said.

Richard Kozul-Wright, Director of the Division on Globalisation and Development Strategies at UNCTAD, said that South-South Cooperation in the discourse of the development agenda in the 70s was closely associated with the New International Economic Order discourse which aimed at overcoming asymmetries and gaps inherited from the previous decades.

UNCTAD played a central role in that discourse and in supporting developing countries in their calls for restructuring the international division of labour, he said. In the early 80s however, development in the international economic relations discourse has changed. Development disappeared from the international economic discourse driven by market forces and with reduced role for the state, a dominant thinking which prevailed in the last 20 to 25 years. Slow growth in advanced economies in this period impacted their engagement in the global economy and development cooperation, including in achieving longstanding commitments in ODA, which are still to be accomplished.

Kozul-Wright said that over past decades the productive economic agenda was replaced with greater focus on the social component in the development cooperation discourse. At

the same time, there has been also fragmentation of the South in the past three decades or so which led to different growth experiences now reflected in their initiatives in South-South Cooperation with differentiated focus on human capital, services and infrastructure. He also said that developing countries' growth in the 2000s led to the idea of decoupling from the historical dependence on the North, a growth that carried out its fragilities as cautioned by UNCTAD and which was based mainly on speculative capital.

This period also saw an impressive rise of South-South Cooperation. Despite their development challenges and based on different principles from that of North-South cooperation, developing countries boosted an agenda of alternative ways of development cooperation focusing on sharing experiences on issues abandoned in the past decades such as industrial policy.

In recent history, new alternatives and more democratic structures were formed with the New Development Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank which are responses to discontent with the dominant structures of finance and development of the Washington based institutions. He mentioned also the role of policy space as very necessary for developing countries to reach inclusive development for their people and which must be a central element of the Right to Development.

Youba Sokona, Special Advisor on Sustainable Development of the South Centre, spoke on the linkages between climate change and South-South Cooperation and the Right to Development. He called upon developing countries to be more at the front of the discourse.

Developing countries must leave the position of working on the agenda set by others and instead taking a position in which they can set the agenda, he said, referring particularly to the Paris Agreement and the SDGs, two important outcomes in which means of implementation will play a crucial role.

Sokona also highlighted the good example of the African region with the recent decision to establish the African Energy Initiative, a home-bred initiative which will support projects of energy in the continent and with focus on sectors such as small scale farming systems, an important element in development cooperation for the African continent. He also made a strong call for a change in the nature of development cooperation giving strong focus to solidarity and concrete actions on the ground.

In closing the Dialogue, Yu highlighted that the following “take aways” could be discerned from the presentations and the discussion that took place:

1. A greater level of South-South learning, sharing, and information exchange is needed among developing countries in order to ensure that South-South cooperation reflects and innovates on the experiences of the South;
2. South ownership with respect to South-South development cooperation must be at the foundation of such cooperation;
3. The development focus of South-South cooperation establishes the key link to the Right to Development; and
4. Given the diversity among developing countries, it is necessary that South-South development cooperation will be undertaken through a diversity of models and alternative approaches, making it important for policy space to be present to allow

South-South cooperation for development to be innovative and transformative.

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Photo: Of the 24 million land parcels that exist in the Philippines, it is estimated that only half have formal land titles. Here, community members examine aerial maps from a drone survey. Credit: Asia Foundation

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