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India's Development Cooperation

Charting New Approaches in a Changing World



India is helping the nation-building process by constructing the Parliament building in Kabul

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Executive Summary

As India's economy has grown in recent decades, the range and volume of its development cooperation has increased significantly. While the definition of India's development cooperation is debated, foreign spending in 2013-2014 on aid is estimated to rise to \$1.3 billion.¹ India's growing stature as a global development actor has generated much international interest on the nature and evolution of its external assistance programmes.

On 5th March, 2013 the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) and Saferworld held a round-table meeting in New Delhi on *India's development cooperation in a changing global environment* with a focus on conflict-affected states. The meeting explored challenges and opportunities in development

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cooperation, drawing both upon India's own experience and the experiences of other international actors.

The round-table opened with a keynote address delivered by Amb. P.S. Raghavan, Additional Secretary, Development Partnership Administration (DPA), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. The meeting was co-chaired by Dr. C. Raja Mohan, Head of ORF's Strategic Studies Programme, and Mr. Ivan Campbell, Saferworld's Senior Advisor on Conflict and Security. A number of experts from India, South Africa, Brazil, the United Kingdom and Myanmar also participated in the discussions.

During the round-table a range of themes related to Indian and international development cooperation were discussed. Key messages that emerged are outlined below:

- Development is an inherently political process, so development cooperation should not be viewed from a purely technical perspective. Development interventions must take into account how they will affect the balance of resources between local stakeholders and potentially alter power relations.
- Stakeholder consultation is essential when state or private sector actors intervene in developing countries. It is not sufficient simply to deal with central government authorities. External actors should engage with local stakeholders and listen to their concerns, and wherever possible avoid displacing local communities.
- There is growing recognition that conflict and violence undermine development. In conflict-affected states, external actors should ensure that they understand local conflict issues and dynamics so that their interventions do not inadvertently fuel violence and insecurity.
- India has increased the scope of its development cooperation, evidenced by the establishment of the new Development Partnership Administration. Whether through Lines of Credit or capacity-building grants, the country's approach to development cooperation is predicated on a demand-driven, consultative model of engagement with recipient countries.
- Greater dialogue is required between Indian development officials, research institutes, NGOs and the private sector in order to aid policy-making and enhance practice. It is also important to include representatives of less developed and conflict-affected countries in this dialogue.
- The traditional paradigm of donor-recipient development is increasingly challenged by the rise of global actors from the South. India could play a key role in shaping a new agenda for

development cooperation, both through fora such as IBSA and BRICS and by engaging with broader processes to define a new international development framework.

This report highlights the prominent inputs from the round-table.

It first briefly delves into the historical context within which India's development cooperation must be seen. In the following section, the role, objectives and the functioning of the DPA is explained. The report then touches upon India's role in the development architecture as a new participant on the global high table. Thereafter, it outlines some significant experiences of international actors in conflict-affected states, the role of the private sector and the role of civil society in development cooperation. The report concludes with a set of recommendations for the DPA, Indian civil society and other international actors.

The History of India's International Development Cooperation

The recent international focus on 'emerging donors' assumes that their development cooperation programmes are new. However, India's experience with aid and external assistance goes back almost to its independence in 1947. From its inception, Indian development cooperation was part of a conscious effort by New Delhi to build solidarity with other Afro-Asian nations and promote economic cooperation among post-colonial states.² It was also about assisting smaller neighbours on the subcontinent, with which India had traditional and privileged relationships.

In its early years, India's relationship with developing nations of differing political systems shaped a development cooperation strategy premised on sovereignty and non-interference. Such principles were reinforced by India's leading role in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), founded in 1961. In the 1950s and early 1960s, developing countries were supported by India through economic tools, specifically grants and loans primarily administered through the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).³

In 1964, New Delhi established the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme, whose primary architect was Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. ITEC was an “attempt by India to share the fruits of its socio-economic development and technological achievement with other developing countries”.⁴ Over the years, India has provided training to many thousands of civil servants from developing countries and deployed Indian technical experts to these countries. By training over 8,500 civilians from 161 countries to date, India has not only helped to strengthen capacities in developing countries but has also developed enduring links with ITEC beneficiaries and enhanced its soft power.⁵



The India-funded Terai Road Project in Nepal

India's long-standing development cooperation policy underwent significant changes in the early 2000s, as strong economic growth transformed the balance between India's dual role as aid recipient and donor. The past ten years have seen the emergence of various new tools for Indian development cooperation. The India Development Initiative (IDI) was established in 2003 both to manage India's own debts and to cancel those of heavily indebted poor countries.⁶ While providing a new source of grants and project assistance to developing countries in Africa, it was also explicitly designed to leverage and promote India's strategic economic interests abroad.

In 2004, India introduced a Lines of Credit (LoCs) scheme, whereby money is raised through international debt markets rather than traditional yearly budget mechanisms. This innovation enabled an expansion of Indian development cooperation more in line with India's global aspirations. By early 2013, open LoCs amounted to roughly \$10 billion.⁷ According to DPA, nearly 60 per cent of LoCs have been provided to Africa. In contrast, the majority of India's development assistance in the form of grants is provided to neighbours in South Asia, such as Afghanistan and Bhutan.

These developments bear witness to the significant evolution of India's development cooperation over the past 50 years. While India has a long tradition of providing assistance to developing nations, the volume of assistance has grown rapidly in recent years, more than doubling since the turn of the century. Meanwhile, the aid modalities and instruments deployed by India have diversified. Four main ones have emerged over time: capacity-building and training, as provided by ITEC; Lines of Credit or concessional loans; grant assistance; and bilateral trade and investment. However, as the range and volume of India's aid have grown, so too have the institutional, policy and programming challenges.

The Establishment of the Development Partnership Administration

The expansion and diversification of India's development cooperation described above has prompted contemporary debate on its structure and efficacy.

Moreover, the multiple agencies and delivery channels have led to the recognition of a need to rationalise aid delivery. Thus, the Development Partnership Administration (DPA) was established within the Ministry of External Affairs in 2012 as India's official agency for international development cooperation.

Amb. P. S. Raghavan, the top official in the DPA, explained that the agency's role is to consolidate and streamline all aspects of India's development assistance. The DPA is charged with efficiently managing the formulation, implementation and evaluation of India's aid projects. It will, for the first time under one umbrella, coordinate a range of activities related to trade and investment, technology transfer, financing through credit, and capacity building (technical and economic cooperation). The agency currently has three divisions: one to make appraisal of projects and lines of credit; second focusing on capacity-building, disaster relief, and ITEC; and the third responsible for project implementation.

Amb. P. S. Raghavan described how the DPA is in the process of strengthening its technical capacities in order to fulfil its mandate. The current Indian emphasis is on ensuring that development programmes respond effectively to the priorities of partner countries and on the sustainability of their impact. The DPA also seeks to introduce more transparent processes, creating a level playing field for public and private sector businesses to participate in projects, both under lines of credit and under grant assistance.

At the same time, the DPA is trying to raise public awareness regarding the nature of India's overseas development cooperation. Amb. Raghavan highlighted the need to learn lessons from India's own development experiences; particularly he called for greater coordination with Indian companies operating overseas. The agency is exploring models of partnership with the private sector in, for example, infrastructure and connectivity projects in Africa. The DPA will also seek to engage with NGOs and the academia involved in the conceptualisation and delivery of development programmes within India, so that it can replicate the success of such programmes in other developing countries.

Placing the DPA under MEA control represents tacit acknowledgement by the Indian government that development cooperation cannot be divorced from the broader foreign policy strategy and national interests. The round-table participants also expressed the hope that the DPA would help bolster the capacities and resources needed for more effective management of Indian overseas aid.

The participants also debated the ways in which vested interests of donor nations can distort development assistance. In this respect, there was support for India's approach of 'demand-driven aid' that responds to the priorities of developing countries. In turn, this prompted debate about whose demands development aid should respond to—those of governments or communities.

India and the Global Development Architecture

Although the focus of Indian development cooperation has primarily been bilateral, New Delhi has taken part in the OECD-led international dialogue on development. This process seeks to enhance agreement on norms governing development assistance, promote information exchange between providers of assistance, and create a global regime under which there would be better coordination of delivery, more sensitivity to the needs of recipient countries and objective yardsticks for impact assessment. This dialogue has strengthened mutual understanding regarding perceptions of aid and development cooperation, both among 'Southern' actors and between the North and South.

However, India has also articulated its reservations about certain premises underlying the OECD-led dialogue. The participants acknowledged that the three fundamental principles of India's cooperation—namely, not attaching conditionalities, not prescribing policies and not questioning sovereignty—are unlikely to change in the near future.

A number of speakers reiterated the key principles and modalities of India's approach to development, such as South-South cooperation and mutual benefit, based on India's own experience as a still developing country. They also outlined a vision of development aid (including trade, investment and technology transfer) that offers an alternative to the OECD definition of aid. It was argued that India's approach is more transparent than that of Western states, whose aid policies may be perceived to reflect hidden agendas relating to economic and geo-strategic interests.

A comparison was also drawn between Western states, which are increasingly focused on addressing 'governance gaps' through their development interventions, and India, which has traditionally focused on filling 'capacity gaps'. Participants acknowledged the concerns of some traditional donors that assistance from 'emerging powers' such as India, China and Brazil underplays the importance of good governance, human rights, and related values that have traditionally defined North-South development cooperation.

The Head of the DPA expressed caution about the more “expansive proposals” put forward for the post-2015 global development agenda. Some developing countries have also expressed reservations about governance norms and processes in the evolving post-2015 development agenda; though others, such as members of the G7+ group, have explicitly supported them.



Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project in Myanmar being constructed by India

In line with its emphasis on South-South cooperation, India is also an active participant in a number of multi-lateral fora outside the OECD-led processes, notably the IBSA (India, Brazil, South Africa) grouping. These fora provide an opportunity for key rising powers, which share the characteristic of being both developing countries and growing providers of overseas assistance, to develop alternative modalities for development cooperation. For instance, an IBSA Fund has been used to develop programmes that support the improvement of medical clinics in Africa, drawing upon the experiences of IBSA countries. This approach to South-South cooperation also uses economic partnerships to create an alternative narrative to North-South Cooperation and calls into question aspects of the approach taken by traditional donors.

Engaging in Conflict-affected States

Risks

As its global presence expands, India will increasingly find itself operating in countries affected by conflict. Although India's development cooperation has been shaped by the principle of non-interference, it inevitably has an impact on the local political economy.

Even if conceived as a purely technical intervention, development assistance affects the balance of power and resources, either at a macro or micro level. Therefore, India is by default involved in local conflict dynamics when it engages in conflict-affected states. Engaging in such environments thus carries particular risks, but lessons can be drawn from the experience of other international actors.

Western development actors increasingly recognise that aid and other development interventions can sometimes worsen conflict situations. One of the most significant examples occurred in the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide in 1994. When the international community provided humanitarian aid to Rwandan refugee camps in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo following the genocide, it inadvertently contributed to strengthening the capacity and entrenching the power of the very groups that had perpetrated the genocide. The armed ethnic militias within the camps were able to control aid distribution, using it to re-provision their forces so that they could continue their ethnically targeted violence.

Although an extreme case, the Rwanda example vividly illustrates the harmful impact of aid in conflict-affected states. There are plenty of lower-profile examples: from the construction of wells that benefit one village at the expense of another, thus aggravating inter-community tensions, to procurement practices by development agencies that favour a particular ethnic or religious group.

However, the Rwandan experience was regarded by many in the Western aid community as a watershed moment, highlighting the risk of aid actually doing harm. It underlined that development assistance is never neutral in its impact: it represents a transfer of resources that inevitably creates winners as well as losers. The winners may exploit their power over other groups, while the losers may feel aggrieved at missing out on the benefits.

There are other risks as well when international actors, whether development agencies or private companies, engage in countries affected by conflict. One obvious risk is to the safety of citizens employed overseas. This was vividly illustrated by the kidnapping in January 2013 of a group of Western employees at a gas facility in Algeria, leading to the deaths of 39 foreign hostages. There is also the risk to investments when private companies engage in conflict-affected states. When war broke out in Libya in 2011, many Western companies involved in contracts worth billions of dollars had to pull out. The energy sector is especially vulnerable since many of the main sources of oil and natural gas are located in conflict-affected states, such as Nigeria or South Sudan.

However, this can also affect other sorts of commercial operation. Infrastructure projects such as hydropower dams and land acquisition for agricultural development have led to community protests and violent attacks in a number of cases. As a result, companies have suffered major financial losses when operating in conflict-affected states. These stem from damage to plant and equipment, disruption to production, extra payment for security services, higher insurance premiums, and the difficulty of raising capital for further investment.

These risks do not only apply to Western development agencies and companies. The representative from Myanmar at the round-table highlighted how Chinese investments in infrastructure projects and extractive industries have been held up, or in some cases cancelled, due to insecurity arising from

local protests and the threat of violence. Similarly in Sudan and South Sudan, conflict has led to serious challenges for Chinese companies involved in the oil sector. Further, Chinese overseas employees too have been caught in the violence in other African countries: for example, kidnapped by Somali pirates in the Indian Ocean or by separatist rebels in Ethiopia.

India is not immune from these risks. As its global trade, investment and development assistance has grown, so has its presence in developing countries affected by conflict. Thus India, whether through its development cooperation or private investment, is vulnerable to these threats in conflict-affected states. Furthermore, Indian development decision-makers must grapple with the risk of aggravating existing conflict situations.

Responses

Recognising that aid can exacerbate conflict has been an important lesson from Western development experiences, and donors and other development actors have taken some steps to mitigate this risk. For instance, a 2002 UK government review of the relationship between UK aid and the conflict in Nepal found that it risked fuelling conflict in a number of ways. Aid for capacity-building was found primarily to benefit elites rather than excluded groups, and there were limited benefits to the poorest and most conflict-affected regions since aid was largely allocated to more accessible areas of the country. As a consequence, it was apparent that UK aid risked consolidating the very divisions and patterns of exclusion—both socio-economic and geographic—that first gave rise to Nepal's conflict. In light of this review, the UK re-oriented its development programming to mitigate the risk of fuelling further violence.

The Nepal example can be viewed as part of a broader trend among Western development actors to adopt a 'conflict-sensitive approach'. This approach is founded on first ensuring that development actors understand the local context, especially issues that cause or fuel conflict. Next, it is important to identify if and how intervention may affect the local conflict dynamics. Based upon this analysis, development actors should take steps to minimise any harmful effects of their intervention, while also seeking to promote peace. While these basic principles of conflict sensitivity are now understood by many Western development actors and are beginning to be reflected in some donor policies, applying the learning in actual conflict situations is more complex.

Based on the experiences of conflict-affected states, as well as lessons learnt by Western actors, three practical steps have been put forward to avoid the risks described and to ensure a conflict-sensitive approach. First, local stakeholders must be consulted. The Myanmar representative described how international companies often justify interventions on the basis of contracts signed with the central government in Naypyitaw.

However, it is not sufficient for companies to consider that because a project is approved in the Capital, it has the approval of the local community, which may be thousands of miles away, disconnected from the seat of national power or may even be in armed opposition. Therefore, it is imperative to consult with local stakeholders such as community chiefs, local administration and religious leaders. Such consultation provides an opportunity to explain the project, understand local conflict risks and consider mitigation strategies. Ideally, local stakeholders will be involved in all stages of the project cycle, from initial risk-analysis through to evaluation.



Community security consultation with local stakeholders in South Sudan. *Saferworld photo/Thomas Martin*

A specific example was given of a Western oil company in South-east Asia facing a conflict with the local community over the impact of its operations. This conflict threatened to cause delays and financial losses. The company undertook a consultation process, which included listening to local opinion leaders, conducting perception surveys, and involving the community in formulating plans and procedures. This process was estimated to cost \$6 million for a \$4.5 billion project. The company concluded that the consultations enabled it to avoid delays and complete project activities on schedule, leading to savings of approximately \$60 million.

Second, development cooperation programmes must be designed in ways that help to reduce the underlying causes of conflict wherever possible. This particularly applies to conflicts caused by grievances between communities that feel economically and politically disadvantaged or excluded. By redressing inequalities between groups, development programmes can actually help to strengthen peace and stability. Thus, returning to the Nepal example, the UK recognised that its development programmes risked reinforcing divisions and grievances between socio-economic

groups and regions of the country. Therefore, development programmes were redesigned with the express aim of helping to reduce these divisions.

Third, as emphasised by a panellist from South Sudan, sensitive handling of land issues is critical. Every effort should be made to avoid displacing local communities, whether as a result of development projects, infrastructure development or land acquisition. If displacement and resettlement are unavoidable, measures should be taken to minimise resettlement impacts. This includes understanding informal land use practices and engaging with informal land users, who may otherwise be excluded from compensation schemes. Furthermore, outside actors must understand and respect the non-monetary value of land. Consulting thoroughly with local communities during resettlement planning in order to understand any concerns and allow sufficient time for the resettlement process is therefore essential.

Notwithstanding the unique development experience and context in India, lessons learnt by other international actors and the experiences drawn from conflict-affected states were viewed as highly relevant by round-table participants. Conversely, it was noted that the international community may be able to draw useful lessons from India's experience of engaging in Afghanistan.

Given India's growing and diversifying development cooperation, the country is increasingly engaged in conflict-affected states through trade, investment and development assistance. Going forward, Indian actors will inevitably be involved in local conflict dynamics, and how they engage and operate will affect these dynamics. Therefore, it is in India's interests, as well as those of local communities, to understand the conflict risks and to adopt a conflict-sensitive approach.

The Role of the Private Sector in Development Cooperation

The preceding discussion regarding the nature of India's development cooperation underlines the role of bilateral trade and investment by Indian companies, which often constitutes the most visible aspect of India's in-country presence. How to integrate the private sector into India's current development cooperation strategy remains a key question. The DPA is exploring innovative public-private partnership models with Indian business and industry, so that it can combine development assistance with commercial perspectives to create assets that have an enhanced development impact. In the round-table discussions, it was acknowledged that the private sector's comparative advantages in job training and technical expertise could be effectively allied with public sector experience in development cooperation. However, some participants questioned whether donor government grants channelled through private companies lead to optimal development outcomes.

The African continent provides an example of the growing opportunities for Indian private sector engagement in development cooperation. Indian investments in Africa—which total roughly US\$50 billion—align with the continent's inherent strengths.⁸ A large chunk of the African labour force is involved in agriculture and the continent is also the world's second fastest growing telecom market.⁹ Both are sectors in which Indian companies are global leaders. Therefore, these companies could have a major development impact. Despite China's investment lead in Africa (by late 2012, China had investments totalling roughly US\$70 billion), it was suggested by some participants that African states may be favourable to Indian companies. Especially, given the perception of China's somewhat heavy-handed investment approach and its preference for Chinese workers rather than African.

It was noted that if Indian development cooperation is to include a significant private sector component, it should be structured in a way that makes economic sense for firms. India already has tools at its disposal that could be deployed to promote private sector-instigated development cooperation in targeted nations. For example, some ITEC funding could be earmarked for Indian companies best positioned to provide in-country skills training, particularly in areas such as infrastructure and telecom. Likewise, new LoCs could be allocated to private investments that would stimulate emerging nation development.

The Role of Civil Society in Development Cooperation

India has a strong tradition of social activism and a wide array of civil society organisations (CSOs), which have great potential to enhance India's development cooperation. Furthermore, Indian CSOs are increasingly active in developing countries, including those affected by conflict, and some are developing an impressive record. One example cited was of an Indian trade union, the Self Employment Women's Association (SEWA), in Afghanistan. Since 2009, SEWA has been running vocational training programmes for Afghan war widows. To date, approximately 3,000 women have been trained, and a cadre of local trainers have now created their own organisation in Afghanistan with SEWA-India providing support. The wider international development community could learn important lessons from these and similar good practices developed by Indian CSOs operating overseas.

However, participants remarked that the vast majority of Indian CSOs focus on domestic mobilisation and advocacy around issues such as service delivery. Few engage in policy debates about international affairs or India's development cooperation. Given the immense challenges of domestic development confronting India, this is not surprising. Furthermore, opportunities for public dialogue on Indian development assistance have been relatively limited. This begs the question of how the capacities and energies of Indian CSOs can be harnessed to contribute to debates about international development. In particular, how can these CSOs constructively engage

with India's development officials and contribute to the formulation of a development cooperation policy?

Participants noted some opening up of the development debate in India. National networks are beginning to engage with international issues. One recent notable development was the early 2013 establishment of the Forum for International Development Cooperation in New Delhi. This is an informal grouping of academics, civil society representatives and NGOs aiming to provide a platform to discuss programmes and policies regarding India's development cooperation, including with the Development Partnership Administration and other relevant government agencies.



Boys hold up a sign for transparent oil exportation by China in South Sudan.

UN photo/Isaac Billy

Priorities and Ways Forward

The final section of this paper offers a number of suggestions to relevant stakeholders about how to take forward key issues related to development cooperation.

To the Development Partnership Administration

- Collaborate with the broader Indian development community (research institutes, academics and NGOs) to raise domestic awareness about India's development cooperation and explain its importance

- Support research on lessons learnt from Indian development cooperation in conflict-affected states such as Afghanistan (both official assistance and by Indian NGOs). This could lead to a compendium of best practices and exportable models that engage policy makers both in India and abroad.
- Promote lessons learnt from India's own development experience (as aid recipient and donor) as the basis for constructive engagement in global mechanisms for international development cooperation, e.g. the Global Partnership for Aid Effectiveness and the post-2015 process
- Support dialogue with the policy communities in other BRICS/IBSA member states to identify shared approaches to development cooperation, especially with respect to aid effectiveness.
- In conjunction with the private sector, explore practical ways of developing coherence and synergies between India's official development assistance and Indian private investment in developing countries
- Strengthen capacities required to enable the DPA to track investments by India's private sector in developing countries, especially those affected by conflict
- Assess impact of Indian development cooperation in developing countries, both positive and negative, e.g. impact of land acquisition by Indian companies on local communities
- Develop guidelines/code of conduct for responsible investment by Indian companies in conflict-affected countries
- Establish a mechanism for regular interaction and policy dialogue between Indian think-tanks, academics, NGOs and the DPA

To Indian civil society

- Engage more actively on issues of international development cooperation and India's role in the world, notwithstanding domestic development needs
- Participate in sharing experiences of development cooperation and constructive debate with the Indian government, especially with the DPA

- Study best practices from the experiences of Indian NGOs working overseas, which can help evolve India's approach to development cooperation
- Strengthen the voice of Indian CSOs on behalf of constituencies in developing countries
- Develop normative frameworks for ensuring stakeholder rights and transparency regarding international development engagement of the Indian government and private sector

To other international actors

- Acknowledge India's own experience of development cooperation and be open to learning lessons from this
- Identify commonalities between the OECD-DAC approach to development cooperation and India's approach
- Encourage and enable India and other large developing countries to play a more prominent role in global processes engaged in formulating a new development framework, e.g. the Global Partnership for Aid Effectiveness and the post-2015 process
- Support public dialogues among relevant stakeholders (governmental and NGO) on India's development cooperation and how to include or increase participation of stakeholders from less developed countries.

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