



India's Role in South-South and Triangular Climate Cooperation

Event Summary

Friday October 20, 2023

- The Centre for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP) hosted a roundtable discussion on **India's Role in South-South and Triangular Climate Cooperation** on 20 October, 2023.
- The lead speakers of the discussion included **Sanjeev Varshney**, Head, International Cooperation, Department of Science and Technology, Government of India, **Sebastian Haug**, Senior Researcher, German Institute of Development and Sustainability, and **Veda Vaidyanathan**, Associate, Harvard University Asia Centre and Visiting Associate Fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi.
- The discussion explored alternate paradigms of cooperation beyond the North-South engagements that currently dominate climate negotiations. It assessed how different perspectives of South-South and triangular cooperation can be effectively applied to enhance climate policies globally. The discussion also emphasised the role that India can play as an incubator of ideas and policies to South-South and triangular cooperation initiatives. The discussion nuanced successful partnership models, takeaways from past experiences, and obstacles that affect alternate paradigms of global partnerships.
- The discussion was moderated by **Pooja Ramamurthi**, Associate Fellow, CSEP. Participants of the discussion included scholars from India's leading think tanks, universities, and officials from various embassies and missions.

The significance of South-South and triangular cooperation

Participants discussed how the Industrial Revolution affected countries in the Global North and Global South differently. Initially, Global South countries did not prioritise policies and practises to address the challenge of climate change. However, taking into consideration the repercussions of climate change inaction, governments in the Global South have become more sensitised towards tackling the problem. Participants addressed the guiding principles that have influenced India's conduct when it comes to climate change: meeting 50% of its energy requirements from renewable energy by 2030 and cutting down to net-zero emissions by 2070. India has emerged as a country that is actively participating in international negotiations around technology and knowledge transfer, influenced by domestic innovations.

The discussion highlighted the significance of South-South and triangular cooperation which enables countries from the Global South to collaborate on climate policies and create knowledge partnerships to develop solutions that suit all contributing countries. Additionally, one speaker suggested

that the "one size fits all" approach should not be adopted towards climate cooperation in the Global South. Different countries have unique challenges when it comes to climate change, and it is important to create systems that include a diverse set of solutions which meet the socio-economic and political context of the recipient country. Participants discussed how India has capacity building initiatives with countries, such as in the neighbourhood, ASEAN members, and African countries. These enable exchange of models and thought processes between researchers to find sustainable solutions that have been effective in tackling climate change. For example, the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme (ITEC), which is a leading capacity building platform of the Ministry of External Affairs, offers fellowships to promote the exchange of ideas and innovations.

The discussion also focused on how sub-state and non-state actors are contributing to South-South cooperation. For instance, The Society for Technology and Action for Rural Advancement (TARA), which is a social enterprise of the Development Alternatives Group based in New Delhi, has been working on a clean building technology transfer to Malawi.

India's role in triangular climate cooperation

In addition to South-South cooperation, the discussion also underlined the significance of triangular partnerships as a means for the Global North and Global South countries to collaborate on climate governance. Participants highlighted how India has been an active player in international cooperation by joining hands with actors for the benefits of a partner country. One participant highlighted how India is becoming the frontrunner of triangular cooperation with the establishment of the India-UN Development Partnership Fund in 2017 which promotes Southern-led sustainable development projects in the least developed countries (LDCs). India has become the biggest contributor to the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC). The discussion also analysed India's emerging practices of triangular cooperation which include UN supported funds, mechanism promoted by Northern donors, and triangular platforms such as the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor.

When it comes to climate policy, participants underscored that triangular cooperation should not be conducted at the margins of other forms of international cooperation. One participant stressed the importance of Global North countries to become important collaborators for countries in the Global South by circumventing the donor-recipient relationship. The discussion highlighted how India has the potential to create a nexus on the climate change regime which finds a middle ground between the Northern focus on mitigation and Southern focus on adaptation. However, participants identified one major limitation to triangular climate cooperation: Development Association Committee (DAC) countries such as France, the United States, and the United Kingdom which are key players for India, do not prioritise triangular cooperation. Participants highlighted that while India could serve as a bridge between the Global South and North, the projects were still one-off and fragmented with better need for institutions and long-term capacity. There is an increased need to engage with different players, in a systematic fashion to build up bureaucratic processes that can enable smooth cooperation amongst countries.

Participants also discussed how China's approach towards triangular cooperation has shifted. Over a decade ago, China was interested in collaborating with UN entities to set up projects that partners in the African continent required. However, now that China has strengthened its own capacity, it does not rely on UN entities to develop initiatives. Participants noted that since China has tailored its approach to triangular cooperation, there are few instances of collaboration between China and other western countries.

India and Africa partnerships

The discussion also highlighted how African countries have become an active part of triangular climate cooperation through different instruments such as capacity building initiatives, technology transfers, grants, and concessional finances. One participant noted that over 50% of India's line of credits (LOCs) through the India Export-Import Bank (EXIM) is targeted at developmental projects in the African continent. Another participant stated that half of the members of the International Solar Alliance (ISA) are African countries. India has pledged a concessional credit line to develop 10,000 solar power systems across the Sahel region in collaboration with the African Development Bank. Participants discussed whether the ISA is a geopolitical instrument to assert India's global power, or it is a framework that can make India the frontrunner in the climate discourse. One participant also highlighted that ISA could be "a market making mechanism that could tap into the potential of solar rich countries".

Additionally, European partners are funding developmental projects while India serves as the conduit to make these innovations adapt locally to the African context. For instance, the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-arid Tropics (ICRISAT), which is based in New Delhi, has been setting up food processing incubators and food tasting labs in Angola, Cameroon, Ghana, Nigeria, and Congo.

The discussion also highlighted other methods of cooperation such as grassroots cooperation. For instance, the Barefoot College in Rajasthan has been training delegations of African women to make solar lamps. Participants noted that such grassroot initiatives give space to alternate pathways of collaboration between India and Africa.

The way forward

Participants stressed that India needs to continue to actively engage in partnerships that promote all stakeholders such as state, non-state, and private actors to contribute towards mitigating the climate crisis. One participant hailed India on creating new platforms, such as the International Solar Alliance and the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), which have innovative multi-stakeholder implementing mechanisms at an international level. Platforms like the ISA and the CDRI have been conceptualised by India but are receiving funding from various donors around the globe. The discussion concluded by emphasising that it is important for India to leverage these multi-stakeholder partnerships and mobilise more financing channels that will bring India and the world closer to achieving their climate goals.

All content reflects the individual views of the participants. The Centre for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP) does not hold an institutional view on any subject.

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