

## SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION: FOSTERING GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT AND SOLIDARITY

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*(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)*



**In an interconnected world marked by unprecedented challenges and inequalities, South-South cooperation has emerged as a pivotal mechanism for advancing global development and promoting solidarity among nations. This form of collaboration, primarily among countries in the developing world, has gained prominence for its potential to address a wide array of issues, from climate change and healthcare crises to economic development and poverty reduction. This essay explores the significance and impact of South-South cooperation in today's world.**

In recognition of the significance of South-South cooperation and commemoration of the day in 1978 when the United Nations Conference on Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries adopted the Buenos Aires Plan of Action for Advancing and Executing Technical Cooperation among Developing Nations (A/C.2/66/L.48), the General Assembly designated September 12 as the United Nations Day for South-South Cooperation. The theme of the 2023 United Nations Day will be “Solidarity, Equity and Partnership: Unlocking South-South Cooperation to Achieve the SDGs,” to highlight needs emerging from various regions; as well as to present transformational initiatives by Member States, the UN System, private sector, and civil society toward addressing the most acute priorities in achievement of the 2030 Agenda.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> South-South Cooperation Day 2023, *United Nations Office for South South Cooperation*, <https://unsouthsouth.org/south-south-cooperation-day-2023/>

South-South cooperation, as defined by the United Nations, encompasses a broad framework for collaboration among nations in the developing world across political, economic, social, cultural, environmental, and technical domains. It is a collaborative effort guided by principles such as respect for national sovereignty and ownership, free from any conditions, involving developing countries working together to enhance their capacity through the exchange of knowledge, skills, resources, and technical expertise.<sup>2</sup> This cooperation extends to regional and inter-regional collective actions, including partnerships with governments, regional organizations, civil society, academia, and the private sector, all aimed at benefiting individual countries and regions.

It occurs at various levels, from bilateral to regional, and encompasses the exchange of knowledge, skills, resources, and solutions. This collaboration takes shape through trade, foreign investment, regional integration, and technology transfer. Regions like Africa, Central and Latin America, and parts of Asia-Pacific make up the 'Global South' and are rapidly evolving into strong emerging markets, driving global economic growth and cultural exchange. South-South cooperation is a concept rooted in the principles of solidarity, mutual benefit, and shared development objectives. It stands in contrast to the traditional North-South aid paradigm, where developed countries assist their less-developed counterparts. South-South cooperation involves developing countries coming together to exchange knowledge, expertise, resources, and best practices in various domains, including trade, technology, healthcare, education, and sustainable development.



Source: *South-South Cooperation Partners*<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Office of South-South Cooperation, <https://unsouthsouth.org/about/about-sstc/>

<sup>3</sup> "South-South and Triangular Cooperation," *Food and Agriculture Organization*, <https://www.fao.org/partnerships/south-south-cooperation/our-partners/en/>

## Historical Context and Evolution

Over the past seven decades, developing nations, emerging from colonialism and foreign influence, worked diligently to establish their political identities and economic systems. During the Cold War, the world was divided between capitalism and centrally planned command economies led by the United States and the Soviet Union, respectively. Official Development Assistance (ODA) emerged as a means to stimulate growth and production in developing countries. It was not solely driven by altruism but also aimed at creating markets for developed nations' goods, securing bloc loyalties, and consolidating political alliances.

The ODA had some successes, including in countries like Pakistan. However, over time, it fostered dependency and led to crony capitalism, exacerbating economic disparities. The realization grew that economic growth alone, without addressing inequality and poverty, was insufficient. Developing nations adopted people-centred policies, expanding the middle class and indigenous manufacturing and marketing capabilities.

## The Role of South-South Cooperation in Sustainable Development

Sustainable Development Agenda at the United Nations underscores the importance of scaling up South-South and triangular cooperation. The focus is on infrastructure development, energy, technology transfer, and industrial capacity-building. Concessional financing mechanisms are crucial for the success of these projects.

For Pakistan, a country with its unique set of development challenges and aspirations, the principles of South-South cooperation hold significant relevance. Its national development goals, especially those aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) necessitate renewed efforts in fostering partnerships, both domestically and internationally, through which Pakistan can benefit immensely from the sharing of knowledge, resources, and expertise with fellow developing nations. The adoption of South-South cooperation approaches in Pakistan's policies and operational programs reflects the growing recognition of its potential to drive sustainable development.

It is crucial to identify effective mechanisms and methodologies to make our cooperation efforts more practical and well-coordinated to achieve our desired goals. One notable aspect is the emerging trends in South-South cooperation, which can play a pivotal role in mobilizing and directing resources toward sustainable development initiatives in Pakistan. These trends encompass a range of collaborative activities, from technology transfers to trade agreements, all aimed at bolstering economic growth, reducing inequality, and enhancing overall well-being.

Pakistan stands to gain significantly from embracing the principles of South-South cooperation as it navigates its development journey in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Through strategic partnerships, adopting best practices, and tapping into the resources offered by fellow developing countries, Pakistan can make substantial strides toward promoting its national development goals and contributing to the global effort to realize the Sustainable Development Goals.

### **Enhancing South-South Cooperation: Pakistan's Role and Opportunities**

Pakistan has always advocated for the deepening of collaboration among developing nations to complement North-South cooperation, emphasizing its critical role in addressing the interconnected challenges of finance, food security, and climate change that the world currently faces. Pakistan is a firm believer that the South-South cooperation can have a robust impact in multiple domains including, but not limited to, trade; infrastructure connectivity; human capital; education; health; agriculture; science and technology; climate resilience, and; disaster risk reduction, among others.<sup>4</sup> Deputy Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the UN in New York Mr. Aamir Khan, while speaking at a session of the High-Level Committee, called for further intensification of cooperation among developing countries to complement North-South cooperation as the world contends with interlinked crises of finance, food and climate change.<sup>5</sup>

South-South cooperation should be a level playing field based on sovereign equality and inclusive partnerships, It is not a substitute for, but rather a complement to, North-South cooperation and the developed countries must fulfil their commitments for North-South cooperation.<sup>6</sup> Pakistan consistently emphasized the significance of South-South cooperation, underscoring its commitment to fostering collaborative endeavours characterized by equality, mutual advantages, and mutually beneficial results. Pakistan expressed its unwavering dedication to adopting successful models and imparting the knowledge gained through its experiences in Disaster Risk Reduction and climate resilience, especially following the climate-induced floods of 2022.

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) serves as a pivotal entry point for South-South cooperation. This ambitious initiative encompasses not only the development of road and railway

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<sup>4</sup> "Pakistan Calls For Boosting South-South Cooperation As World Grapples With Multiple Crises," *Associated Press of Pakistan*, June 02, 2023, <https://www.app.com.pk/global/pakistan-calls-for-boosting-south-south-cooperation-as-world-grapples-with-multiple-crises/>

<sup>5</sup> "Pakistan Calls For Further Intensification Of Cooperation Among Developing Countries," *Radio Pakistan*, June 02, 2023, <https://www.radio.gov.pk/02-06-2023/pakistan-calls-for-boosting-south-south-cooperation-as-world-grapples-with-multiple-crises>

<sup>6</sup> "Pakistan Calls For Boosting South-South Cooperation As World Grapples With Multiple Crises," *Associated Press of Pakistan*, June 02, 2023, <https://www.app.com.pk/global/pakistan-calls-for-boosting-south-south-cooperation-as-world-grapples-with-multiple-crises/>

networks, energy projects, and a substantial boost in trade activities but also entails collaborative efforts in addressing environmental concerns and pursuing shared socio-economic objectives. CPEC holds the promise of diversifying the economy, thereby enhancing both economic and social resilience. Furthermore, it has the potential to enable the region and neighbouring nations to effectively address future challenges through cooperative endeavours.

It's vital to avoid favouring only large economies or least developed countries, ensuring that middle-income developing countries are not overlooked. Strengthening institutions supporting South-South cooperation is essential.

1. Coordination in multilateral trade negotiations among developing countries should be improved to advance North-South partnerships for economic and social dialogue and mutually beneficial investments.
2. As part of the developing world, Pakistan should strive to deepen its integration into the multilateral politics and markets of the South, focusing on trade, finance, and technology. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, a significant South-South project, holds enormous potential for regional connectivity and economic growth.
3. Pakistan's Vision 2025 emphasizes the development of a competitive knowledge economy, value addition, and product diversification. Exploring new markets in East Asia, Africa, and Latin America is crucial to reducing dependence on traditional markets.
4. Science and technology collaboration with countries like China, the U.S. and Europe can help Pakistan harness opportunities in biotechnology and nanotechnology, further enhancing its competitiveness.

*Key Aspects of South-South Cooperation:*

1. **Mutual Empowerment:** South-South cooperation allows Pakistan and other participating nations to leverage their collective strengths and experiences by sharing knowledge and resources, empowering each other to overcome common challenges and achieve shared goals. For instance, agricultural practices from one country may be adapted to suit the climate and conditions of another, leading to increased food security.
2. **Resource Mobilization:** South-South cooperation fosters resource mobilization among participating countries. By pooling resources and expertise, developing nations like Pakistan can

jointly invest in infrastructure development, research, and innovation, which might not be feasible individually enhancing economic growth and reducing dependence on external aid.

3. **Technology Transfer:** Pakistan has often faced hurdles in accessing cutting-edge technologies from the developed world. South-South cooperation facilitates the transfer of technology and knowledge, enabling nations to bridge technological gaps, enhance productivity, and promote sustainable development. This exchange ranges from renewable energy solutions to medical advancements.

4. **Capacity Building:** Capacity building is a fundamental aspect of South-South cooperation. Nations with expertise in various fields provide training and technical assistance to their counterparts, helping them develop the skills and knowledge needed to address complex challenges. This knowledge transfer contributes to human resource development and economic growth.

#### *Impact of South-South Cooperation on Pakistan:*

1. **Addressing Global Challenges:** South-South cooperation has been instrumental in tackling pressing global issues, such as climate change and pandemics. Pakistan can share strategies for mitigating environmental risks and responding to health crises, exemplified by collaborative efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic. In a significant move aimed at collaborative environmental conservation efforts, Pakistan and China have entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) titled 'Provision of Goods through South-South Cooperation to Combat Climate Change.'<sup>7</sup>

2. **Economic Growth:** By fostering trade and investment among themselves, countries in the 'Global South' experience economic growth and diversification. This can lead to poverty reduction and improved living standards for their populations.

3. **Reducing Inequalities:** South-South cooperation plays a pivotal role in reducing inequalities within and between nations. It empowers countries to develop independently, narrowing the gap between the North and the South.

4. **Promoting Self-Reliance:** Through knowledge exchange and resource sharing, Pakistan under the umbrella of the South-South cooperation can promote self-reliance among participating nations and become less reliant on external aid and more capable of independently addressing their development needs.

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<sup>7</sup> "Pakistan, China Sign MoU for Addressing Climate Change" *News*, September 09, 2023, <https://www.nation.com.pk/09-Sep-2023/pakistan-china-sign-mou-for-addressing-climate-change>

## Conclusion

South-South cooperation represents a beacon of hope in the complex and interconnected world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It embodies the principles of solidarity, mutual support, and shared responsibility among countries in the 'Global South.' By collaborating to address global challenges, promote economic growth, reduce inequalities, and foster self-reliance, South-South cooperation offers a path to a more equitable and sustainable future for all. As we commemorate the United Nations Day for South-South Cooperation, nations and communities worldwide need to embrace this transformative approach and build bridges towards a better world.

South-South cooperation is reshaping the global development landscape. It represents a shift from historical North-South dynamics and offers a path to sustainable development, economic growth, and unity among developing nations. As the world embarks on the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, scaling up South-South cooperation is essential. Ultimately, South-South cooperation is the pivotal way forward for a more equitable and prosperous world.