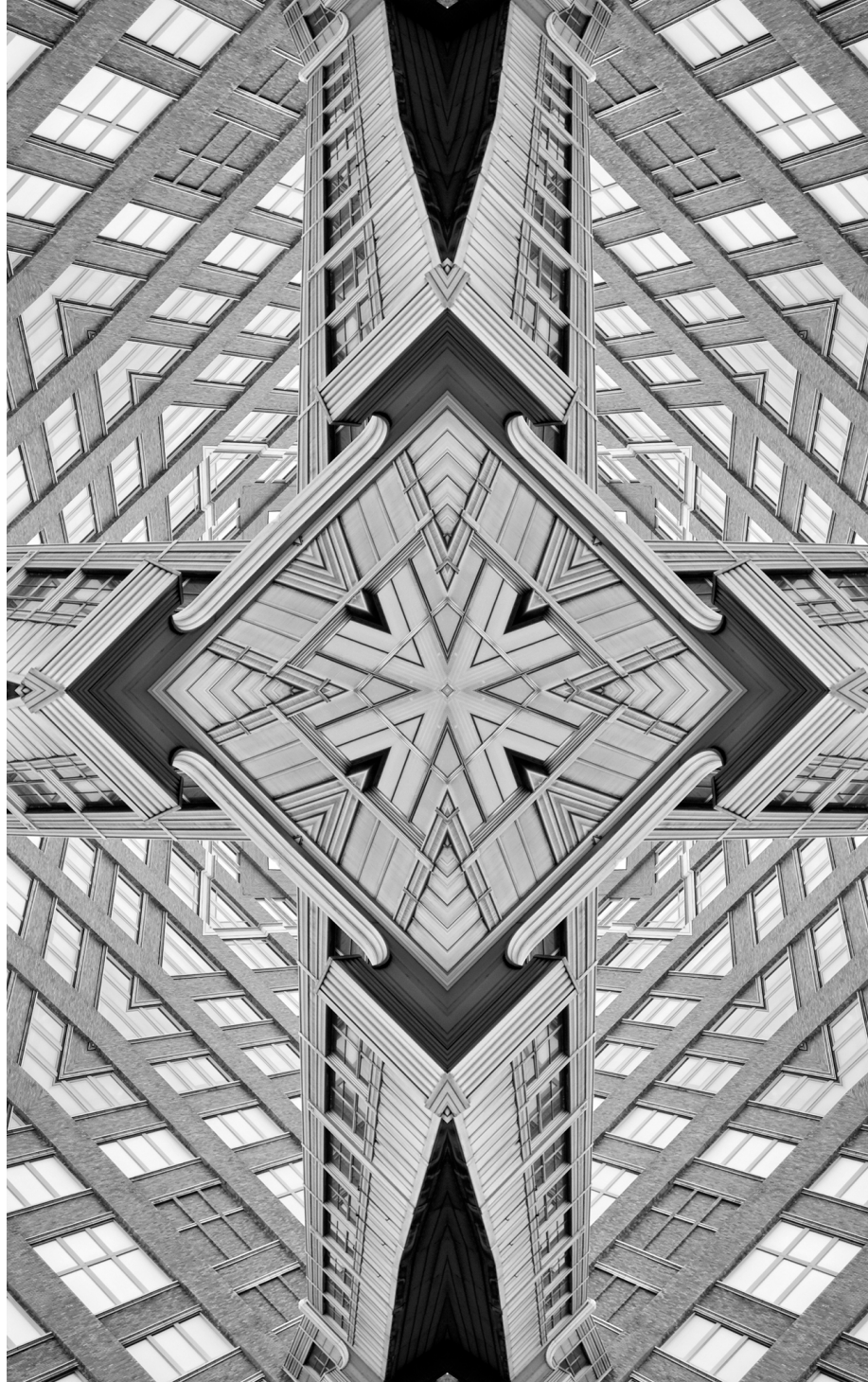


Issue

Brief

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The Sustainability Thread in India's Development Partnerships

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Abstract

This brief analyses the alignment between India's development partnerships since Independence, and sustainability goals. It conducts the examination using three phases of India's development partnerships—i.e., Phase 1, 1947-1990; Phase 2, 1991-2008; and Phase 3, post-2008—and finds that the country's development cooperation agenda has historically incorporated objectives of sustainable growth. This pattern would continue throughout the different phases of its development partnerships, all the way to the era of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) beginning in 2015. The brief explores the key trends in India's development partnerships in the remaining ten years for the international community to work towards achieving the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030.

There is less than a decade left before the deadline set by the international community for itself to make the world a better place and achieve the 17 Goals and 169 targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs aim to “end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity” by 2030.¹ Since the UN General Assembly adopted the SDGs in 2015, much of the world is lagging in many of the goals and there is an urgent need to mobilise resources and enhance implementation. In this context, India is emerging as a potential game-changer in the international development cooperation efforts, not only because its population is a massive 17 percent of the world’s, but given that it is a key development partner to many countries, especially in the South Asian region. Indeed, its development cooperation engagements^a in recent years have leveraged its position in the broader development cooperation narrative. India institutionalised its development cooperation in 2012 by creating the Development Partnership Administration (DPA) under the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).

This brief evaluates India’s development partnerships and weighs them against the theme of sustainability. The objective is not to provide a description of the development cooperation initiatives *per se*; there is sufficient existing literature in this regard (among them, Sachin Chaturvedi, T. Fues and E. Sidiropoulos, 2012; Urvashi Aneja, 2015; Kashyap Arora and Rani D Mullen, 2017; Gareth Price, 2013; and Vijaya Katti, Tatjana Chahoud and Atul Kaushik, 2009). Rather it is to identify a co-relation between India’s development partnerships and objectives of sustainability. To pursue this enquiry, the brief examines India’s development partnerships in three phases (Phase I, 1947-1990; Phase II, 1991-2008; and Phase III, post-2008). It then ponders the most fundamental imperatives for India’s DPA in the run-up to the Agenda 2030 deadline.

a This study uses the word ‘partnership’ and ‘cooperation’ interchangeably. However, the official terminology utilised by the Government of India is ‘partnership’, as seen in the nomenclature of the Development Partnership Administration (DPA).

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Phase I (1947-1990)

India's efforts to build effective partnerships with developing countries—both in its immediate neighbourhood and beyond, such as in Africa—can be traced to the British colonial era.² After 1947, India and other newly independent nations gathered in Bandung, Indonesia in 1955 and declared a set of 'Bandung Principles'. These principles of political self-determination, mutual respect for sovereignty, non-aggression, non-interference in internal affairs, and equality served as the pillars of India's foreign policy, which in turn guided the country's development cooperation. This was further given an impetus through the broader South-South Cooperation (SSC) structure facilitating cooperation in cases of conflict of ideas, differences in development, and other related issues.

During this period, a prominent feature of New Delhi's development cooperation came in the form of the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme, Special Commonwealth Assistance Programme for Africa (SCAPA), and bilateral aid to other developing countries. Its initial footprints could be traced through the cultural fellowships launched by the MEA in 1949 to foster goodwill and friendly ties with fellow developing countries.

In 1954 the Indian Aid Mission was created in Kathmandu, later renamed Indian Cooperation Mission (ICM), to manage and coordinate India's development projects in Nepal. Other partners at the time included the neighbouring countries of Bhutan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka, encompassing various sectors such as infrastructure, capacity-building, and technical training. (See Table 1)

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**Table 1:
India's Development Cooperation in
South Asia and Africa (1947-1990)**

Country	Nature of Cooperation	Years Covered
Nepal	a) Power Exchange Agreement b) Education	1971 1960s onwards
Myanmar	a) Treaty of Friendship b) Grant of loan amounting to US\$ 46 million c) ITEC programmes d) Infrastructural and Road Projects	1951 1958
Bangladesh	a) Active Development Partner b) Loans and Grants of US\$ 369.7 million c) ITEC programme training civil and military officials	1971 onwards
Afghanistan	a) Intervention in the Health Sector and Capacity Building b) Training of Afghan bureaucrats, doctors and paramedics under ITEC	1979 onwards
Bhutan	a) Extended Finance to the Five Year Plan (FYPs) b) Invested US\$ 63 million towards linking the Bengal-Assam plains to Phuentsholing, and Phuentsholing to Thimpu and Paro	1960s onwards
Ethiopia	Capacity building, trade and investment, infrastructure, education and supplying trained teachers	1950
Mauritius	Disseminating oriental learning	1976
Libya	Growth of power sector	1980

Source: Author's own, using various sources

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Phase II (1991-2008)

Following the economic reforms of the 1990s, there were paradigmatic shifts in India's security and foreign policy aspirations, which in turn were reflected in its development cooperation. During this period, India's assistance strategy was heavily influenced by both economic considerations—such as gaining access to markets and raw material—and strategic ones as well (i.e., strengthening relations with other developing countries, for example, to procure support for India's bid to gain a permanent seat in the UN Security Council). Globally, countries were taking cognisance of the need to incorporate environmental factors in economic goals.³ These included the issues of protecting indigenous knowledge, as well as intellectual property rights.

In 2000, the world committed to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).^b This declaration is widely regarded as a catalyst for development cooperation in a global scale. Indeed, the MDGs helped streamline official development assistance (ODA).

For India, a highlight of this second phase was the introduction of the second stage of the LOC programme in 2003-04 through the Export Import Bank of India (EXIM), thereby substantially widening the reach of New Delhi's development cooperation. Earlier formulated as Indian Development Initiative (IDI) and later renamed Indian Development and Economic Assistance Scheme (IDEAS), LOCs are extended as loans on the recommendation of the MEA to the developing countries. They were initially limited to African and Asian countries and amounted to US\$ 215.36 million, with a sectoral focus on rural electrification, railway rehabilitation, and hydropower projects. (See Table 2 for the LOCs extended by India to the African region from 2003 to 2007 and Table 3 for South Asia.)

^b The MDGs are a set of eight goals that UN Member States agreed to achieve by 2015. They committed world leaders to combat poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation, and discrimination against women.

**Table 2:
LOCs Extended by India to Africa
(2003-2007)**

Country	Nature of Cooperation	Years Covered
Ghana	Rural electrification	2003
Lesotho	Export of pump sets and irrigation equipment	2004
Mozambique	Supply of water drilling machines	2004
Sudan	Electrification equipment and PV cells	2004
Zambia	Supply of motor vehicles and vocational toolkits	2003
Ethiopia	Development of sugar industry by providing superior germplasm for sugar strains	2006
Cote d'Ivoire	Capacity building in Small and Medium Scale Industries	2007

Source: EXIM Bank, Lines of Credit Statistics

**Table 3:
LOCs Extended by India to South Asia
(2004-2008)**

Country	Nature of Cooperation	Year
Myanmar	Setting up Optical Fibre Connection Link between Moreh and Mandalay	2004
Vietnam	a) Devoted to textile machinery b) Services for hydro power projects	2004
Syria	Development and modernisation of Steel Plant in Hama	2008

Source: EXIM Bank, Lines of Credit Statistics

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During this period, New Delhi also engaged in different sectors with other immediate neighbours. In Afghanistan, following the Taliban exit in 2001, India began collaborating with the Northern Alliance in its quest for sustaining democracy and peace. India joined Kabul's *School Feeding Programme* in 2003 by converting one million tonnes of wheat into high-protein biscuits for distribution in schools, in collaboration with the World Food Programme (WFP). Healthcare and medical facilities is another important sector where Indian development initiatives found its presence around 2001. For instance, medical camps were set up for fixing artificial limbs for Afghans who suffered during the conflict. Moreover, as part of the *Small Development Project Scheme*, India facilitated the establishment of basic health clinics in various areas such as Badakshan, Balkh, Kandahar, Khost, Kunar, Nangarhar, Nimroz, Nooristan, Paktia and Paktika. In the sector of power and transmission, in 2004, New Delhi initiated the construction of the *Salma Dam Power Project* on the river Hari Rud in the province of Herat. It promised a generation of 42 MW electricity and also an irrigation capacity of 40,000 hectares.

In the subsequent years, Indian development cooperation gradually broadened its overseas influence by reaching out to Latin America and also the Pacific island nation, Fiji. Table 4 provides a summary of the LOCs offered by India during 2003-08 in various sectors to Asia, Africa, Latin America and Oceania. Table 5 lists the capacity building programmes introduced by India from 2003 to 2008. The last column of Table 4 refers to the relevant Sustainable Development Goals, as they have been institutionalised by the international community in 2015, that reflect the aims of these earlier LOCs. (See Annex for a complete list of the SDGs.) This illustrates that indeed, historically, India's development partnerships have hewed to sustainability aims. That today, looking back, one can see that India's development partnerships over the years have been organically following the aims of sustainability.

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**Table 4:
Summary of LOCs extended by India
(2003-04)**

Year	Amount of LOCs (in USD million)	Region	Sector	Relevant SDGs
2003-04	215.36	Africa, Asia	Transport, Agriculture, Hydropower, Rural Electrification, Data Connectivity	SDG 9 SDG 2 SDG 7
2004-05	284.87	Africa, Asia, Latin America	Energy, Transport, Agriculture	SDG 7 SDG 9 SDG 2
2005-06	1,233.76	Africa, Asia, Latin America, Oceania	Agriculture, Transport, Communications, Energy,	SDG 2 SDG 9 SDG 7
2006-07	383.66	Africa, Asia, Latin America	Hydropower, Agriculture & Irrigation, Housing, Health, Transport	SDG 7 SDG 2 SDG 3 SDG 9
2007-08	697.70	Africa, Asia, Latin America	IT Training, Energy, Sugar Industry, Fisheries, Irrigation, Data Connectivity	SDG 14 SDG 9 SDG 7 SDG 2

Source: Author's own, data derived from the Exim Bank Lines of Credit Statistics

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**Table 5:
Capacity-building programmes by
India in Africa (2003-2008)**

Country	Nature of Cooperation	Year
Ghana & Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)	a) IT training of lectures, IT toolkits and a financial assistance amounting to US\$ 2 million b) Partnering with local communities for capacity building	2003
Mauritius	a) Providing technical training of curators, and supplying exhibits and equipment for Science Centre b) Promotion of Scientific Innovation	2004
Pan-African E-Network Project	a) Promotion of e-governance, e-commerce, tele-education, resource mapping, meteorological and other related services for the African continent	2004
Sierra Leone	a) Decentralizing energy sector b) Building a Community-scale model towards installing, repairing and maintain their own solar system c) Training of independent women solar engineers	2008

Source: Author's own, data collected from Ministry of External Affairs

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Phase III (Post-2008)

The 2007 financial crisis had cascading impacts on the international development aid landscape; it resulted in cuts in the aid budgets to regions like Africa and Asia. For India, analysts aver that the economic reforms during the previous phase allowed the country to escape, albeit narrowly, the fallout of the global recession. In 2008, the Indian development cooperation, then known as India International Development Cooperation Agency (IIDCA), deepened its engagement with Africa through the India-Africa Forum Summit by committing to double its existing LOCs towards infrastructural development programmes, agricultural productivity, IT, energy, and rural electrification.⁴ The sustainability narrative was steadily gaining more ground at this time. In 2012, as mentioned earlier, India established the Development Partnership Administration (DPA) under the MEA, thereby institutionalising its development partnerships abroad. (See Table 6).

Table 6:
Key Strands of Indian DPA, Sectoral focus, and SDG Ambitions

DPA Element	Target Countries	Sectoral Focus/SDG Ambition	Amount (as of 2021)
Lines of Credit (LoCs)	Asia (Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Laos, Mongolia) Africa (Burkina Faso, Burundi, Congo, Core d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe) South America (Guyana, Suriname) Central America (Nicaragua) North America (Cuba) Oceania (Fiji, Papua New Guinea)	Infrastructural development (SDG 9) Regional connectivity (transport, railways, roads and ports) (SDG 9, SDG 11) Trade and commerce in agriculture and irrigation (SDG 2) People-to-people contact (SDG 17)	US\$ 318.75 million Total LOCs (2014-2020) US\$ 18,647.70 million

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Grants-in-Aid	Asia (Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Myanmar, Afghanistan, Mongolia) African Countries Oceania Eurasian Countries Latin American Countries Other Developing Countries	Hydroelectricity & power transmission (SDG 7) Infrastructure development (SDG 9, SDG 11) Agriculture (SDG 2) Education (SDG 4) Health (SDG 3) Industry (SDG 9)	₹6,786.65 Crores Total (2008-2020) ₹71,834.27 Crores
Capacity Building & Technical Assistance	Asia (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar) African Countries Latin American Countries Oceania Other Developing Countries	ICT (SDG 17) IT (SDG 17) Security Studies Logistics	NA

Source: Author's own, using the MEA dashboard

At present, India's DPA gives focus to regional connectivity in its bilateral engagements in the immediate neighbourhood.⁵ Table 7 lists New Delhi's development initiatives with a sectoral focus in its neighbourhood.

Table 7:
India's Development Cooperation in its Neighbourhood (2008-present)

Country	Sectoral Focus
Nepal	a) Road Projects b) Cross Border Electricity Transmission
Bangladesh	a) Extending LOCs towards infrastructural connectivity b) Capacity Building, Skill Training and Setting up of Cultural Training Centres
Myanmar	Regional Connectivity
Sri Lanka	Regional Connectivity

Source: Author's own, using data from Ministry of External Affairs

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Indian development partnerships, apart from the bilateral initiatives, are also present in a number of multilateral forums. Although multilateralism has been declining in the past few years, collaboration remains pivotal in the run-up to Agenda 2030. As part of various multilateral forums under the wider SSC umbrella, India is setting up alternative modes and avenues of mobilising finance as opposed to the OECD-DAC structure (see Table 8).⁶

Table 8:
India's Development Initiatives on Global Platforms

Initiative	Focal Countries	Year
IBSA (India, Brazil South Africa) Fund	Southern countries, for example a) Improving healthcare access for children in Cambodia b) Facilitating the means for irrigation on 630 hectares of agricultural land in Laos c) Resilience training in modern agricultural techniques of 1,600 smallholder famers in Timor-Leste	2006
India-UN Development Partnership Fund	Small Island Developing States (SIDS), Least Developed Countries (LDCs), and Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs)	2017
International Solar Alliance (ISA)	Sunshine rich countries geographically located either fully or partly between the Tropic of Cancer and Tropic of Capricorn	2015
Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI)	Countries vulnerable to disasters caused by rising climatic risks, such as the Pacific Island Nations	2019
New Development Bank	BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) and other emerging economies	2015

Source: Author's own, using official websites of ISA, CDRI, IBSA, BRICS and the UN

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In order to keep up with the surge in development cooperation demand from the developing countries owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, India stepped up its humanitarian assistance under 'Vaccine Maitri' by sending COVID-related medical kits, PPE suits, vaccines, and other medicines to its neighbours in South Asia.⁷ This falls in line with the SDG 3 ambition. Furthermore, in its bid to handle the pandemic, it utilised e-ITEC programmes to share technical expertise and knowledge (SDG 17) with other developing countries.⁸ On the cultural front, New Delhi has "completed more than 50 projects" involving the restoration of several old temples, religious structures and relics belonging to different South Asian countries.⁹ This particularly falls in line with target 4 of SDG 11.

To better understand the change in stances adopted by the Indian development partnerships across the various phases, Table 9 gives a timeline marking the reflection of the SDG ambitions across the three phases in India's development cooperation. The point is that, historically, India's development partnerships have been aligned with themes of sustainability. These objectives were eventually institutionalised, first, as the MDGs and later, as the SDGs.

Table 9:
The Alignment of India's development partnerships and Sustainability Goals

Phases	Nature of Cooperation	Country	SDGs
<i>Phase 1 (1947-1990)</i>	Power Exchange Agreement and establishment of Schools and setting up facilities in Tribhuvan University	Nepal	SDG 7 & SDG 4
	Treaty of Friendship towards infrastructural and ITEC programmes	Myanmar	SDG 9 & SDG 17
	Indira Gandhi Children's Hospital and training of Afghan bureaucrats, doctors and paramedics under ITEC	Afghanistan	SDG 3 & SDG 17

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Phases	Nature of Cooperation	Country	SDGs
	LOCs amounting to US\$ 63 million linking Bengal-Assam plains to Phuentsholing, and Phuentsholing to Thimpu and Paro	Bhutan	SDG 9
	Cooperation in capacity building, trade and investment, infrastructure, and ensuring supply of trained teachers	Ethiopia	SDG 17, SDG 9, SDG 3, SDG 8
	Mahatma Gandhi Institute (MGI) promoting cultural cooperation	Mauritius	SDG 4
	2X20 Tripoli West Power Station	Libya	SDG 7
<i>Phase II (1991-2008)</i>	Under the Second phase LOCs programmes, US\$ 640 million towards sugar industry	Ethiopia	SDG 2
	Centre for Demonstration and Promotion of Technologies (CDT)	Cote d'Ivoire	SDG 1, SDG 8, SDG 9
	School Feeding Programme, healthcare facilities, Small Development Project Scheme, initiation of Salma Power Dam	Afghanistan	SDG 4, SDG 1, SDG 3, SDG 7, SDG 2, SDG 17
	Advanced Information Technology Institute-Kofi Annan Centre of Excellence in ICT (AITI-KACE)	Ghana and ECOWAS	SDG 9, SDG 17, SDG 4
	Rajiv Gandhi Science Centre (RGSC)	Mauritius	SDG 4
	Pan-African E-Network Project	Africa	SDG 2, SDG 4
	Barefoot College under ITEC	Sierra Leone	SDG 5, SDG 7
	43 Road Projects, Arun-3 Hydropower Project	Nepal	SDG 11, SDG 7

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Phases	Nature of Cooperation	Country	SDGs
<i>Phase III (post-2008)</i>	Extended LOCs amounting to US\$ 7,000 million towards 31 connectivity projects, High Impact Community Development Projects	Bangladesh	SDG 11, SDG17, SDG 4
	Regional Connectivity	Sri Lanka	SDG 11, SDG 9
	IBSA Fund-Healthcare access	Cambodia	SDG 3
	IBSA Fund- Facilitating means of irrigation	Laos	SDG 2
	IBSA Fund-Training in modern agricultural techniques	Timor-Leste	SDG 2, SDG 17
	India-UN Development Partnership Fund	SIDS, LDCs and LLDCs	Covering all the 17 SDGs
	International Solar Alliance (ISA)	Developing nations of Africa and Asia	SDG 7
	Coalition of Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI)	Asia, Pacific and Oceania	SDG 13, SDG 11
	Vaccine Maitri	Global	SDG 3, SDG 17

Source: Author's own

In the short term, New Delhi must look out for six crucial trends in its development partnerships, keeping in mind the sustainability goalposts.

Institutionalising SDGs as a separate vertical in the DPA

The Indian DPA has failed to give adequate space to the SDGs in its institutional structure. Even as India's development partnerships, as shown in this brief, have historically fallen naturally within the ambit of the SDGs, most of the projects are undertaken on the basis of demand; still *not* as an SDG policy drive. It is time to reorganise the DPA to meet the demands of the current 'Decade of Action'.

Preparing a specialised cadre on the SDGs

Institutionalising the SDGs as a separate vertical under the DPA would be incomplete without the right personnel. A core group must be set up to work on interweaving the development partnership activities and the 17 SDGs. This specialised cadre would also facilitate the assessment of foreign policy drivers connected to achieving ecological equity as well as setting up the institutional fibre, as a whole.

Conducting Impact Assessments of partnerships

Stocktaking is a vital step in institutionalising effective and formidable development partnerships. This has been one of the DPA's weaknesses in the past nine years. Establishing a separate ministry or an institutional agency dedicated to India's development partnerships should be considered, keeping in mind the long-drawn sustainability targets.

Pushing the envelope on robust multilateralism

Trade-offs between domestic interests and international strategic gains influence not only India's foreign policy formulations but also its development cooperation. As multilateral forums fall under the scanner for their failings, India is exploring other modes of bilateral and minilateral engagements such as BRICS.¹⁰ This is not to say that the UN is to be ignored by New Delhi. Efforts should be made towards strategic confidence-building with other partners and

traditional donors to rally support around the SDGs in the UN. After all, the sustainability agenda is equally vital for both developed and developing nations, especially in the COVID-19 era.

Comprehending the ‘China Challenge’

The volume of Chinese aid is substantially increasing in many parts of the world, in particular through the country’s flagship Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In the Indo-Pacific, Indian and Chinese interests intersect: both countries are seeking to expand their footprints through projects on disaster risk resilience, renewable energy, and agriculture, among others.

Three Key SDGs: 13, 14, and 15


The COVID-19 pandemic has made it clear that all 17 of the SDGs command adequate attention from the international community. The paradigmatic shifts in development caused by the pandemic requires India’s development partnerships policymakers to reform the institutional structure of the DPA. There are three SDGs that Indian DPA needs to consider especially, so as to “future proof sustainable recovery and sustainable development” in the coming few years.¹¹ Climate Action (SDG 13) initiatives have far-reaching consequences on the overall development partnerships. As South Asia has historically been vulnerable to the manifold consequences of natural disasters, India’s model of development cooperation has to be grounded in this SDG target. Life on Land (SDG 15) and Life below Water (SDG 14) concern themselves with the vitality of safeguarding living organisms and their natural habitats. Disturbing and encroaching on the natural territories could possibly result in more frequent outbreaks of diseases; this is seen in COVID-19.¹² India’s farming, mining and housing initiatives in partner countries, for example, must focus on sustainable pathways.

Conclusion

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India's development partnerships over the past many decades have historically considered sustainability. More recently, since the UN member states adopted the SDGs, India has maintained such alignment between development partnerships and sustainability goals.

Following independence, New Delhi's desire to extend support to other fellow developing countries was born out of a compulsion to secure its own position in the foreign policy landscape. At the time, India chose to engage in sharing technical expertise, knowledge, and capacity-building given how it was itself still struggling to find a path to economic growth. In the 1990s, economic reforms allowed India to pursue partnership initiatives. In the following decade, India undertook several projects in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, working in sectors that fall in line with the SDGs, including: agriculture (SDG 2), housing (SDG 11), health (SDG 3), irrigation (SDG 2), energy (SDG 7), and infrastructure (SDG 9 and 11). As observed, it has been an organic process rather than a policy-driven initiative.

In the coming years, India can potentially drive the SDG narrative, as some analysts have pointed out, by "providing solutions and weaving roadmaps for others."¹³ If New Delhi can successfully reinvent its DPA priorities and marry them with the SDG Agenda, it would be possible to envision an "Indian model" of sustainability. 

Annex

The Goals of Agenda 2030



Source: United Nations, 2015.

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