

# India's Development Cooperation in the Post-Aid Era

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Debate

## Abstract

This paper analyses the evolving landscape of development cooperation, emphasising India's leadership role within South-South Cooperation (SSC). It outlines the historical and contemporary operational principles of India's SSC, approach detailing its global development compact. Against the backdrop of widespread reduction in aid (ODA), particularly from the Global North, the paper critically assesses the implications for the Global South. It argues that SSC and Triangular Cooperation (TrC), which leverages the comparative advantages of traditional and emerging partners, present a resilient, efficient, and equitable pathway to address financing gaps and foster sustainable, context-appropriate development solutions.

**KEYWORDS:** South-South Cooperation (SSC), Triangular Cooperation (TrC), Official Development Assistance (ODA), Global Development Compact, Lifestyle for Economy (LiFE).

## El desarrollo de la India. Cooperación en la era posterior a la ayuda

### Resumen

El panorama cambiante de la cooperación para el desarrollo, haciendo hincapié en el papel de liderazgo de la India en la cooperación Sur-Sur, describe los principios operativos históricos y contemporáneos del enfoque de la CSS de la India, en un contexto de reducción generalizada de la ayuda, especialmente por el "Norte Global". Similarmente, evalúa de forma crítica las implicaciones para el Sur Global. Sostiene que la CSS y la Cooperación Triangular aprovechan las ventajas comparativas de los socios tradicionales y emergentes, representan una vía resistente, eficiente y equitativa para abordar las deficiencias de financiación y fomentar soluciones de desarrollo sostenibles.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Cooperación Sur-Sur (CSS), Cooperación Triangular (CT), Ayuda Oficial al Desarrollo (AOD), Pacto Mundial para el Desarrollo, Estilo de Vida para la Economía (LiFE).

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## **1. Introduction**

The landscape of development cooperation can be broadly divided into three parts i.e. North-South Cooperation (NSC) also referred to as foreign aid, South-South Cooperation (SSC), and Triangular Cooperation (TrC). Each of these three international development practices emerged from requirements of time and each of these practices have operationally brought new dimensions to the development cooperation ecosystem. Ernesto Sirolli in his seminal book “Ripples from Zambezi” best articulated the development cooperation landscape (Sirolli, 1999). He describes how well researched, and well-meaning Italian aid workers with the best intentions to assist the farmers reached Zambia, and started carrying out soil research, weather pattern studies, and studies related to farming cycles of Zambezi River basin. They concluded that the soil is extremely fertile, the weather pattern is quite suited for agriculture, and the region would have bumper harvest if only the local Zambian farmers shed their laziness and start working in the farms. These aid workers sowed seeds, irrigated the land, tended to the crops, and were satisfied to see their hard work bearing the positive results. The tomatoes were plump and red, and just as they were about to harvest the tomatoes, in came the hippopotamuses from the Zambezi River and destroyed the standing crops.

The aid workers were aghast, and in tears, and this was the first occasion they interacted with the local farmers, the very people whom they were committed to help in the first place. The local people and farmers said the hippopotamus problem is the real reason why they don't practice agriculture despite the fertile soil and appropriate climate in the region conducive for agriculture. One of the major learnings that the author expressed through this incident was to first interact and listen to the people whom one wants to help and wait for the people to demand things from the organisations who want to help them. Various developmental researchers, and experts from the Global South took notice of this and realised that they have always been practicing demand driven assistance and mutual learning through their SSC, much before this realisation dawned on the developmental practitioners and researchers from the Global North.

This anecdote broadly explains the operational differences between foreign aid and SSC.

With this background and context, this paper will now meander towards different issue areas related to India's development cooperation journey. The next section will discuss the country's SSC from a historical and contemporary perspectives. The third section of this paper will deliberate on the framework and the ideas of LiFE (Lifestyle for Economy), Global Development Compact, and the Right to Development (RtD) as inherent part of the Indian development cooperation. The next section discusses empirically the dwindling of Official Development Assistance (ODA) and its impact on India and the Global South. The fifth section of the paper deals with the issues of development finance in South Asia. The region of South Asia is important with respect to development finance as most countries in the region are at the cusp of graduating out of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) category thus losing their preferential status at the trading landscape. Also, it is of consequence to India as it is placed at the centre of such transformations. Topic of global trends of TrC, followed by a section on the current scenario of declining Official Development Assistance (ODA) and the role of TrC in that context. The fourth section discusses the issues of SSC and TrC, and their contributions to the Global South. The penultimate section of the paper briefly touches on the issue of triangular cooperation (TrC) and how it is being seen as a possible solution for development cooperation in wake of dwindling financial resources. The last section ends with possible policy recommendations and way forward.

## **2. India and South-South Cooperation**

The present scenario of India's development cooperation is vastly different from the time when India started engaging with the developing world right after its independence in August 1947. In fact, the declaration of solidarity with the colonised countries came as far back as 1927 when Jawaharlal Nehru met the Chinese delegation at the Anti-Imperialist Congress in Brussels (Gaur, 2005). The Indian and Chinese delegation forged a common stand and issued a joint declaration. The Indian National

Congress was urged to launch an agitation in support of the Chinese struggle, and also for the withdrawal of Indian troops from China (Gaur, 2005, p. 12). Another remarkable initiative was the Asian Conference held in April 1947 in Delhi (Thakur, 2019). Twenty-eight countries sent their representatives, which included still colonised countries of Malaya, Indonesia, and Vietnam; China and Tibet were represented separately; seven Asian 'republics' of the Soviet Union and Korea; and the Arab League were represented too, along with a Jewish delegation from Palestine (Guha, 2007). The objectives of the conference were "to bring together the leading men and women of Asia on a common platform to study the problems of common concern to the people of the continent, to focus attention on social, economic and cultural problems of the different countries of Asia, and to foster mutual contact and understanding" (ICWA, 2013).

A few months before the conference in September 1946, the interim Indian government established a fellowship programme for trainees from China and Indonesia (Chaturvedi, 2016). India's role in SSC was again visible in its co-organising the Bandung conference in 1955. The Afro-Asian conference of Bandung and the subsequent emergence of its development offshoot (SSC) must be seen under the wider sphere of global IR as it was for the first time that a framework of enquiry in all its diversity, especially with due recognition of the experiences, voices and agency of non-Western peoples, societies and states, who were marginalised in the discipline of economics, development and international affairs, came to the limelight (Acharya, 2014).

India's stated policy has always been that national development across the South is an outcome of not only the efforts by the national governments, but also those of the international community (Chaturvedi, 2012a). Over the years, the political solidarity of India towards the countries of the Global South has evolved to a relationship based on the sound economic logic of win-win cooperation and mutual benefit for the countries without relinquishing the features of equality and trust. Political solidarity has also progressed to developmental oriented projects, and programmes on the ground.

Different approaches and understandings of SSC have led to the evolution of basic tenets of SSC from the Indian perspective, a perspective India has consistently promoted at international fora (RIS, 2013). They are as follows:

- **Demand Driven**

In SSC, it is the partner or the recipient, rather than the provider as the source of funds or capacities that determines the priorities in the project. The selection of projects and the methods for implementation are decided in consultation with the partner and is never imposed.

- **Respect for national sovereignty**

In line with the principle of national sovereignty, the partner, or the recipient countries themselves initiate, organise, and manage SSC activities. SSC is basically about interdependences, not ‘new dependencies.

- **Political and Macroeconomic Non-Conditionality**

SSC never interferes with internal dynamics of the partner countries by providing policy recommendations thereby, challenging the national sovereignty of the partner. Nor does it withhold or/and rescinds partnerships due to changes happening within the partner country.

- **Spirit of Sharing (Solidarity)**

One of the major tenants of SSC is that it is based on a partnership of partners involved with an absence of hierarchy in development cooperation. The spirit of sharing through capacity building and technology transfer continues to drive SSC.

- **Mutual Benefit**

SSC is carried out in the nature of partnership to promote mutual benefit and thereby rejecting an unequal dependent relationship. The aim of cooperation is to create a higher level of capability and economic opportunity for both the partners, aimed at mutually beneficial interdependency.

After this brief introduction of India’s engagement with SSC, the next section will look deeper into the framework of Indian development cooperation.

### **3. Framework of India’s Development Cooperation**

India has come a long way in its efforts at development cooperation towards like-minded developing countries. The Indian development

cooperation budget has not only increased but the geographical reach has also broadened along with a sectoral expanse (Aneja, 2015). At present, apart from capacity-building (which continues to be India's focus), India's development cooperation is manifested through its 'development compact' on five components: capacity-building and skills transfer, technology and technical assistance, development finance (which includes concessional loans and lines of credit), grants, and trade and investment (which also include credit lines) (Chaturvedi, 2015). The development compact is between the countries of the South and is based on the basic tenets of SSC as explained earlier. The development compact offers opportunities for growth and economic expansion through human capacity building and strengthened institutions (Chaturvedi, 2016).

Many of the decolonised countries in Asia and Africa suffered from an acute shortage of skilled manpower. India, on the account of their advanced university education system and the early establishment of Indian Institutes of Technology, Indian Technical institutes and Indian Institutes of Management was somewhat better placed as compared to other countries (Chaturvedi, 2012b). India shared its advantage in the field of education, and capacity building with the countries of the Global South<sup>2</sup> (Iyengar, 2017). Also, in the early years of its independence, India realized that countries in the global South that were emerging from colonialism would be affected by fragility, poverty, lack of infrastructure and possibly conflict or violence and would need development partnership right from the moment they gained independence. Although the term "South-South Cooperation" was not coined then, the seeds of its need and values can be traced to this phenomenon of helping countries in the global South build a peaceful environment through development cooperation and partnership.

Thus, capacity building through training and technical cooperation formed an important part of India's development assistance. Capacity building initiatives of India are channelled through the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) which was formalised in 1964, though India has provided human resources assistance to developing countries since its independence (Kumar, 2009). Civilian and Defence

training programmes including educational exchange remain a significant part of ITEC to this day. ITEC is offering training to more than 12,000 candidates per year from 161 countries through 120 participating institutions which cover over 300 courses (ITEC, 2025). Total number of people trained since ITEC's inception stands at more than 225,000 (ITEC, 2025), starting with a small number of nine scholarships just after independence (ITEC, 2025).

Of all the modalities associated with India's development cooperation, the modality of concessional loans has been in a prominent position. India has been providing Lines of Credit (LoCs) to developing countries since the late 1940s when the first such support was extended to Burma (Chaturvedi, 2012b). In an institutional manner, the Government of India (GoI) has been extending LoCs to African and other developing countries under the Indian Development and Economic Assistance Scheme (IDEAS) since 2005-06 (Chaturvedi, 2012, p. 566). Extension of GoI supported LoCs has been entrusted to be channelled through the Export-Import (EXIM) Bank of India under the aegis of the Ministry of Finance (MoF) with the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) handling the sectoral charge (Chaturvedi, 2012, p. 567). MEA's Development Partnership Administration (DPA) acts as a key link between the EXIM Bank in India and the actual project site in the partner country (Chaturvedi, 2012, p. 567). The local Indian mission forwards the request from respective countries to DPA and then the process begins. The status of EXIM Bank in terms of disbursing LoCs has been increasing over the years. The EXIM Bank's operative LoC as of December 15, 2025, stands at USD 26.93 billion covering 347 projects in 59 countries of the South (EXIM Bank, 2025). India has undertaken various infrastructure projects; however, India's sectoral advantage lies in services, especially in sectors such as healthcare, information technology, education and agriculture-related services. The Government of India has been supporting Indian firms through Interest Equalisation Scheme and encouraging firms from LDCs through Market Access Initiatives to expand the presence in the markets of the Global South (PIB, 2025).

Apart from the developmental initiatives described above for the Global South, India has been taking concrete steps when it comes to the emergence of a new development paradigm, keeping in sharp focus the issue of climate change. The new 'Development Paradigm' is based on two complementary frameworks. First is the conceptual framework of LiFE Economy (G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration, 2023) emphasising on five facets for a transformative yet nuanced approach on sustainable development. The other one is the operational framework of a Global 'Development Compact', which is a means of achieving collective and equitable development in the Global South through SSC. The recent emerging crisis of climate change also requires a strong coordination mechanism among countries to come with an impactful solution. Economic and non-economic factors play complementary role in the development process. Availability of financing in the absence of necessary coordination mechanism and harmonious leveraging of different elements fail to bring in development to the required level in the Global South. A new 'Development Paradigm' is necessary to help achieve coordination amongst stakeholders and across modalities to ensure sustainable development at the global scale. In this regard, India's proposed a conceptual framework of LiFE (Lifestyle for Economy) as an important contribution towards achieving this new 'Development Paradigm'.

The five facets of LiFE Economy are:

- Promoting sustainable consumption and production (SCP) patterns, including circular economy practices. LiFE places sustainable consumption at its core while addressing existing inequalities,
- Measuring well-being beyond GDP, incorporating factors such as natural capital, basic needs, inequalities, and negative environmental externalities,
- Embracing social enterprises and community participation for sustainable and equitable development, while promoting the localisation of efforts,

- Reorienting development finance towards non-discriminatory and ethical considerations, with a focus on resilient infrastructure financing, particularly for Global South countries, and
- Mainstreaming ethical and value-based economic systems, fostering technology development, and strengthening global governance.

On the other hand, India is playing a leadership role in the field of development cooperation by insisting on the point that availability of finance is an important element towards the achievement of development for the Global South, but it is not a sufficient condition to realise development. The challenge of achieving development must go beyond the financing aspects. There are other areas like non-availability of relevant and adaptable technology, and a limited presence of well-trained human resources in different spheres and sectors who would contribute to the development in their respective countries. This is where the global ‘development compact’ proposes and views developmental concerns of the developing countries in a holistic perspective where capacity building for sustainable growth, and technology sharing finds an important mention.

The complementary framework towards this new ‘Development Paradigm’ on the operational front is the idea of Global ‘Development Compact’. India has been operationalising its development cooperation through the concept of Global ‘Development Compact’, which has the following modalities:

- **Trade for Development:** Trade has always been considered an engine of growth and development. This modality in the ambit of ‘development compact’ for the Global South goes beyond the usual trading of goods and services to assisting the Global South countries in providing them trade facilitation and trade promotion initiatives, along with providing them trade finance, and by providing them Tariff concessions under Duty Free Quota Free (DFQF) Scheme.

- **Capacity Building for Sustainable Growth:** Traditionally, the Global South has faced challenges in the realm of enhancing the capacities of their human resources. The capacity building and training programmes for sustainable growth have evidently evolved from simple

training modules aimed at handholding and sharing of technical expertise to more sophisticated domains of scientific and technical knowledge, extending to professional fields like management, administration, policy and global governance.

- **Technology Sharing:** Another challenge in the development of Global South has been the lack of access to affordable, effective, and adaptable technologies. This modality in the sphere of ‘development compact’ for the Global South through joint R&D projects, co-creation of knowledge, establishment of technical institutes, and development of shared indigenous technology will assist the Global South in achieving their desired goals.

- **Project specific Concessional Finance and Grants:** Availability of finance at sustainable interest rates, access to grants for development, and ODA has been in short supply to the countries of the Global South. This modality of ‘development compact’ aims to fill the gap in this regard by providing lines of credit, grants, and providing humanitarian assistance to the countries in times of distress.

Global ‘Development Compact’ bears harmonious leveraging and coordination across these modalities towards an effective mechanism for implementing India’s development cooperation. All the modalities are informed by sustainability that engages a peaceful habitation of human being and the planet necessitating human beings to be a part of the ecosystem, not controlling it. It is important to note that the modalities are not operated only in terms of financial resources. Coordinated human interactions are also important in implementing any of these modalities, thereby holistically manifesting the LiFE model.

Theoreticians and academics have for long discussed that the concept of development must be viewed from the expanded perspective and needs to go beyond the realm of economic development to include the aspects of social, cultural, civic, political, and environmental aspects as well. The idea of Right to Development (RtD) which discussed many of these issues and was adopted at the UN General Assembly in 1986 when all countries of the Global South voted in its favour. However, it went into a deep slumber and

only recently it is trying to revive itself at the global stage. ‘Development Compact’ is on a similar pedestal similar things with the only and a major difference being that while the ‘Right to Development’ has not been able to operationalise itself on the ground, ‘development compact’ is already a successful operational model across the Global South.

BRICS, a grouping of the Global South of which India is a founding member has actively pursued and consistently articulated RtD in BRICS Declarations. It provides a precise blueprint for strengthening global governance and achieving inclusive multilateralism. Grounded in international law, RtD calls for a fundamental rebalancing of global decision-making away from entrenched hierarchies. The New Delhi Declaration of BRICS 2021 situates the RtD as an “innovative means to achieve sustainable development” (para 49), whereas the Rio Declaration of 2025 invokes the RtD for “partnership for the promotion of human, social, and cultural development” (para 103). BRICS declarations across the Chairships situates RtD for “strengthening and reforming global governance” (Beijing Declaration, para 9), “partnership for inclusive multilateralism” (Johannesburg Declaration, para 6), and “strengthening multilateralism for a more just and democratic world order” (Kazan Declaration, para 21 and 22).

The collective emphasis, seen from the Brasilia Declaration onward, on preserving “policy space” for national development strategies underscores that inclusive multilateralism must respect sovereign equality and diverse pathways. By championing a “multipolar world order” where developing nations are not merely recipients but agenda-setters, BRICS positions the RtD as the essential operational principle for a system that is truly representative and effective. Therefore, advancing this right is not a peripheral concern but the core requirement for a legitimate and resilient global governance architecture capable of delivering shared prosperity and tackling common challenges.

At this stage it is important to have a look at the unravelling situation of the Official Development Assistance (ODA) from the developed world to the developing countries. The crises have been long in the making and it rapidly descended into chaos at the start of the year 2025.

#### **4. Declining Official Development Assistance (ODA)**

The start of the year 2025 was of major disruption as following the trend set by the new US administration of winding down USAID, the other major DAC donors followed suit in reducing their aid budget (Doud, 2025). Major European DAC providers shifted their development aid budget to security related and humanitarian aid to Ukraine (Szynol, 2025). This reduction would result in a shortfall of USD 81 billion in ODA for 2025 as compared to the ODA figure of 2024 (Kumar, 2025b). The foreign aid architecture had been under stress for some time till the new administration took office in the United States in January of 2025. The stressed North-South Cooperation ecosystem transitioned into existential crisis when the US foreign aid activities was put under a moratorium for 90 days pending reevaluation and realignment of its activities, projects, and programmes within the broader US foreign policy objectives (White House, 2025). The hardest hit was United States Agency for International Development (USAID) where 5,200 of 6,200 USAID contracts, or 83% of its activities have been cancelled (NPR, 2025). It is important to remember that USAID is the primary US Foreign Assistance Agency and provider of the US foreign aid to the countries of the Global South accounting for more than 60 per cent of the total foreign aid of the US which in 2023 stood at USD 71.93 billion.

In fiscal year 2023 (the latest year for which largely complete data is available) the USAID disbursed USD 43.79 billion to the developing countries. Other major US agencies contributing to US foreign aid are Department of State, Department of Defense, Department of Health and Human Services, and the Department of Treasury. The details of funding can be found in table 1. The crisis further spiraled where in the US State Department has now officially notified the US Congress of its plans to dissolve USAID which until now was an independent federal agency established in 1961 (ABC, 2025).

**TABLE 1**  
**FOREIGN ASSISTANCE (DISBURSEMENTS) BY DIFFERENT AGENCIES**

Managing Agencies	2014 – 2022 (USD billion)	2023 (USD billion)
USAID	250.21	43.79
Department of State	153.71	21.29
Department of Defense	67.77	0.24
Department of Health and Human Services	28.14	1.86
Department of the Treasury	23.56	2.44
Millennium Challenge Corporation	7.27	0.73
Peace Corps	4.54	463
Department of Agriculture	4.42	0.39
Department of Energy	3.7	0.30
Department of Interior	1.58	0.22
Others	14.79	0.22
<b>Total</b>	<b>559.69</b>	<b>71.93</b>

**Source:** US Foreign Assistance (2025a).

U.S. foreign assistance supports a wide variety of humanitarian, economic development and democracy-promotion efforts, although the categories can be somewhat opaque and the lines between them blurry. For instance, the biggest activity area in fiscal 2023, at USD 15.9 billion or 22.1% of all disbursed aid, was “macroeconomic foundation for growth.” That may sound like it all went for economic development, but USD 14.4 billion of that total was direct monetary support to the Ukrainian government in its war with Russia. Interestingly, USD 2.1 million aid was provided to Greenland, out of which USD 1.09 million was spent on operating expenses. Similarly, the entire aid of USD 412,600 to Germany was spent on operating expenses. The amount, recipients and uses of foreign aid shift from year to year, depending on changing circumstances (such as wars, disasters or disease outbreaks) and evolving policy priorities. For example, U.S. foreign aid spending was much lower, comparatively, in fiscal 2001: USD 24.6 billion in inflation-adjusted 2023 dollars. But by federal budgetary standards, annual aid spending in recent years hasn’t varied all that much. Between fiscal 2008 and fiscal 2023, annual aid spending ranged from USD 52.9 billion to USD 77.3 billion, adjusted for inflation. The U.S. government

is the single-largest aid donor in the world, according to the United Nations, accounting for more than 40% of all humanitarian aid the UN tracked in 2024 (Pew Research, 2025).

#### **4.a. US Chilling Effect on other Northern Donors**

The unravelling of the US foreign aid has had repercussions across the Atlantic as well where Germany has proposed to reduce its spending on development aid and further intends to integrate its Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) into its Federal Foreign Office. The reasoning behind such a move is to ensure the integration of the country's foreign policy, security policy and development policy, as well as the promotion of foreign trade (DW, 2025). Additionally, Germany's development aid in 2024 has suffered some of the biggest comparative decreases, with the funding shrinking by almost €2 billion compared to 2023 (DW, 2024). On the other hand, the United Kingdom's overseas development aid will fall from 0.5% of the UK's gross national income to 0.3% – a cut of about £6 billion (Commons Library, 2025). The merging of UK's Department for International Development (DFID) with its Foreign Office took place in 2020 resulting in the creation of new department – the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office thereby uniting development and diplomacy with the intention of bringing together Britain's international efforts (UK Foreign Office, 2020). Another major provider in Europe is France whose austerity budget for 2025 has reduced its public development assistance by more than €2 billion – close to 35 percent of its annual funding. The ODA budget for 2025 now stands at €3.8 billion (RFI, 2025). Other European countries like Netherlands, and Switzerland plans to reduce their development cooperation budget in a phased manner in coming years (Netherlands Policy Papers, 2025 and Swiss Info, 2025).

The table below shows the reduction of development by major Northern providers as of March 23, 2025.

**TABLE 2**  
**ODA REDUCTIONS PROPOSED**

S. No.	Country	ODA Reductions Proposed
1.	USA	USD 60 billion reduction including 90 per cent cut in USAID contracts.
2.	UK	USD 7.7 billion aid reduction from 0.5 per cent to 0.3 per cent of GNI by 2027 to fund defense spending.
3.	Germany	USD 5.26 billion reduction due to budgetary constraints including merging of BMZ with the German Federal Foreign Office.
4.	European Union	USD 2.2 billion reduction by shifting focus from direct support to investment and trade.
5.	France	USD 1.43 billion reduction from USD 6.25 billion in 2024 to USD 4.82 billion in 2025.
6.	Canada	USD 915 million reduction to fund construction of military base.
7.	Belgium	USD 700 million reduction i.e 25 per cent reduction in ODA over the next 5 years.
8.	Finland	USD 425 million reduction i.e 25 per cent reduction in ODA over the next 3 years.
9.	Netherlands	USD 330 million aid reduction with funds redirected to domestic asylum seeker support.
10.	Sweden	USD 291 million reduction with funds redirected to domestic needs.
11.	Switzerland	USD 282 million reduction with funds redirected to the army.
12.	Italy	USD 220 million reduction
13.	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>USD 79.75 billion</b>

**Source:** Adapted from Masood (2025).

Total ODA reduction in coming years stands at a staggering USD 79.75 billion. To put this in perspective, total ODA in 2023 was in tune of USD 213.96 billion (OECD Data, 2025). This slashing of foreign aid proposed are a massive 37.27 per cent reduction from the 2023 levels of ODA.

#### **4.b. Impact of cut in US Foreign Assistance on Official Development Assistance**

The reduction of foreign aid budgets from across the different countries in Europe is substantial however, the shuttering of USAID and the slashing of the US aid budget is the most substantial and will have huge consequence on the overall Official Development Assistance (ODA) flow to the developing countries. See table 3 for details. US assistance to the world through USAID as per cent of total US assistance to the world including other agencies has ranged between 60.82 per cent in 2023 (maximum) to 37.18 per cent in 2015 (minimum). Average USAID as per cent of total US assistance through 2014 to 2023 is 46.84 per cent. The highest USAID amount (in 2023) was USD 43.79 billion out of the total US assistance of USD 72 billion in 2023. The lowest USAID amount (in 2014) was USD 17.54 billion out of total US assistance of USD 42 billion in 2014. Per cent of US ODA as part of total ODA has varied between 29.55 per cent in 2014 (maximum) and 23.74 per cent in 2019 (minimum). Average US ODA as per cent of total ODA assistance through 2014 to 2023 is 26.56 per cent.

**TABLE 3**  
 USA FOREIGN ASSISTANCE AND US ODA (USD BILLION)

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total US Assistance (As per US FA)</b>	<b>Component of USAID in Total US Assistance</b>	<b>USAID as per cent of Total US Assistance</b>	<b>Total US Assistance (As per OECD-DAC)</b>	<b>Total ODA (As per OECD-DAC)</b>	<b>US Assistance as per cent of Total ODA</b>
2014	42	17.54	41.76 %	40.49	136.98	29.55 %
2015	49	18.22	37.18 %	37.56	144.88	25.92 %
2016	47	18.99	40.41 %	41.33	160.66	25.72 %
2017	45	19.32	42.94 %	40.97	159.81	25.63 %
2018	47	20.09	42.75 %	39.39	159.2	24.74 %
2019	47	20.74	44.13 %	37.99	160.02	23.74 %
2020	47	22.67	48.24 %	39.83	166.49	23.92 %
2021	49	28.35	57.86 %	51.57	180.34	28.59 %
2022	74	38.72	52.33 %	60.52	210.66	28.72 %
2023	72	43.79	60.82 %	62.34	213.96	29.13 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>519</b>	<b>248.43</b>	<b>47.86 %</b>	<b>451.99</b>	<b>1693</b>	<b>26.70 %</b>

**Source:** US Foreign Assistance (2025a) and OECD Data. (2025).

#### 4.c. Impact of Dwindling Foreign Aid to India and the Global South

Foreign aid to India is miniscule in the portfolio of the total US foreign assistance which constitutes only 0.27 per cent of the total US foreign assistance disbursement to India. See table 4 for details. Between 2014 and 2023, total US foreign assistance (disbursement) to India was USD 1.418 billion. It ranged between a maximum of USD 251.2 million in 2022 to a minimum of 107.74 in 2019. The average US assistance to India during this period is USD 141.8 million. USAID provided USD 1.11 billion to India in the same time period which accounted for 78.34 per cent of the total US assistance.

**TABLE 4**  
 TOTAL DISBURSEMENT OF US FOREIGN ASSISTANCE AND USAID TO INDIA (USD BILLION)

Year	Total US Aid	US Aid to India	US Aid to India as per cent of Total US Aid	Total US Aid through USAID	US Aid through USAID to India	US Aid through USAID to India as per cent of Total US Aid through USAID
2014	42	0.125	0.29 %	17.54	0.091	0.51 %
2015	49	0.117	0.23 %	18.22	0.088	0.48 %
2016	47	0.126	0.26 %	18.99	0.089	0.47 %
2017	45	0.136	0.30 %	19.32	0.091	0.47 %
2018	47	0.136	0.28 %	20.09	0.095	0.47 %
2019	47	0.107	0.22 %	20.74	0.077	0.37 %
2020	47	0.111	0.23 %	22.67	0.083	0.36 %
2021	49	0.108	0.22 %	28.35	0.094	0.33 %
2022	74	0.251	0.33 %	38.72	0.228	0.59 %
2023	72	0.201	0.27 %	43.79	0.175	0.39 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>519</b>	<b>1.418</b>	<b>0.27 %</b>	<b>248.43</b>	<b>1.111</b>	<b>0.45 %</b>

**Source:** US Foreign Assistance (2025b).

It is interesting to note that on expanding the years of US foreign assistance to India between 2001 and 2023 the sectors of Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance accounted for USD 22.69 million. Overall, the sector of Health and Population has received the maximum assistance which is in tune of USD 1.83 billion (54.62 per cent of total US Assistance) for the 2001-2023 period. The disaggregation of US assistance in Health and Population sector (USD million) in India between 2001-2023 is tabulated in

table 5. In total the US funds for Commodity Assistance to India has stood at USD 402.1 million between 2001 and 2023. Commodity assistance as per the US Foreign Assistance data comprises of development food aid or food security assistance. In 2001 and 2022, Commodity Assistance was the top sector where the assistance went in USD 78 million and USD 96 million respectively. In later years it stood at lower rankings with 2011 (USD 3.7 million) being the last year when US funds were allocated for commodity assistance.

**TABLE 5**  
 US ASSISTANCE IN HEALTH AND POPULATION SECTOR (USD MILLION) IN INDIA

Sub-sector(s) of Health and Population sector	Disbursement (USD million)
Basic Health including Infectious Disease Control and TB	671.1
STD control including HIV/AIDS	467.8
Maternal Child Health including Reproductive Health, and Family Planning	441.8
Water Supply and Sanitation including Water Sector Policy and Administrative Management	188.38
General Health including Health Policy	47.5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1816.58</b>

**Source:** US Foreign Assistance (2025b).

In nutshell, a slash in US foreign assistance to India will have minimal direct economic impact owing to a small amount of US aid to India. US foreign aid to India has significantly declined over the years, as India has grown into one of the world’s largest economies. Also, in recent years, US aid has been limited to specific sectors like health, education, and climate change mitigation, rather than broad economic support. Given India’s robust economy, foreign aid from the US is a very small fraction of its overall GDP. If aid cuts target health programs, initiatives like HIV/AIDS prevention, maternal and child health, and tuberculosis treatment may be affected. Climate change and renewable energy projects that receive U.S. support might slow down. Educational and research collaborations, especially those funded by U.S. grants, could suffer.

However, increased budgetary allocation from the government of India in these sectors have increased over the years thereby dampening the effect of reduction of US foreign assistance to India in these particular areas.

While the reduction in U.S. foreign assistance to India would not severely impact the Indian economy, it could affect specific social programs and strategic relations in other countries of the Global South. India's growing economic self-reliance means such a move would be more symbolic than economically significant. Impact of reduction in ODA to the Global South has not been a new phenomenon. Despite reaching historical levels in 2022, ODA decreased by 2% (USD 4 billion) for developing regions, affecting over 70 countries and almost 3 billion people. For the needful within the Global South, ODA is the most stable and predictable source of external financing, especially in times of crisis (UNCTAD, 2024). Global ODA reached record levels in 2022, USD 287 billion at constant 2021 prices, but continues to fall short of the SDG 17 aid target. ODA from DAC donors remained USD 143 billion below the SDG 17 aid target of 0.7% of their gross national income. Moreover, the aid landscape is undergoing shifts that may be detrimental to the development aspiration of some countries (UNCTAD, 2022). The further reduction in ODA spearheaded by the US and followed by other major donors in Europe (as explained in the previous section) will have detrimental effect and far-reaching consequences for the developing countries.

## **5. Development Finance and Global South**

As alluded to in the previous section that the major economies in the Global South will not be severely impacted by the reduction in ODA in general and axing of the USAID in particular. However, at the same time it must be understood that the shortfall in ODA will not be filled by any single country of the Global South. Moreover, quick amping up of development finance through SSC might also not meet the immediate reduction in ODA. The development finance situation appears more ominous for the countries in South Asia as many of them are at the cusp of graduating from the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) status in coming years.

Bhutan graduated in December 2023, Bangladesh and Nepal are set to graduate in 2026, and Myanmar in 2027<sup>3</sup>. The imminent graduation of these countries has posed both, development opportunities and developmental challenges for them. Reduction in ODA and in development finance will have grave consequences for them as major concessions accrued to them would be lost owing to their graduation out of LDC status.

LDCs are recipients of special concessions at the global platform and they benefit from International Support Measures (ISM) in the areas of trade, development cooperation, and participation in international organisations and processes. Specific concessions associated with LDCs are in the domain of development financing, notably grants and loans from donors and financial institutions. This also includes market access for goods and services under the special preferential market access under WTO and other regional trade agreements. India for example has been granting duty-free quota-free (DFQF) access to exports from Bangladesh in particular and other LDCs in general. India has extended similar concessions to Mauritius (though not an LDC) through the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement which was signed in 2021.

Globally, under the multilateral trading system, such as preferential market access and special treatments, caps and discounts on the contributions to the UN budgets and financial support for their representatives to travel to UNGA meetings and other multilateral meetings are also accorded to LDCs. They are also assisted with technical and financial assistance by bilateral and multilateral partners towards special programmes and budget allocations at the multilateral organisations. Other measures include the Investment Support Programme (ISP) that provides on-demand legal and professional technical advice and assistance to LDCs on investment related negotiations, dispute settlement, and capacity building in these areas.

As has been mentioned in the above paragraphs that ODA is not an end all for development cooperation, other important factors include trade facilitation, trade concessions, and market access for the developing countries. India, through its developmental history has realised that development finance is a necessary condition, but it is not a sufficient

condition to ensure development. Development finance, while crucial, is just one piece of the puzzle when it comes to fostering sustainable development. It provides the necessary resources to kickstart programmes, initiatives and projects aimed at improving various aspects of the society, such as infrastructure, education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. However, for development to truly take root and flourish, several other factors need to be considered and addressed alongside finance.

## **6. Ascendancy of Triangular Cooperation in an Era of Stagnant ODA**

The post-2015 development agenda, anchored by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), demands ambitious and scaled-up financing. Paradoxically, this coincides with a period of fiscal pressure in many traditional donor countries, leading to a plateauing or contraction of ODA flows (UNCTAD, 2025). This divergence between needs and resources renders existing aid modalities insufficient, compelling a search for more efficient and impactful models of development partnership. Within this context, the triangular cooperation (TrC) has garnered significant attention, yet its strategic function is often under-theorized, being viewed as merely complementary rather than foundational. This paper contends that TrC is uniquely positioned to address the core inefficiencies of the traditional aid system, acting as a force multiplier and a catalyst for a more equitable and effective global development paradigm.

The primary impetus for the rise of TrC is its inherent potential for enhanced cost-effectiveness. In a climate of constrained ODA, the imperative to maximize development impact per unit of currency is paramount. TrC achieves this by leveraging the comparative advantages of its constituent partners. Traditional donors typically provide financial resources, high-level technical expertise, and access to global networks. Southern providers, conversely, contribute contextually proven technologies, policies, and practical knowledge acquired through their own recent development trajectories (Abdenur & Fonseca, 2013). For instance, a digital payment system pioneered in India or a conditional cash transfer model from Brazil

offers a more fiscally sustainable and immediately adaptable solution for a similar low-income country than a complex, high-cost equivalent from the Global North. Thus, TrC avoids the costly process of “reinventing the wheel,” instead facilitating the scaling of proven, frugal innovations, thereby multiplying the developmental return on a diminished ODA budget.

A long-standing critique of traditional North-South aid has been its occasional misalignment with local contexts, leading to projects with low adoption rates and questionable sustainability. TrC directly mitigates this risk by centering the knowledge of Southern partners. Solutions originating from countries that have navigated similar developmental challenges are, by their nature, more likely to be technically appropriate, culturally acceptable, and economically viable within comparable socio-economic structures (Mawdsley, 2012). This peer-to-peer knowledge transfer, facilitated by Northern resources, fosters a greater sense of ownership in the beneficiary country. The outcome is not merely a transferred solution, but an adapted and internalized one, significantly enhancing the prospects for long-term sustainability beyond the project lifecycle.

Beyond mere efficiency, TrC plays a transformative role in reshaping the normative foundations of development cooperation. The model inherently challenges the hierarchical donor-recipient dichotomy, advancing a narrative of equitable partnership (Chaturvedi, 2012a). By formally recognising the expertise of Southern nations, TrC elevates their status from passive beneficiaries to active co-creators of development solutions. This shift is crucial for the legitimacy and effectiveness of the global development system. It strengthens South-South linkages, building robust networks of knowledge exchange that are less dependent on Northern intermediation over time. The traditional donor's role evolves from a director of aid to a facilitator, broker, and catalyst of Southern-driven development processes.

The contemporary global challenge set—climate change, pandemic preparedness, irregular migration, and cyber-security—is inherently transnational. These “wicked problems” defy unilateral or bilateral solutions and demand collective, multi-stakeholder action. TrC provides an institutional framework for such collaboration. It enables the pooling

of Northern financial and scientific capital with the ground-level, adaptive expertise of pivotal Southern states. A quintessential example is a partnership where a European nation provides climate financing, a Small Island Developing State contributes expertise in coastal resilience, and a Southeast Asian nation implements the adapted strategies. In this way, TrC becomes an indispensable vehicle for providing global public goods, leveraging fragmented resources and distributed knowledge to tackle challenges that no single nation can solve alone.

## **7. Conclusion: Way Forward and Policy Recommendations**

This paper has provided wide sweep of India's SSC engagement both historical, and contemporary, along with discussion ODA, and TrC forming the three pillars of the development cooperation ecosystem. India's increasing and expanding role in SSC has also been dealt with in this paper. The current global context, marked by intersecting crises and dwindling ODA, necessitates a strengthened and more institutionalised SSC and TrC framework.

TrC holds promise as an innovative, efficient, and inclusive modality by combining the resources and expertise of Northern donors and Southern partners, and by building on peer-to-peer and demand-driven collaboration. The goal is not only to expand financial flows but to create sustainable and context-appropriate development solutions, fostering ownership and adaptability. This last section of the paper aims to provide specific policy recommendations to enable SSC and TrC to be a strengthened form of development cooperation. To begin with, one of the strengths of SSC is its plurality and uniqueness. Countries have adopted, adapted, and tweaked the operability of SSC to suit individual cases. This goes in consonance that there needs to be a non-straight jacketed approach to realise sustainable development.

However, this uniqueness of plurality has also been one of the challenges in SSC when it comes to its data collection, reporting mechanisms, and the associated institutional frameworks. Thus, some amount of policy coherence and strategic coordination is required. The question then appears

as to which stakeholder shall take a lead in this regard. Will it be a provider country that strengthens its providing mechanism in SSC, or shall it be the partner country in this regard.

A related policy recommendation is to come up with country and region-specific SSC strategies. This will entail a close working relation not only between the two principal partners involved, but also the relevant institutions from the two countries. Apart from the national governments, and government agencies, care must be taken to involve the civil societies, academia, and the private sectors from the relevant entities. Such a multistakeholder participation in the SSC will help build an inclusive ecosystem which will foster research, innovation, and create a pluralistic knowledge sharing platform, both national and regional in its scope.

Overall, the following policy recommendations are envisaged through this paper:

- **Strengthen National and Institutional Frameworks:** Countries should develop clearly defined institutional structures and dedicated government units for managing development cooperation projects, ensuring smooth coordination among all partners, and institutionalising lessons learned from successful pilots.

- **Invest in Partnership Capacity:** Building the capacity of national institutions and officials to engage in complex SSC and TrC negotiations and project management is crucial. This involves training in multi-stakeholder coordination, understanding the distinct roles of facilitating, pivotal, and beneficiary partners, and fostering the soft skills necessary for horizontal, demand-driven partnerships.

- **Enhance Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships:** Successful SSC demands coordinated engagement among governments, donors, private sector actors, and civil society. Integrated sectoral approaches, such as those demonstrated in agriculture and digital transformation, should be prioritised and scaled up.

- **Systematise the “Development Compact” Approach:** The Indian model of a ‘development compact’—which integrates trade facilitation, capacity building, technology sharing, and concessional finance—should

be formalised and promoted as a holistic framework for SSC involving other countries too. This moves beyond mere financial transactions to create sustainable, multi-faceted partnerships that address the systemic challenges of the Global South.

- **Expand Financial Modalities:** Diversify SSC and TrC financial instruments, including concessional finance, grants, and humanitarian aid. Mobilise resources from both traditional and emerging donors and explore blended finance to maximize impact.

- **Enhance Data Collection and Reporting:** To address the current fragmentation and under-reporting, a concerted effort is needed to improve data ecosystems. National governments and institutions should systematically document and report on SSC and TrC activities, including non-financial and in-kind contributions. This will enhance transparency, facilitate learning, and provide a clearer picture of scale and impact, moving beyond isolated success stories.

- **Empower Key Demographics:** Specific interventions should target marginalised groups, especially women and youth, to promote inclusive development and sustainable livelihoods, as illustrated by agri-business incubators and capacity-building initiatives in case studies.

- **Promote Knowledge Sharing and Peer Learning:** SSC and TrC should institutionalise systems for sharing technical know-how, practical experiences, and best practices across similar contexts, leveraging South-South linkages supported by Northern resources.

- **Promote Adaptive and Agile Governance:** Given the evolving landscape of development cooperation, SSC and TrC frameworks must be adaptable and agile. This involves scenario planning, fostering learning networks among SSC and TrC partners, and developing flexible funding mechanisms that can respond to changing priorities and complex global challenges like climate change and digital transformations.

- **Advocate for TrC in Global and Regional Fora:** Pivotal countries should continue to champion SSC and TrC within international bodies such as the UN, G20, BRICS, SCO, ASEAN, India-Africa Forum Summit and other fora. This advocacy should focus on securing broader

political recognition, and integrating TrC as a core modality within the global development architecture, positioning it as a fundamental, not just complementary approach.

## Notes

- 1 Consultant, RIS.
- 2 India is industrially and educationally more developed than many other Southern countries and is reckoned as an Emerging Industrial Economy (EIE) as per UNIDO Country Classification of 2024. But this distinction cannot conceal the developmental challenges in many parts of India. In order to improve the condition of India and the wider newly decolonized countries in Asia and Africa, the countries require much mechanical and technical aid. India welcomes such cooperation with the Global South on terms that are of mutual benefit.
- 3 Committee for Development Policy (CDP) agreed to recommend to ECOSOC the graduation of Cambodia, Djibouti and Senegal. The Committee deferred the decision on Comoros and Myanmar to 2027, and found that Timor-Leste and Zambia, which had met the graduation criteria in previous reviews, no longer do so. Rwanda, Uganda, and the United Republic of Tanzania met the graduation criteria for the first time and will be assessed for a possible graduation recommendation in 2027. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/cdp-plenary-2024/>

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