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Research & Education in Global Health & Development : Are movements for 'Decolonization' actually shifting power systems

Remarks by Ambassador Tanmaya Lal

Distinguished experts, friends,

Good morning,

I am not an expert but have some experience in the design and supervision of a few development partnership projects, including in health sector.

This includes bilateral projects and broader India Africa partnerships.

Trilateral frameworks such as Indian UN Development Fund and the India Brazil South Africa IBSA Fund.

And some opportunity to engage with the multilateral discourse on development and south-south cooperation.

Friends,

India's case in some ways is unique. India was a colony for a long time. Subsequently, India was a recipient of international assistance. Today, India has a substantive development partnership engagement with a number of partner countries.

India's independence was accompanied by the traumatic breaking up of the country and huge forced migration.

Colonization had destroyed the economy and the country even faced food shortages.

India was among the only fifty odd independent nations at the time who were members of the United Nations.

Our own development journey went hand in hand with our active support to and solidarity with other countries who were still colonies.

This started with exchange of experts to scholarships for higher education to project assistance.

In those early years, India became a strong voice for 'decolonization' in a wider sense.

This flowed from our own experience that political independence could be sustained only if countries were able to control their economic choices.

India adopted a two-fold approach for this.

One, India pushed for a consensus at the UN for the proposition that economic and social progress in former colonies was an international responsibility to be implemented collectively.

That developed countries had an international obligation to support development in former colonies, not as a charity but as a partnership for collective peace & prosperity.

Two, India also pushed for cooperation among the developing countries themselves.

India became an early proponent and practitioner of what came to be called south-south cooperation.

This was based upon a certain solidarity among countries that had emerged from similar colonial past and faced similar challenges. A relationship of equals.

By mid 1960s, when most former colonies had obtained independence, India also became a strong advocate for equitable economic growth, development and technology discourse.

The emphasis shifted from technology transfer to equitable access and empowerment.

This south-south partnership came to encompass various modes of collaboration and capacity building.

For instance, collective negotiating blocs such as the G77 based on common concerns. On climate change or WTO.

It took the form of economic integration; setting up of regional banks; Clearing Unions; Regional export credit financing etc.

The principles of India's development partnerships remain – demand driven, non-conditional, owned and led by partners countries.

These efforts over the decades have ranged from Technical Assistance to Concessional Loans; Project assistance to trade concessions; Humanitarian relief and Grants.

Every year around 12-14,000 training slots are offered. An estimated 300 Lines of credit worth USD 30 billion have been extended to nearly 70 countries.

India has assisted building of dams, irrigation systems, power transmission lines, schools, hospitals, metros, highways in a number of partner countries.

India is now also among the first responders for humanitarian emergencies in the Indian Ocean region.

Friends,

If we look at Health sector, this partnership has taken various forms.

- More than a decade back, we had the Pan Africa e-Network project putting in place satellite and fibre optic links to provide access to Indian educational institutions and super specialty hospitals for education and consultation.
- State-of-the-art hospitals have been constructed in a number of countries. In 2019 one such hospital was inaugurated in Mauritius. This became especially useful within a few months as pandemic struck.
- Concessional credit has been provided to provide medical equipment and ambulances in around 20 countries.
- India had a big role to play in the international response to HIV/AIDS through affordable generic medicines.

- During the Covid19 pandemic, Indian vaccines reached 100 countries and UN entities. This included around 15 million doses as grant to 50 countries.
- Diagnostic kits & PPEs were provided to another 47 African partners.
- Emergency and essential medicines were provided to a number of countries during Covid. For instance, in case of Mauritius we were able to airlift medicines, including Ayurvedic medicines as requested by their authorities.
- There was extensive sharing of experience and best practices in management of Covid with partner countries in our region that share a similar context.
- During Covid, India also offered the free and open source CoWin digital app that was developed in India for tracking and monitoring vaccination drive.
- Besides humanitarian relief, India also strongly pushed for vaccine equity including through a temporary TRIPS waiver at the WTO, with limited success.
- India has advocated for a greater recognition of traditional medicines. A WHO Global Centre for Traditional Medicine will now come up in India.

The India UN Development Partnership Fund was established in 2017 to support SDGs.

The Fund is completely demand-driven and non-prescriptive.

The projects are implemented by relevant UN agencies. The UN Office for South South Cooperation is the Secretariat and Fund Manager.

A quarter of the projects implemented so far are specifically on Health.

These projects are on Health infrastructure, reducing maternal mortality, prevention of sexual violence & adolescent pregnancy, prevention of HIV transmission, family planning, Covid response, and sanitation.

Similar projects are being funded and implemented by the IBSA Fund jointly funded by India Brazil and South Africa and managed by the UNOSSC that became operational in 2006.

Before concluding I would like to mention three examples of the India Sweden partnership models.

India and Sweden initiated the Leadership Group on Industry Transition – a global public private partnership – on climate action. Bringing together diverse partners to work on a common global challenge.

Second is on Humanitarian action where India and Sweden deliver an annual joint statement at the UN General Assembly, bringing together diverse perspectives.

The most recent is the India Sweden Healthcare Innovation Centre. It is supported by multiple stakeholders and focuses on innovative collaborations to provide scalable solutions.

I would conclude by referring to what Prime Minister Modi said in Ugandan parliament - India's development partnership will be completely guided by the partner country's priorities, and it will be on terms that will not constrain their future.

Thank You.