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Global South's Aspirations for Inclusive Human Development

By Sudheendra Kulkarni



China's epoch-changing success in complete eradication of extreme poverty by the end of 2020 has many lessons for other developing countries, including India, that still have a large burden of poverty. India and China, as the only two nations with populations over one billion, should expand all-round cooperation based on mutual learning. Without any doubt, this will prove highly beneficial to inclusive Global Development.

Le succès sans précédent de la Chine dans l'éradication complète de l'extrême pauvreté d'ici à la fin de 2020 est riche d'enseignements pour les autres pays en développement, y compris l'Inde, qui portent encore un lourd fardeau de pauvreté. L'Inde et la Chine, qui sont les deux seules nations à compter plus d'un milliard d'habitants, devraient développer une coopération globale fondée sur l'apprentissage mutuel. Il ne fait aucun doute que cela s'avérera très bénéfique pour un développement mondial inclusif.

El éxito histórico de China en la erradicación completa de la pobreza extrema para finales de 2020 tiene muchas lecciones para otros países en vías de desarrollo, incluida India, que todavía tienen una gran carga de pobreza. India y China, como las dos únicas naciones con una población superior a los mil millones de habitantes, deberían ampliar la cooperación integral basada en el aprendizaje mutuo. Sin duda alguna, esto resultará muy beneficioso para el Desarrollo Global inclusivo.

The prevailing landscape of global development presents two contrasting features. The Global North, the collective of rich western nations, is steadily losing its economic dominance. This decline is more starkly evident in Europe, as has been highlighted by Mario Draghi's seminal report, *The Future of European Competitiveness*, released in September 2024. Authored by the former Italian Prime Minister, it warns that the European Union faces an "existential challenge" because of its multiple weaknesses: economic, industrial, financial, technological and even political. The decline of Japan (an Asian nation that has made a common cause with the West) is also undeniable. The economy of the United States of America continues to show some vibrancy, which, however, is sustained more by the dollar's global dominance than by the intrinsic strengths of its own industry.

In contrast, the Global South, the collective of developing and under-developed nations in Asia, Africa and Latin America, is steadily rising economically. For instance, the share of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa ...) alone in global gross domestic product (GDP) exceeded that of the Group of Seven (G7) countries to reach 35%. This unstoppable trend also signifies democratisation of the global economy since the Global South, accounting for nearly 85% of the world's population, is now challenging the hegemony of western powers and finding its rightful place in a fairer and more balanced development of mankind.

China, along with India, is at the forefront of this history-changing trend. Fareed Zakaria, the renowned India-born United States scholar and media personality, was one of the earliest to spot this transformation. In his 2008 bestseller *The Post-American World: And the Rise of the Rest*, he had written, "The rise of China and India is really just the most obvious manifestation of a rising world. In dozens of big countries, one can see the same set of forces at work — a growing economy, a resurgent society, a vibrant culture, and a rising sense of national pride."

China's economic rise, powered mainly by homegrown advancements in futuristic technologies and innovations, is now widely recognised — including, grudgingly, by the West. In line with its rapid progress in economy, technology and even international diplomacy, China has also now become the leading voice of the Global South in the discourse on development. Until recently, this

debate was almost entirely dominated by western think tanks and academic institutions. Naturally, the West shaped it in ways that desperately sought to perpetuate today's unequal and unfair world order and present western values and paradigms as universal ones.

China is reshaping the global discourse on development

The fact that China has begun to reshape this discourse with its own narrative, which is in alignment with the narrative of other developing and under-developed countries, is evident from a superb report produced by the Centre for International Knowledge on Development (CIKD), a reputed Beijing-based think tank. Titled *Global Development Report 2024 — A World of Turbulence and Change: Cooperate to Address the Common Challenges of Global Development*, it was [released](#) in Beijing on December 6, 2024. This writer, along with Dr. Carlos Correa, Executive Director of South Centre, participated in the launch function.

This report not only comprehensively examines the problems plaguing mankind's development, but also offers practical ideas for overcoming them. All its solutions converge around one big idea: what the world needs is maximum global cooperation — not only South-South cooperation but also South-North cooperation — to achieve inclusive, fair, ecologically sustainable and people-centred development that does not exclude anyone among the 8 billion people on planet earth.

This is indeed the idea that animates the United Nations' (UN) 2030 blueprint for sustainable development, calling for global partnership to realise 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that prioritise ending poverty, improving health and education, reducing inequality, tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans, forests and other precious ecological resources. In this sense, the CIKD report faithfully captures the spirit of the Global Development Initiative (GDI) put forward by President Xi Jinping in September 2021, which aims "to close the development deficit and accelerate the implementation of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda".

Whereas the UN calls for deepening and broadening global cooperation, the troubling reality is that ruling elites of the US-led western powers are moving in the opposite direction of anti-globalisation, unilateral tariff hikes, protectionism, technology denial, illegal sanctions and confrontation. The CIKD report rightly observes: “Economic globalization is an irreversible historical trend, in accordance with the development of social productive forces and the result of maximized efficiency of resource allocation on a global scale.” It sharply comments that “the backlash against globalization goes against the basic laws of economics, weakens the efficiency of global development, and is bound to be unsustainable.”

I commend the authors of the report for their insightful analysis of two principal forces that promise to drive the global development in a positive direction: (a) leading technologies such as artificial intelligence and (b) new planet-protecting energy sources that are green, clean, low-carbon and, most importantly, affordable. These “will provide new cooperation opportunities for the sustainable development of globalization.”

Green development can speed up Global South's sustainable industrialisation

The report convincingly illustrates that cooperation with China can help Global South countries achieve energy transition — from fossil fuels to renewables — in an accelerated manner. It says: “The cost of producing solar PV modules in China is 35% to 65% lower than that in Europe and America, the cost of producing main components of onshore wind turbines is 20% to 30% lower than that in Europe and America, and the cost of producing battery cells is 20% to 35% lower than that in Europe and America.”

The report adds: “This (lower costs of sustainable energy) could lower the threshold for green industrialization of developing and underdeveloped countries. By integrating into open and cooperative global industrial and supply chains, developing countries can obtain not only stable capital, technology and talents, but also a large amount of good value intermediate products from China and other countries.”

The report rightly warns against the current trend of technology monopoly and protectionism. Digital technologies are becoming increasingly monopolized. Taking AI as an example, the number of training parameters for large models has seen exponential

growth, which requires significant investment to acquire high-quality datasets and high-performance computing infrastructure. This in turn has substantially raised the barrier to entry for latecomers, leading to a “winner take-all” effect. A few large digital platforms can also become monopolistic ecosystems given their powerful lock-in effect, extensive network and large scale, as well as massive data, numerous algorithms and substantial capital. These digital monopolies may hurt market competition, hinder innovation dynamics, and harm consumer welfare and public interest.”

World needs both South-South and North-South cooperation

I strongly argue for boosting not only South-South cooperation but also North-South cooperation, as South-South Cooperation is not a substitute for the latter. Indeed, North-South cooperation is also in the interest of western nations, which are currently facing multiple economic and social problems. After all, East or West, South or North, all countries and all peoples belong to one indivisible humanity. Furthermore, such cooperation is fully in line with the adoption of the ‘Pact for the Future’ by about 130 heads of state and government gathered at the United Nations Summit of the Future in September 2024. This summit demonstrated the firm commitment of all the countries in the world to cooperation in addressing common challenges.

Thoughtful development experts around the world have observed that, whereas the USA offers war-igniting weapons and militaristic ideas to developing countries, China offers practical examples to promote human welfare based on its own success stories. I was particularly struck by one specific use of digital technologies — in school education. The CIKD report says, “By the end of 2023, China’s Smart Education platform, which had been online for just over a year, had attracted more than 100 million registered users, over 36.7 billion page-views, and 2.5 billion visitors, giving many children in rural and remote areas the access to the ‘same class’ as those in big cities and enabling online learning for nearly 200 million primary and secondary school students in China.”

I believe India and other developing countries should learn from such examples to accelerate their own progress in education and other areas of human development. Spearheaded by the China International

Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA), which was until recently chaired by veteran diplomat Luo Zhaohui, China is actively offering its useful knowledge and experience to the Global South. This, too, is reducing the dominance of USAID and other western aid agencies.

Eradication of poverty: China's useful lessons

CIKD's analysis of, and recommendations on, 'Global Poverty Reduction' are especially instructive. Its report expresses four serious concerns. First, "global poverty reduction progress has slowed down". It points out that "growth in countries with severe poverty lack inclusiveness". Second, it cautions that "the concentration of global trade and investment has led to the marginalisation of countries not yet integrated into global value chains". Third, "The shift of FDI to high value-added sectors has narrowed the development window for developing countries". Fourth, "Conflicts undermine the development foundation of countries with concentrated poverty".

As a remedy, the report suggests that the "effectiveness of international cooperation for poverty reduction needs to be enhanced". In this context, I must point out that China's epoch-changing success in complete eradication

of extreme poverty by the end of 2020 has many lessons for other developing countries (including India) that still have a large burden of poverty. I am saying this on the basis of my own six visits to China's countryside last year for an on-ground study of removal of poverty and rural revitalisation.

In conclusion, I have a suggestion for the kind consideration of the Chinese authors of this commendable report. It does not provide adequate focus on the development lessons offered by India, which has now emerged as the world's most populous nation. India will also soon become the world's third largest economy. I believe that India and China, as the only two nations with populations over one billion, should expand all-round cooperation based on mutual learning. Without any doubt, this will prove highly beneficial to inclusive Global Development.

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