

THE NEED FOR A SOUTH PLATFORM

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ASSERTING THE SOUTH'S IDENTITY

2005 marks the 50th anniversary of the historic 1955 Bandung Conference, the first major South-South conference of developing countries that launched the process which gave rise to the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the Group of 77.

2005 also marks half a century of developing countries' continuing struggle:

- to change the world order and to make the external environment supportive of their national efforts to develop, to free their peoples from poverty, deprivation and underdevelopment, to overcome dependence and the vestiges of colonialism in the economic, political and cultural domains, and
- to gain a rightful place and influence at the global negotiating table where policies and decisions are made that concern and affect them all.

Today, 50 years later, these tasks are still unfinished.

During this period, a great deal has changed in the world and in the South. There are now 132 developing countries members of the Group of 77. They are highly diverse: their specific situations differ, their interests often vary, and their ideological outlooks may not coincide. A few have made major strides in development and have become global actors on the world scene and in the international economy. Some have sufficiently developed and diversified their economies as to be able to cope with competition in a liberalizing global economic environment. Many, however, continue to struggle and find it very difficult to emerge from underdevelopment and the poverty trap.

Notwithstanding the changes and the growing diversity of specific interests and situations, developing countries continue their efforts to work and act together as a group in pursuit of common goals, and share a common identity as the South.

What binds developing countries together and inspires their common action in the name of the South?

In terms of objective conditions:

- In addition to similar development experiences and situations, having been subjected to colonial domination and exploitation, they continue to be largely on the economic periphery and to experience discrimination, including racism, against non-Western cultures.
- Large numbers of their populations continue to lead a precarious existence facing poverty, hunger, disease, lack of basic amenities and environmental degradation.

Regarding, their perception of the world and of their geopolitical status, developing countries:

- Strive for an improved world economic order and for implementation of the international development agenda.
- Oppose mounting unilateralism by the powerful in international affairs, the denial of multilateralism, and the belittling of the basic premises of the UN Charter and of the rule of international law.
- Share deep concern regarding the exogenous pressures to which their countries are exposed, and the interference in all aspects of their domestic affairs, limiting their sovereign policy space and freedom of action, choice, and often expression.
- Share a common awareness that, as a group, they can mobilize significant countervailing power in a world arena that is otherwise dominated by well-organized and coordinated countries of the North, thereby reducing the lack of influence and disempowerment that most of them experience individually.

However, these commonalities are not a sufficient condition for sustained common action. The latter requires nurturing and strengthening through continual working together, developing a set of common goals and a shared vision of a better world, and maintaining an understanding of changing conditions and how these affect the developing countries in the global scheme of things.

ENDURING AGENDA AND SHARED GOALS

Over the decades, a number of joint declarations have expressed developing countries' group identity and aspirations as the South, and highlighted the continuity of their common struggle. They will do so again at the Second South summit in Doha in 2005, which provides an opportunity to chart the strategic directions of this continuing struggle for a better, just and equitable world order in the years to come. It is only developing countries who can or will take such initiative, for it is they and their peoples that are principally affected by the structures, processes and built-in biases of the prevailing order.

Reform and change of the international economic and political environment have been advocated by developing countries so that it becomes:

- more supportive of their national efforts to achieve development and structural change, including through industrialization and modernization of their economies, within the framework of sustainable development;
- responsive to the fact that countries are at different levels of development and have different abilities to participate in and cope with the complex processes and requirements characterizing the global economy and society, and as a consequence require special measures and treatment in what are de facto highly asymmetrical and biased playing fields, as well as special support;
- imperialism and domination are not sustained or reproduced in new, sophisticated forms.

The original South agenda was articulated in the 1960s, based on the first NAM Summit Conference and the findings and outcomes of UNCTAD I. It contained a series of principles, goals and objectives, many of which remain valid and topical to the present day and which concern the very core of North-South relations and the need for a development-supportive international environment. For example:

- the principles of sovereignty and sovereign equality of states, territorial integrity and non-intervention in the internal affairs of any state;
- access to markets of developed countries and preferential treatment for exports of developing countries;
- remunerative prices for commodities and the diversification of economies to overcome dependence on commodity exports;
- provision of development assistance and international support to overcome balance of payments difficulties and bridge foreign currency gaps;
- transfer of technology and knowledge to enable countries to develop the national S&T capabilities and human resources needed for advanced forms of development.

GLOBALIZATION VS. THE SOUTH'S AGENDA

These and other South goals and objectives – repeated over the years in international declarations and conference outcomes, including most recently at the 2000 South Summit in Havana and the 2003 NAM Summit in Kuala Lumpur – have been largely sidelined or negated in the multilateral arena under the impact of the form of globalization promoted by the North. This aims for full liberalization of international trade and financial flows, competition on the basis of so-called

“level playing fields” in the realm of economic policy, market supremacy and privatization as the route to development, and a greatly diminished role of the state in managing the development process and financing and promoting social and economic development. This has been paralleled by a decline in interest in concerted international development action, and a de facto interruption of the North-South dialogue and negotiations on the part of the developed countries.

This reflects the fact that the world order and the prevailing economic structures and dominant policies emanate from a North-based intellectual framework and the interests of powerful northern actors. The current global trade and finance regime, the intellectual property and other international regimes promote the interests of a global minority that wields considerable power. These policies continue to be promoted though theoretical and empirical evidence suggests that such policies are deficient even in their own terms. While such policies predominate, unchallenged by economic perspectives rooted in the South’s reality, the countries of the South will remain structurally and systemically peripheralized.

The negative effects in many parts of the South include de-industrialization and food insecurity, rising poverty and the erosion of living standards, health, education and employment of important segments of the population, often destabilizing societies and leading in some cases to armed conflicts and civil wars. The resulting instability opens the countries and regions in question to interference and influence by North actors in all spheres of the economy and governance, increasing their dependence and diminishing their national sovereignty.

The South is held to be entirely responsible for its own problems and increasingly those of the world at large. It is blamed for global environmental degradation and is now seen as a worldwide security threat, including through terrorism, infectious diseases, and transnational crime. At the same time, lack of development is attributed to shortcomings in domestic governance, including alleged institutional and democratic deficits and corruption. Attention is thereby diverted away from the hostile, exploitative external environment and the role of structures and processes in the world economy that reproduce underdevelopment and generate violence. The role, policies and actions of the countries of the North and of their transnational corporations are at the same time shielded from scrutiny by the international community.

The social and political turbulence, civil strife and conflict in the South resulting from the impact of globalization and liberalization and the concomitant lack of development, poverty and deprivation are perceived as threats to the security of the North. New doctrines are therefore propagated that legitimize resort to global policing and military interventions, in addition to the export of supposedly superior forms of governance from the North, directly or via intermediaries. Putting developing countries’ national sovereignties at risk and exposing them to external intervention is not only politically unacceptable but also contributes to polarizing societies and the international community, undermining peace and security worldwide.

The past two decades have witnessed a slackening of the South initiatives to reform the global trade, finance and development regimes and institutions in ways that would promote development. The marginalization of development from the international agenda occurred at the time when, from the point of view of developing countries, the development challenges became more complex and difficult to cope with in the context of the North-designed and driven globalization processes. In particular, the end of the Cold War and global economic and technological restructuring radically altered the geo-politics of development, diverted policy attention from the South’s development needs and demands, and contributed to downgrading development from its former position of the priority concern of the international community.

The Millennium Development Goals, now supposedly the centerpiece of the international development agenda, are addressed essentially to developing countries for implementation. While most of the goals are of the utmost importance, little attention is given to how they can be attained in view of the current global economic regime whose policies and processes contribute to the polarization of wealth and poverty both at national and international level, and given the national macro-economic policies pursued by the rich countries.

TIMELINESS OF AN UPDATED SOUTH POLICY PLATFORM

Recently, however, there has been a re-awakening of the South's collective awareness and it has begun to react, as for example, in the trade negotiations, both at the WTO and the FTAA. Also, the groundswell of anti-globalization campaigns by civil society organizations and people at the grassroots level in the South, as well as in the North, are increasingly significant factors in the challenge to the existing inequitable world order.

The strength of developing countries today lies in the fact that together they account for the overwhelming majority of the humankind and that with a few large economies in their midst, they represent a growing and now significant share of world GNP and of world trade. As production and export centres, critical markets for Northern goods, services and investment, sources of supply of key renewable and non-renewable natural resources, the economies of the South are of strategic importance for the successful and smooth functioning of the globalizing economy. Northern societies and economies, and indeed the international economy, cannot be sustained and grow without them, nor can the goal of sustainable development be secured.

Together, as the South, developing countries' voices count: they constitute a political, economic, moral and social force that can exercise countervailing power. Their voice is essential if the democratization of world politics and international relations is to be achieved.

The South needs to assume a proactive stance in order to be heard and to counter the assertive unilateralism by the North and its quasi monopoly of policy initiatives in the international arena which is greatly assisted by the global media largely under its control.

The lessons learned during the recent period regarding the negative impacts of the current form of globalization, and the elements of the traditional South agenda that have continuing validity, provide strong bases for developing an updated agenda and alternative approach to globalization and development.

The starting premises for any effort to elaborate a new framework and agenda include recognition of the following:

- the need for a competent, well-equipped, self-confident state to lead and make possible a successful development process, and to cope with the multiple, complex challenges to national economies, societies and politics posed by the evolving world economy and the broader geo-political context;
- the need for the South to influence and shape this global order over which to date it has had little influence. But in order to exercise such influence in the future, as a full

- and equal partner, it must have a clear and coherent vision and agenda of its own that can be negotiated collectively with a view to modifying the status quo;
- that development should be the first priority of the international community, at the very epicentre of UN's activities, based on the joint efforts and differentiated responsibilities of all members of the international community to overcome development gaps, poverty and social fractures that characterize the contemporary world;
 - that there is a need to think about the future in holistic terms, starting from the global objectives and public or common interest standpoint, such as maintaining peace and achieving nuclear disarmament given the mounting risks of use of N-weapons and their proliferation, achieving welfare for all, securing sustainable development and protecting global environment, harnessing S&T to meet major challenges on the international agenda, democratizing global governance, and indeed fostering dialogue and cooperation between different cultures and civilizations.

A FRAMEWORK FOR A SOUTH POLICY AND ACTION PLATFORM: LAUNCHING AND SUSTAINING THE PROCESS

An appropriate policy cum action platform could consist of the following four interlocking strategic sets of actions and objectives for the next decade:

- the elaboration of a **South intellectual platform**, as an essential conceptual tool underpinning collective action, drawing on the many dispersed analyses and policy prescriptions of researchers and institutions working from a South perspective;
- building up and expanding the South's power and influence by harnessing the growing development potential existing in its midst to foster **South-South cooperation** through diversified and strengthened South-South horizontal links of cooperation, as a new and strategic feature of the 21st century global geopolitical and economic landscape;
- focusing political action on the United Nations and international organizations in general, with the objective of **defending and strengthening multilateralism and democratizing global governance**;
- resuming the **North-South development dialogue** towards achieving a world economic order that is intended to be supportive of development goals and objectives.

a. Elaborating a South Intellectual Platform

A South intellectual platform would be built on an understanding, from a South perspective, of a number of processes and issues, including the nature of developing countries integration into the

global system at the present time, and of the mechanisms and systemic processes that limit their policy and development space and thus of possible ways in which the South can challenge the system, change the disadvantageous structures and relationships, and indeed “expand its policy space”. This new concept addresses the the long-standing challenge of each country securing its own political and economic sovereignty and independence under contemporary conditions in which there is an increasingly interdependent yet grossly asymmetrical global community, or rather global “non-community” in which the great majority of members have no other choice but to participate on terms which go against their interests and ignore their desires.

Enhancing the information and analytical basis upon which policy and negotiating positions are formulated would lead to a growing sense of South solidarity, as commonalities and shared interests become more apparent both to policy-makers and to the peoples of the South and as grounds for mutual support in defending diverging interests can be developed. Such efforts would contribute significantly to the intellectual empowerment of the countries of the South.

In other words, by assessing the systemic processes that shape the South’s reality, including the deficiencies and biases of neo-liberal globalization, it would be possible to derive a vision and an overarching framework that would enhance policy makers’ ability to discern options and determine what is in their own country’s best interest, as well as to define common and shared objectives of developing countries regarding the broader international system. The latter objectives need to be pursued collectively at the global level and it is the results of these negotiations that will largely determine what choices and options individual countries will have regarding development policy.

By definition, to be effective a South platform would need to be updated and refined continuously. This calls for a long-term, coordinated undertaking and involving the efforts of many actors. A proper balance would need to be established between, on the one hand, the academic and intellectual efforts that require a sufficient degree of autonomy and initiative and, on the other, the governmental and intergovernmental bodies who constitute the key users and those who will be implementing the conceptual and policy framework, including in particular the Group of 77.

b. Prioritizing South-South cooperation

South-South cooperation has a major and growing potential, as recent efforts and innovative and successful experiences demonstrate in different regions of the South. This potential needs to be tapped and developed fully and systematically in support of development needs and goals. This should be one of developing countries’ strategic priority objectives for the period to come, and an area where it is in their own power to act.

- The South’s collective voice and role in global affairs requires strategic thinking, and well-resourced institutional support to remedy the organizational deficit that has traditionally hobbled its actions and negotiating efforts in the global arena. Institutional capacities for this purpose need to be developed and strengthened in order to overcome this weakness. An independent and critical evaluation needs to be undertaken of the various groupings of developing countries operating at the global level, e.g. the Group of 77, NAM and G15, with the objective of strengthening, equipping and enabling them to fulfill their functions in a more effective manner.

- The South's intellectual capacities are expanding rapidly and should be networked so as to foster collective intellectual empowerment and challenge the intellectual dominance traditionally exercised by the North. Elaborating the proposed South intellectual platform can help to launch this process of networking.
- Today, as a result of diversification through structural change and an active developmental state some developing countries have dynamic economies, skilled human resources, and a diversified and advanced science and technology base, and thus have a great deal to offer to and share with the rest of the South. Such support and cooperation should be extended especially to those developing countries most in need of genuine development assistance, without the sort of conditionalities and ulterior motives that accompany such assistance from the North. These major countries of the South can play the role of developmental "locomotives", providing markets for exports of other developing countries, including commodities, supplying them with key products for their development and for the welfare of their populations, helping them educate and train their human resources, sharing science and technology advances, and investing in infrastructure, industrial and agricultural development, in a manner suited to the conditions and needs prevailing in the developing world.
- Developing countries have many challenges in common, arising from the similar experience of development, ecosystems, cultural backgrounds, and legacies left by the age of colonialism and imperialism, which can be dealt with through joint South-South endeavours. Similarly, many opportunities can be tapped by sharing experiences, knowledge, skills and human resources, sub-regionally, regionally and inter regionally through integration and trade liberalization mechanisms and schemes such as GSTP, or through South-South projects such as those mounted in the framework of the Group of 15. Such initiatives should be pursued systematically and within a long-term plan of action.

South-South projects for public good, involving both the public and private sectors and financed through public and private funding, should be pursued in such domains as food security, health, energy, sustainable development, biodiversity, rational management of shared natural resources in a regional context, education, information and communication, media, employment, space research, etc. They could be pursued by drawing on advanced science and technology capacities that exist in some developing countries.

South-South cooperation for development would not only yield important practical results and benefits for those involved, build bridges within the South and supplement the traditional vertical links with the North inherited from the colonial era, but would also reflect beneficially on the manner in which international economic relations are conducted and managed and on North-south relations.

c. Championing global democratic governance

The whole developing world is highly concerned by the North's policies and actions that shrink developing countries' sovereign national space. They are also concerned by the dominance of key decision-making processes in international relations by a handful of countries from the North and by the fact that some key international organizations are managed, run and used by them to

serve their own interests. The democratic deficit is most striking in those organizations that deal with the “hard economic” issues and the governance of the world economy, in particular the IMF and the World Bank, but also increasingly WTO, and are kept at arms length from the UN by the developed countries.

This deficit is becoming increasingly evident in the UN itself, where money and economic and military power are used to erode democratic principles, including that of sovereign equality and multilateralism, in an attempt to control outcomes, processes, agendas and indeed specific actions and products, including via the secretariats.

Given the critical and growing importance for all of humanity of the decisions and policies made at the global level, such decision-making cannot be left to the powerful few. It is for the developing countries together with the likeminded countries and people in the North, to defend and reclaim the democratic and progressive values embodied in the UN Charter and to work for the democratization of international relations. A genuinely interdependent and civilized international community must be built on notions of solidarity, cooperation and mutual help, rather than the current values and practices that pervade international relations and that are generating a global confrontation, insecurity and uncertainty regarding the future.

d. Relaunching the North-South development dialogue and restoring the International Development Agenda

It is now more than two decades since the North-South dialogue was largely replaced by continual lecturing by the North and its single model and “one size fits all” policy prescriptions to be implemented by countries of the South.

North-South dialogue needs to be renewed and achieving this should be one of the developing countries’ strategic goals.

Indeed, the South should demand that an approach similar to the UN International Development Strategy and UN Development Decades be reestablished, superseding the current fragmented, piecemeal approaches that prevent an integrated approach to this critical and central challenge on the international agenda. Negotiating and implementing such a Strategy should be one of the priorities of the United Nations, making it possible to place development at the centre stage of its work.

CONCLUSION

The time is ripe for developing countries to mobilize and demonstrate once again their collective power and influence as the South. They have sound arguments, and the resources and capacities needed for adopting an active stance. South-South cooperation can and should be a powerful vehicle for evolving alternative approaches to globalization, for opening new areas for equitable cooperation between the North and the South, for promoting an international development strategy, and for democratizing global governance.