Before the end of the bi-polar world, there existed what was called Soviet and US block of countries among which there existed a stiff competition as well as conflicts. The imbedded complexity then was the politics of "foreign aid" coupled with arm twisting strategies to stabilize geo-political relations in favour of aid-giving nations. Often, the Northern aid giver would try to influence the macroeconomic policies and governance conditions of developing countries. It fostered and nurtured the conditions of dependency mainly because of unequal trading relationship / unequal bargaining power between super powers and developing countries. Foreign aid was used as a tool to consolidate and establish the regional strength and to establish monopoly and exercise hegemony with a view to gaining control over regional economy as well as politics. Indeed, the deep rooted persistence of political problems between India and Pakistan and the rivalry in building defense capabilities in rather competitive manner is to a great extent attributed to this historical reality. This is just an example.

Besides the bi-polar politics, the north-south cooperation was very much in existence but again on unequal terms. The basis of north-south cooperation (for technology transfer, foreign aid to promote economic development, food aid etc) was invariably dependent upon the foreign policy of recipient countries. Therefore, the north-south cooperation is also fostering and imposing dependency status.

Nevertheless, national economies world over have been undergoing rapid changes both in political and economic fronts. In the post globalization era several regional powers have emerged / or are emerging in the south. The countries such as China, India, Brazil and South Africa have been experiencing rapid economic changes. In particular, China's economic performance has been stunning. And so also India's, Brazil's, South Africa's. The BRIC nations alone account for 25% of global GDP. This is a changing scenario - when the countries of North were shaken due to global recession, the countries of South stood like a rock and not only absorbed the shock but also established a sustained growth. This is precisely the objective condition that gave strength and confidence to south - south development cooperation. Several big countries of South have turned out to be a big aid-giving nations and also extending credit at a lower rate of interest. These countries have also started building basic infrastructure in the poorer south countries such as road, bridges, railways, power projects etc.

After all, South-South partnership was envisaged with a view to evolving new strategies of cooperation between all "non-north" countries, essentially after the end of bi-polar world. South-South Cooperation was supposed to help in restricting the domination and arm-twisting strategies of North. But, remember the effectiveness of south-south cooperation again very much depends upon the existing geo-political conditions and the prevailing regional political compulsions and economic conditions and stresses. Therefore, evolving a new global partnership - South-South cooperation for sustainable development is also seemingly not all that
Nevertheless, the UN Sec-Gen, Ban ke Moon expressed the south-south cooperation will "ensure shared prosperity, sustainable development and a life of dignity for all,". This is the expression of normative concern which needs to be respected and upheld. There is an urgent need for cooperation among Non-north countries for mutual benefit and to combat common challenges and looming climate threats. Technical cooperation, exchange of knowledge and experiences, evolving common development strategies and most importantly to work towards sustainable development which signifies ecological and environmental security. Most importantly, in the SSC “aid giver and receiver” are seen as partners. Furthermore, the aim of the SSC is to strive hard to connect with several important stakeholders such as private sector agencies, civil society organizations, academia besides state agencies. This makes a significant difference from conventional approaches of international cooperation.

Nevertheless, there is a tendency towards the emergence of regional powers even among the non-north countries; best examples are China and South Africa. The regional geopolitical conditions and compulsions still determine the aid and cooperation between countries within south. But it does make a qualitative change: However, the SSC politics is less problematic and goes much beyond the traditional areas of cooperation (such as building defense capability, export of capital goods, limited technology transfer food aid etc). The SSC cooperation now extends to infrastructure building, climate change, energy, FDI in key areas of industrial development besides technology transfer.

UNDP and FAO have assumed a huge responsibility as facilitators and to build the required capacities to confront common development strategies and challenges. As a way to make North-South aid more effective, donor countries also support developing nations through triangular cooperation (TRC).

International experience of SSC

- IDRC and in particular, Canada-UNDP initiative has brought together countries such as Cambodia, Haiti, Mali, Niger, Sudan etc for joint learning and exchange of ideas and experiences in the areas of climate risks, early warnings, disaster risk reduction, evolving and sharing adaptation experiences in key sectors of agriculture and water management.
- UNDP in partnership with Denmark working with China, Ghana, and Zambia on renewable energy technology transfer, in which the key player being China
- South-south cooperation has also attracted support and commitment from North: China's recent announcements on climate change commitment fund of US$ 3.13 billion has attracted US and, France. In fact, China has agreed to contribute an additional US$2 billion to support South-South Cooperation in general.


**India's contribution to SSC**

Amazingly, India's contribution to SSC has been extremely impressive. India is turning out to be a significant player in contributing to SSC:
• Through SSC, India has gone much beyond the conventional aid-receivers of South Asian neighbor of Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka.
• It has been estimated that India provides assistance worth $1.5-2 billion every year. Major areas of cooperation include: Lines of Credit (LoC), capacity-building training programmes and bilateral grant assistance projects.
• Till March 2015, the EXIM Bank had signed 194 Lines of Credit agreements with 63 countries with credit commitments of about $11.7 billion. More than 60% of this credit was for African countries
• Under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation programme, about 10,000 (8,500 civilian and 1,500 defense) personnel from over 160 countries are trained in India every year.

Changes in trade among SSC

• Trade among South-South countries went up from USD 577 million in 1997 to over USD 2,000 billion in 2006.
• The total trade of African goods with non-African developing countries went from USD 34 billion in 1995 to USD 97 billion in 2004 and USD 283 billion in 2008.
• Chinese-African trade was estimated at over USD 200 billion in 2012.
• India’s trade with Africa rose from USD 9 billion to USD 31 billion during the period 2004-2008.

Are SSC is completely unconditional?

The answer is no but not coercive as it is in the case of North-South relationship. What is the difference? As I indicated earlier, the North-South dealings always carried coercive tags, influencing macro-economic policies in particular pushing for privatizing all key sectors and so forth. But the SSC is also not free from conditionalities but one can say, it is less coercive. Example: China for all its infrastructure building projects would want the aid receiving countries to extend 70% of contracts be given to Chinese approved companies. This would deprive the local companies. In fact, many projects in Africa were carried out by bringing workers from China. This may severely affect the local economy and the intended results may be negative.


South-South cooperation: A new glow in international cooperation?)

The grey areas of SSC

What are the objectives of SSC? Is there any long-term strategy for SSC? What do the southern countries stand to gain? Are all aid contracts that take place among southern countries are unconditional? If conditional, what are they? Does SSC completely uphold the principle of "no hegemony, no dependency, no exploitation and only collective self-reliance"?

More specifically, when a vast majority are in poverty in most donor countries of south and when over 60% of population do not have adequate access to drinking water supply and
sanitation, why billions of dollars are given away as aid to other southern countries? Can we rule out completely the conflicting interests that exist among Southern countries?

Therefore, it is important to acknowledge the main challenges / issues / concerns that may inhibit larger south-south cooperation? The poor socio-economic conditions that are prevalent in southern countries (including that of Emerging nations such as China, India, Brazil, South Africa etc who are considered major players in SSC) are seemingly very important inhibiting factors that may inhibit full-scale SSC.

"According to the UN Multidimensional Poverty Index, 2.2 billion people still live in abject poverty. About 1.4 billion people, the majority in the South, still have no reliable electricity, 900 million lack access to clean water and 2.6 billion do not have adequate sanitation"

None the less, the commonality of poor socio-economic conditions themselves may provide some kind of solidarity and strength for collective self-reliance and may help to keep away the conventional exploitative strategy of north-south trading relationship at least to some extent. What are those commonalities?

- Poverty, hunger, malnutrition
- Urban slums
- Low human development indicators
- lack of adequate social security and health care measures
- Ecological degradation and erosion of natural capital
- Environmental degradation
- Climate change threat and associated challenges
- Increasing consumerism, rapid rise in waste generation, lack of scientific disposal methods

These commonalities themselves may provide an excellent level playing ground for cooperation among SSC to achieve the goal of sustainable development.

**Let me now list the possible areas of cooperation and areas for joint learning**

1. During the last couple of decades, most of the developing countries, more so the emerging nations have been experiencing a very high degree of urbanization. Urban population in several of these countries and carrying capacities of major cities have become unmanageable. Some of the urban problems pose a huge threat and remain unresolved. These emerging problems could be jointly addressed by southern countries: What are they?

   - Slum management
   - Streamlining urban and peri-urban expansion
- Urban poverty
- Waste disposal (solid waste, bio-medical waste, liquid waste and e-waste)
- Waste water treatment and recycling
- Urban transport - the concern of declining road space
- Urban floods
- Urban fundamentals

2. In the agricultural sector also there are issues which warrants immediate attention which could be addressed jointly by SSC: They are.

- Low agricultural productivity despite the use of high levels of chemical inputs and declining soil health
- Need for promotion of organic farming
- Low water use efficiency and the need for increasing productivity per unit of land and water
- Lack of scientific storage facility (particularly for fruits and vegetables)
- Scientific irrigation water delivery system through modernizing canal network
- Modernizing agricultural techniques and implements
- In the context of Groundwater emerging as the most predominant source of irrigation it is important to work towards balancing this precious resource. How to match the GW extraction and recharge -- Scientific rainwater harvesting strategies?
- Sustainable agriculture
- Dry land farming, promotion of small millets and promotion of risk aversion practices
- Large scale conversion of prime agricultural land for non-agricultural purposes – Its impact is going to be adverse and raise serious food security concerns as well as issues of raising rural unemployment. As a consequence, in the absence of alternate livelihood options there is a danger of rise in rural poverty
- The urgent need for Agricultural / crop insurance - particularly because of increasing climate risks
- Need to promote an intensive dialogue among southern countries on how to make agriculture a commercially viable and sustainable enterprise

3. How to address a large number of water conflicts that are emerging in the context of development process? Inter-state and transnational water disputes, rural-urban, inter-sectoral, hydro-power generation versus livelihood needs etc. The example of Nile basin initiative (NBI) in East Africa

4. Erosion of natural capital, Eco-restoration and guaranteeing ecological security and sustaining per capita bio-space - the key for sustainable development

5. Treatment of industrial effluent
6. Rejuvenation of rivers and water bodies and maintaining overall environmental standards

7. Climate change and adaptation and mitigation strategies, particularly so in the energy sector; promotion of non-conventional source of energy

8. Protection of low elevation coastal zone in particular deltas; deltas are supposedly granaries of food grains but in recent times under very stress due to various factors; the most important factor is increasing salinity of soil and groundwater which affects considerably agricultural productivity and employment; the reverse flow of seawater in deltas needs to be addressed

9. Protection of coastal ecology and coastal environment- the sundarbans the classic example - the much needed cooperation between India and Bangladesh

10. Address also jointly the issue of limits to adaptation in the context of global dialogue on climate change

11. Disaster management and disaster risk reduction strategies; Early warning and early action systems

12. Sharing experiences of flood and drought management and evolving joint long-term strategies for flood and drought mitigation

13. Managing water quality standards - the case of arsenic

14. Sharing the academic experiences of natural resources accounting and ecosystem valuation and natural resources regeneration

15. Issues pertaining to Environmental accounting

16. Attacking poverty - sharing poverty alleviation measures - example: PDS, National rural employment guarantee scheme, direct money transfer to beneficiaries, noon meal scheme in the schools and so forth

17. Building a resilient state and society

18. Infrastructure building - highways, rail transport, energy, telecommunication

19. Supply of protected water and scientific sanitation facility for all

20. Affordable health care and social security system

21. Affordable school education for all
22. Encourage civil society participation in South-South development cooperation

23. Promote consciously joint research and stakeholders’ dialogue between south-south countries in all the areas listed above in particular, vital areas such as agricultural water use efficiency, ecological and environmental security, climate change, climate mitigation and adaptation, disaster management and DRR, rural-urban migration, sustainable urban and city development, water quality, drinking water and sanitation and ensuring food and livelihood security

24. Most vital, gender disparity is very glaring in all these areas in all countries - these need to be jointly addressed and work towards women empowerment. In this context, the initiative of women self-help groups is very important