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China's Role in Advancing South-South Cooperation in the 21st Century



By Mr. Khalid Taimur Akram, Executive Director,
Pakistan Research Center for a Community with
Shared Future (PRCCSF), Islamabad

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The South-South cooperation (SSC) refers to the unique arrangement where two or more developing countries share technical skills, exchange knowledge, transfer technologies, and provide financial assistance. It is a tool used by the states, international organizations, academics, civil society and the private sector to collaborate in specific areas such as agricultural development, human rights, urbanization, health, climate change etc. The South-South cooperation is basically about developing countries in the Global South working together to find solutions to common development challenges. In the 21st century this form of cooperation has become very important as the developing countries seek growth models that reflect their own needs and realities. Against this backdrop, China has emerged as the strongest and the most active supporter of the South-South cooperation. It is playing a major role in shaping more inclusive and balanced global development system. Being the world's largest developing country and a global economic giant, China presents its development experience as an example for others to follow. Some of the core principles of South-South cooperation include respect for sovereignty, equality and mutual benefit, non-interference and so on. When we look at China's approach, we can observe that China's policies include all these principles. China respects other nations' sovereignty. It promotes mutual respect. It follows the principle of non-interference. It is an ardent supporter of shared development and





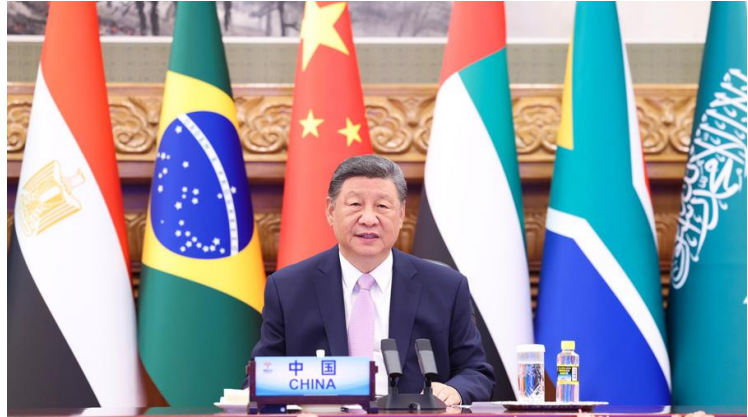
mutual benefit. So, all these factors are the reason that China has positioned itself as a key partner for Asian, African, Latin American, and the Middle Eastern countries.

China's Development Philosophy and South-South Cooperation

In supporting South-South cooperation, China follows a development philosophy that is very much different from the traditional North-South Model. China's development philosophy, as discussed earlier, is guided by equality, mutual benefit, and respect for national sovereignty. China neither believes in nor follows the conventional donor-recipient models. China's development cooperation is a form of mutual assistance between developing countries. For China, cooperation is a form of partnership where all sides gain rather than one side enjoying all the benefits while the other being exploited as done in the West. This approach is strongly supported by the developing countries seeking alternatives that respect their independence and development choices.

China often highlights its own development journey that how it lifted its people out of abject poverty and now it is world's 2nd largest economy today. The purpose of presenting itself as an example is to serve as a source of experience that may be useful to other developing nations. China never claimed that its model is the best or it fits all. Instead, China is open to learning, it promotes dialogue, it promotes flexibility and adaptation according to the conditions and the resources of the country. This flexible approach strengthens trust and cooperation among Global South countries.

Even on international forums, China has always been very vocal about the interests of the Global South. It supports the South-South cooperation through several initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) launched in 2013, the major global initiatives including the Global Development



Initiative (GDI) launched in 2021, the Global Security Initiative (GSI) launched in 2022, the Global Civilization Initiative (GCI) launched in 2023, and the Global Governance Initiative (GGI) launched in 2025. In addition, China-UN South-South Development Facility was also launched in late 2025. It is a new partnership launched by China and the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC) to boost sustainable development in the Global South. It provides a framework for China to share its development experiences and resources with other countries in the South. At the same time, China also offers funding, for instance South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund. It shares expertise in agriculture and tech. In 2024, the China-led G20 agenda focused on core concerns of the Global South, such as food security and climate finance, highlighting its political influence. Apart from collaborating with UN bodies, China also collaborates with regional forums such as Forum on China-





Africa Cooperation and China-Arab States Cooperation Forum. All these efforts are aimed at creating platforms for knowledge exchange and tangible development projects in areas like green energy, digital economy, and food security. By doing so, China reinforces South–South cooperation as a key pillar of global development in the 21st century.

Economic, Infrastructure, and Trade Cooperation

Economic, infrastructure, and trade cooperation lie at the heart of China’s South–South engagement. In economic sphere, trade, investment, financial aid, infrastructure development, everything is included but if we specifically consider trade then China has become one of the largest trading partners for many developing countries, supporting their integration into the global economy. Trade is an important engine for economic growth and to facilitate trade and to enhance the competitiveness of developing countries in the global supply chain, China has taken measures to help its partners improve their trade infrastructure. To speed up the customs clearance process for goods and combat smuggling, China has donated container inspection equipment to more than 20 countries including Georgia, Armenia, Tanzania, Kenya and the Philippines. Similarly, to help developing economies build trade capacity, China set up funds in the World Trade Organization and the World Customs Organization. This is how trade cooperation allows developing nations to expand exports, build industries, and create jobs.

A major area of China’s contribution to South-South cooperation is infrastructure development in the Global South. A shining example is the Belt and Road Initiative. Through various projects in transportation, energy, telecommunications, and logistics,



China helps address infrastructure gaps that limit growth in many developing regions. Railways, roads power plants, and ports, for example Gwadar Port, built with Chinese cooperation support long-term economic activity rather than short-term aid and dependency on anyone. In this way China is also trying to make developing nations self-reliant.

China encourages industrial cooperation and investment also. Manufacturing zones, industrial parks, and joint ventures help developing countries expand their exports beyond raw materials only. This move of China supports economic diversification and sustainable growth and both of these are central goals of South–South cooperation. In addition, China promotes financial cooperation by providing development financing and working with multilateral development institutions. These efforts aim to support growth while respecting national development priorities.

It should be noted that China’s contributions to South-South cooperation are not limited to the above-mentioned areas only. Beyond trade, infrastructure, and investment, China strongly focuses on capacity building and human development. We discussed in the beginning that South-South cooperation also includes exchange of knowledge and skills also. So, technology transfer and skills



development are key elements of China’s South–South cooperation strategy. It shares



experience in agriculture, digital technology, renewable energy, healthcare, disaster management, and many other areas. Similarly, China does not only help developing countries build roads and ports, it assists them in building digital infrastructure also. By doing so, China is making sure that the countries in the Global South are not left behind in digital economy.

To further support human development, China offers training programs, scholarships, and allows academic exchanges also, so that students and professionals from developing countries to gain skills and knowledge. Health cooperation further demonstrates China's people-centered approach. Modern equipment, medical teams, hospital construction, and public health support contribute to improved healthcare systems in developing countries. These efforts highlight that South–South cooperation is not only economic in nature. It has a social and human-focused aspect also.

China's Vision for Inclusive Global Development

The 21st century is facing some serious global challenges such as climate change, inequality, uncertainty, and economic instability. All these challenges require collective solutions. No nation alone can cope with these problems. That's why, China promotes South–South cooperation as part of its broader vision for inclusive global development. This vision emphasizes shared responsibility, cooperation over competition, and development as a universal right.

China supports international frameworks that give greater voice to developing countries. It works through multilateral platforms to promote development financing, climate cooperation, and sustainable growth. By aligning South–South cooperation with global development goals, China seeks to ensure that progress benefits a wider range of countries.

Importantly, China’s approach avoids political conditions and respects national paths of development unlike West. This



principle builds trust and countries cooperate with each other on the basis of shared goals rather than external pressure. Consequently, South–South cooperation becomes a platform for genuine partnership rather than dependency.

Conclusion

In essence, China’s role in advancing South–South cooperation in the 21st century reflects its commitment to shared development, mutual respect, and inclusive growth. China has always presented itself as a partner rather than a patron, and by doing so, it has redefined development cooperation and how it is understood and practiced. The emphasis of China on equality, practical results, long-term growth, and win-win cooperation aligns closely with the needs of the Global South. South–South cooperation will remain an essential pillar of international development. China’s active participation and leadership in this area position it as a key supporter of a balanced, fairer, inclusive and cooperative global order.