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# India's Development Cooperation in Africa: The Case of 'Solar Mamas' Who Bring Light

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## **Abstract**

*This paper argues that grassroots organizations that find scalable, low-cost, innovative solutions, usher in a new dimension of 'South-South cooperation' and can help governments and multi-lateral agencies craft inclusive, sustainable policies. The aim of this paper is threefold. First, to understand the mechanics of India's broader development cooperation in Africa, particularly identifying specific frameworks that have been successful as well as the factors that facilitate or hamper the practical implementation of projects.*

*Second, this paper will explore the role of grassroots organizations who have found localized solutions in India who then export their learnings to other geographies and how they craft a unique role for themselves in India's broader development cooperation framework. To explore this idea further, the paper will utilize the case study of a community-based grassroots organization, Barefoot College Tilonia, founded by Sanjit Bunker Roy in 1972, that expanded into Africa in 2013. The 'Barefoot Approach' trains women from impoverished communities as solar engineers to electrify their villages, earning them the title of 'Solar Mamas'.*

*Third, this paper examines the reasons why New Delhi's development cooperation with countries in Africa provides a template of sustainable development cooperation and it is worthy of closer scrutiny. It argues that the uneven, fragmented, Indian experience provides an important perspective that can inform policy makers crafting global development strategies.*

# India's Development Cooperation in Africa: The Case of 'Solar Mamas' who bring Light

## Introduction

A crucial component of the global development landscape, and the new development paradigm is the rise of South-South cooperation in which actors from the developing world are pooling resources and expertise to work together towards achieving the SDG's. While considerable variation exists between actors considered 'non-traditional', their modes of operations have some parallels. Similarly, while the 'Southern' powers fundamentally differ from the donors of the OECD-DAC groups, there are instances where they have adopted select practices of the DAC donors and engage with them in various contexts.

India's international development began taking shape soon after its independence in 1947 and there are three factors that set it apart: it is demand-driven, not tied to conditionalities and does not employ traditionally used 'donor-donee' semantics. Scholars making a case for an Indian model of development cooperation argue that a "policy evolution is underway that is building a self-confident and unique Indian government approach to development cooperation."<sup>1</sup>

An understanding of the mechanics of this 'unique Indian approach' calls for an analysis of its instruments, components, and organizational layout. For instance, the nodal office of India's development cooperation is the Ministry of External Affairs, with the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Commerce, and the EXIM bank of India playing critical roles. However, in January

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<sup>1</sup> Dye, B. (2020) Uneven Convergence in Development? The Case of India's Lines of Credit to Africa. FutureDAMS/IUKDP Working Paper 014. Manchester: The University of Manchester.

2012, the Development Partnership Administration (DPA) was set up in the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) to streamline the delivery of assistance and improving the effectiveness of such efforts.

“The DPA functions in close coordination with the concerned Territorial Divisions of the MEA, who continue to be the main interlocutors with partner countries on the prioritization and selection of projects for coverage under India's development assistance initiatives. DPA comprises of four Divisions and among them DPA- II Division is the nodal division for all capacity building programmes, including the Indian Technical & Economic Cooperation Programme (ITEC) and Technical Cooperation Scheme (TCS) of Colombo Plan schemes.”<sup>2</sup>

The aim of this paper is threefold. First, to understand the mechanics of India's broader development cooperation in Africa, particularly identifying specific frameworks that have been successful as well as the factors that facilitate or hamper the practical implementation of projects. Second, this paper will explore the role of grassroots organizations who have found localized solutions in India who then export their learnings to other geographies and how they craft a unique role for themselves in India's broader development cooperation framework. Third, this paper explores the reasons why New Delhi's development cooperation with countries in Africa provides a template of sustainable development cooperation and it is worthy of closer scrutiny. It argues that the uneven, fragmented, Indian experience provides an important perspective that can inform policy makers crafting global development strategies.

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<sup>2</sup> 'ITEC: Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation'. [itecgoi.in](http://itecgoi.in), 2 October 2022.

## **India – Africa Development Cooperation**

The narrative of India's evolving relationships with countries in Africa is dominated by the century-old trade partnerships, support of African anti-imperial struggles and solidarity displayed during the Non-Aligned Movement. Today, India positions itself as a partner in development, has extended concessional loans of over US\$12.3 billion, and allocated \$700 mn in grant assistance to Africa. The creation of imaginative and progressive capacity building initiatives, as early as 1949, have focused on skills, technology, and knowledge transfer.

The Indian private sector that has made forays across African landscapes, have also been successful in leveraging Lines of Credit, which have been a crucial component of India's development cooperation mechanisms. These interactions have brought in a renewed vigor to State-to-State interactions driven under the auspices of the India Africa Forum Summit (IAFS) and their commercial success has encouraged a new wave of migrants seeking opportunities in Africa. Now, Indian sub-national actors, including civil society and voluntary organizations are setting up linkages across these geographies, scaling up innovative development solutions and sharing knowledge.

India's partnerships with African countries in the health sector is also noteworthy. One of the most significant contributions has been Indian manufactured generic antiretroviral (ARV) that facilitated the treatment of HIV/AIDS through low-cost, quality assured medicines. In Africa especially, India stood up to massive resistance from Western pharmaceutical companies to provide drugs that cost \$1, made possible due to India's unique patent system and legal provisions,

thereby making huge strides in containing the disease.<sup>3</sup> Studies show that Indian ARV's continue to dominate the market, accounting for more than 80% of annual purchase volumes.<sup>4</sup> This cooperation extended into the pandemic when 32 African countries received 150 tonnes of medical assistance, including access to vaccines manufactured in India. Other initiatives including e-Vidyabharati and e-Aarogyabharati (e-VBAB) project are looking to leverage technology to expand the scope of cooperation.

India and countries in Africa are poised to be close partners in the fight against climate change. To that end, when India launched the International Solar Alliance (ISA), at COP 2015, African countries showed tremendous support and today over half of ISA member states are from the continent. India has pledged a concessional credit line of US\$2 billion to Africa over five years for the implementation of off-grid solar energy projects.<sup>5</sup> The ISA is also working with the African Development Bank to develop 10,000 MW of solar power systems across the Sahel, “which aims to provide electricity to approximately half of the 600 million Africans who remain off-grid”.<sup>6</sup>

India is also the third largest provider of UN peacekeeping troops, with over 5,300 soldiers deployed in eight of the twelve UN missions around the world. Since 1953-54, the Indian army

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<sup>3</sup> Indian generics and AIDS, Frontline, <https://frontline.thehindu.com/social-issues/indian-generics-and-aids/article5228850.ece>. 2 October 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Waning, Brenda, Diedrichsen, Ellen and Moon, Suerie, ‘A lifeline to treatment: the role of Indian generic manufacturers in supplying antiretroviral medicines to developing countries’, Journal of the International Aids Society, v. 13. N. 35, 14 September 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Karingi, Stephen and Naliaka, Laura, ‘The future of India-Africa relations: Opportunities abound’, Foresight Africa 2022, Brookings, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2022/02/25/the-future-of-india-africa-relations-opportunities-abound/>. 25 February 2022.

<sup>6</sup> African Development Bank signs deal with International Solar Alliance to propel solar development in Africa, The African Development Bank, <https://www.afdb.org/ar/news-and-events/african-development-bank-signs-deal-with-international-solar-alliance-to-propel-solar-development-in-africa-17936>. 2018.

has contributed over 2.58 lakh personnel in 51 of the 71 UN missions. Most recently, an infantry battalion with 570 soldiers were deployed under the UN interim security force for Abeyi (UNISFA), tasked with monitoring the border between Northern and Southern Sudan.<sup>7</sup>

### **South – South Cooperation**

India's development partnerships with countries in Africa is built on the changing notions of South-South Cooperation (SSC). In this paper, SSC is defined as the exchange of resources, personnel, technology, and knowledge between developing countries. The origins of SSC can be traced back to the Bandung Conference of 1955 where 29 African and Asian states decided to present a unified voice against status quo which later took the form of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). These newly independent, politically fragile countries had the arduous task of achieving economic progress, which scholars argue changed their attitudes from 'uhuru' (freedom) to 'uhurunakaze' (freedom means hard work)<sup>8</sup>.

This is very much in line with the Buenos Aires Plan of Action (BAPA) for Promoting and Implementing Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries endorsed by the General Assembly in 1978 (resolution 33/134)<sup>9</sup> that emphasizes “fostering the self-reliance of developing countries by enhancing their creative capacity to find solutions to their development problems in keeping with their own aspirations, values and specific needs”, “promoting and strengthening

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<sup>7</sup> Pandit, Rajat, 'India to send a battalion for peacekeeping ops in Africa', The Times of India, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/india-to-send-a-battalion-for-peacekeeping-ops-in-africa/articleshow/88939315.cms>. 17 January 2022.

<sup>8</sup> Ugwuja, A. A, Ubaku, K. C. et al, 'South - South Cooperation and the Prospects of a New International Economic Order: An Insight into the India Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) Dialogue Forum', International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education, vol. 1. No. 8. August 2014.

<sup>9</sup> About South-South and Triangular Cooperation, United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC), [unsouthsouth.org](https://unsouthsouth.org), November 2022.

collective self-reliance among developing countries through the exchange of experiences”, and to “improve the capacity of developing countries to absorb and adapt technology and skills to meet their specific developmental needs.”

The establishment of financial institutions such as the New Development Bank, the India-Brazil-South Africa Facility for the Alleviation of Poverty and Hunger (IBSA Fund) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, seeks to fill a fundamental gap in development financing with non-traditional development partners becoming viable alternatives to traditional lenders.

A common, oft-quoted challenge to South-South Cooperation as explained in this report by the OECD, is:

“While South-South learning and knowledge exchange is gaining traction, it often draws on very scarce resources and takes place in an isolated form. Developing countries willing to share their expertise tend to resolve this lack of fuel with creativity and (often personal) commitment, recycling available budgets and human resources. However, this approach entails severe limitations, especially in terms of scaling-up, coordination among South-South partners and their platforms, accumulative learning, and the generation of good practices. It is also one of the main causes why there are still some voices that claim that South-South cooperation does not exist: it frequently happens in an informal, uncoordinated, and ultimately invisible way.<sup>10</sup>”

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<sup>10</sup> ‘Boosting South-South Cooperation in the context of Aid Effectiveness’, OECD, <https://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/46080462.pdf>, August 2022.



While this perspective is not entirely inaccurate, as many actors do operate with severe limitations and scaling up is a challenge, SSC is not nearly as isolated as it is made out to be. As this paper will put forth, there are institutions, frameworks, personnel, and resources that facilitate these operations and is far from an ‘informal or invisible’ phenomenon.

### **The Mechanics of India’s Development Cooperation in Africa**

India’s development cooperation rests on two main pillars: The first emphasizes the role of partnership and the second on priorities determined by the partner country. Over the years, the initiatives have increased in scope and includes “Lines of Credit, grant assistance, technical consultancy, disaster relief, humanitarian aid, educational scholarships and a wide range of capacity building programmes including short-term civilian and military training courses.”<sup>11</sup>

One of the major programmes in this regard is the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC). Instituted by a decision of the Indian Cabinet on 15 September 1964, it now extends to over 161 countries in Asia, Africa, East Europe, Latin America, the Caribbean as well as Pacific and Small Island countries. The three components of the ITEC are training and capacity building, including executive programs for bureaucrats and civil servants, deputation of Indian experts abroad to assist in developmental activities and study tours in India where delegates from partners countries are taken to different institutes and training centers in the country.

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<sup>11</sup> ‘ITEC: Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation’. [itecgoi.in](http://itecgoi.in). 2 October 2022.

While India's development assistance is categorized as 'demand driven', Indian authorities also have a list of sectors they want to engage in. While 'demand driven' would entail that it is always the partner country that identifies a project based on its priorities and submits a request to the Indian government for Lines of Credit, this is not always the case. Sometimes, host countries may not have the resources for project conceptualization. To offset this, a 'Project Preparation Facility' was created in 2018 to "expeditiously provide free-of-cost Indian consultancy support to requesting governments in the preparatory phase of project formulation and design for projects that may be considered for Government of India Lines of Credit"<sup>12</sup>.

That said, certain criticisms pertaining to India's development cooperation in particular, do point towards challenges unique to the country. For instance, a scholar argues that:

"Rather than continuing the rate of increase in IDEAS loans and thereby delivering a high volume of functioning projects, LoCs to African countries have decreased. This demonstrates the weak capacity of India's development bureaucracy and Foreign Service, something which recent announcements on increases in staff and African embassies, for example, may start to address. Equally, it shows the potential challenges of increasing intervention and 'paperwork' requirements for the emerging powers' development cooperation programmes."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> 'Project Preparation Facility (PPF) for Government of India Lines of Credit (LoCs)', Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, January 15, 2018. <https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/attach/Project-Preparation-Facility.pdf>. 2 October 2022.

<sup>13</sup> Dye, B. (2020) Uneven Convergence in Development? The Case of India's Lines of Credit to Africa. FutureDAMS/IUKDP Working Paper 014. Manchester: The University of Manchester.

This notwithstanding, the three components of India's development cooperation towards countries in Africa that are crucial to examine closely are: 1) training and scholarships, sending experts to partner countries, 2) funding and equipment for specific developmental projects 3) engaging civil society organizations that have identified innovative, scalable, low-cost solutions to shared developmental challenges.

### **I. Emphasis on Capacity Building**

Official documentation traces the emphasis on individual and institutional capacity building to 1953, where a central government circular suggests that state governments should sponsor at least two students from Africa.<sup>14</sup> Soon, in 1956, the Government of India helped establish a residential Royal Technical College in Nairobi, to provide higher technical, commercial and arts education. Later in 1961, when the government of Ethiopia requested assistance in programmes related to community development, Ethiopian participants were sent to India for training. In mineral-rich countries dependent on extractives, Indian engineers have helped set up the knowledge bases to train local engineers.

Today, the Indian Council for Cultural Research (ICCR) alone offers nearly 3365 scholarships under 24 schemes of which almost 1000 are for countries in Africa. The C. V. Raman Fellowship for African Researchers has trained over 400 scientists from over 40 African countries in Universities and Research institutes in India.<sup>15</sup> Under the Africa Scholarship Scheme that began in 2012, over 4000 civilian training slots were made available to African students wanting to

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<sup>14</sup> Enhancing India-Africa Development Cooperation, Brookings, February 1 2016.

<https://www.brookings.edu/research/enhancing-india-africa-development-cooperation-more/>.

<sup>15</sup> CV Raman International Fellowship for African Researchers, <http://www.indoafrica-cvrf.in/>. October 2022.

pursue undergraduate, post graduate or PhD training in India. At the India Africa Forum Summit in 2015, 50, 000 scholarships were announced of which over 32, 000 slots have so far been utilized.<sup>16</sup>

There are also sector and country specific training programs that are more focused. For instance, International Crop Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), headquartered in Hyderabad, has established food processing incubators in Angola, Cameroon, Ghana, Mali and Uganda, food testing laboratories in Nigeria, Gambia, Republic of Congo, Zimbabwe, Rwanda and mentors 6 value chain agro business value chain incubators in various countries by partnering with local bodies. Over 800, 000 farmers have benefited from these schemes, it has created 4665 jobs and 294 startups in Africa.<sup>17</sup>

This emphasis on capacity building has also shaped several triangular programs with partners like the United States. For instance, the ‘Feed the Future India Triangular Training Program’ is a partnership with the USAID and the Indian Ministry of Agriculture’s premier institute – The National Institute of Agricultural Extension management (MANAGE) – to train 1,500 agricultural practitioners from 11 African and 6 Asian countries on specialized farming practices to increase productivity. “Phase I of the program trained 219 participants from Kenya, Liberia, and Malawi in agricultural marketing, dairy management, food processing and other best practices to prevent post-harvest losses.”

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<sup>16</sup> Address by External Affairs Minister, Dr. S. Jaishankar at the 17th CII-EXIM Bank Conclave on India-Africa Growth Partnership, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. July 19 2022. [https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl%2F35499%2FAddress by External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar at the 17th CIIEXIM Bank Conclave on IndiaAfrica Growth Partnership](https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl%2F35499%2FAddress%20by%20External%20Affairs%20Minister%20Dr%20S%20Jaishankar%20at%20the%2017th%20CIIEXIM%20Bank%20Conclave%20on%20IndiaAfrica%20Growth%20Partnership). October 2022.

<sup>17</sup> Facilitating agribusinesses, International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics, <https://www.icrisat.org/portfolio/facilitating-agribusinesses/>. October 2022.

Similarly, in the “Feed the Future India Africa Innovation Transfer Platform” USAID partnered with a US NGO Technoserve to share and transfer innovative Indian soil and water management techniques known as *Khadins* and *Taankas* in Kenya and Malawi. According to official documents:

“These techniques helped local communities improve off-season crop production, provide water for their cattle, and explore options for growing additional fodder crops. In Kajiado county of Kenya, 97 million liters of run-off water holding capacity has been created to benefit over 400 masai tribal households. In Dedza district of Malawi, over 200 households benefited through taking a second crop due to construction of seepage wells demonstrating the benefits of these technologies for wider use.”<sup>18</sup>

## **II. Funding Developmental Projects**

Beyond training, over 50% of the Lines of Credit provided by the Indian EXIM bank is targeted at developmental projects in Africa. So far India has completed 197 projects, has 65 currently underway with 81 at the pre-execution stage.<sup>19</sup> These projects span across various sectors and countries from water supply, agriculture, food processing and building the National Assembly in Gambia, erecting prefabricated health posts and building a hydro power project in Zambia, building social housing, the new Supreme Court and the metro express in Mauritius, a Centre for

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<sup>18</sup> [U.S.-India Triangular Cooperation | India | Archive - U.S. Agency for International Development. usaid.gov.](#) September 2022.

<sup>19</sup> Address by External Affairs Minister, Dr. S. Jaishankar at the 17th CII-EXIM Bank Conclave on India-Africa Growth Partnership, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. July 19 2022. [https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl%2F35499%2FAddress by External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar at the 17th CIIEXIM Bank Conclave on IndiaAfrica Growth Partnership](https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl%2F35499%2FAddress+by+External+Affairs+Minister+Dr+S+Jaishankar+at+the+17th+CIIEXIM+Bank+Conclave+on+IndiaAfrica+Growth+Partnership), October 2022.

excellence in IT in Namibia, establishing solar panel production unit and training local scientists in Maputo, Mozambique to name a few<sup>20</sup>.

Some of the Centers that are set up, such as the Gandhi-Mandela Centre of Specialization for Artisan Skills in South Africa, signed in 2018, will collaborate with the Hindustan Machine Tools Limited (HMTL) offer resources and equipment to train mechanical fitters, electricians, boilermakers and millwrights – vocational jobs that have a huge demand in South Africa.<sup>21</sup>

Triangular cooperation with the US extends into development projects as well. For instance, the “India-Kenya Dairy Development Project” a partnership between USAID and a leading infrastructure development and financial services group, Infrastructure Leasing & Financial Services Limited (IL&FS), to transfer and pilot India’s successful smallholder dairy production and marketing business model to Kenya. According to primary source data:

“The program has introduced and tested feed and fodder management best practices, as well as established a micro-milk processing unit in Nakuru County, Kenya, that increased milk production by more than 50 percent in the target communities where the model is being piloted.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Address by External Affairs Minister, Dr. S. Jaishankar at the 17th CII-EXIM Bank Conclave on India-Africa Growth Partnership, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. July 19 2022. [https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl%2F35499%2FAddress\\_by\\_External\\_Affairs\\_Minister\\_Dr\\_S\\_Jaishankar\\_at\\_the\\_17th\\_CIIEXIM\\_Bank\\_Conclave\\_on\\_IndiaAfrica\\_Growth\\_Partnership](https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl%2F35499%2FAddress_by_External_Affairs_Minister_Dr_S_Jaishankar_at_the_17th_CIIEXIM_Bank_Conclave_on_IndiaAfrica_Growth_Partnership), October 2022.

<sup>21</sup> ‘India-South Africa Relations’, High Commission of India, [https://mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/South\\_Africa\\_Sept2019-1.pdf](https://mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/South_Africa_Sept2019-1.pdf). August 2022.

<sup>22</sup> [U.S.-India Triangular Cooperation | India | Archive - U.S. Agency for International Development. usaid.gov.](https://www.usaid.gov/press-releases/2022/09/01/india-kenya-dairy-development-project) September 2022.

### **III. Indian Civil Society Organizations: Introducing Innovative, Scalable Solutions**

Indian civil society organizations are also a crucial, understudied aspect of its development cooperation initiatives in Africa. An example is ‘Kudumbashree’ that was set up in 1997 in Kerala, a state in southern India. The word in Malayalam means ‘prosperity of the family’ and is a poverty eradication and women empowerment programme. Implemented by the State Poverty Eradication Mission (SPEM) of the Government of Kerala, it has a three-tier structure for its women community network, with Neighbourhood Groups (NHGs) at the lowest level, Area Development Societies (ADS) at the middle level, and Community Development Societies (CDS) at the local government level.<sup>23</sup>

The Governments of Uganda and South Africa have shown interest in implementing this model in their countries. Experts from Kudumbashree travelled to Kampala to provide a 10-day training for 57 participants on their institutional architecture and share information on the community approaches that were successful.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, the leaders of Free State province in South Africa have sought assistance to set up Self Help Groups, however Kudumbashree officials state that they will first need to study the different social contexts as well as different drivers in each of these geographies before implementing them. A delegation of experts from Ethiopia, also closely studied similarities between the countries and the role SHG’s played in finding solutions and was keen on modelling similar programs. These transfers of ideas, resources and structures are an important dimension of addressing shared challenges. To gain a more nuanced understanding of how this plays out, we now turn to the case study of the Barefoot College in rural Rajasthan.

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<sup>23</sup> [Kudumbashree Story, Kudumbashree, thekudumbashreestory.info](https://www.kudumbashree.org/). September 2022.

<sup>24</sup> [Kudumbashree, International Assignments, https://www.kudumbashree.org/](https://www.kudumbashree.org/). September 2022.

### **Case study: Social Work and Research Centre and the Barefoot College, Tilonia**

The Social Work and Research Centre also known as the Barefoot College Tilonia, founded by Sanjit Bunker Roy in 1972. This community-based grassroots organization worked in partnership with rural Indian communities to provide basic services and find solutions to problems with the aim of encouraging self-sufficiency and sustainability. These ‘barefoot solutions’ ranged from solar energy, water, health to waste management and in 2013 the Barefoot College expanded into Africa.

Today the college trains women from impoverished communities in India as well as groups of women from faraway African towns, as solar engineers to electrify their villages and maintain the grid for maximum efficiency, earning them the title of ‘Solar Mamas’. The ‘Barefoot Approach’ involves selecting unlettered women, training them for over 6 months to fabricate, install and maintain household solar electrification systems. This unique model is community owned and managed, provides financial self-sufficiency thereby empowering women. It has been introduced in 36 countries in Africa and has already trained over 560 ‘Solar Mamas’.

The Barefoot College is working with the Government of India to construct 5 women’s regional vocational training centers in Liberia, Burkina Faso, Senegal, South Sudan, and Zanzibar. In 2019, the centre in Madagascar was inaugurated where 50 women from rural villages were trained each term (5 months), and then they were provided the equipment to install solar panels. They expect



that by 2030, 744 women will be certified Solar engineers and will provide light to around 630,000 homes.<sup>25</sup>

While the primary aim of building these networks and institutions, was to push for electrification, during the outbreak of the pandemic, the team at the Barefoot College in Zanzibar was able to utilize their extensive networks in relief work, revealing flexibility in their operations. They were able to produce and distribute over 100,000 masks, create awareness in local communities by distributing fliers, and battle misinformation by sending over 2000 text messages a day, emphasizing best practices.<sup>26</sup>



Photograph taken by the Author, August 2022

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<sup>25</sup> ‘Celebrating Barefoot’s Grand Training Centre Opening in Madagascar’, Barefoot College International, <https://www.barefootcollege.org/celebrating-barefoots-grand-training-centre-opening-in-madagascar/>. September 2022.

<sup>26</sup> ‘Barefoot College Zanzibar’s Response to Covid-19’, Barefoot College International, <https://www.barefootcollege.org/barefoot-college-zanzibar-covid19/>. October 2022.

During the authors visit to the Barefoot College in Rajasthan, in early August 2022, a group of 15 women were being trained to become solar mamas. The organizers were preparing to host a delegation of African women who would arrive later in the year for training, the first international batch after the pandemic had struck.

A major takeaway was that the teaching based on color coding and a manual with step-by-step photographs and instructions, transcended language barriers. The women learnt by doing and repetition was key. Over the course of the 6 months friendships and kinships were formed and there was a support system to help those that were struggling to keep up. The experience of having picked up a tangible skill, having access to solar equipment after returning to their villages and ‘bringing light’ to unelectrified homes helped break through generations of oppression and offset biases they faced due to their gender and other social norms.

## **Conclusion**

Instruments of India’s development cooperation in Africa, some designed when India herself was newly independent, indicate that they are rooted in the ethos of finding creative solutions and pooling resources to address developmental challenges. While the advantages for New Delhi are aplenty: a range of African leaders who have been trained in India, familiar with its functioning, numerous jobs created, support for its initiatives in multilateral forums, making it the ‘pharmacy of the world’, and developmental projects that have benefited local communities, which in turn has generated tremendous goodwill.

On the downside, a common criticism has been the time it takes to implement projects. Stakeholders interviewed admit that even if they win a tender floated by an African government, it may be years before the Indian EXIM bank releases the money that has been approved for the project. According to one respondent “We might get a project approved in 2015, but the money to start work might only be issued in 2020 and the final project completed by 2022, by which time a lot of realities in the ground would have changed.”<sup>27</sup> Delays in project delivery has also been attributed to government red tape and time-consuming bureaucratic processes.

This paper identifies legitimate grassroots organizations as key actors in a country’s development cooperation ecosystem. Their role involves not just finding scalable, low-cost, innovative solutions, but helping governments and multi-lateral agencies craft inclusive, sustainable policies and usher in a new dimension of ‘South-South cooperation’. Furthermore, the paper concludes that New Delhi’s development cooperation with countries in Africa provides a template of sustainable development cooperation and that the Indian experience provides an important non-western perspective that can inform policy makers crafting global development strategies.

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<sup>27</sup> Personal Interview, Ghana, 2022.