

South-South Cooperation and Inclusive Growth

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Ongoing criticism over the efficacy of a modern development model characterised by an imbalance of power with respect to terms of action has in recent years spawned discussion regarding the utility of 'South-South cooperation' as a potential new development paradigm. We agree with many of the critiques levelled at development in its current form, particularly when considered in the context of the clearly growing disparity across the globe between those who have and those who have not (see Ortiz and Cummins, 2011). But we also have reservations related to questions as to what exactly South-South cooperation means, and indeed worry that this 'new' paradigm is not new at all if it merely reinforces a hegemonic view of two 'worlds', a North and a South. The primary objective of this Working Paper is thus to contribute to an understanding of how South-South cooperation might distinguish itself as a genuine alternative to prevailing macro-level development approaches.

During the colonial era the sciences of economics and anthropology were intimately connected; the latter discipline in particular grounded in highly Eurocentric understandings of the biological evolution of species. With this fact as a starting point, we undertake a critical historical analysis of economic thinking to reveal the neo-liberal impulse of the Washington Consensus as heavily infused with notions of 'natural progress' and 'survival of the fittest'. As a mode of 'othering', the discursive entanglement of economics and anthropology, we argue, had the effect of actually creating inequality by projecting humans as having followed a particular evolutionary or developmental trajectory—either 'forward' or, as it were, 'backward'. And because (as of the early 21st century) ideological structures are so deep-rooted, it continues to have this effect. The socio-cultural phenomenon known as casteism, 'the Southern problem', is a standout case in point.

The relentless concern among so many economists with augmenting people's purchasing power, guised as it is as 'progress', is where casteism acquires contemporary expression. Indeed anthropologist Louis Dumont's widely-cited *Homo Hierarchicus* (1966), identified by a number of scholars as the most influential theoretical work on caste ever produced, is quite clearly bound within the same evolutionist thinking that informed, among other Western scientific works instrumental to the entrenchment of GDP-thinking globally, Rostow's 'Take-off Theory' of economic growth. *Homo Hierarchicus*, we contend, embodies the proclivity of development practitioners to conceive of human identity in essentialised 'value' terms, and thus poverty and inequality as practically natural incorrigibles of development.

Caste-based discrimination is commonly associated with countries of the so-called Global South. The caste system in India is held as a pure type. Yet the low-caste 'reality', contra Dumont, is far from fixed and uniform—that is to say, far from 'pure' or 'natural'. A comparison of literature on the lived experience of Dalits in India (colloquially known as 'untouchables') with the growing body of work aimed at describing that of Dalits in Bangladesh, coupled with primary-source data derived via qualitative interviews we the authors carried

out in 2008 and 2010 with Dalit communities in each of Bangladesh's major administrative divisions, indicates that Bangladeshi Dalits are distinguishable from their Indian counterparts by a powerful 'double consciousness'. Bangladeshi Dalits feel not merely like 'second-class citizens' but, indeed, 'second-class nothings'—veritable strangers in their own homes and communities as a consequence of their forced migration by the British *raj*, centuries ago, from Hindu-dominated India to Muslim-dominated East Bengal. In other words, for all the similarity that exists between Indian and Bangladeshi Dalits, there are crucial differences too; differences which confirm that 'low-caste' peoples are far from being a monolithic 'other'.

Altogether, the double consciousness experienced by Bangladesh's Dalit community underscores a broader thesis put forward by post-colonial development theorists that there is no complete homogeneity between culture and identity; that development practices which fail to appreciate micro-level context and the plurality of self risk interventionist and aggressive attitudes towards other peoples and a concomitant betrayal of the very principles of fallibilism, tolerance and understanding upon which the United Nations was originally built. This is perhaps the most pertinent lesson for new development cooperation practitioners in the Global South (or anywhere else). If the South-South movement is to be genuinely different from those development schemes operating under the rubric of the Washington Consensus, then those who celebrate it must embrace the intersubjectivity—'we could be wrong about our ideas; there are different ways of seeing and being'—associated with the collapse of grand narratives about the modern human condition, thus avoiding 'race', GDP, gender and other forms of essentialist thinking which continue to exacerbate inequality across the globe.

By adopting resistance strategies which, in relation to essentialism, are much more nuanced, including embracing alternative knowledge systems (for example, Dalit oral histories) that dislocate the hegemonic Euro-American perspective, the Global South can potentially help the rest of the world embrace the contingent, the discontinuous and the unrepresentable as coordinates for remapping and rethinking borders that define one's existence and place in the world. For South-South cooperation to be effective it must define itself by 'unexpected moves' that disrupt the kinds of language games—'Global North' and 'Global South' included—that characterise the current world order. In turn, this must entail recognising the paradox of similarity and difference, as revealed by the lived experience of Bangladesh's Dalits of Indian origin as compared to other 'low-caste' peoples around the world.

References:

- Dumont, L. (1970). *Homo Hierarchicus*. Translated by G. Weidenfeld and Nicholson Ltd. Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press.
- Ortiz, I. and M. Cummins (2011). 'Global Inequality: Beyond the Bottom Billion – A Rapid Review of Income Distribution in 141 Countries', *Social and Economic Policy Working Paper*, April. New York, NY, UNICEF Policy and Practice.