

Bolstering India-EU Development Partnership on Sustainable Development in the Indo-Pacific

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1. INTRODUCTION

As the world inches towards the target year of 2030 for fulfilling the targets of the Sustainable Development Agenda, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the pandemic has reconfigured the increasing geopolitical impulses, particularly in the Indo-Pacific. Even before Covid-19 became a part of our realities, this region has been facing the brunt of severe climatic regression (SDG 13) and posing risks to the sustainable use of the oceans (SDG 14), pushing it back in its SDG milestones¹. In addition, over the past few decades, the Indo-Pacific region has grabbed eyeballs from every quarter of the international community, becoming the centre of political and economic gravity². Besides environmental concerns, the increasing influence imposed by Beijing is also one of the primary driving factors behind this region gaining fast traction among major powers, including the European Union (EU) and India. Although Europeans have been aloof with regard to this region for a long time, they are now forced to pay attention and act “strategically” in their approach. The recently released Joint Communication by the European Commission laying out a Strategy on the Indo-Pacific is a case in point³. Considering the urgency of fulfilling the sustainability targets in the “decade of action”, what is the potential role of the EU in the Indo-Pacific? This is the central question that this paper seeks to address.

1. UNESCAP. 2021. Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2021. (https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/2021-03/Highlights_Brochure_ESCAP_Asia_and_the_Pacific_SDG_Progress_Report_2021.pdf).

2. Grare, Frédéric and Reuter, Manisha. 2021. Moving Closer: European Views of the Indo-Pacific. European Council on Foreign Relations. (<https://ecfr.eu/special/moving-closer-european-views-of-the-indo-pacific/>).

3. European Commission. 2021. Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council. The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. (https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/jointcommunication_indo_pacific_en.pdf).

First, it outlines the status of Agenda 2030 unfolding in the Indo-Pacific and the development cooperation initiatives taken by the Union in this geographical space. It then goes on to describe the aspirations of the Asian partners, particularly India, and the ways in which the Union and its member states, either collectively or individually, could possibly engage in this region. It envisions a potential merging of the development cooperation capacities of the EU and India in certain sectoral areas, such as disaster resilient infrastructure, renewable energy, capacity-building and resource sharing to cope with the challenges faced, especially by the island nations of the Pacific. Finally, the paper addresses the challenges that could possibly crop up in this kind of development partnership.

2. UNPACKING THE NEXUS BETWEEN AGENDA 2030, THE EU AND THE INDO-PACIFIC

Although the Indo-Pacific occupies no more than one-quarter of the globe's land area, it houses roughly half of the world's population, and accounts for almost 40 per cent of global GDP. Even to casual observers, the population's dependence on agriculture, fisheries or tourism for their livelihoods is apparent. Moreover, the hybrid economies of the island states, their varying topographies, and the accompanying environmental drivers make them susceptible to extreme socio-economic and ecological changes⁴. Being highly exposed to both natural and man-made disasters, the urgency of realising the Sustainable Development Agenda for the region, particularly SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being), SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 14 (Life below Water), SDG 15 (Life on Land) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), becomes crucial. While there do exist geo-political and strategic imperatives for the renewed focus on the region, viewing the Indo-Pacific from a broader lens of sustainability is thus essential, particularly during the current global pandemic. The issues plaguing this region, such as vulnerability to climatic risks, loss of biodiversity, ecosystem disruptions, cascading natural disasters and an eroding economy post the Covid-19 pandemic, will implicate the futures of not just the nations directly affected, but rather the international community as a whole.

Several nations, such as the United States, Australia, Japan, and India, have shown keen interest towards this region by fostering maritime cooperation,

4. Some of the countries are more economically advanced as compared to others; some of them are mostly covered with forests whereas others are situated next to oceans, thus having an increased vulnerability to natural disasters.

economic security, and diplomatic engagements under the umbrella of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad). Created in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004, it is a free grouping rather than an official alliance⁵. Besides, these countries too have released their individual strategies over the past few years, with an eye towards intensifying their engagement in various sectors, such as connectivity, energy, trade, technology, cybersecurity, counter-terrorism, etc. As one of the priorities of its development cooperation, Japan released its “Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy” (FOIP) in 2017⁶. On the other hand, India has been advocating for FOIP under its broader *Act East Policy*, Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) and the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative. In 2018, at the Shangri-La Dialogue, India enunciated its Indo-Pacific Strategy through the SAGAR doctrine⁷. The US followed suit in 2019 by announcing “their shared vision for FOIP”⁸.

Europeans, on the other hand, had been quite reserved and had kept themselves distant from this geographical domain⁹. In 2018, France became the first EU member state to identify the region’s significance towards addressing some of the pressing global challenges, including climate change and biodiversity¹⁰. It also emphasised regional multilateralism, with a view towards deepening its engagements with regional organisations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Germany¹¹ and the Netherlands¹² followed the French footsteps by establishing their own individual strategies in 2020. Considering these developments,

5. Smith, Shiela A. 2021. The Quad in the Indo-Pacific: What to Know? Council on Foreign Relations. (<https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/quad-indo-pacific-what-know>).

6. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan. 2017. Priority Policy for Development Cooperation FY 2017. (https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/page23e_000434.html).

7. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. 2021. Foreign Secretary’s Introductory Remarks at the India-France-Japan Workshop on the Indo-Pacific. (https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/33397/Foreign_Secretarys_Introductory_Remarks_at_the_IndiaFranceJapan_Workshop_on_the_IndoPacific).

8. Department of State, United States of America. 2019. A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision. (<https://www.state.gov/a-free-and-open-indo-pacific-advancing-a-shared-vision/>).

9. Swati Prabhu. 2021. Examining the EU’s Indo-Pacific Strategy. In Pratinashree Base (ed.) Brass Tacks: Unpacking the Indo-Pacific Template. New Delhi: ORF and Global Policy Journal.

10. France Diplomacy. 2021. The Indo-Pacific Region: A Priority for France. (<https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/asia-and-oceania/the-indo-pacific-region-a-priority-for-france/>).

11. Federal Foreign Office, Germany. 2021. Germany-Europe-Asia: Shaping the 21st Century Together: The German Government Adopts Policy Guidelines on the Indo-Pacific Region. (<https://rangun.diplo.de/mm-en/themen/politik/-/2380764>).

12. Government of the Netherlands. 2020. Indo-Pacific: Guidelines for Strengthening Dutch and EU Cooperation with partners in Asia. (<https://www.government.nl/documents/publications/2020/11/13/indo-pacific-guidelines>).

it was but natural that Brussels was forced to shed its lackadaisical approach towards the Indo-Pacific. The result was the Council Conclusions on EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific promulgated in April 2021, in which it out rightly stated its commitment towards bolstering *sustainable development* in this region¹³. Besides identifying the region as spanning from the “east coast of Africa to the Pacific island states”, the Council tasked the Commission to come up with an official EU Strategy without further ado. In September 2021, the EU officially presented its strategy to the world by stating that “the Union and the Indo-Pacific are natural partners” and how it aspires to intensify its engagement by building partnerships and addressing global challenges¹⁴. Furthermore, the strategy, in a way, reiterated the commitment expressed by Ursula von der Leyen in 2019 when she took over as the European Commission President, of leading a “geopolitical Commission to reinforce the EU’s role as a relevant actor in giving a better shape to the global order”¹⁵. In the same vein, it is worth noting that von der Leyen, in her State of the Union Address in September 2021, stressed on how the Union needs to “focus on the next generation of partnerships so as to become a more active global player”¹⁶. In this context, it is essential to understand the Union’s participation, as a development cooperation provider, in the Indo-Pacific before the strategy was released.

13. Council of the European Union. 2021. Indo-Pacific: Council Adopts Conclusions on EU Strategy for Cooperation. (<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7914-2021-INIT/en/pdf>).

14. European Commission. 2021. The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. (https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eu-indo-pacific_factsheet_2021-09_final.pdf).

15. European Parliament Think Tank. 2020. The von der Leyen Commission’s Priorities for 2019-2024. ([https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI\(2020\)646148](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI(2020)646148)).

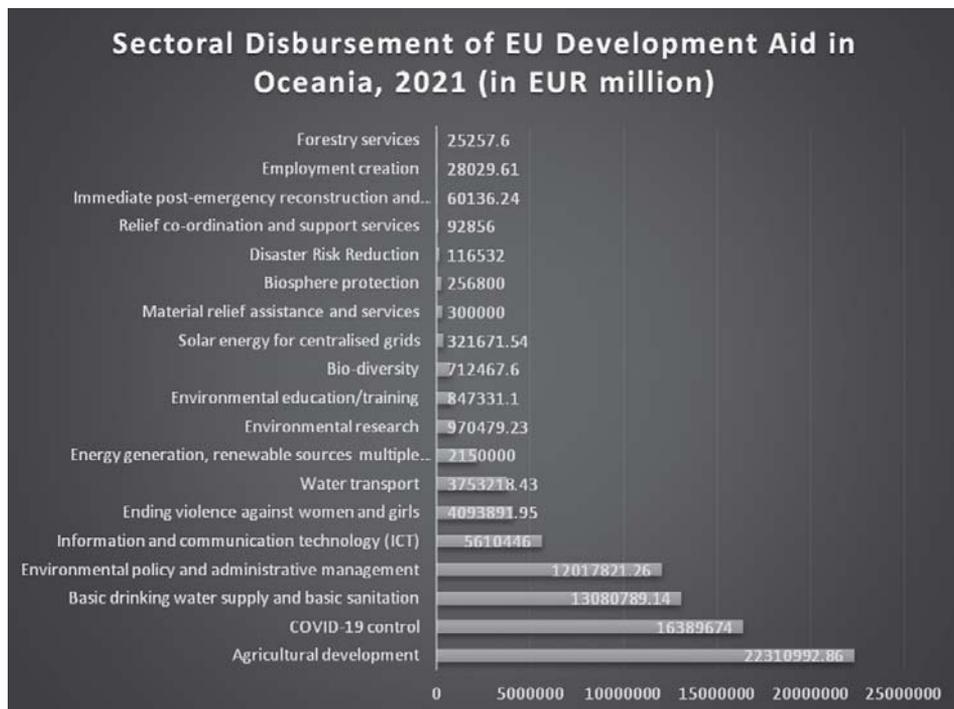
16. Ursula von der Leyen. 2021 State of the Union Address by President von der Leyen. (https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_21_4701).

2.1 Deconstructing EU development cooperation in the Indo-Pacific

Underlining the significance of geopolitical partnerships, DG-DEVCO (Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development) was renamed as DG-INTPA (Directorate-General for International Partnerships) by the von der Leyen Commission in 2021¹⁷. We will focus on the *Oceania* region, consisting of the Pacific islands and Southeast Asia, to appraise the EU development cooperation initiatives.

Defining Oceania as the islands of the southern, western and central Pacific Ocean, including Micronesia, Melanesia and Polynesia, the EU and its institutions have contributed around EUR 2.84 billion in development aid over the past decade¹⁸. In 2021, the Union extended around EUR 64.62 million in the sectoral areas of health, rural development, climate adaptation, strengthening food production capacity and resilience, water and sanitation, technical cooperation, etc. (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Sectoral Disbursement of EU Development Aid in Oceania, 2021 (in EUR millions).



17. EU Monitor. Directorate-General for International Partnerships (INTPA). (<https://www.eumonitor.eu/9353000/1/j9vvik7m1c3gyxp/vimjj87bjxnr>).

18. Data retrieved from EU Aid Explorer.

It has been observed that from 2010 to 2020, the EU disbursed almost EUR 2.25 billion to this region, with Papua New Guinea receiving EUR 250.19 million, Fiji EUR 161.02 million, Solomon Islands EUR 92.92 million, Vanuatu EUR 92.4 million, Samoa EUR 90.43 million, Tonga EUR 34.9 million, Kiribati EUR 34.39 million and Tuvalu EUR 13.03 million. Deconstructing this through the lens of the SDGs, it exhibits that Brussels provided almost EUR 83.88 million towards SDG 13, EUR 46.18 million on SDG 2, EUR 27.68 million for SDG 3, EUR 21.58 million on SDG 14, EUR 19.91 million for SDG 15 and EUR 31.88 million on SDG 7. In fact, the EU and its institutions' "aid to environment" is channelled under the wider umbrella of the Global Climate Change Alliance (GCCA), now upgraded to GCCA+ in 2014 as part of the 2014-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework¹⁹. The idea behind this alliance was to advance dialogue, cooperation and mainstreaming of climate change, especially in the least developed countries (LDCs) and small island developing states (SIDS). The EU also shares a special association with the Pacific Islands through the ACP-EU partnership agreement or the Cotonou Agreement. Involving the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) states, it is one of the earliest development cooperation programmes of the Union, falling under its external action activities, covering areas of trade, investment, capacity-building, energy, promotion of human rights, etc.

Table 1 lists some of the projects undertaken by EU development cooperation from 2010 to 2020 and their accompanying SDG ambitions.

19. Global Climate Change Alliance+ official website. (<https://www.gcca.eu/>).

Table 1: Selected EU development initiatives in Oceania from 2010 to 2020 & their SDG ambitions.^{20 21 22 23 24}

Nature of Cooperation	Description	Country	SDG Coverage
ACP-EU Building Safety and Resilience in the Pacific (2012-2020)	To strengthen the capacity of the islets towards climate change adaptation	Pacific Island Countries (PICs)	SDG 13
Pacific Plan for Strengthening Regional Cooperation and Integration ²⁰	Fostering economic growth, sustainable development, governance and security	Pacific Island Countries	Covers all the 17 SDGs
Regional Indicative Programme (RIP) ²¹	Enhancing marine governance, countering illegal fishing, fostering sustainable management of natural resources, gender equality	Pacific Island Countries	SDG 14, SDG 13, SDG 7, SDG 5
EIB-Vanuatu Wind Farm (2010) ²²	First and only wind farm promoting renewable energy	Vanuatu	SDG 7
Building Safety and Resilience in the Pacific	Towards real-time disaster information and management. Establishing two Provincial Emergency Operation Centres (PEOCs) ²³	Vanuatu (Malampa and Sanma)	SDG 13
EU-Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) Adaptation to Climate Change and Sustainable Energy ²⁴	Facilitates climate change adaptation and reducing dependence on fossil fuels	15 Pacific countries of the ACP (Niue, Kiribati, Solomon Islands, Republic of Marshall Islands, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Palua, The Cook Islands, Republic of Nauru, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Samoa, Vanuatu, Timor-Leste, The Kingdom of Tonga, Tuvalu)	SDG 13, SDG 7
Pacific Response to Disaster Displacement	Assisting national and regional efforts to reduce the risk on displacements caused by disasters	Fiji, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu	SDG 13

Source: Author's own.

20. European Commission. Pacific Islands- EU Relations: Focus on Climate Change.

21. European Commission. European Union-The Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. Pacific Regional Indicative Programme for the period 2014-2020.

22. European Investment Bank. 2009. Vanuatu: 650 million Vatu for Renewable Energy.

23. Pacific Community. 2018. Vanuatu Opens Two Provincial Emergency Operation Centres in Malampa and Sanma. (<https://www.preventionweb.net/news/vanuatu-officially-opens-two-provincial-emergency-operations-centres-malampa-and-sanma#:~:text=This%20week%2C%20Vanuatu%20Prime%20Minister,total%20cost%20of%20%E2%82%AC700%2C000.>).

24. EU-GIZ ASCE Adapting to Climate Change and Sustainable Energy Official Website. (<http://acsepacific.org/projects/>).

Placed towards the eastern part of Oceania and the Pacific, the Southeast Asian nations are also equally prone to a number of socio-economic and sustainability challenges, preventing their smooth progression towards fulfilling the SDGs. Occupying a primary portion of the Indian Ocean, several of the nations are now alarmingly regressing in their environmental goals²⁵. As per the 2021 UNESCAP SDG Progress Report, this region is lagging behind severely in climate action (SDG 13), preserving the marine resources and fisheries (SDG 14), and rampant damage to biodiversity (SDG 15), thereby resulting in a domino effect on the other SDGs²⁶.

Given the swift rise of the “Asian century”²⁷, the EU is striving to secure its place in this part of the world. For Brussels, Asia forms a critical piece of the geopolitical strategic puzzle that it has been seeking to shape for a long time and its call for rules-based multilateralism can only be realised if it collaborates with Asia. For instance, its 2003 European Security Strategy stressed the integration of its development cooperation programmes with the regional partners, such as ASEAN, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) or ACP, to promote effective multilateralism.

Over a period of time, its development assistance initiatives, particularly in Southeast Asia, have gradually begun to centre on promoting a decarbonised economy, giving due credence to environmental impact assessments and other associated standards²⁸. In 2020, this region received around EUR 315.6 million, with Cambodia (EUR 78.45 million), Vietnam (EUR 53.76 million), and Mongolia (EUR 29.86 million) being the top three recipients²⁹. However, in the face of the coronavirus pandemic, the Union’s total development assistance stooped to an all-time low last year (in 2019, it stood at EUR 2.57 billion).

25. UNESCAP. 2021. Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2021. (<https://www.unescap.org/kp/2021/asia-and-pacific-sdg-progress-report-2021>).

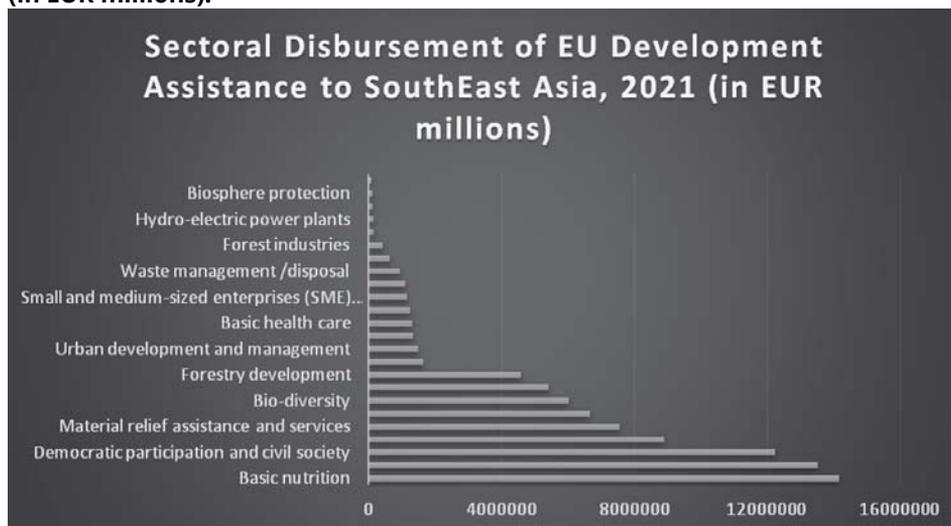
26. Khalid, Haniza. 2021. Sustainable Development Goals in South-East Asian Countries. UNDP Malaysia, Singapore & Brunei Darussalam. (<https://www.my.undp.org/content/malaysia/en/home/blog/2021/sustainable-development-goals-in-south-east-asian-countries.html>).

27. McKinsey Global Institute. 2019. The Asian Century. Discussion Paper. (<https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-asia/topics/the-asian-century>).

28. As per the Communication released by the Commission titled “Connecting Europe and Asia-Building Blocks for an EU Strategy” at the 12th Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Summit, 2018.

29. As per the EU Aid Explorer. (https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/content/explore/recipients_en).

Figure 2: Sectoral Disbursement of EU Development Aid in Southeast Asia, 2021 (in EUR millions).



Source: Author's own.

In 2010, the EU established the Asia Investment Facility (AIF) under the aegis of the European Investment Bank (EIB) to promote investments in the region through infrastructural development with a specific focus on sustainable development and reducing inequality. SWITCH-Asia is one of the EU's flagship initiatives that aim to promote sustainable development and economic prosperity, with an overarching target of poverty reduction. As far as its contribution to climate change mitigation and adaptation is concerned, it was reported in 2017 that out of its 53 projects, around 43 focussed on climate change, either directly or indirectly³⁰. Although it has been observed that the EU has fallen short in developing a coherent regional approach, its development cooperation and the regional policy dialogues have been mutually reinforcing, giving Brussels leverage in key socio-economic, environmental and political fields³¹.

30. SWITCH-Asia. Where We Work. SWITCH-Asia Official Website. (<https://www.switch-asia.eu/switch-asia/where-we-work/>).

31. OECD. 2014. Evaluation of the European Union's Regional Cooperation with Asia. Volume 1.

3. RECONFIGURATION OF THE GLOBAL SYSTEM: WHAT DOES INDIA EXPECT FROM THE EU?

As the world stands today amidst a deadly pandemic, global power equations have been enormously reconfigured, especially in the domain of global aid architecture. The divide between the North and the South in aid structure is gradually waning as we see the arrival of emerging economies on the scene, such as India. Furthermore, the rampant disruption of global supply chains, moving away from China, has also changed the narrative of the global system. Keeping this in mind, the Indo-Pacific is touted to be the new strategic playground, especially in the context of the failure of globalisation and a freefalling multilateralism³². Developing countries are now taking the lead in manufacturing life-saving drugs; for instance, India has been actively taking part through its campaign *Vaccine Maitri*. The present scenario has also caused a serious dent on the sustainability conversation, not to say that SDGs have taken a backseat.

The time is now ripe for the developed actors to collaborate with these developing economies and harness their capacities towards resolving the larger challenges of sustainability. In the Indo-Pacific, India in particular is one of the successful examples of a nation providing development cooperation in a number of sectors and also being a preferred regional partner. For instance, in 2019, India announced a USD 150 million Line of Credit (LOC) to the Pacific islands for projects related to climate action³³. However, it fares poorly when it comes to finance and visibility, owing to the competing interests portrayed by China in this region. On the contrary, the EU is a long-established development partner, quite popular for its benevolence, even though it follows its economic interests vigorously. By now, it has been asserted repeatedly by several scholars that the Union can definitely ensure three things: norms, technical know-how and finance. India's own advantage and familiarity of being a developing nation itself has helped it in building a viable platform where it is successfully sharing its knowledge and capacity-building programmes, such as the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC). Building positive synergies between these two actors in the Indo-Pacific could further the

32. Aaron Friedberg. 2020. The United States Needs to Reshape Global Supply Chains. *Foreign Policy*. (<https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/05/08/united-states-reshape-global-supply-chains-china-reglobalization/>).

33. The Hindu. 2019. PM Modi Announces \$150 mn Line of Credit to Pacific Island Nations for Climate-related Projects. (<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/pm-modi-announces-150-mn-line-of-credit-to-pacific-island-nations-for-climate-related-projects/article29507764.ece>).

dialogue on sustainable development, which is especially relevant considering the region's appalling environmental progress.

4. LIMITATIONS & OPPORTUNITIES: INDIA-EU DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

As a geo-strategic and geo-economic platform, it is necessary to look at the Indo-Pacific through the lens of economic diplomacy underwriting the objectives of maintaining a rules-based order. In this context, the Indo-Pacific presents a great opportunity for cooperation among nations, particularly for revamping North-South cooperation. It is important to note that several of the island nations are severely vulnerable to sea level rise, storm surges and extreme natural disasters. Furthermore, their physical disadvantages of remoteness and dispersion, in a way, limit their opportunities for economic and sustainable development. Here, it is important to underline that a majority of the global South, particularly in the Indo-Pacific, lack the wherewithal for addressing uncertainties concerning climate change mitigation and adaptation or the wider sustainability issue. This provides an entry point to development cooperation in the form of knowledge sharing, technical expertise, capacity-building, etc. A joint India-EU development partnership in the Indo-Pacific could just be the answer that the Indo-Pacific is looking for.

With the rise of India as a key development partner and the EU as the largest provider of development cooperation in the world, a collaborative canvas could possibly be painted by the two in this region³⁴. In fact, the attainment of the SDGs in this decade of action, so urgently needed, could potentially be realised if Brussels and New Delhi could team up towards making it an *Indo-Pacific decade*. India's outreach to the PICs gains further significance against the backdrop of the prevalent assertion that "the Pacific is generally underappreciated and misunderstood by the wider world, and such lack of insight has triggered many diplomatic blunders and failed attempts at cooperating with the regions"³⁵. On the other hand, the EU is already one of the biggest trading partners in the Indo-Pacific. Undoubtedly, its intentions of giving its engagements a meaningful drive involve a host of stakes and challenges. Nevertheless, its approach of "not following the Chinese political and

34. Swati Prabhu. 2021. Envisioning an India-EU Development Partnership in the Indo-Pacific. ORF Expert Speak. (<https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/envisioning-an-india-eu-development-partnership-in-the-indo-pacific/>).

35. Patrick Walsh, 2017. "A Guidebook on Pacific Diplomacy: India looks to the 'Far East'" ORF Occasional Paper.

economic values”, as stated by European Council President Charles Michel, easily makes it an attractive and safe partner to collaborate with³⁶. In addition, building new and stable partnerships in the region could also lay the foundation of a level playing field for pursuing sustainable development, as rightly stated in the Council Conclusions of the EU Indo-Pacific Strategy. There are two important sectors where an India-EU development collaboration could facilitate consolidation of the SDGs in the coming years.

(A) Disaster resilient infrastructure

SDG 13 target 1 “stresses on the need to strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters”. This becomes extremely relevant in the case of the PICs and also the island nations located in the Indian Ocean. In 2019, India led a global initiative, the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), with a clear-cut goal of achieving sustainable development in the long run³⁷. As mentioned earlier the PICs are sitting right at the heart of natural calamities and climatic risks. The same is the case with several of the island nations in Southeast Asia, such as Indonesia or the Philippines, owing to their location in the Pacific Ring of Fire. As a recent positive move, Brussels has joined hands with CDRI earlier this year, although there are no concrete reports on project outputs or plans as such. The EU has been quite quick to demonstrate its interest in working with CDRI on a trilateral set up in the SIDS which could possibly open doors for a development partnership with India. If Brussels could join hands with New Delhi to work in the PICs and the southeast region to leverage efforts towards empowering communities to tackle disaster-related displacement, preventing conflicts, and providing appropriate technical training and skill development in building natural early warning systems, it will certainly facilitate the national governments’ efforts to respond better in the long run and fast-track their sustainability pathways.

36. Charles Michel. 2020. A Stronger and More Autonomous European Union Powering a Fairer World- Speech by President Charles Michel at the UN General Assembly. (<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/09/25/a-stronger-and-more-autonomous-european-union-powering-a-fairer-world-speech-by-president-charles-michel-at-the-un-general-assembly/#>).

37. Ministry of Home Affairs. 2019. Prime Minister Announces Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure at UN Climate Action Summit 2019. Press Release. (<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1586051>).

(B) Renewable energy

Both the EU and India are intensely committed to energy transition to reduce their dependencies on fossil fuels. India views renewable energy through the lens of gaining economic and political traction at international fora. Take for instance its global leadership, with France, in the International Solar Alliance (ISA), which has been making waves since 2015. Its recent achievement of crossing the 100 GW milestone of installed renewable energy capacity needs to be applauded; however, the glass is yet to be filled. It is now targeting to achieve about 450 GW of installed renewable capacity, a majority of which, 280 GW, relies on solar power. However, its rising Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions do not quite match up with its international political will to be a green economy leader³⁸. Conversely, through the European Green Deal, Brussels has been popularising climate neutrality by 2050 and urging other countries to step up their efforts towards reducing their emissions, particularly in the context of the Glasgow COP26 Summit.³⁹ The island nations occupy “large swaths” of the Pacific, making them naturally rich in energy resources. As per the data released by the International Energy Agency (IEA) in 2018, about 45 million people in Southeast Asia still live without access to electricity. This creates an avenue of cooperation for India and the EU to effectively utilise their capacities and technical expertise, and strengthen joint efforts to tackle the issue of energy poverty. Decentralisation of renewable energy can give an impetus to the much-discussed blue economy, generate employment and thereby empower and rebrand their image on the larger geopolitical map. Germany, with its specialisation in manufacturing high-quality solar panels, and India, popular for its low-cost renewable energy, can put together a feasible development initiative in the Indo-Pacific.

These avenues of collaboration, however, could face certain limitations or road-blocks. First, although both India and the EU have been quite vociferous regarding mitigating climate change and augmenting sustainability, efforts have been quite feeble. Time and again, a trilateral set of engagement between the two parties has been vocally expressed but no tangible efforts are visible from the leadership. A sense of scepticism on undertaking joint collaborative efforts in third countries remains. These are low-hanging fruits which neither Brussels nor New Delhi seems keen to pluck. Second, the EU appears to be on a sticky wicket on the China

38. van Schaik, Louise, Ramnath A. and Anand, H.S. 2021. Better Together: EU-India Cooperation in Addressing Climate Risks. Planetary Security Initiative and the IPCS. (<https://www.planetarysecurityinitiative.org/news/better-together-eu-india-cooperation-addressing-climate-risks>).

39. Ursula von der Leyen. 2021 State of the Union Address by President von der Leyen.

challenge. China's growing footprints in the digital sector, its building of coal-based plants in Europe, the presence of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Europe, and transgressions in the Indo-Pacific are worrying the EU. It has been trying its best to appease Beijing and New Delhi, not turning against either. However, with the initiation of its new connectivity strategy, the Global Gateway Partnerships, Brussels is upfront in its approach of creating links and not dependencies. This is an outright counterattack against the Chinese BRI. Brussels is now embracing a new kind of realism, which was long overdue, thereby aiming to establish a "trusted brand" of its own. It needs to be seen how viable this project turns out to be in the coming years. Third, in order to succeed in winning partners in the Asian region, Brussels must strengthen its participation in the regional organisations, such as ASEAN or the BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation). Cooperating in the sectoral areas of energy, climate change, digital connectivity, or disaster management could potentially open effective opportunities for engagement in the Indo-Pacific.

4. CONCLUSION

The rise of the Indo-Pacific as a geo-economic and geopolitical centre of gravity in recent years has closely affected the sustainability debate. Influenced equally, both India and the EU have huge stakes in this geographical space. On one hand, New Delhi has been charting a somewhat successful passage on development partnerships, and on the other, we have the Union as the largest provider of development assistance. The Indo-Pacific is the site of a plethora of environmental risks and sustainability challenges which these two actors can help tackle through a joint collaboration, particularly in sectoral areas of disaster-resilient infrastructure and generating capacities for renewable energy. Although there have been talks on the merging of their respective partnership plans in third countries, nothing substantial has taken place till date. The recent release of the EU Indo-Pacific Strategy has now made the geopolitical game more intriguing. Its realist approach towards the Chinese BRI, exhibition of strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific and vocal advocacy of climate neutrality are noteworthy. With the international community racing against time to fulfil the sustainable development agenda topped up by the pandemic, this is a crucial juncture for New Delhi and Brussels to pool their resources in the PICs and the island nations of Southeast Asia to prevent and prepare for the climatic onslaught in the coming years.

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