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“India in East Africa – COP26 expectations”

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In the past decade, growing attention has focused on South-South cooperation in climate change mitigation, energy transitions, and infrastructure development, especially on the increasing role of BRICS countries in sub-Saharan Africa. India and China position themselves as leaders that can share knowledge, finance, and technology with other countries in the global South (Power et al., 2016). This engagement draws on a history of cultural exchange, ideas of South-South cooperation, and post-colonial solidarity. In the climate change negotiations under the UNFCCC, this ‘leadership’ has historically manifested as India and China defending the rights of ‘developing’ countries to emit and follow the path of development as modernisation laid out by ‘developed’ countries (Okereke & Coventry, 2016).

More recently, India and China in their status as ‘transition economies’ have shifted their stance by taking up emissions reduction responsibilities (Okereke & Coventry, 2016). They aim to balance clean energy transitions with continuing or increasing the pace of development and infrastructure provision. This dichotomy has come to shape India and China’s engagement in sub-Saharan African energy transitions. The argument that India and China have tackled the same sort of infrastructure gaps that currently afflict sub-Saharan African countries is increasingly used (Mawdsley, 2019). Notably, they now tackle these infrastructure gaps while transitioning to cleaner energy. As India and China expand their respective economic and political footprints, they also look towards raw materials, markets, and geopolitical interests beyond their borders (Mohan & Tan-Mullins, 2019).

Questions surrounding China’s role in extraction, land acquisition, debt-trap (and resource-backed loans) and neo-colonialism, or as an important locus of the global energy transition, have received increased scholarly attention over the past decade (Mohan & Tan-Mullins, 2019; Shen & Power, 2017). But less attention has focused on India’s growing role (and growing ambitions) in sub-Saharan Africa, where the historical presence of an Indian diaspora and its complicated colonial linkages offer India a different entry point than China. India’s engagement in Africa, particularly in connection with energy and climate challenges, has drawn on post-colonial solidarities in development.

Our project, supported by the White Rose Collaborative Fund, centres on the questions of energy and climate justice at a time when energy transitions has become a key issue in global climate negotiations. We ask how the relationships between India and East African nations shape, and are shaped by, the process of energy transitions. In what ways can new forms of transnational assistance facilitate energy transitions? And what expectations arise from this engagement?

Early on, we have become aware of a need for rethinking the concept of energy justice. Conventionally, it rests on a three-legged framework, including distributional, procedural and recognition dimensions. It emphasizes that changes in energy systems must address inequalities in power and injustices across entire socio-energy systems. However, it falls short of enquiring how these injustices historically arise and embed themselves, or how historical experiences of shared injustices might complicate contemporary justice questions.

Driven by this complicated notion of justice, we look at India's engagement in sub-Saharan Africa with nuance and critique. India has considerable expertise in green technologies, including bioenergy and solar photovoltaics. It has provided training to sub-Saharan African partners in biogas, solar technology, rural credit, and food processing through the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation program since 1964. At COP21 in Paris, India partnered with France to create the International Solar Alliance (ISA) to support transitions to solar energy in the counties that lie between the tropics of Cancer and Capricorn. With its secretariat in India, the ISA provides technological, financial and know-how to global South countries. While the ISA is discursively imagined as an initiative to 'support' energy transitions in global South, evidence suggests that it also feeds into a domestic manufacturing and export-oriented policy for India that views sub-Saharan Africa as market for solar goods[1]. As COP26 approaches, the USA has indicated it might join India under the ISA[2]. This South-South *cooperation* has complications of 'partnership' or '*co-option*' by global North countries.

India's southern engagement also has a pernicious side in other energy sectors, entrenching high-carbon development, including large investments in extractive resources (e.g., coal, oil and gas), spurred by Indian domestic demand. This pernicious side is revealed by the unlikelihood that renewable energy developments can keep up with the rapid rise in demand for growth and development. Even if renewable energy could keep pace, this would likely involve development of large-scale infrastructures like solar parks and battery installations. These will need raw materials and the impacts of rapid extraction of minerals might be felt by 'partners' in Africa. Questions surrounding China's role in extractive economies in sub-Saharan Africa warn us of possible futures that the unabashed demand for energy, renewable or otherwise, might produce through India's involvement.

What is the alternative? We think the question of 'demand', and its link to development as modernity needs critical examination to open alternatives. Scholars have indicated that the demand of energy leading to a demand of minerals, land and cheap labour for solar panels, electric cars and batteries is adversely affecting certain global regions or places. It is then important to ask: is the classical link between energy and development – access to more energy leads to more development through acquisition of goods and services that define modernity –helpful? Are there other ways to imagine development and therefore rethink energy demand? Would such rethinking of energy demand in India also lead to less demand on minerals and markets in sub-Saharan Africa? Could such reorientation of ideas establish different notions of energy and climate justice based on post-colonial South-South solidarity?

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