

KERALA FLOOD: FOREIGN AID AND COOPERATIVE FEDERALISM

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ABSTRACT

In the cosmic of international relations, foreign assistance is an action initiated by a country whereby it voluntarily transfers resources to another country. Foreign assistance in theory and practice has multifaceted meanings and implications. It may be considered as a tool for accelerating diplomatic ties, a gesture of appreciating the contributions of a foreign nation, modus operandi for resource extraction, pursue foreign policy goals and also a mechanism used for altruistic and humanitarian reasons.

India's stand on foreign assistance during the time of catastrophic 2018 Kerala floods is aborting the state government's endeavours to receive financial support from UAE for its reconstruction and rehabilitation works. With an estimated loss of Rs 20,000 crores, Kerala government is struggling hard with the miniscule support received as financial aid from the central government. New Delhi's stand in this regard is against the spirit of cooperative federalism in the Indian constitution. Cooperative federalism works on the premise that national, state and regional governments work collectively by accommodating each other's policy preferences in a cooperative spirit. For the successful functioning of democracy in the pluralistic country like India, cooperative federalism is a prerequisite.

In this context, this paper intends to throw insights on various aspects of foreign aid and cooperative federalism. This paper also tries to critically analyse the Indian government's stand on foreign assistance during Kerala flood.

Keywords:

INTRODUCTION

A country's behaviour in the lexicon of international relations is driven by its desire to satisfy its goals and objectives. The national interest of a country is given prime importance while formulating its strategies in international relations. There are multifaceted goals and objectives of a nation including economic, political, ideological and security concerns have always been on the prime agenda with regard to a country's foreign policy. For the perusal of these goals and objectives, states have several tools at disposition and foreign aid is one among them.

Foreign aid can be defined as "the international transfer of public funds in the form of loans or grants either directly from one government to another or indirectly through the vehicle of a multilateral assistance agency like IBRD" (Suvranshu Pan, 2007, p. 11). Foreign assistance in theory and practice has multidimensional connotations and inferences. It may be considered as an instrument for reinforcing diplomatic ties, a sign of acknowledging the assistance provided by a foreign nation, modus operandi for resource extraction, pursue foreign policy goals and also a mechanism used for altruistic and humanitarian reasons. "U.S. leaders and policymakers view foreign assistance as an essential instrument of U.S. foreign policy which has "increasingly been associated with national security policy" (Tarnoff, 2016). Foreign aid is a convenient instrument for the diplomat of a state. It supports governments to realise multilateral collaborations on multidimensional issues.

India's stand on foreign assistance is creating a big headache for the Pinarayi Vijayan government's efforts for the rehabilitation and reconstruction works in Kerala after the catastrophic floods of 2018. New Delhi's stand in this regard is disturbing the cooperative federalism in theory and practice. Cooperative federalism works on the principle that various constituents of a state will work in a cooperative spirit by respecting each other's policy preferences. For a pluralistic country like India, nuances of cooperative federalism are essential for the successful functioning of its democratic form of government.

In this context, this paper intends to throw insights on various aspects of foreign aid and cooperative federalism. This paper also tries to critically analyse the Indian government's stand on foreign assistance during Kerala flood.

FOREIGN AID AND ITS MOTIVES

The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines "foreign aid as resource flows provided by official agencies with the intent to promote economic development. The resources must be given on concessional terms with at least a 25% grant element. The resources can be economic in nature, such as financial contributions, but can also include

technical assistance and commodities (such as food aid or agricultural equipment). (Development, 2018)” The voluntary transfer on accounts of humanitarian intentions and altruistic nature can also be considered foreign assistance.

There are many motives behind a country’s decision to voluntarily transfer resources to a donee. Many countries extend free financial and human support for development and poverty reduction (Viktor Jakupec, 2015). The donee state is “expected to use this as an instrument to facilitate economic development, alleviate poverty, and improve human welfare. (Viktor Jakupec, 2015)” Foreign aid is also contributed with the intentions of ensuring global security by checking the vulnerable threats to human life and national security, such as political instability, economic breakdown, human rights violations, natural hazards, epidemics, population explosion, refugee crisis, environmental degradation, terrorism, so and so forth (Viktor Jakupec, 2015). “The provision of foreign aid has developed into an international norm. Rich countries provide assistance to poor countries to better the human condition” (Lancaster, 2007).

Apart from this foreign assistance is also used “as a diplomatic weapon to promote geostrategic interests, for the right to build and maintain foreign bases, to strengthen alliances, or to keep allied regimes in power” (Bealinger, 2006). For facilitating friendly relations with foreign governments, states adopt the strategy of extending altruistic help and support. Foreign assistance act as a catalyst for cooperation, and it builds strong alliances. The pursuance of commercial and economic motives and interests “through foreign aid can be seen in the practice of tying aid”. Tied aid is “when a country binds its aid to the procurement of goods and services from the donor country. (Mikesell, 1970)

Foreign aid can act as tool to increase or decrease a country’s prestige. For instance “the Dutch were determined to set a new international level on aid giving in order to project an image of good global citizen, while the Norwegians focused on matching or surpassing other Western nations in the allocation of foreign assistance. (Veen, 2011)” For some countries foreign aid act a matter of concern with regard to their prestige in the international community. Therefore some states may prefer to *receive* loans instead of straight grants (Change, 1957).

It is the aforementioned matter of pride and prestige which is primarily stopping the Indian government to politely decline the apparent offer made by UAE in the wake of disastrous Kerala floods. This is against the wishes of Kerala government which subsequently put a question mark in the smooth functioning of cooperative federalism.

COOPERATIVE FEDERALISM

Co-operative federalism - defined in terms of federal-regional co-operation and interdependence, especially with reference to the schemes of development, predominantly financed by the federal government and administered primarily by provincial governments has become a fact of life. (M. M Sankhdher, 1997). Cooperative federalism is “a system where the national and state governments of a country work together to solve common problems. This is in contrast to an arrangement where there is a strict separation of powers between the various levels of a government, or to a unitary system of government in which a more powerful federal government tries to enforce its will on the subordinate governments.” (Front, 2018) Since the national and state government work hand in hand without any strict segregation of power, cooperative federalism is also known as marble-cake federalism (Front, 2018)

In a geographically vast and demographically pluralistic country like India, cooperative federalism has a quintessential role for the successful functioning of democracy. As Co-operative federalism encourages the governments at different levels to take advantage of a larger national market, diverse and rich natural resources and the potential of human capabilities in all parts of the country and from all sections of the society for building a prosperous nation, the constitutional framers infused it in the Indian constitution.

The Indian government’s decision to go against interests of Kerala state government in the wake of recent floods is diluting the spirit of cooperative federalism in India. In this juncture, the central government’s decision to politely turning away the foreign help has to be analysed seriously for its prudence.

KERALA FLOOD AND FOREIGN AID

India’s stand on foreign assistance is creating a big headache for the Kerala State Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan government’s efforts for the rehabilitation and reconstruction works in Kerala after the catastrophic floods.

The precedent policy of turning down the support of foreign governments and international agencies during the 2004 tsunami by the UPA I government is standing as the primary justification given by the Ministry of External Affairs for refusing foreign aid. In the onset of tsunami, Dr Singh had stated: “We feel that we can cope with the situation on our own and we will take their help if needed.” (Kasturi, 2013) But this statement

was not a legally binding one rather an executive statement which did not close the door for foreign aid completely. This evident from the line, “we will take their help if needed.” (Kasturi, 2013) Former National Security Adviser Shivshankar Menon and Former foreign secretary Nirupama Rao are supportive about respecting the humanitarian aids from the foreign government. Ex-Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao said “saying no is not so simple”. “If memory serves, the 2004 decision was to not accept foreign participation in relief but accept it for long term rehabilitation case by case”, said the former top diplomat Shivshankar Menon (Ghosh S. B., 2018).

The disaster management policy, act and plan of Government of India is positive in accepting foreign aid in the wake of natural disasters. To quote the National Disaster Management Plan of 2016 states that, “if the national government of another country voluntarily offers assistance as a goodwill gesture in solidarity with the disaster victims, the Central Government may accept the offer.” (Authority, 2016) Apart from this acceptance of foreign aid is supported by law as per the Section 35(g) of the Disaster Management Act, 2005 and clause 3.3.3 of the National Policy on Disaster Management, 2009.

The diplomatic strategy of exposing and asserting India’s power to the world by showcasing it as a country capable of overcoming the catastrophic effects of the natural disaster by its own seriously needs reconsiderations and more deliberations. Eventhough the intention of presenting a new India which is no more a begging bowl is good but its timing seems to be hasty and hurried. Eventhough India’s economy is the fastest growing one, it is yet to become a developed nation. It is still struggling with the menaces of unemployment, illiteracy and poverty. India has to go long way for literally claiming cent percent economic self-sufficiency. Apart from this, it is wrong to tie an unbreakable knot between national pride and foreign assistance. It is a misconception that the developed countries do not accept foreign aid fearing the brand of begging bowl. Japan didn’t hesitate to accept India’s assistance in the form of rescue and relief following the east Japan earthquake in 2011. The United States accepted help from 36 countries and international organisations after Hurricane Katrina in 2005. In 2008, after the Sichuan earthquake, China also accepted foreign humanitarian assistance. (India, 2018) All this contradicts the relationship between national pride and foreign aid in international relations.

Eventhough states are the primary players in International relations, it is the emotional and prudent statesmen who are behind the wheel. Therefore it is quite natural to expect dual intention behind the each and every penny of assistance. The funding assistance provided by World Bank and Western countries, developmental works initiated by China in South Asian and African countries, assistance offered by the US and USSR to developing and under-developed countries during cold war period etc had and have the strings attached. (Bealinger, 2006) These strings may harm the receiving country in long-term directly or indirectly. But when it comes to humanitarian assistance and charity, chances of these strings are slim as the transactions are made unconditionally between the donor and donee.

The central government’s few hundred crores aids is not going to fruitfully help the reconstruction and rehabilitation work in Kerala as the Chief Minister said the estimated loss as per primary reports is whopping 20000 crores.

CONCLUSION

On accounts of devastating effects of floods, it is not prudent to have the prejudice about the relationship between the pride of a nation and acceptance of foreign aid. It is not sensible and judicious to run for image building rather than accepting the real potentiality of India’s capability to take on the huge rehabilitation works on its own. For a country like India, with a just seven-decade-old independence history has to go a long way to claim itself as a developed nation with economic self-sufficiency and surplus. Even then it is no way wrong to accept the unconditional helping hand of foreign nations during the time of natural disasters. It is not prudent for nation-states, being a part of an interlinked society of states, to stand indifferent with tied hands to charity and humanitarian assistance forever. Money and other tangible and intangible assets of a country, be it developed, developed or underdeveloped is not permanent and subject to ups and downs. In order to truly upright the spirit of cooperative federalism, the central government shall seriously think about reversing its stand on turning down the humanitarian foreign aid in the wake of natural calamities.

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