

# Six Decades After the Conference: Challenges on Reviving Bandung Spirit

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## IIS Brief

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This April marks the 62nd anniversary of the Bandung Conference, an event where 29 countries from Asia and Africa met to promote anti-colonialism and cooperation between the two continents. This conference was the starting point for a deeper cooperation, such as the establishment of Non-Alignment Movement and G-77. The Bandung Spirit had encouraged these countries to work together “on the basis of mutual interest and respect for national sovereignty” ([Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic Indonesia, 1955](#)).

After the Cold War ended, the member countries of Bandung Conference have been trying to keep this spirit alive by building cooperation among them. One of the examples is the establishment of New Asia-Africa Strategic Partnership (NAASP) led by Indonesia and South Africa in 2005. This cooperation was created to revive the Bandung Spirit, which “continues to be a solid, relevant and effective foundation for fostering better relations between Asian and African countries and resolving global issues of common concern” ([Senior Officials’ Meeting, 2009](#)). It works in three broad areas i.e. political solidarity, economic cooperation, and socio-cultural relations. There is also South-South Cooperation (SSC), a special unit under the United Nations Development Program. This unit encourages not only cooperation between South-South countries but also South-North countries in order to foster the development of the former.



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Despite these efforts, the Bandung Conference countries still face many challenges to revitalizing Bandung Spirit in practice. At least two challenges should be considered. The first challenge is on how to create a more integrated and transparent alternative development cooperation. As President Joko Widodo said in his speech at the 60th Asia-Africa Conference Commemoration 2015, there is a need for these countries to “build a new global economic order ... to eliminate the domination of one group of countries over other countries” (Widodo, 2015). This is important because development issue remains the main concern of these countries and they want to overcome it without having to ‘surrender’ to the provider countries. The problem is that the emerging countries from Asia-Africa have not succeeded in creating a common view on how the alternative development cooperation should work. The actors are very heterogeneous, in terms of their economic capability, political system, as well as priorities and interests in international politics. It is hard to create a common view on alternative development cooperation when there are, for example, China and Japan at the same table. While the latter is a member of Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the former has been keeping a distance with its mechanisms and even criticizing it.

In many cases, such as in SSC, they focus more on bilateral cooperation than on an integrated multilateral cooperation. Of course, development cooperation can be done through this form; however, many of this bilateral cooperation—done between emerging countries—have shown relatively low transparency (Fagan, 2012), making it hard to measure the size and the success of their development program. Low transparency level could increase the negative perceptions of these emerging countries’ development programs, which would then used by the ‘traditional’ donors to discredit the program and show that their solution is still better after all.

Furthermore, these development programs are not so ‘alternative’. They are not totally free from the ‘traditional’ development institution. One of the examples is the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA), a framework to support financial stability made by BRICS, and how it still depends on IMF. A CRA member who wants to borrow more than 30% of its quota will have to take a structural adjustment loan from IMF and should fit into its conditionality before getting the loan from CRA (Bond, 2016). Plus, they are also not as free (of political interest) as they claimed. For example, even though Xi claimed that their development assistance has ‘no political strings attached’, in reality, China is still holding one-China Policy as their “important political foundation ... to develop its relations with other countries in

the world” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The People’s Republic of China, 2016)—including their development cooperation with Bandung conference members.

The second challenge is on how to create a more unified voice in international institutions. This has been a major obstacle for developing countries considering some of bigger developing countries have been competing with each other. India, South Africa and Japan demand for a reform of UN Security Council and a permanent seat in it. But China, in a passive-aggressive way, opposed this idea because it might threaten UNSC’s unity and stability (The Times of India, 2015). In 2011, developing countries had a chance to fill the director seat of IMF with many strong candidates coming from India, China, Mexico, and Brazil. However, they failed to have a solid single voice to beat the American candidate, Christine Lagarde. The same thing happened during the presidential succession of World Bank in 2012. Okonjo-Iweala, a strong candidate from Nigeria, was failed to get the position because China, India, and Brazil decided to vote for Jim Yong Kim, an American candidate (Blackden, 2012).

These examples show that many times, Bandung Spirit itself is contradictive with the national interest of the Bandung Conference countries; and it can be seen that they would choose latter over ‘the solidarity’ among them. Moreover, they have been working with developed countries for decades so changing this status quo will mean their interest will be

affected—for better or worse. There is a challenge for them to reorganize their priority and put cooperation among Bandung Conference countries on top of cooperation with the former.

The Bandung Spirit might be still alive and relevant to today’s world. But obviously, this spirit should not only be revived but also be brought into realization. More cooperation and commitment of these countries are needed in order to make a change—not only written in documents; mentioned in speeches, or kept as a principle that barely shows its significance in their policy practice. One of the examples is revitalizing NAASP and broadening the membership so that it can be the multilateral form of SSC. In order to achieve it, each country should show their desire and effort to turn this partnership into a more solid cooperation, such as international institution that can serve as a forum to discuss and initiate policies related to their interests. It is also important for emerging countries, like China, India, and Brazil to engage more in this cooperation so they can play as the ‘locomotives’ (Gosovic, 2016). Besides that, network with and support from international institutional remains important, as those are the major platforms for international cooperation. Therefore there is a need to promote Bandung Spirit in these institutions, such as UN and WTO so that the development agenda on the international level can be more supportive towards the developing countries.

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