

IN PURSUIT OF EQUALITY: MALAYSIA-AFRICA RELATIONS IN THE 1990s

Hamidin Abd Hamid

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia's relations with Africa in the 1990s moved in accordance with the changes experienced by the international communities at large. In the 1980s, old issues with new developments and new challenges faced by the world community changed the nature of the relations among the developing countries, including between the Malaysian government and its African counterparts. More importantly, the new relation created were clearly gearing towards future cooperation as could be seen by the formation of the South-South Commission.

Political, social and economic crisis during the 1970's and 1980s underlined the development in challenges faced by Africans. The high hopes of independence, democracy and economic development in 1960s gave way to military coup, personal and authoritarian rule and the collapse of economy witnessed in these two decades.¹ Africa was indeed the only region in the world that witnessed decline in their average output per capita between 1960s and 1990s. At the same time, Africa's share in the world trade also plummeted.² For African countries, economic problems of the 1970s which accelerated in the early 1980s posed tougher challenges. When most of the African countries reached its independence in 1960s, they had "to contend with the disjoint structures of underdeveloped economies" and also inherited the colonial economy "with production geared for export and with very limited domestic market." Despite problems of declining price of the commodities in the early 1960s, the world wide recovery of the commodity prices in the second half of the 1960s for a while seem to have brought 'miracle' to the newly independent states in Africa.³

The economic problems that faced African states in the early 1980s were worsened by the natural catastrophe such as drought. African countries call for a new international economic order was undermined by the developed countries calls for 'internal structural adjustment' as prerequisite in any assistance to resolve African economic problems. The 1980s was 'a decade of catastrophe' for African economic development and developed countries decision on the debt of African countries forced many African countries economies to their knees. Therefore, in 1980s Africans were bracketed by crisis and experienced 'a steep regional economic decline, stagnant growth, dwindling production and trade, widening internal poverty and worse still burgeoning foreign debt.'⁴ The early 1980s saw the drought which between 1983 and 1985 affected over 20 countries and some 35 million people. Public saving among African countries, which were still 15 per cent (of GDP) ten years ago, have

fallen to the extremely low rate of 6 per cent. At the same time, the net flow of outside capital is falling dangerously. Despite their efforts in the debt rescheduling, African countries devoted an average of 26 percent of their export earning to pay their debt.⁵

The period of 1990s started with the majority of the world communities experiencing the hardship of the economic downturn. For the developing countries, the worst of the economic recession seemed to be located there. Most of the income of the developing countries mainly arrived from the export of the commodities, however, the economic recession brought the price of the commodities into the ground and in turn strongly affected the economy of the world. The failure of the developed countries to participate in the efforts to stabilize the price of the commodities caused the developing countries to question the developed countries role towards their relation with the developing countries. However, the last decade witnessed the political transition in many countries in Africa in the form of multiple party elections, the growing role of civil society, and focused attention on corruption and the emergence of new political groups of leadership as one of the scholars on Africa argued that:

“At the close of the decade [1980s], the region experienced a dramatic transformation as African regimes were confronted with concerted pressure for democratization. The end of the cold war disrupted the external alliances and rivalries that had long stabilized many governments. A combination of domestic opposition and global influence induced a majority of regimes to either liberalize their political systems or concede a transition to democratic rule. The ensuing political shifts proved beneficial to some countries but detrimental for a number of others. Most of the region’s military and single-party states shifted towards some form of competitive politic, although in several instances regime change yielded new instability or increased conflict.”⁶

SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION: ESTABLISHING THE APPROACHES

The notions of belonging to the ‘same world’ and to act as one voice were discussed and debated long before south-south cooperation was introduced. Bandung Conference 1955 was one of the earliest efforts by the Africans and Asians to define the needs and frameworks of the developing countries. In addition, some scholars reminded us that “one cannot grasp the reality of the third world if the analysis is limited to the contemporary data’ as the ‘Third World’ or ‘Developing Countries’ or ‘The South’ is a historical phenomenon.⁷ Therefore historical perspective must always be borne in mind in the discussion regarding the South-South Cooperation, in general and Malaysia-Africa relation in particular. Malaysia was certainly in the right path when it continuously kept in touch with issues concerning Africa in the 1980s because their existence in the South is too big to be ignored if any attempts to revise the unjust relation between the North and the South.

One of the major developments in the international scenario in the 1980s

was the general perception of the southern countries of the failure on behalf of the New International Economic Order (NIEO) in pursuing the interest of the developing countries not only to reduce the economic and trade gap but also its ineffectiveness in pursuing the notions for fair and reciprocal relations between the North and the South. By 1980s the South realized that industrialization and economic development that happened since 1950s were highly "uneven and has encountered serious setbacks."⁸ Therefore the development particularly the economy, of the South until 1980s "took place in highly propitious circumstances and under a conducive international order." The South began to accept the reality that "[t]he principal of non-reciprocity in trading relation between the North and the South" and importantly the South accepted that "the principle of special and differential treatment for southern countries because of their underdevelopment."⁹

Malaysia as one of the developing countries shared the mutual feelings of the African countries, the group that was affected most by the situation that existed. Therefore, Malaysia argued that a new approach must be taken to bring a bout better relation between the North-South. Malaysia strongly believed the initiative for a better world condition must come from the South and have to be worked together by the south.¹⁰ The opinion and the involvement of the South too must be sought by the powerful and rich developed countries in order to have a just international system especially on economic, trade and development. Malaysia strongly believed that the South-South cooperation would be a successful one because of it most fundamental asset, namely the people."¹¹

Malaysia's role in the efforts to establish South-South Cooperation was clearly cemented by its commitment and efforts in the formation of the South-South Commission. The Second South-South Conference was held in Kuala Lumpur on May 1986, three years after the first conference was Held in Beijing, China. The holding of this conference on South-South Cooperation could not have come at a more opportune time as South-South Cooperation must emphasized on Africa as "in Africa the battle for survival remains as grim as ever."¹²

The efforts in the 1970s to create a new world order in terms of economic and trade system in order to narrow the gap between the developed and developing world failed as clearly showed by the situation that the developing world were facing in the early 1980s and accepted that NIEO was a non starter.¹³ The impact of the unjust economic system was mostly felt in the South rather than in the North. The collapse of the commodity trade as experienced by the developing countries in the end of 1970s and the early 1980s went beyond it effects on the economic terms. Most of the developing countries faced political instability due to the unjust international economic. "If the Government is weak it may fall". Political instability among the developing countries then would continue and the efforts to rebuild the economic became the never-ending story. Therefore a vicious circle is started which escalates inexorably."¹⁴

One of the major problems faced by the South was their inability to act as one group. So many countries had so many interests of their own undermined the

collective interests of the south. In urging the south to be united, Malaysia admitted the differences that exist but the south must work not to emphasize the differences but concentrating on the similarity of the goals needed to improve themselves. The developed countries action that seemed to undermine the multilateralism that used to be the approach towards the international cooperation must be encountered. Therefore, Malaysia argued that South-South Cooperation must not only be based on bilateral but also group cooperation."¹⁵

The proponent of the Cooperation argued and admitted and reminded the developing countries that success nor the failure of the South-South Cooperation could be seen overnight. Importantly, it was time for the south at least to start thinking about the measures and approaches that available for them to strengthen the cooperation as "one of the objectives of this meeting should be not simply to identify areas of South-South Cooperation, but also to spell out clearly what measures should be adopted to implement these programmes."¹⁶

While the second south-south conference in Kuala Lumpur concentrated on the economic issues, Malaysia argued that other field of cooperation must also be emphasized to ensure the success of the co-operation. One of the areas that was suggested in order to form a better understanding among the South countries was the cultural aspect. Realizing the important of cultural understanding as a pre-requisite for a better cooperation, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad pointed out that:

"... there are other areas where we can cooperate for mutual benefit. The Cultural field is one. There is a great need for us to know each other. We Malays say: 'Tak kenal maka tak cinta' (Because we do not know each other, therefore we do not love)."¹⁷

The Second South-South conference was a historic moment within the movements of south-south as this conference accepted Dr. Mahathir's suggestion of the formation of a commission to conduct a depth study on South-South Cooperation and the establishment of the Independent Commission of the South on Development issues. The Steering Committee held it first meeting on 9th August 1986 and discussed several issues such as the chairmanship of the proposed South Commission, its terms of reference, financial question and its modus operandi.¹⁸ Dr. Mahathir announced the plans to establish the South Commission at the 8th Meeting of the Heads of States and Government of Non-Aligned Movement in Harare, Zimbabwe on September 1986 and personally approached one of the great sons of Africa, *Mualimu* Julius Nyerere to be the chairman of the South Commission. As the chairman of the Steering Committee Dr. Mahathir reminded others from the South that the Independent Commission must be helped in their duties "[i]f it is not going to be yet another academic exercise we must translate our support into political commitment and action. We owe this to ourselves."¹⁹

As the chairman of the South Commission, *Mualimu* Nyerere immediately traveled to most of the developing countries to discuss the role of the commission with all sorts of groups such as business and academic communities. On the 1st

August 1987, the Commission Secretariat was established with the assistance of Switzerland government at Geneva. Kuala Lumpur once again played its role in this historic process as it was there the Commission adopted its terms of reference during the second meeting of the Commission on the 1-3 March 1988. The terms of reference adopted by the Commission were to:²⁰

- 1) Analysis of national development experience in the south and elaboration of an integrated perspective and vision of the future.
- 2) Analysis of the global environment.
- 3) South-South co-operative for collective self-reliance
- 4) South North Relation.

The Commission held ten plenary meetings between October 1987 and May 2000 to gather and analyze information before publishing their report.²¹

In 1990, the Commission published its report called *the Challenge to the South*. The Commission published the reports on the purpose "to contribute to the success of this endeavour so that the countries of the South may determine their own destinies while playing a full part in humanity's development and in enhancing the security of its common heritage-the planet earth"²²

The just world system as have been pursued by the developing countries which started with Bandung Conference in 1955 was clearly manifested by the South Commission report when the report argued that:

"On the contrary, the South seeks an divided world in which there would be no 'South' and no 'North'; in which there would not be one part developed rich, and dominating, and the other underdeveloped, poor, and dominated. The South's goal is a world of equal opportunities in which criss-crossing lines of interaction-political, economic, social, cultural, scientific- may sustain global interdependence; in which nations in their variety would work together in pursuit of jointly agreed goals; in which peace, security, and dignity would be the birthright of all persons and all peoples; in which the world's resources may be prudently used to satisfy the needs of all and not merely the narrow self-interest of a few."²³

There were mixed reactions toward the report published by the South Commission. Some sections argued that the reports were merely a lip services and only the re-enactment of the NIEO that was the talked of the decade in 1970s. Others argued that the Report must be seen as a critical analysis of the South toward the international system and to some extent admitted the success of the South to act as one clear voice in their efforts to develop themselves.²⁴ Whatever criticisms and supports thrown towards the report, what was showed by the report was the consensus admission of the south that they have the common goals to be pursuit. The report also recognized that the pursuit of the goal was not an easy not an easy journey. It obviously not need a lot of patience and time to be achieved. The

contents of the report seemed to pursuit an ideal world. However, as Dr. Mahathir once said that “while we wait for the ideal, we should do the possible.”²⁵

1990S: AFRICAN AWAKENINGS

A new wave of African renaissance (borrowed term from Mr. President Mbeki of South Africa) is emerging and it is going not unnoticed. Some scholar explained the changes that happened in the early 1990s as “second African Independence” and some called it “Second liberation.”²⁶ How they called or termed the changes, what is clearly happened in Africa as an observer on African political, economic and social development noticed that since 1995, overall development in Africa particularly in the Sub-Saharan African began to show some bright future.²⁷

“Despite the grim backdrop, most African countries are not at war, and many are continuing efforts to deepen their economies reforms. Sub-Saharan Africa’s overall growth rate for 1997 was 3.1 percent, broadly continuing the upturn that started in 1995. But mostly because of the unfavourable external environment that depressed prices for some important African commodity exports, growth in 1998 was 1.9 percent; excluding South Africa and Nigeria, growth was 3.6 percent for the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa. ... Most of the good performers are benefiting not only from reforms- but also from better governance. More open political systems, and more hospitable climate for the private sector.”²⁸

In the economic terms, the economic growth of most of the Sub-Saharan Africa countries in the early 1990s were in fact lower that what was recorded during the early years of independence in the 1960s. For example, Ghana’s income and export per capita were higher than Korea in 1965. However, Sub-Sahara Africa until 1995 were “caught in a low equilibrium development trap, just as Asia was viewed in 1960s.”²⁹ However, the economic development of the continent also promisingly increased during the last decade despite the Asian financial and economic crisis (see Table 1).

Table 1: Average Annual GDP in Sub-Sahara Africa, 1965-1999³⁰

Years	65-69	70-79	80-89	90-94	95-99
Sub-Sahara Africa	2.4	4.0	2.1	0.8	4.2

As part of the world community, Malaysia’s involvement in Africa throughout the 1990s was mostly through its involvement in international institutions such as the UN and its permanent body of organizations. However, the establishment of the G-15 inaugural summit in Kuala Lumpur in 1990 witnessed Malaysia’s own initiative to gather the developing countries to work together in order to challenge the imbalance

of developments between the North and the South.³¹ The formation of the group also paved the way for better cooperation in economic relations between Malaysia and other members of the Group that belonged to Sub-Sahara Africa, such as Zimbabwe, Kenya, Nigeria and Senegal. The group was formed in the awakening of the challenges that faced by the developing countries against the changing scenario of the world order as the bipolar world system ended with the collapsed of Soviet Union. As the developing nations, Malaysia and African countries realized that the challenges brought by the new world order were something that needed a new approach that strongly demanded the developing country to act as one voice.³²

The formation of the G-15 must be seen as part of the efforts of strengthening the South-South Cooperations as among the developing countries as suggested by the South Commission. Malaysia's own efforts to innovate new measurers in forging a better relations among the countries of the South and mostly to equip the developing countries on the latest information about others developing countries was manifested with the formation of "South Investment, Trade and Technology Data Exchange Centre" SITTDEC. Despite the fact that the SITTDEC was formed as part of the discussion during the G-15 inaugural meeting in Kuala Lumpur in 1990, the embracement of the philosophy of South-South Cooperation, any developing countries were welcomed to access the information available in the SITTDEC in order to improve their trade with others developing countries. This center was formed because Malaysia believed that:

"... companies in the North, through an established networks of business relationships and data base, have been finding doing business with the South very profitable. Clearly we are missing opportunities for mutual help in the South. Why is this so? The answer perhaps lies in our inherited perception that the North is the hub of the World. As a result all our communication lines and trade are with the North and it is they who distribute our products to the rest of the world including ourselves. This means that we buy our own goods through them. The net result is that our import cost more and our export yield less. The North on the other hand not only profit from their middleman role but from processing freight and insurance. We lose at every turn."³³

In the G-15 Summit in Jamaica in 1999, Malaysia argued that the nature of the world was strongly evolved towards disadvantages on behalf of the developing countries. He reminded them that the pursuit of the common voices and action among the developing countries was something that could not be proud of and must be improved if the developing countries wanted to seriously competet with the ever aggressive developed countries. However, the cooperation among the developing countries as promoted by the G-15 was not an easy task to be achieved in the shortest time available. Despite the obstacle faced, Malaysia continuously propagated the importance of being united among the developing countries.³⁴

Asian countries' including Malaysia acknowledges the continued fragility of Africa political and economic structure and situations. In support of these reforms

and the 1991 UN New Agenda for the Development in Africa (UN-NADAF) Tokyo International Conference on Africa Development (TICAD) was held in October 1993 by Asian countries. Through the formation of TICAD Asian countries "will serve to strengthen an emerging new partnership for sustainable development of Africa based on self-reliance of African countries and the support of Africa's development partners."³⁵ In its declaration TICAD adopted 35 point of action in the declaration known as "Towards the 21st Century" to improve African development. One of the points highlighted in the declaration was that the African countries will works closely with its Asian counterparts in exchanges of ideas and experiences for its development. The TICAD opened up the door for commitments of Asian communities to involve in African development and furthermore increased South-south cooperation between Asia and Africa. In the second TICAD (TICAD II) held in Tokyo on the 19 October 1998 African countries reciprocally reacted towards Asian initiative and argued that:

"We recognize that the Asian experience of economic development and the catalytic role of international cooperation offer hope and provide challenges for economic transformation."³⁶

The momentum gathered in Tokyo was followed by the first Asia-Africa Forum which was held in Bandung on the 12-16 December 1994 and the second Asia-Africa Forum was held in Bangkok in 1997. Malaysia took up the leadership to lead was in this new partnership and never failed to attend the subsequent Asia-Africa Forum conferences which was held in Bandung and Bangkok. Malaysia also involved in other subsequent program that emerged from the TICAD conference such as the Asia-Africa Cooperation in Export Promotion Conference which was held in Seoul Korea in December 1998 to mainly to review both Asian experience and the challenges facing African countries in promoting their exports. Importantly, the Conference emphasized the formation of the framework for cooperation and equal partnership.

Malaysia also involves in organizing the Africa-Asia Business Forum which taken place at Kuala Lumpur on October 1999. Malaysia efforts to strongly participated in measures by Asian countries to forge a better relations with Africa was clearly pointed by then the Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad that:

"Africa today stand as one of the final frontiers of economic development. Unfortunately, for many in the developed world and the fast growing economies of the East and elsewhere, Africa is still an unknown continent. If Africa is merely unknown, this would not have been too great a tragedy, for man's spirit of adventure and discovery would have made him discover the opportunities that Africa offers. However, today, witting or unwittingly, Africa has been too often potrayed by the International (i.e. Western) media as a continent of violence, war, tribal conflict, poverty, Aids, etc, a continent to be avoided like the plague."³⁷

Malaysia also argued that Africa states must turn towards the East but

without neglecting the West in their efforts to develop themselves. At the same time Malaysia urged Asians to share some of its experiences with Africans and that should be a better platform for understanding between the two continents. Malaysia also played the role in establishing the Asia-Africa Investment and Technology Promotion Centre (AAITPC) as the Center is located in Kuala Lumpur. The objective of the Centre was to promote sustainable industrial development by enhancing the capabilities of the recipient countries in Africa and by optimizing the existing resources of provider countries from Asia. The activities of the Centre were linked with the United Nation Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) to enhance the project sustainability.

In regards to Malaysia commitment in African development, this was clearly showed when Malaysia had hosted the Third Asia-Africa Forum in Kuala Lumpur from 23 to 25 May 2000. The Malaysian commitment on the effort was clearly showed, accepted and appreciated by the parties involved and The Kuala-Lumpur's forum managed to gather the largest participation of 10 Asian countries, 49 African countries, 13 donor countries and 11 international, regional and sub-regional organizations in the history of TICAD.³⁸ The importance of the cooperation between Asia and Africa particularly by program such as TICAD was best described by the UNDP officer speech in the opening of the Forum when he pointed out that:

“To be blunt, Africa has a lot to learn from Asia – about good governance and good government, about equitable and effective development, about successful entrepreneurships. But equally Asia has a lot to gain from Africa – uniquely generous natural resources, an industrious people, and 6000 million people who yearn to become consumers of Asia's industrial product. Asian countries have shown the world how implementing sound macro economic policies, investing in people's health and education, encouraging investment trade, trade and export, and capitalizing on comparative advantages, can literally transform the lives of their population by lifting a majority of the people out of poverty in the span of a single generation. And Africa is listening. Economic growth rates are looking up across the continent, and democratic governance is spreading. But progress remains agonizing slow, and there have been too many instances of achievement being rolled back. Further, as attested by a number of chronic conflicts, Africa is running out of times. So TICAD set out to facilitate contacts between the two continents, at the policy-maker level as well as at the decision-maker level in government and in the private sector.³⁹

Through these international platforms Malaysia continuously reminded the Asian and African alike the important of being united in the political and economic sector. Both parties were also reminded not only to just participate in the world economic and political activities but to make sure that their participation as a sound one. Importantly, Malaysia also emphasized the importance of exchanging ideas between the two continents. “Our approach hitherto has been to exchange experiences. We should now move forward to forge smart partnership that will lead

to a win-win situation and the betterment of all [and] may need to introduce innovative approaches and dismantle existing barriers".⁴⁰ The importance of being united was emphasized as "[i]t is essential that we put our act together as the global economy is now iniquitous. The disparities in income and lifestyle between the rich and the poor have reached unprecedented proportions. ... Developing countries by definition are poor, some are very poor. Alone we can do practically nothing to help ourselves... There seems to be no future for us. But if we act together we may yet be able to influence the processes which affect us."⁴¹

The Forum admitted the importance to identify capacity constraints in Africa and Asia and more importantly to highlight the relevant experiences from both continents to overcome these constraints especially within the context of enhancing the capacity development in Africa. With the themes "Joining Hands for Strengthening Partnership" the Kuala Lumpur Forum concluded that:⁴²

- 1) African and Asian countries need further strengthen their partnership, and exchanged development experiences, which would be useful to overcome capacity constraints
- 2) The international community, including donor countries, international regional and sub regional organization, the private sector and civil society should play important roles in promoting and enhancing Asia-Africa cooperation. Others such as G-8 also should support the efforts made by Asian and African countries.
- 3) Cooperation in agriculture should be further enhanced between Asia and Africa
- 4) To promote collaborative researches and s concerted support for increased productivity and the transformation of Africa's predominantly agrarian economies into industrializing economies.
- 5) To promote the development of Private sectors, particularly small and medium sized enterprise and to facilitate its participation in enhancing Asia-Africa cooperation.
- 6) To formulate strategies to ensure wider availability and usage of IT.

Malaysian participation in giving hand and ideas towards the development of Africa also happened outside the TICAD. In September 1994 in conjunction with 100 years of electricity in Malaysia, Malaysia organized the 2nd Afro-Asian International Conference on Power Development. The Conference objectives were to share Malaysia experience in developing their power infrastructure with other African countries. In sharing Malaysia experience on the matters with African participants, Malaysia argued that:

"The provision of adequate infrastructure is one of the prerequisite for sustainable economic and social development. Developing countries must now examine and 'experiment' with non-traditional and virtually untried methods to implement needed infrastructure development. The ability to learn from failure is as critical as the lesson from the success of any experiment. The fundamental challenge before Government is to

improve ways to advance the process of systematic changed to guide it through successive stages to completion. The issue is not whether reform should be more or less radical, but how to ensure that the reconstruction of the institutional structures and development of new norms do not lag behind liberalization and deregulation. The right approach seems to be to marry boldness with realism.⁴³

LID AND SAID: CHANGING THE MINDS

In a more personal attempt in forging relationship with Africa, Malaysia also made its own initiatives. In accordance to Malaysia's policy to survive in the globalized economy, Malaysia took the initial steps to enhance the economic relationship between the South-South cooperation. For African countries, they had benefited greatly by the introduction of Smart Partnership that is based on win-win cooperation that was started through the formation of Langkawi International Dialogue (LID) in 1995.⁴⁴

In the inaugural Langkawai International Dialogue, Malaysia voiced its about the situation that was facing the developing countries once again but importantly and emphasized the importance of Dialogue approaches to overcome the challenges faced by the developing countries and emphasized that the philosophy and perception that dominated the thinking of the world must be changed. The concept of the Dialogue emphasized not only the theoretical discussion on problems but also highlighted the actual experience of certain country in facing certain challenges to be learned by others was emphasized by Malaysia.⁴⁵

Malaysia also highlighted the virtue of smart partnership and its benefit as the approach of Smart Partnership and argued that it is one of the best available weapons in facing the challenges in the ever changing and demanding economic and trade system of the world. However, Smart-partnership also requires a pre-requisite to ensure it total success. In this area Malaysia pointed out the importance of technology as one of the major areas that need to be added for the success of Smart Partnership.⁴⁶ Therefore, Malaysia emphasized that the core of Smart partnership that was by being united collectively.

"[I]n order not to be left out of the mainstream of world economic activities, countries need to re-evaluate their national strategies. Individually we want only a win situation. Collectively we can have a win-win situation if we were to work together. While there are various ways of doing this, few have done so in any affective fashion yet. Undeniably national and international partnership accords greater benefits, as it enhances the capacity and capability to access and share markets, technology, management expertise and specialized skills, and be cost competitive in a global environment.⁴⁷

The success of the Langkawi International Dialogue interested the African countries that participated in the Dialogue. The southern region of Africa was the first region in the continent that adopted the Dialogue approach in discussing problems and challenges faced by them for development of the region. As one of the country

that pioneered the concept of Smart partnership and experience in organizing the successful Langkawi international Dialogue, Malaysia was invited to participate in the Southern Africa International Dialogue in its inaugural opening at Kasane, Botswana on 5th May 1997.

In the SAID 2000 held in Mozambique, Malaysia promoted the ideas that the future of the economic development of the world will be decided by the knowledge based economy. Therefore he urged the African states participated in the Dialogue to strongly consider the development of the K-economy as it already became part of the developed world. The fast changing nature of the world brought by the wind of globalization surely forced the countries of the world, especially the developing countries to reconsider their approaches towards nation building. The new arms of globalization such as economic liberalization obviously threatened the basic cores of any countries such as sovereignty. Malaysia reminded the Dialogue about the new threat and challenges that was facing them. Gathered from its own experiences, Malaysia argued that:

“This [Globalization] clearly call for a new way of thinking, for developing nations to chart a new paradigm in nation building such that old mistakes are not repeated. Given the onslaught of voices propagating the good of an open and liberal economy, sovereignty as a basis for self-determination and empowerment seems contradictory and out of place. Yet at no times is it more relevant that it is now. ... Nation building is not only about the lowest cost, it is equally about social justice and a conducive environment for the development of human dignity. A grain of rice or wheat or maize or barley is not simply an issue of how much it cost to produce but does the person planting it make a decent living? And who ends up eating the produce? Nation building is about the ability and freedom an flexibility to make strategic choices in finance, trade and investment for oneself. If nations are willing to accept higher prices in order to acquire the technologies t compete later, that should be the right of sovereign nations to decide.”⁴⁸

In the Southern African International Dialogue (SAID) 2001 which was held in Kampala, Uganda, Malaysia reminded the Africans the importance of Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) in their measures to develop their countries as experienced by Malaysia. In that conference, Malaysia exchanged ideas of attracting and managing the investments, however, at the same time, Malaysia also reminded the Africans that the nature of the FDI is evolving rapidly that need to be addressed carefully as “foreign investment is now widely perceived as a formidable force in today’s world economy. Besides, FDI has in recent years undergone significant changes in terms of size, form and impact. FDI is apparently linked to globalisation. But globalisation is yet to take its final form. Indeed, like all ideas and concepts, it will change and change again as the players try to extract the best from it.”⁴⁹

Interestingly, the initiatives taken by Malaysia through the Smart Partnership were not confined to economic benefits only and only intra South countries only.

The LID was also used by Malaysia as a platform to promote its national interests and also its international agendas but importantly it also gathered developing countries together with developed countries to enter into dialogue to find a practical way in solving many problems between countries within the south and problems between the North and the South.⁵⁰ The issues discussed in the LID and SAID also expanded to Social and Youth by the Langkawi international Dialogue 2002. Malaysia's involvement to foster development in Africa successfully contributed to the formation of Smart Network International News Partnership during the SAID-GLOBAL conference. The suggestion of such cooperation was first initiated during the Third Asia-Africa Forum, which was held in Kuala Lumpur. Part of the formation of the Network was the realization on the importance of information and communication in the process of globalization and also to bring the perspective of the local in the news that until currently is strongly controlled by the Media belonged to the North.⁵¹

BILATERAL RELATIONS: SIGNIFICANT CHANGES

The 1990s witnessed Malaysia starting its stronger efforts to cultivate a stronger bilateral relation with some of the African states south of Sahara. One of the earliest countries in south of Sahara visited by Malaysia Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir was Mali in 1984. The Malaysia-Mali relations similar to the majority of Malaysia and other African states was strongly bound by their membership of international organization other than the UN such as Organization of the Islamic Countries (OIC) and Non-Aligned Movement. The visit to Mali obviously was seen by Malaysia as a breaking point into their venture in bilateral relation with Africa.⁵²

The changing scenario of politics and economic developments in Sub-Sahara Africa in 1990s strongly witnessed Malaysia's efforts to establish bilateral relation with African countries. The increasing bilateral relations between Malaysia and African states could be seen through the participation of African countries with Malaysia's Technical Cooperation Program (MTCP). The MTCP which started in 1980 strongly belief in the concept of developing a country through its human resources i.e the quality of its human resources determines the development of the country. Based on that concept MTCP focuses on the development of human resources by providing training to the various sectors which are crucial in a country's development e.g. development planning, poverty alleviation, agriculture development etcetera.

The unit which is responsible in the administration and coordination of all MTCP activities is the Economic Planning Unit. The Programme which initially meant for the ASEAN countries have eventually expanded to include all major regions of the world based on the policy of Prosper thy Neighbour. There are basically 133 countries from all over the world participating in this Programme and out of these 133 countries, 41 countries are from the African Countries such as Angola, Gambia, Cameroon, Ghana, Somalia just to name a few. Today MTCP would be part as a programme in any Bilateral agreement with any developing countries.

Furthermore, the changing political scenario of the Southern Africa in the first year of the 1990s was manifested by the declaration of Namibia independence

in March 1990 and before that by the decision of the Pretoria Regime to release Nelson Mandela and other black South Africa from their jails in February 1990. Malaysia acted swiftly to forge a stronger relationship with the changed region of South African. By November 1992, Dr. Mahathir Mohamed visited Namibia to strengthen the bilateral relation between two countries. Eventually, Southern African region became the “the port of entrance” for Malaysia to participate more effectively in Sub-Sahara Africa. By the end of 1990s, Malaysia had a bilateral relation with most of the countries in Sub-Sahara Africa such as Gabon, Mauritius, Senegal, Uganda, Kenya, Chad.

Malaysia’s relations and involvement, particularly, in the economic sector, with its African counterparts is increased enormously in the last decade. Malaysian companies such as Petronas, Malaysia Resources Corporation Berhad (MRCB), Telekom, TV3, and Promet were involved in various economic sectors in Africa such as manufacturing, construction, property development, farming, electricity, energy (oil and gas) and also infrastructure. Among the Sub-Saharan African States, South Africa is the largest and the most important trade and economic partner for Malaysia. Malaysia is also the largest Southeast Asian investor in Africa. At the same time Malaysia is the major destination for South African’s investors. In fact, when a consortium consisting of a United States’ company, SBC Communications Inc and Malaysia’s Telekom bought 30% of South Africa’s Telkom in 1996 it was the largest FDI ever in the history of South Africa.⁵³

Malaysia’ top investment destinations in the Sub-Sahara Africa, 1993-2000, in RM (Million)⁵⁴

Country	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	Total
South Africa	-	45	68	1183	147	43	33	3	1522
Mauritius	10	44	73	15	18	212	79	55	1217
Sudan				16	215				231
Ghana				6	3	8	2	192	
Namibia		5	23	20	4	24	1		
Mozambique					2	3	15	15	35
Liberia	2		7	2	6				17
Malawi/Tanzania			6.3		1.9		5		12
Guinea				1	5	2			8
Total	12	94	177.3	1,243	401.9	292	135	265	3,042

South Africa’s Trade with Malaysia from 1990-2000 in RM⁵⁵

Year	SA’s Exports to Malaysia	SA’s Imports From Malaysia	Total Trade	Balance of Trade +Surplus -Deficit
1990	6,248	89,297	95,545	-83,049
1991	-	138,481	138,481	-138,481
1992	5,220	105,335	110,555	-100,115
1993	14,554,792	24,356,808	38,911,600	-9,802,016
1994	314,175,626	457,976,911	772,152,537	-143,801,285
1995	509,957,422	680,183,452	1,190,140,874	-170,226,030
1996	643,241,971	719,434,437	1,362,676,408	-76,192,466
1997	928,497,339	813,503,695	1,742,001,034	+114,993,644
1998	454,119,921	1,169,845,286	1,623,965,207	-715,725,365
1999	628,581,047	950,465,211	1,579,046,258	-321,884,164
2000	860,975,667	951,495,018	1,812,470,685	-90,519,351

However, despite the growing interest about Africa among Malaysian companies, their involvements in African economic is strongly 'supported' by the Government.⁵⁶ Dr. Mahathir himself while attending the SAID-GLOBAL 2001 in Kampala urged the private sector not to rely heavily on the Government when trading or investing in African economy. Malaysian investors in Africa were urged to also invest in human development, as this is the main sector that most of the African countries and peoples needed in order to be a developed country.⁵⁷

In other words, in pursuing the equality in the international scenery Malaysia Africa relation within the globalized world should not concentrate only on the economic aspect, but also on cultural aspect to foster lasting links between us. Dr. Mahathir, as the architect of Malaysia-Africa relation himself pointed out that the cultural aspect is so vital in Malaysia Africa relations as one have to understand the others in order for both of them to gains benefit from each other.⁵⁸ In the words of other African:

"Asians and Africans must get to know each other better. They must discover each other's history, learn to appreciate each other's artistic values, practice each other's language, listen to each other's music and confront their respective ideas."⁵⁹

CONCLUSION

The economic hardship of the 1980s and the issues of Apartheid strongly brought Malaysia closer to Africa. The unjust relation between the North and the South eventually created a better understanding between Malaysia and African countries as they began search for the best approach to encounter the unjust international world order. The philosophy of the south-south cooperation that highlighted the importance and the need for the new approaches for the south to act as united body, and to voice their concerns in one voice brought to a new dimension of Malaysia – Africa relation. This new dimensions provided a new path of cooperation, under standing and importantly unity in their search for a commons goals.

The last decade witnessed a better and improved relation between Malaysia and Africa. Malaysia policy of Prosper Thy Neighbour and and its embracement of Smart Partnership in international cooperation obviously played a big role in improving the ties between the two parties. The increase of bilateral relation between Malaysia and African countries is clearly indicated by the increasing volumes of trade between them. Importantly, the Dialogue such as of Langkawi International Dialogue and Southern Africa International Dialogue successfully managed to penetrate both parties' notions and dreams and eventually brought them to the table of discussion to find the way to pursuit the equality in the international scenery.

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