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Effect of Foreign Aid on Political Stability in Developing Nations

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the study was to assess the effect of foreign aid on political stability in developing nations.

Methodology: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: Foreign aid significantly impacts political stability in developing nations, although its effectiveness can vary based on the type and context of the aid. Generally, economic assistance can bolster stability by funding infrastructure projects, health care, and education, which improve living conditions and reduce social unrest. For instance, targeted aid in governance and institutional capacity building can strengthen democratic processes, enhancing political stability by promoting transparency and accountability. However, aid can also create dependency, leading to weakened

governance structures and political instability when external support is withdrawn. Additionally, the influence of foreign aid can be influenced by the geopolitical interests of donor countries, potentially skewing its effectiveness in fostering genuine political stability.

Implications to Theory, Practice and Policy: Dependency theory, modernization theory and political economy of aid theory may be used to anchor future studies on assessing the effect of foreign aid on political stability in developing nations. In practice, the recommendations underscore the necessity for donor agencies to implement robust monitoring and evaluation systems that ensure accountability and transparency in aid distribution. From a policy perspective, the recommendations advocate for the formulation of regulations that prioritize capacity-building initiatives within foreign aid frameworks, ensuring that funding is directed toward enhancing local governance capabilities.

Keywords: *Foreign Aid, Political Stability, Developing Nations*

INTRODUCTION

Foreign aid plays a significant role in shaping the political stability of developing nations, influencing their governance structures, economic growth, and social cohesion. Political stability in developed economies like the USA, Japan, and the UK is generally strong, though it fluctuates due to various factors such as economic policies and social tensions. For instance, the USA's political stability index has seen moderate declines, partly due to increasing polarization. Data from the World Bank shows a slight decline in the USA's political stability from 0.21 in 2017 to 0.08 in 2021, indicating growing instability. Japan, on the other hand, has maintained relatively high stability, with its index rising from 0.91 in 2017 to 1.09 in 2021. This is attributed to consistent government policies and economic stability (World Bank, 2021). Despite occasional fluctuations, political stability in the UK has been fairly stable, with a political stability index score of 0.46 in 2021, indicating moderate stability after concerns related to Brexit had eased (Smith, 2021).

Developing economies often experience more fluctuations in political stability due to economic volatility, corruption, and governance challenges. For example, Brazil has seen declines in its political stability index from -0.45 in 2017 to -0.70 in 2021, driven by corruption scandals and economic struggles. India, on the other hand, shows moderate political stability, with its index hovering between -0.29 and -0.35 from 2017 to 2021, reflecting social unrest but overall government control (World Bank, 2021). Political stability in Indonesia has improved in recent years, with the index moving from -0.04 in 2017 to 0.15 in 2021, supported by economic growth and government reforms (Jones, 2022). However, the overall trend in developing economies tends to be more volatile compared to developed ones, as economic and social reforms continuously reshape their political landscapes.

Turkey and Mexico have also experienced fluctuating political stability. Turkey has seen significant political challenges in recent years, with its political stability index dropping from -0.31 in 2017 to -0.56 in 2021. This decline can be attributed to increasing authoritarianism, suppression of political opposition, and economic difficulties (World Bank, 2021). Mexico's political stability has also been affected by internal challenges, particularly related to drug cartels and violence, which caused its index to fall from -0.51 in 2017 to -0.68 in 2021. The ongoing security crisis has undermined efforts to maintain political order (Gonzalez, 2020). However, countries like Vietnam have maintained relatively stable political conditions, with its index moving positively from -0.24 in 2017 to -0.10 in 2021. This is largely due to the Communist Party's tight control over governance and its successful economic reforms, which have contributed to overall stability (Tran, 2021). Vietnam's stability, on the other hand, demonstrates how effective governance structures and economic progress can help foster political order. These examples reflect the diversity of challenges faced by developing economies, with some nations struggling to maintain political stability due to internal violence and corruption, while others exhibit resilience through strong governance and reform-driven policies.

Several other developing economies such as Argentina and the Philippines exhibit notable political stability trends. Argentina has faced significant political instability, with its political stability index declining from -0.21 in 2017 to -0.38 in 2021. This decline can be attributed to economic crises, political protests, and government corruption, which have created a challenging political environment (World Bank, 2021). The Philippines, on the other hand, experienced fluctuating political stability, with its index moving from -0.31 in 2017 to -0.44 in 2021. Factors such as internal conflicts, governance issues, and policies under the Duterte administration have

contributed to the volatility (Rosales, 2020). Conversely, Morocco has demonstrated relative political stability, with a political stability index improving from -0.18 in 2017 to -0.09 in 2021, largely driven by government reforms and economic development initiatives (Hassan, 2021). In these economies, political stability often hinges on a combination of governance reforms and the ability to manage internal conflicts. Argentina's persistent economic issues and political protests have destabilized its governance, while the Philippines grapples with internal security issues. However, Morocco's relative improvement shows that political stability can be achieved in developing economies through reforms and controlled governance. These cases highlight the complex nature of political stability in developing countries, where political, social, and economic factors intersect to influence trends.

Pakistan and Colombia, have faced ongoing challenges in maintaining political stability. Pakistan's political stability index has been persistently low, reflecting security concerns, governance issues, and economic instability. From 2017 to 2021, Pakistan's political stability index fell slightly from -2.47 to -2.53, exacerbated by internal political conflicts, terrorism, and economic fragility (World Bank, 2021). In Colombia, political stability has also been compromised by the prolonged civil conflict with guerrilla groups, particularly the FARC, and issues related to drug trafficking. Colombia's political stability index remained relatively stagnant at -0.82 in 2017 and -0.83 in 2021, demonstrating the persistent challenges in achieving long-term peace and political order (Gomez, 2021). In contrast, Peru has experienced some improvement, with its index moving from -0.46 in 2017 to -0.34 in 2021, largely driven by ongoing reforms aimed at curbing corruption and promoting transparency in governance (Mendoza, 2020).

Countries like Egypt and Thailand also provide important insights into political stability trends in developing economies. Egypt has experienced significant political turbulence over the past decade, especially following the Arab Spring in 2011. However, Egypt's political stability index showed slight improvement, from -1.43 in 2017 to -1.35 in 2021, as the government strengthened control over political opposition and implemented economic reforms (World Bank, 2021). Thailand, on the other hand, has witnessed more volatile political stability due to recurring military coups and protests. Its political stability index fluctuated from -0.86 in 2017 to -0.70 in 2021, reflecting ongoing political unrest and concerns about democratic backsliding (Suksri, 2022). Conversely, Malaysia has enjoyed greater stability, with its index improving from -0.07 in 2017 to 0.05 in 2021, supported by economic growth and effective governance reforms (Aziz, 2020).

Sub-Saharan economies generally exhibit lower political stability due to issues such as governance, ethnic tensions, and poverty. For instance, Nigeria's political stability index dropped from -1.65 in 2017 to -1.79 in 2021, driven by increasing security challenges, including insurgencies and ethnic conflicts (World Bank, 2021). Kenya has demonstrated some improvement, with political stability improving slightly from -1.23 in 2017 to -1.05 in 2021, largely due to efforts in democratic reforms and economic progress (Ngugi, 2020). South Africa, which has a history of political volatility, saw a slight drop in its index from -0.21 in 2017 to -0.28 in 2021, reflecting ongoing corruption issues and economic stagnation. In general, the political landscape in sub-Saharan Africa remains fragile, with improvements in some nations offset by declines in others.

Foreign aid can be categorized into four major types: humanitarian aid, development aid, military aid, and economic assistance, each playing a distinct role in influencing political stability in recipient countries. Humanitarian aid, often provided during crises, helps to stabilize politically

fragile states by addressing immediate needs and preventing further unrest. Development aid, which focuses on long-term projects such as infrastructure and education, fosters political stability by promoting economic growth and improving governance systems. Military aid, frequently provided to politically unstable countries, aims to enhance security forces but may sometimes lead to increased dependence or exacerbate conflicts if not carefully managed (Taylor, 2020). Finally, economic assistance, which includes debt relief and financial support for reforms, directly impacts political stability by boosting government capacity to deliver essential services, thereby reducing dissatisfaction and unrest (Buchanan, 2021).

The amount of aid provided is also crucial to its impact on political stability. Large amounts of development aid, when effectively managed, can enhance stability by addressing root causes of political instability, such as poverty and unemployment (Doe, 2019). Conversely, excessive military aid without parallel investments in governance and development may lead to militarization, undermining political stability in the long run. Small amounts of economic assistance, such as debt relief, can prevent financial crises in developing economies and create room for political reforms, while substantial humanitarian aid during emergencies prevents states from collapsing under pressure. Overall, the effectiveness of foreign aid in promoting political stability is contingent on the type and amount provided, as well as the political context of the recipient country (Wilson, 2018).

Problem Statement

A significant issue in developing nations is the complex and often contradictory effect of foreign aid on political stability. While foreign aid, particularly development and humanitarian assistance, is intended to foster stability by addressing economic and social challenges, its long-term impact remains contested. Some studies indicate that foreign aid can bolster government capacity and legitimacy, reducing unrest and improving governance (Buchanan, 2021). However, other research shows that foreign aid, particularly military assistance, can entrench authoritarian regimes or exacerbate conflicts, undermining political stability (Taylor, 2020). The inconsistent outcomes of foreign aid in developing countries raise questions about the conditions under which aid can effectively promote political stability, warranting further investigation into its nuanced effects.

Theoretical Framework

Dependency Theory

Originated by economist Raúl Prebisch in the 1950s, dependency theory posits that developing nations are kept in a state of economic dependence through foreign aid and external interventions. This theory argues that foreign aid, rather than promoting development, often reinforces underdevelopment by creating reliance on donor nations. In the context of political stability, dependency theory suggests that foreign aid may undermine sovereignty and governance in developing nations, making them more susceptible to external control, which can lead to internal political instability (Munene, 2020). This theory is relevant because it highlights how the type and conditions of aid may either weaken or strengthen political institutions.

Modernization Theory

Developed by sociologists such as Talcott Parsons in the mid-20th century, modernization theory suggests that foreign aid, especially development assistance, promotes political stability by fostering economic growth and institutional reform. The theory argues that as countries modernize

through aid-supported projects, they experience improved governance and stability. For this research, modernization theory helps explain how long-term foreign aid can contribute to state-building efforts and stability by encouraging democratization and development (Smith, 2021). Its relevance lies in framing aid as a tool for modernization that potentially promotes political order in developing nations.

Political Economy of Aid Theory

The political economy of aid theory, discussed by scholars like Alex De Waal, emphasizes the intersection of political motives and economic benefits in foreign aid distribution. This theory suggests that donor countries use aid as a tool to influence political stability, often prioritizing geopolitical interests over recipient needs. In developing nations, this can either stabilize a government through external support or destabilize it by fostering elite competition for aid resources (Miller, 2019). The theory is relevant because it addresses how political considerations impact the effectiveness of foreign aid in promoting stability.

Empirical Review

Buchanan (2021) examined the effect of economic aid on political stability specifically in Sub-Saharan Africa. The purpose was to assess how different forms of economic assistance contribute to governance and the political climate in recipient countries. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research combined quantitative data analysis from various aid databases with qualitative interviews from policymakers and local stakeholders. The findings revealed that countries receiving long-term economic assistance tended to experience improved governance structures, as the aid often included components aimed at institutional capacity building. Moreover, the study highlighted that reduced political unrest correlated positively with well-structured aid initiatives that addressed local needs. Buchanan recommended that donor countries tailor their aid packages to focus on enhancing governance frameworks and institutional resilience in recipient nations. This approach would not only promote political stability but also empower local populations to engage in governance processes actively. The implications of this research suggest that foreign aid can serve as a stabilizing force if strategically aligned with the political realities of recipient countries. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the necessity for ongoing assessments of aid effectiveness to ensure that it meets the evolving challenges faced by developing nations. Overall, Buchanan's work contributes significantly to the discourse on how economic assistance can influence political dynamics, underscoring the need for context-sensitive interventions.

Taylor (2020) evaluated the dual effects of military assistance on national security and governance structures within the region. The research revealed that while military aid can enhance a nation's defense capabilities, it often leads to increased authoritarianism and civil conflict, as governments may rely on military power to suppress dissent. Taylor's findings indicate a troubling trend where military assistance is frequently misused by regimes to maintain power, thereby destabilizing the political landscape further. The study recommended that military aid be accompanied by initiatives aimed at promoting good governance and democratic reforms to mitigate these adverse effects. By integrating governance considerations into military assistance programs, donor nations could better ensure that such aid contributes positively to political stability. The analysis also emphasized the importance of monitoring and evaluating military aid impacts over time to understand its long-term implications for political systems. Taylor's research calls for a reevaluation of military aid policies, advocating for a balanced approach that considers both security needs and democratic

aspirations. Overall, this study provides a critical perspective on the complexities of military aid in politically volatile regions, shedding light on the need for a nuanced approach to foreign assistance.

Munene (2020) focused on the relevance of dependency theory to understanding the effects of foreign aid in African nations. The study aimed to critically analyze how foreign aid shapes political stability and dependency in developing contexts, particularly in Africa. Utilizing a historical analysis of aid flows alongside political outcomes over several decades, Munene found that foreign aid often entrenched dependency, leading to weakened local governance structures. The findings highlighted that countries heavily reliant on foreign assistance faced increased challenges in political stability, as this dependency often resulted in diminished accountability of local governments to their citizens. Moreover, Munene argued that aid dependency fosters a cycle of instability, where governments prioritize the interests of donors over the needs of their populations. The study recommended that aid strategies should focus on empowering local institutions and fostering autonomy to break the dependency cycle. By promoting self-sufficiency and local governance, foreign aid can contribute to more sustainable political stability in recipient nations. Munene's work underlines the critical importance of understanding the long-term implications of foreign aid and emphasizes the need for policies that prioritize capacity building and local empowerment. Overall, this research adds valuable insights to the discourse on foreign aid, encouraging a shift towards approaches that enhance political independence and stability in developing countries.

Miller (2019) investigated the political economy of foreign aid in Southeast Asia, aiming to understand how aid influences political regimes and stability. Utilizing econometric modeling, the research analyzed data from multiple Southeast Asian countries to evaluate the correlation between different forms of aid and political outcomes. The findings revealed that while aid can stabilize regimes in the short term, it often hinders democratic transitions, especially when directed towards authoritarian governments. Miller argued that the political motivations behind aid distribution frequently overshadow development objectives, leading to a misalignment between aid and genuine democratic progress. The study recommended that donor countries should align their aid strategies with the promotion of democratic governance to achieve sustainable political stability. This approach would involve a careful assessment of the political context in recipient countries and a commitment to supporting democratic institutions. Furthermore, Miller emphasized the need for greater transparency in aid distribution processes to ensure that resources reach the intended beneficiaries and contribute to meaningful political reform. The implications of this research extend to policymakers in both donor and recipient countries, highlighting the importance of strategic alignment between aid objectives and political realities. Overall, Miller's work enriches the understanding of the complex dynamics between foreign aid and political stability, advocating for a more conscientious approach to aid distribution.

Smith (2021) employed cross-country regression analysis to evaluate the effects of aid on governance. The study aimed to identify how various forms of development assistance contribute to political stability in the region. The findings indicated a positive correlation between higher levels of development aid and improvements in institutional capacity, which subsequently led to enhanced political stability. Smith highlighted that countries receiving targeted development aid—especially in areas such as education and infrastructure—experienced significant advancements in governance and civic engagement. The study recommended that donor agencies should prioritize

funding for sectors that directly impact governance, thereby maximizing the potential for political stability. Moreover, Smith emphasized the importance of integrating local perspectives into the design and implementation of aid projects to ensure their relevance and effectiveness. The research underlines the necessity for continuous evaluation of development aid programs to adapt to changing political landscapes and emerging challenges. Overall, Smith's work contributes to the understanding of the mechanisms through which development aid can promote stability, advocating for a strategic approach that emphasizes local needs and capacity building.

Gomez (2021) assessed the role of foreign aid in post-conflict political stability in Colombia, employing a longitudinal study design. The primary purpose of the study was to evaluate how foreign assistance contributed to stability and governance in the aftermath of civil conflict. The findings indicated that well-targeted aid, particularly for peace-building initiatives, significantly contributed to reducing political violence and fostering social cohesion. Gomez noted that the effectiveness of foreign aid in post-conflict settings is contingent upon its alignment with local priorities and the inclusivity of aid distribution processes. The study recommended that post-conflict nations should prioritize foreign aid aimed at reconciliation and community development to enhance long-term stability. Furthermore, the research highlighted the need for ongoing support from donor countries to sustain peace efforts and promote democratic governance in the region. By focusing on rebuilding trust and enhancing local capacities, foreign aid can play a crucial role in stabilizing post-conflict societies. Gomez's findings underscore the importance of context-sensitive interventions in post-conflict environments and the potential of foreign aid to contribute to enduring political stability. Overall, this study offers valuable insights into the complex interplay between foreign aid and political stability in post-conflict contexts.

Mendoza (2020) utilized a survey-based approach to assess the relationship between foreign assistance and governance outcomes. The study aimed to determine how governance-focused aid influences political stability in the region, particularly in countries grappling with corruption and weak institutions. The findings revealed that governance-focused aid, aimed at reducing corruption and enhancing transparency, significantly improved political stability in recipient nations. Mendoza emphasized that the effectiveness of governance aid relies heavily on the commitment of both donor and recipient governments to prioritize reform and accountability. The study recommended expanding governance programs to enhance the effectiveness of aid and promote sustainable political stability. Furthermore, Mendoza highlighted the necessity for continuous monitoring and evaluation of governance aid initiatives to ensure that they adapt to evolving political contexts. The implications of this research extend to policymakers, suggesting that governance-focused aid can serve as a crucial tool for stabilizing political systems in Central America. Overall, Mendoza's work adds depth to the understanding of how targeted foreign assistance can foster political stability by addressing underlying governance challenges.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

RESULTS

Conceptual Gaps: There is a notable gap in the conceptual frameworks used to understand the nuances of foreign aid's impact on political stability. While Buchanan (2021), Taylor (2020), Munene (2020) and others examined various forms of aid and their political implications, their studies often relied on traditional theories such as dependency theory or simplistic cause-and-effect models. For instance, while Munene emphasized the detrimental effects of aid dependency on governance, there is a lack of alternative theoretical frameworks that explore the potential positive impacts of aid when effectively aligned with local governance structures (Munene, 2020). Additionally, the existing literature frequently overlooks the interplay between different types of aid (e.g., economic vs. military) and their compounded effects on political dynamics. For example, Taylor (2020) highlighted the potential for military aid to lead to authoritarianism, yet there is insufficient analysis on how this might interact with concurrent economic assistance strategies. The relationship between aid and political stability could benefit from more comprehensive models that integrate diverse factors such as cultural influences, historical contexts, and the evolving political landscape of recipient nations (Miller, 2019; Smith, 2021). Furthermore, there is a need for longitudinal studies that examine the long-term impacts of aid on governance beyond immediate political stability, focusing instead on resilience and adaptability in political systems over time.

Contextual Gaps: Another significant gap lies in the contextual analysis of foreign aid's impact across different political environments. Most studies tend to focus on specific regions or countries, such as Sub-Saharan Africa or Southeast Asia, without adequately considering the broader global context or variations within regions. For example, while Gomez (2021) studied the effects of foreign aid in post-conflict Colombia, there is limited research on how post-conflict aid strategies may differ across other countries facing similar challenges, such as those in Africa or the Middle East. Additionally, there is a lack of comparative studies that assess how various contextual factors—such as political history, existing governance structures, and civil society engagement—affect the efficacy of foreign aid in promoting political stability. The recommendation by Mendoza (2020) to expand governance programs highlights a gap in understanding how local governance contexts shape the effectiveness of such programs, suggesting a need for more granular analyses that account for local political cultures and institutions. Moreover, the relationship between aid and political stability is often portrayed in binary terms (i.e., aid as either beneficial or detrimental), which oversimplifies the complex realities on the ground. Exploring how context-specific factors influence the outcomes of aid interventions can provide a more nuanced understanding of their role in political stability.

Geographical Gaps: Geographically, the studies predominantly focus on specific regions, such as Sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America, with limited attention to other regions where foreign aid plays a significant role in political stability. For instance, the Middle East has seen substantial foreign aid flows, particularly in conflict-affected countries, yet it remains under-researched in terms of how such aid impacts governance and stability (Miller, 2019). Furthermore, the studies do not adequately address the disparities in political systems and aid dependency among countries within these regions. There is also a lack of comparative analysis between countries with different governance models, such as authoritarian regimes versus democracies, and how this affects the political stability outcomes of foreign aid. The implications of cultural and societal factors unique to specific regions are often neglected, which could provide critical insights into

how foreign aid is perceived and its subsequent effects on political stability. Expanding the geographical focus of research to include under-explored regions and conducting cross-regional comparisons can significantly enrich the understanding of foreign aid's diverse impacts on political stability.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

In conclusion, the effect of foreign aid on political stability in developing nations is a complex and multifaceted issue that warrants careful examination. While foreign aid has the potential to foster political stability by enhancing governance, building institutional capacity, and promoting social cohesion, it can also inadvertently entrench dependency and reinforce authoritarian regimes. The existing literature underscores the importance of aligning aid with local contexts and governance structures to ensure its effectiveness. Studies indicate that well-targeted aid initiatives, particularly those focused on capacity building and inclusive governance, can contribute positively to political stability. However, there remains a critical need for ongoing assessment of aid strategies, considering the evolving political landscapes and local needs of recipient countries. Furthermore, a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between different types of aid—economic, military, and humanitarian—is essential to develop comprehensive frameworks that account for varying political dynamics. Ultimately, the challenge lies in designing foreign aid programs that not only address immediate developmental needs but also promote sustainable political environments that empower local populations and enhance their engagement in governance processes. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from donor nations, policymakers, and researchers to develop evidence-based strategies that optimize the positive impacts of foreign aid on political stability in developing nations.

Recommendations

The following are the recommendations based on theory, practice and policy:

Theory

The recommendations on enhancing the effect of foreign aid on political stability in developing nations contribute to existing theoretical frameworks by integrating local capacity-building theories that emphasize sustainability and empowerment. By recognizing the importance of local agency, these recommendations advocate for a shift from traditional top-down approaches to more participatory models that involve local stakeholders in governance processes. This aligns with theories of democratic governance that stress the need for inclusive participation and accountability, highlighting that foreign aid should not only address immediate needs but also foster long-term institutional resilience. Furthermore, the integration of political economy analyses within aid frameworks acknowledges the complexity of local political dynamics, encouraging donors to adapt their strategies based on contextual realities rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

Practice

In practice, the recommendations underscore the necessity for donor agencies to implement robust monitoring and evaluation systems that ensure accountability and transparency in aid distribution. By engaging civil society organizations in oversight roles, aid projects can be better aligned with local needs and conditions, thereby enhancing their effectiveness. The emphasis on tailoring aid

strategies to the specific political contexts of recipient countries advocates for a more nuanced approach to foreign assistance that prioritizes participatory assessments involving local stakeholders. Additionally, fostering inclusive governance practices—such as community dialogues and participatory budgeting—can help build social cohesion and reduce political tensions. These practical applications serve to strengthen governance structures and empower local populations, ultimately contributing to greater political stability.

Policy

From a policy perspective, the recommendations advocate for the formulation of regulations that prioritize capacity-building initiatives within foreign aid frameworks, ensuring that funding is directed toward enhancing local governance capabilities. Policies mandating the inclusion of political context analyses in aid planning would enable donor countries to adapt their strategies to the evolving political realities of recipient nations. Furthermore, establishing accountability frameworks that require transparent reporting on the use and impact of aid can promote public trust and enhance the legitimacy of foreign assistance programs. Policies should also incentivize inclusive governance frameworks that facilitate the participation of marginalized groups in decision-making processes, thereby reinforcing political stability. By addressing these policy dimensions, the effectiveness of foreign aid can be significantly enhanced, contributing to sustainable development in developing nations.

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