

5. Global South – International Relations

India's advocating for stronger Global South solidarity and UN reforms, positioning itself as a leader for developing nations based on its historical role and recent G20 successes. This leadership push aims to create a more equitable world order, despite challenges from China's influence and India's own domestic constraints.

Understanding the "Global South"

The term "Global South" was coined in 1969 by American political activist Carl Oglesby to describe countries that have historically suffered from political and economic exploitation by the developed nations of the "Global North."

Geographic Scope – It generally refers to the countries of Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Oceania.

Key Characteristics – Most of these nations, home to about 85% of the world's population, experienced colonial rule. They typically exhibit lower levels of industrialization, higher income inequality, and significant external dependence. Economies are often dominated by agriculture and raw material exports, making them vulnerable to global market fluctuations. They face persistent challenges like inadequate infrastructure, limited healthcare and education, and political instability.

Significance of the Global South in the Modern World Order

The Global South is no longer just a group of developing nations; it has become a significant force shaping global dynamics.

Demographic Powerhouse – The region accounts for the majority of the world's population and is experiencing a demographic dividend, with a young and growing population driving labor force expansion and consumer demand.

Economic Hub – The Global South contributes approximately 40% of global trade and half of the world's manufacturing output. Its rising middle class is creating vast new markets.

Shaping a Multipolar World – These nations act as a crucial balancing force in the rivalry between major powers like the US and China, challenging the old North-South divide and promoting a more multipolar global order.



India's Role as a Voice for the Global South

India has emerged as a natural and trusted leader for the developing world for several key reasons –

Historical Legacy – From the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the Bandung Conference (1955) to the G77, India has a long history of championing the cause of developing nations. This aligns with its civilizational ethos of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' (the world is one family).

Relatable Development Journey – As the world's 4th largest and fastest-growing major economy, India's own transformation from an aid recipient to a development partner inspires and resonates with other Global South nations.

Advocacy for Global Justice – India is a vocal advocate for climate justice and the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR). Its leadership in renewable energy and initiatives like Lifestyle for Environment (LiFE) aligns with the priorities of the Global South.

Effective Diplomatic Leadership – During its G20 Presidency in 2023, India placed the Global South at the center of the agenda by hosting the Voice of the Global South Summit and successfully championing the inclusion of the African Union as a permanent G20 member.

Strategic Autonomy – India maintains an independent foreign policy, not aligned with any single power bloc. This makes it a trusted voice that can bridge divides between the West and the Global South.

Challenges to India's Leadership Role

Despite its strengths, India faces several challenges in solidifying its leadership position.

Domestic Gaps – India still grapples with significant domestic challenges like poverty, unemployment, and deficits in health and education.

Resource Constraints – Compared to China, India has a limited capacity to provide large-scale financial aid and infrastructure investment to other developing nations.

Geopolitical Pressures – India must carefully balance its relationships with the West, Russia, and China while simultaneously representing the interests of the Global South.

Competition with China – China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its vast financial resources give it significant leverage and influence across the Global South.

Regional Security Concerns – Ongoing tensions with Pakistan and China, along with the threat of terrorism, can divert India's focus and resources from its global leadership ambitions.

Key Indian Initiatives for the Global South

India has consistently backed its leadership claims with concrete actions and platforms.

Voice of the Global South Summit – An initiative that brought together over 125 countries to collectively voice their concerns on debt, climate change, food and energy security, and the digital divide.

UN Reforms Advocacy – India is at the forefront of the push for UN Security Council expansion to include permanent representation from Africa, Latin America, and Asia.

Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) – Sharing its successful digital models like UPI, Aadhaar, and CoWIN with other nations to foster digital transformation.

Vaccine Maitri – During the COVID-19 pandemic, India supplied vaccines to over 100 countries in the Global South, earning immense goodwill.

Development Partnerships – India has committed over \$30 billion in lines of credit and grants for infrastructure, connectivity, and agricultural projects across Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

Source – <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/external-affairs-minister-jaishankar-calls-for-stronger-global-south-solidarity-collective-push-for-united-nations-reform/article70087554.ece>