India and the Global South

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Introduction

India's relationship with the Global South has deep roots in shared histories, common struggles, and mutual aspirations for development and self-reliance. As one of the largest and most influential countries in the Global South, India's role has evolved from being a leader in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) to becoming a pivotal player in contemporary South-South cooperation.

India's partnership with the Global South was propelled to a whole new level by Prime Minister Narendra Modi when he organized the first Voice of the Global South Summit (VOGSS) on 12-13th January, 2023 within a fortnight of India taking over the Presidency of the G20. This Summit was followed by another later during the year and the third one in 2024.

VOGSS is India's endeavor to provide a common platform to deliberate on the concerns, interests and priorities of developing countries, exchange ideas and solutions, and unite in voice and purpose in forging development solutions.

Background

The concept of the Global South encompasses regions in Latin America, Africa, Asia, and Oceania, representing developing nations with shared historical contexts of colonization and economic marginalization. India's role within the Global South is pivotal, leveraging its growing economic power, democratic framework, and strategic geopolitical positioning to advocate for equitable global governance.

India’s economic cooperation with the Global South is characterized by trade, investment, and development assistance. Trade relations have seen substantial growth, particularly with African and Latin American countries. For instance, India’s trade with Africa surged from $5 billion in 2001 to $90 billion in 2020, making India Africa’s third-largest trading partner. Similarly, India’s trade with Latin America reached $50 billion in 2020, driven by oil imports, and exports of pharmaceuticals, automobiles, and engineering goods.

Investment is another critical aspect of India’s economic engagement. Indian companies have made significant investments in sectors such as telecommunications, pharmaceuticals, agriculture, and mining across the Global South. In Africa, Indian enterprises have invested over $50 billion, creating jobs and contributing to infrastructure development. In Latin America, Indian investments in sectors like IT and renewable energy are on the rise, promoting sustainable development.

Moreover, India’s development assistance programs underscore its role as a partner in progress. Through the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) program, India has provided training, capacity building, and technical assistance to over 160 countries. This program covers a wide range of areas, including healthcare, education, agriculture, and information technology, thereby contributing to human resource development in the Global South.

In recent years, India’s foreign policy has increasingly prioritized the Global South. The “India-Africa Forum Summit,” the “Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation” (FIPIC), and the India-CARICOM Summits are notable examples of India’s structured engagements aimed at deepening ties with Africa, the Pacific Island nations and South America respectively. These platforms facilitate dialogue, development cooperation, and investment partnerships.

Furthermore, India's leadership in the International Solar Alliance (ISA) exemplifies its role in promoting sustainable development through South-South cooperation. The ISA, an initiative launched by India and France in 2015, aims to mobilize resources and promote solar energy adoption in tropical countries. With 121 member countries, many of which are from the Global South, the ISA underscores India's commitment to addressing climate change and promoting renewable energy.

The Voice of the Global South Summit (VOGSS)

VOGSS provides a platform for emerging economies and nations from the Global South to express their unique perspectives, challenges, and innovative solutions on the global stage. Initiated with the goal to amplify the voices of low and middle-income countries, the Summit leverages its influence to call upon developed economies to re-orient their approach towards the underdeveloped world.

The Three VOGSSs

India convened the 1st VOGSS, a one-of-a-kind event, in the early weeks of India's G20 Presidency in January 2023 in virtual format, spread across 10 sessions, to focus international attention on priorities, perspectives and concerns of the developing world. PM Modi presided over the Inaugural and Concluding Leaders' sessions. India was able to channelize the inputs received in these sessions into the deliberations and discourse of the G20.

Following on the success of the first VOGSS, India hosted the 2nd VOGSS on 17 November 2023, under the theme – 'Together, For Everyone's Growth, With Everyone's Trust'. The theme was an extension of India's philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam and PM

Modi's governance ideology of ''Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas. '' The key focus of the Summit was threefold:

- To share the outcomes and progress achieved in the priorities of the Global South during India's G-20 Presidency.
- To amplify the voice of the Global South and deliberate on the way forward to achieve their common objectives.
- To sustain the momentum of exchange and sharing of ideas and best practices between our countries, generated towards our common aspiration of a more inclusive, representative and progressive world order.

Both these editions of the Summit saw participation of over 100 countries from the Global South.

The 3rd VOGSS, with the overarching theme of "An Empowered Global South for a Sustainable Future", served as a platform to expand discussions held in the previous Summits on a range of complex challenges that continue to affect the world, such as conflicts, food and energy security crises, climate change, debt burdens - all of which disproportionately affect developing countries in a severe manner. At the Summit, the countries of the Global South deliberated on challenges, priorities, and solutions for the Global South, particularly in the developmental domain. The Summit witnessed the participation of 173 dignitaries from 123 countries, including 21 HOS/G, 34 Foreign Ministers and 118 Ministers and Vice Ministers. This was a testimony to India's sincerity and commitment in advancing the collective developmental journey of the Global South, and priority accorded by PM Modi to engaging with the Global South.

PM Modi put forward a proposal for a comprehensive Global Development Compact comprising four elements:

- Trade for development;
- Capacity building for sustainable growth;
- Technology sharing; and,
- Project specific concessional finance and grants.

With participation of countries representing over 60% of the world's population, the Summit reinforced the centrality of the Global South in the collective pursuit of a future that is inclusive for all.

A significant achievement of India's support and promotion of interests of the Global South was the admittance of the African Union as a full Member of the G20 on the first day of India's Presidency of the G20 on 9th September, 2023.

Conclusion

India's geopolitical dynamics with the Global South have evolved significantly over the years, reflecting its growing economic power, strategic interests, and aspirations to be a major player on the global stage. India's proactive engagement with the Global South underscores its commitment to a multipolar world where developing nations have a significant voice in global affairs. Through sustained efforts in diplomacy, economic cooperation, and strategic partnerships, India is poised to play a pivotal role in the evolving dynamics of the Global South.

As the world navigates complex challenges such as climate change, economic inequality, and geopolitical shifts, India's role as a partner to the Global South is poised to become increasingly significant.

As both a leader and a partner, India continues to play a crucial role in shaping the future of the Global South. Through sustained cooperation, mutual respect, and shared aspirations, India and the Global South can

collectively navigate the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century.
