



## INDIA'S ECONOMIC CHALLENGES IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBAL SOUTH COUNTRIES

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### ABSTRACT:

India warm hosted the 1st Voice of Global South countries Summit in month of January 2023 and the 2nd edition was held in November 2023, both were in virtual format. The Voice of Global South Summit is an extension of India's philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, or "One Earth, One Family, One Future" to the international arena.

Key Highlights of the 3rd VOGSS

Participation: 123 countries (China & Pakistan not invited)

Theme: An Empowered Global South for a Sustainable Future.

India has proposed a comprehensive and human-centric "Global Development Compact" to address the rising debt of the developing countries for the Global South. India will work to provide affordable generic medicines, share experiences in natural farming with Global South countries. India will also launch a special fund of \$2.5 million to boost trade promotion activities, and \$ 1 million fund for capacity building in in trade policy and trade negotiation.

### KEYWORDS:

**INDIA, GLOBAL SOUTH, VOGSS, ECONOMIC CHALLENGES, COUNTRIES, NATURAL FARMING.**

### INTRODUCTION

#### GLOBAL SOUTH

It refers to technically and socially less developed countries which are located in Southern Hemisphere, primarily in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Brandt Report proposed a division between North and South countries based on various parameters such as technological advancement, GDP etc.

Challenges faced by Global South [1,2,3]

Underrepresentation in global forums: E.g. Exclusion of African and Latin America from the UN Security Council's permanent membership. High Public Debt: E.g. As per UNCTAD's 'A world of debt Report 2024', public debt in developing countries is rising at twice the rate of that in developed countries. Obsolete global governance and financial institutions: E.g. dysfunctional WTO's appellate dispute settlement mechanism, under-representation in Bretton Woods Institutions such as World Bank and IMF.

3Disproportionate vulnerability to climate change. E.g. As per WMO's 'State of the Climate in the South-West Pacific 2023 Report' Pacific Islands are at higher risk due to the increasing sea level despite accounting for merely 0.02% of global emissions. Divergence from Global North: E.g. lack of consensus over interpretation of democracy, human rights, and agenda for climate governance etc. Moreover, geopolitical conflicts of Global North impacts the Global South. E.g. Russia-Ukraine conflict has led to inflation in food and oil prices

#### SIGNIFICANCE OF GLOBAL SOUTH FOR INDIA

International influence: The Global South is an important support for India's international influence and its economic transformation and development. Strategic consideration: Relations with the Global South is an important part of India's "multidirectional alignment" strategy. It also helps to offset China's influence.

Economic development: Global South can provide abundant resources and provide a vast market for the export of Indian products. How is India positioning itself as a voice for Global South? Enhancing connectivity and economic inter-linkages: By undertaking projects ranging from large scale infrastructure development to community related projects in various sectors, including health, housing, environment and education. Extending financial, budgetary and humanitarian assistance to partner countries to aid them in mitigating economic challenges and overcome crises. Capacity building and emerging as 1st responder of the Global South. E.g. India-UN Capacity Building Initiative, Vaccine Maitri initiative during Covid-19. Leading the Global Climate Agenda: E.g. championing International Solar Alliance (ISA) & Coalition for Disaster Resilience (CDRI), supporting Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) Advocacy of issues relevant for Global South: E.g. The induction of the African Union into the G20. Reforming multilateral institutions: E.g. demand for broadening of the UNSC's permanent membership. Alternative Mechanisms on issues like democracy and human rights: E.g. based on Panchsheel,

Gujral Doctrine and Principle of Non- Aligned Movement.

## CHALLENGES FOR INDIA IN LEADING THE GLOBAL SOUTH

**Diverse Interests:** Global South is a diverse region with varying economic, political, and social interests which makes it difficult to align into a unified stance. **Competition with China:** China's competition and interference in development finance, infrastructure, trade, delivery of projects etc. E.g. BRI, cheque book diplomacy. **Diplomatic Challenge:** Balancing strategic partnerships with powers such as USA, Russia while trying to represent Global South can be diplomatically challenging. Moreover, it may undermine its credibility as it might be seen as a tilt away from traditional Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) principles.

**Limited Comprehensive National Strength:** India's limited national strength and poor manufacturing industry, coupled with low S&T innovation and labour quality, pose challenges in addressing the complexities of the Global South.

**Issue with energy transition:** India faces criticism for its reliance on fossil fuels and challenges in meeting its own climate commitments. E.g. Western Countries criticized India after it opposed a commitment to "phase out" coal at COP 26.

**India's Initiatives showcasing advocacy for Global South Social Impact Fund:** India will contribute \$25 million for accelerating Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) in Global South.[4,5,6]

**Global South Young Diplomat Forum:** Launched to promote education and capacity building.

**Induction of African Union into G20:** As a permanent member during India's G20 Presidency. **Vision of Aarogya Maitri:** One World-One Health is India's mission for health security. E.g. Recently, India's first overseas Jan Aushadi Kendra was opened in Mauritius as India transitions from a balancing to a leading power, it should leverage its rich cultural ethos like "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" to unite Global South countries. By bridging the digital divide, supporting disaster-resilient infrastructure, and advocating for an inclusive, equitable international order, India can amplify their collective voice on global platforms.

## DISCUSSION

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, at the inauguration of the Third Voice of Global South Summit (VoGSS), attempted to rebalance the terms of South-South engagement with a new conceptual framework that he described as a "Development Compact". The idea behind the concept is to leverage five different modalities of engagement in a harmonized manner, where one reinforces the other. These are capacity building, technology sharing, trade for development, grants and the most important, concessional finance. If implemented well, India's Development Compact would set a new baseline for wider engagement with the Global South. Due to imbalances in the modalities of engagement, a large section of the Global South has ended up in indebtedness of distressing proportions. The

figures from UNCTAD (2023) say it all: Developing countries' public debt in 2023 was \$29 trillion; developing countries net interest payments on public debt was \$847 billion; 54 developing countries spend more than 10 per cent of their revenues on net interest payments; and developing countries experienced a negative net resource transfer in 2022. Here, it is also worth recalling that the debt crisis has been further accentuated by the continued failure of the OECD countries in meeting their globally agreed UN target of 1970 of providing 0.7 percent of GNP as ODA (official development assistance); so as their commitment on climate change for \$100 billion. It is extremely important for the Global South to go back to basics and revisit the idea of development which disappeared from the global policy landscape. Led by Reaganism and Thatcherism's approach to finance driven globalization and regimentation of GATT to WTO, the transition completely squeezed out the policy space for developing countries. This, in a way, reinforced the apprehensions that Raul Prebisch and others came up with in the form of the centre-periphery theory. Since the collapse of Washington consensus, VOGSS has given new hope for discussing development in its new incarnation for exploring alternative pathways for economic growth, social inclusion and environmental sustenance.[7,8,9]

In this respect, mutual sharing of development experiences and insights on policy making would play a crucial role in evolving new choices. With this year's theme of "Empowering Global South for sustainable future", the summit has focused on sharing each other's experiences, insights and possibilities for evolving an alternative development paradigm. The idea is to have this development narrative based on Southern experiences and perspectives, addressing southern hopes and aspirations.

There are five broad possibilities from the recent development initiatives in India that may be adapted for locally relevant ecosystems in the Global South. The first is in the realm of sustainability, wherein the emphasis is on Lifestyle for Environment (LiFE), reenergizing SDGs and promoting renewable energy through rooftop solar panels and solar farms. The second is the area of promoting health security where the driving force for India is around the concept of "One World One Health". Here, India's contribution for Aarogya Maitri may be recalled. The assistance that India provided to Africa and the Pacific Island countries by building hospitals and Jan Aushadhi Kendras, assumes significance. The third is India's emergence as the first responder in humanitarian crises, be that in Papua New Guinea, Kenya, Gaza and Ukraine. This highlights the effort that India has been making to prepare other countries to bring in disaster resilience and necessary institutional mechanisms for quick, effective and efficient responses. The fourth relates to promoting financial inclusion and last mile connectivity to be achieved through UPI and Digital Public Infrastructure. India has already signed an agreement with 12 countries for the promotion of DPI. The fifth is the need for strengthening interlinkages in the field of education, skills

and capacity building. For sharing India's development experience, institutional frameworks would play a vital role in connecting various entities and people. At the VoGSS, the PM recalled India launching the Global South Centre of Excellence, called DAKSHIN, for knowledge promotion, experience sharing and evolving programmes for skills and capacity building. The role of such institutions is to promote a two way flow of knowledge and experiences. A pluralistic perspective would enrich the Global South vision of development by bringing in strategies for overcoming challenges specific to ensuring access, equity and inclusion. These institutions may facilitate the co-creation of knowledge.

Apart from the Development Compact, some of the other announcements are also significant, as they have been targeted to bridge the gaps where they are clearly evident. Policy impact analysis and trade performance have been weak links in the development journey of the Global South. Keeping this in mind, a special fund for capacity building with \$2.5 million and \$1 million for training in trade policy making has been announced. India has also announced setting up of a Social Impact Fund with an initial contribution of \$25 million. According to an RIS study, India currently extends around \$7.5 billion annually to various partner countries in the Global South.[10,11,12] Prime Minister Modi's emphasis on the Global South to come together for voicing their common concerns and also bringing in positive approaches for global solutions is an important call that should be heard earnestly by the Global South community. VOGSS as a platform to discuss some of these issues is an important initiative in a world where uncertainty and vulnerability have multiplied for democratically elected governments.

The emphasis on de-stabilizing designs through terrorism and active engagement of tools to promote secessionist forces and sectional violence, assumes great significance given the recent events in Bangladesh, whose interim government's chief advisor Muhammad Yunus was also attending the session.

## RESULTS

The 21st century presents unprecedented challenges and opportunities for the developing world, often referred to as the Global South. This diverse group of nations, encompassing Asia, Africa, and Latin America, faces issues like poverty, inequality, climate change, and unequal access to resources. However, the Global South also boasts a burgeoning young population, rich natural resources, and a growing economic footprint. In this context, India's emergence as a potential "Voice" for the Global South presents a compelling narrative for international cooperation and a more equitable global order.

### INDIA'S RISE AND THE GLOBAL SOUTH

India's economic growth story has been remarkable in recent decades. It is now the world's fifth-largest economy by nominal GDP and boasts a rapidly expanding middle class. This economic rise, coupled with its historical experience as a developing nation, positions India uniquely

to champion the concerns of the Global South. Here's why India's voice matters:

**Shared Development Challenges:** India understands the development struggles of other nations in the Global South, having faced similar challenges in its own development trajectory. This shared experience fosters empathy and a collaborative approach to addressing issues like poverty, hunger, and access to education and healthcare.

**Economic Powerhouse:** India's economic growth and rise as a major trading nation give it a stronger voice on the global stage. This allows India to advocate for fairer trade practices, address the concerns of developing nations in international economic forums, and promote South-South cooperation, where developing countries collaborate for mutual benefit.

**Democratic Credentials:** India's vibrant democracy and long history of non-alignment position it as a neutral voice in the often-polarized world order. This allows India to bridge divides and build consensus on critical global issues.

### THE "VOICE" OF THE GLOBAL SOUTH INITIATIVE

India's leadership role in amplifying the concerns of the Global South was exemplified by its hosting of the first and second "Voice of the Global South Summit" in 2023. This initiative brought together leaders from developing nations to discuss a wide range of issues, including:

**Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** The summits fostered collaboration on achieving the UN's SDGs, a critical agenda for the Global South, focusing on poverty eradication, food security, and environmental sustainability.

**Climate Change:** The summits addressed the disproportionate impact of climate change on developing countries and advocated for equitable access to clean energy technologies and climate finance.

**Global Governance Reform:** The summits called for reforms in international institutions like the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the United Nations Security Council to ensure better representation and decision-making power for the Global South.

**South-South Cooperation:** The summits promoted collaboration between developing countries in areas like infrastructure development, technology transfer, and knowledge sharing.[13,14,15]

### CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Despite its potential, India's leadership role as the "Voice" of the Global South faces challenges:

**Internal Development Issues:** India itself continues to grapple with poverty, inequality, and infrastructure deficiencies. Addressing these domestic challenges will strengthen India's credibility and leadership on the global stage.

**Diversity of the Global South:** The Global South is not a monolithic entity. There are significant economic and

political differences among member nations. Building consensus and addressing these diverse interests will be crucial for the success of the "Voice" initiative.

**Geopolitical Realities:** The current geopolitical landscape, with competing power blocs, can make it difficult for the Global South to present a unified voice. India needs to navigate these complexities effectively.

### THE ROAD AHEAD

Despite the challenges, India's potential to champion the Global South remains significant. Here's what India can do to solidify its role as a leading voice:

**Focus on Domestic Development:** Addressing internal challenges like poverty and infrastructure bottlenecks will strengthen India's international standing. **Promote South-South Cooperation:** India can leverage its economic and technological prowess to foster collaboration with other developing nations. This could include sharing best practices, technology transfer, and joint infrastructure projects.

**Bridge the Divide:** India can act as a bridge between the Global South and developed nations, fostering dialogue and promoting a rules-based international order that benefits all.

**Invest in Soft Power:** Building a strong narrative around India's development story and its commitment to the Global South will be crucial for garnering international support. India's emergence as the "Voice" of the Global South presents a unique opportunity to create a more just and equitable world order. By addressing its own challenges, championing South-South cooperation, and advocating for the interests of developing nations, India can play a pivotal role in shaping a future that benefits all.

### THE SUCCESS OF THE "VOICE" REQUIRES COLLECTIVE ACTION

While India's leadership is crucial, the success of the "Voice" of the Global South initiative hinges on collective action. Here's what other developing nations can do:

**Unity in Diversity:** Despite differences, developing countries need to find common ground on critical issues and present a united front in international forums.

**Sharing Best Practices:** Developing nations can learn from each other's successes and challenges by sharing best practices in areas like governance, poverty alleviation, and economic development.

**Building Regional Partnerships:** Strong regional blocs within the Global South, like the African Union or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), can amplify their collective voice on the international stage.

### A NEW NARRATIVE FOR A NEW WORLD ORDER

The "Voice" of the Global South initiative presents a compelling narrative for a new world order based on cooperation, inclusivity, and shared prosperity. Here are some potential benefits:

**A More Equitable Global Trade System:** Developing nations

can advocate for fairer trade rules and increased access to global markets, promoting economic growth and job creation.

**Sustainable Development for All:** Collaboration on issues like climate change and resource management can create a more sustainable future for all nations.

**A Strengthened Multilateral System:** A more robust voice for the Global South can lead to reforms in international institutions, ensuring they are more representative and responsive to the needs of all member states.

**Case Studies: India's Solutions to Development Challenges.**

India's development journey offers valuable lessons for other developing nations tackling similar challenges. Here are 10 case studies exploring how India has addressed specific obstacles:

**The Green Revolution (1960s-70s):** This initiative focused on introducing high-yield crop varieties, improved irrigation methods, and increased use of fertilizers. It resulted in significant agricultural production growth, leading to food security and reduced poverty in rural areas. **Lessons Learned:** Investing in agricultural research, improving infrastructure (irrigation), and providing access to inputs (seeds, fertilizers) can drive agricultural productivity.

**The White Revolution (1970s- onwards):** This program focused on promoting milk production through cooperative societies and dairy infrastructure development. It empowered rural women, created jobs, and improved nutritional outcomes.

**Lessons Learned:** Cooperatives can empower local communities and promote economic development. Investment in infrastructure aids in resource management and processing. [16,17,18]

**Microfinance Movement (1990s- onwards):** This initiative provides small loans and financial services to low-income entrepreneurs, especially women. It empowers individuals, fosters self-employment, and promotes financial inclusion.

**Lessons Learned:** Microfinance can alleviate poverty by enabling individuals to start microbusinesses and manage their finances.

**Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) (2005):** This program guarantees 100 days of wage employment in manual unskilled work for rural households. It provides social security, promotes rural infrastructure development, and mitigates poverty during droughts or agricultural off-seasons.

**Lessons Learned:** Social safety net programs can reduce poverty by guaranteeing minimum income and promoting rural development through infrastructure projects.

**Aadhaar Project (2010- onwards):** This initiative provides a unique identification number to all Indian residents. It improves transparency in government service delivery, reduces corruption, and facilitates financial inclusion by linking bank accounts and subsidies.

**Lessons Learned:** Implementing digital identity systems can improve service delivery, reduce corruption, and streamline financial transactions. **Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Mission) (2014- onwards):** This nationwide campaign aims to improve sanitation and hygiene across India. It focuses on building toilets, promoting behavioral change, and managing solid waste effectively.

**Lessons Learned:** Public awareness campaigns and infrastructure development are crucial for achieving sanitation goals across large populations.

**Digital India Initiative (2015- onwards):** This program aims to improve digital literacy, access to affordable internet, and e-governance services. It has revolutionized access to information, communication, and government services in rural areas.

**Lessons Learned:** Investing in digital infrastructure and promoting digital literacy can bridge the digital divide and empower rural communities.

**Jan Dhan Yojana (People's Money Scheme) (2014-onwards):** This financial inclusion scheme aims to provide basic bank accounts to all Indian citizens. It promotes financial savings, facilitates access to government benefits, and encourages cashless transactions. **Lessons Learned:** Financial inclusion programs can improve access to banking services for the under banked population, enabling savings and promoting financial security.

**Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (Prime Minister's Cooking Gas Scheme) (2016-onwards):** This initiative provides subsidized LPG connections to low-income rural families. It promotes cleaner cooking fuel, reduces health problems due to indoor air pollution, and empowers women by reducing dependence on traditional cooking methods. **Lessons Learned:** Subsidy programs can encourage adoption of clean and efficient cooking fuels, improving health outcomes and empowering women. **Skill India Mission (2015- onwards):** This program aims to create a skilled workforce by providing vocational training and skill development programs. It bridges the skill gap and improves employability for young people, increasing their earning potential.

**Lessons Learned:** Investing in skill development programs is crucial to prepare the workforce for the changing job market and improve employability rates. By studying these case studies, developing nations can gain valuable insights into how India has addressed its development challenges. While each nation has its unique context, these examples provide a foundation for creating effective policies and programs to promote economic growth, social development, and poverty reduction.

### INDIA'S "VOICE" AND THE FUTURE

India's rise as the "Voice" of the Global South presents a compelling narrative for a future built on collaboration, inclusivity, and shared prosperity. However, this journey is not without its challenges. Addressing internal development issues, fostering South cooperation, and navigating a complex geopolitical landscape will be crucial

for India to solidify its leadership role.

The success of this initiative hinges not just on India, but on collective action by all developing nations. By bridging divides, finding common ground, and sharing best practices, the Global South can create a more unified front on the world stage. Technology, a double-edged sword, requires careful consideration to ensure equitable access for all nations.

The potential benefits of a strong "Voice" for the Global South are vast. A more equitable global trade system, sustainable development for all, and a reformed international order with greater representation for developing nations are all within reach.

India's journey, documented in the case studies of its own development struggles and triumphs, offers valuable lessons for other nations. By learning from India's experiences, developing countries can design effective strategies to tackle their own challenges.

Ultimately, India's "Voice" of the Global South represents more than just a call for change; it's a call to action. It's a call for developing nations to work together, share experiences, and advocate for a future where their voices are heard and their concerns are addressed. As India continues on this path, its success will depend not solely on its own leadership, but on the collective will of all nations in the Global South to forge a more just and equitable world order for all.

### CONCLUSION

The Centre for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP) hosted the 22nd edition of its Foreign Policy and Security Tiffin Talk series on 'India's Quest for Global South:

Challenges and Opportunities' with C. Raja Mohan, Non-Resident Distinguished Fellow, Asia Society Policy Institute. The speaker questioned the analytical relevance of the term 'Global South' and suggested the need for an alternative frame of reference to study the complexity of the current world order. The discussion explored India's strategic role within the framework of a 'Global South' and the implications for regional and global dynamics. Participants also shed light on how a research agenda on the Global South can be developed from an Indian perspective. The discussants included Shivshankar Menon, Distinguished Fellow, CSEP and Malancha Chakrabarty, Senior Fellow and Deputy Director (Research), Observer Research Foundation. The discussion was moderated by Veda Vaidyanathan, Associate Fellow, CSEP. Participants included officials from various embassies and missions, scholars from leading think tanks and universities from India and abroad. The Tiffin Talk series features scholars presenting their recent, evidence-based research to peers and practitioners.[19] This series of closed-door seminars seeks to facilitate dialogue between researchers and policymakers on India's foreign and security affairs.

### DEMYSTIFYING THE GLOBAL SOUTH

The speaker initiated the conversation by discussing the origin and evolution of the term 'Global South.' Referring

to it as a post-colonial movement that offered an alternative to the Western-led order and was abandoned as individual nationalisms grew. Re-emerging now into mainstream international discourse after a period of academic hibernation, it was argued that the idea of the 'Global South,' is increasingly outdated in the contemporary world. Describing it as an 'emotionally rich' concept that appeals to a desire for political and economic equity, the speaker warned against idealizing a harmonious past or a false sense of unity within the non-Western world.

Encompassing 120 countries that vary greatly in economic interests, development trajectories, resource endowments, and political landscapes, the speaker underlined how the term is intellectually elusive. Additionally, it was advised that the renewed interest in a 'Global South' must not be viewed as divorced from its underlying political and strategic motivations. The discussants acknowledged the oversimplification inherent in the North-South binary but recognized some practical utility of the term. Particularly in areas like climate action, trade policy, and technology, where the Global South has remained relevant and in broad agreement. Arguments were also made for a more nuanced understanding of the Global South, advocating for selective engagement based on economic considerations rather than ideological alignment.

### INDIA'S STRATEGIC POSITIONING WITHIN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

A significant part of the seminar focused on India's strategic positioning within the Global South. India's desire to assert itself as one of the leading voices of the Global South comes at a time when other actors are competing for influence in the developing world. Participants further discussed the complexity of India's position, emphasising its dual role as a developing economy as well as a strategic partner to the developed world. They noted the identity conundrum that comes with India's ambition to become a major power given its historical position in anti-hegemonic movements.

The scholars stated that it is essential to examine what India's rise in the global order signifies and explore opportunities to enhance its footprint in the non-Western world. Further, the importance of a balanced and inclusive strategy in asserting India's position globally was highlighted. A suggestion was for India to capitalize on its unique position by fostering triangular cooperation between Western powers and other developing states. Participants concurred that India must play to its strengths when engaging with the non-Western world, rather than mimic the strategies of other major powers.

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESEARCH

One of the main objectives of the seminar was to initiate a discussion on how the Global South could be studied from an Indian perspective. Participants deliberated on ways to develop this research agenda, with a pronounced emphasis on economic and strategic partnerships. They underscored the need to investigate various aspects of India's

engagement with the Global South like the effectiveness of its aid policies and Lines of Credit. One of the discussants proposed studying the perspectives of aid-recipient nations as a crucial area of focus. This would help craft an Indian strategy that delineates successful approaches and areas needing improvement in India's initiatives. Questions were also raised about the role of Indian capital and military abroad, the possibilities for expansion and what an Indian developmental agency could look like. Additionally, there were suggestions to examine private sector involvement in development projects abroad, and how they can be leveraged to bolster South-South cooperation. The session concluded with participants noting the ongoing work on the Global South and the potential to explore new avenues for research.[20]

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