



India in the Global South Discourse: Aspirational Leadership, Strategic Engagements, and Domestic Policy Challenges

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Abstract

The term “Global South” refers to emerging countries with shared histories of colonisation and economic marginalisation, including those in Latin America, Africa, Asia, and Oceania. India plays a crucial role in the Global South, using its democratic system, expanding economic power, and advantageous geopolitical location to promote just global governance. India participates in many international organisations, including the G20, BRICS, and the Non-Aligned Movement, to address poverty, climate change, and sustainable development challenges. However, problems still exist at the domestic level, such as managing various socioeconomic inequalities at home, negotiating complicated international relations, and striking a balance between environmental sustainability and economic growth. Initiatives like the International Solar Alliance and development assistance programs highlight India’s commitment to South-South cooperation and its engagement with the Global South. India’s capacity to resolve these issues while promoting equitable and sustainable development will determine the course of its future involvement in the Global South. This research paper explores India’s capability to lead the global south while promoting equitable, just, multipolar governance at the international level and national progress towards developed India. It is an attempt to critically analyse India’s position in the Global South from a third-world perspective and its domestic capabilities to fulfil its global aspirations. The methodology for this research paper is descriptive, historical and analytical. This analytical manuscript finds India’s potential in the Global South convincing to lead the Global South while promoting South-South Cooperation. It also suggests emphasising constructive solutions of domestic affairs and promoting equitable and inclusive growth.



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1. Introduction

The idea of development tries to cover a wide range of intricate social transformation processes. It alludes to a long-term historical endeavour of the liberation of peoples and nations from the lingering effects of colonialism, poverty, oppression, and underdevelopment, and it carries meanings of enormous promise and optimism regarding human advancement to billions of people. Pursuing these historical developments through a vision of mutual benefit and solidarity among the world system’s disadvantaged has made South-South cooperation a central organising principle and a set of actions. It expresses the optimism that the impoverished can develop by helping one another and that the global order will change to reflect their shared interests in the robust global North (Gray & Gills, 2016). With a population of about 1.4 billion, India is a democratic market economy with a population

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equal to that of all 78 Western democracies. With 28 States and 8 Union Territories, 23 official languages, and 456 living languages, India is far more diverse than the European Union (EU), which has 28 countries and 24 official languages. Compared to these higher-middle- or high-income countries, India is still a lower-middle-income country. India's population has surpassed China's, and the country now has the fifth largest economy in the world due to its vast population and relatively low middle income. India must capitalise on its comparative advantage to become a high-income nation in 25 years and an upper-middle-income nation in 10 years. India will become the third-largest economy in the world in a few years thanks to the ongoing economic reforms and the institutional and economic reforms planned for the upcoming years. These reforms will maintain the per capita GDP growth rate of 7% during the 2020s. The difficulty lies in expanding and intensifying these reforms to improve the calibre of our human capital and capitalise on emerging global economic and political trends, ensuring rapid development is maintained for three decades (NITI AYO, 2024).

As part of its dynamic foreign policy under Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his third term, Bharat (the term connotes anti-colonial tune and will be used interchangeably with India) is poised to usher in a new era in forming the Global South agenda. The country has committed to a "new chapter of big decisions" to achieve a Viksit Bharat (Developed Bharat) by 2047. Building on the achievements of the previous ten years, this next stage will solidify Bharat's position as a global force by strategic expansion, alliances, and aggressive diplomacy in the geopolitical arena. Modi's goal of making India the third-largest economy in the world by 2027 will spur several fundamental economic reforms, including advancing energy transitions, developing sustainable digital infrastructure, and strengthening Bharat's ability to withstand shocks from global financial fluctuations. These actions, which are not only economic policies but also instruments of soft power, enhance Bharat's reputation as a location for foreign collaboration and investment in the eyes of both developed and emerging Global South nations. Pursuing permanent membership in the UNSC, which represents the Global South agenda and is a desire India has had for a while as evidence of its standing on the global scene, is another priority that India's foreign policy regime will emphasize. It will need to expand on its role as chair of the G20 and leader of the Global South, where it created intermediary connections between the interests of developed and Global South nations. At the same time, Modi's government will increase its efforts to address China's threat by employing cooperative and competitive convergence strategies.

With a network of logistics firms, shipping services, airlines, and internet cables connecting all the nations on the Indian Ocean's borders, the Gulf, and its islands, India can develop into a hub for the Indian Ocean region. A government-funded and subsidised Indian Ocean Logistics firm might promote and coordinate these. Southeast and West Asia will have more options as a result of India's increasing involvement in the Indo-Pacific. Participants came from East Africa, West Asia, the Indian Ocean, South Asia, and island nations. India may create a "Gondwana Common Market (GCM)." This organisation may have unique market agreements with the GCC and ASEAN by 2050. The process started with announcing the IndiaMiddle EastEurope corridor (IMEC) and the Free Trade Agreement with the United Arab Emirates (Virmani, 2024).

Unrest in Myanmar has disrupted the Trans-Asian highway and the Trans-Asian railway, which connect Vietnam with West Asia via India. These will eventually be realised by 2035, having been envisioned by Asian nations and approved by ESCAP decades earlier. With major Southern highways and rail routes connecting Bangladesh and Myanmar to Thailand and Malaysia, the Northeast region of India will be at the intersection of EastWest traffic. With a North-South rail route connecting Chabahar with Russia via Afghanistan and Central Asia, Afghanistan may develop into another logistical hub. Increased connection will make it easier for all South Asian nations to contribute to India's development (Virmani, 2024).

2. India's Historical Ties with Global South

India and the Global South have a long history together, have faced similar challenges, and share a desire for growth and independence. From being a forerunner in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) to being a key factor in modern South-South cooperation, India has developed into one of the Global South's biggest and most powerful nations. A combination of historical solidarity, economic cooperation, and diplomatic efforts to address shared issues and promote mutual development define this relationship. India's involvement with the Global South stems from both its own colonial history and the larger anti-colonial movement that characterised a large portion of the 20th century. Countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America developed a sense of solidarity due to their shared experience with colonialism. Indian leaders who were outspoken supporters of decolonisation and the rights of oppressed peoples worldwide were Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi.

The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) was founded in 1961 largely because of Nehru's devotion to anti-imperialism and his understanding of internationalism. NAM offered a forum for recently independent nations to express their issues and goals without siding with the US or the USSR, the two Cold War superpowers. This movement was founded on non-interference, peaceful coexistence, and respect for one another's sovereignty. India's current political, economic, and social climate has been significantly impacted by its colonial past under British control. Early in the 17th century, the British East India Company made its first foray into India, progressively expanding its dominance over the Indian subcontinent. The British Crown took direct control by the middle of the 19th century, which resulted in the creation of the British Raj, which persisted until India attained independence in 1947.

India was affected by colonial control in many ways. In terms of the economy, it resulted in the deindustrialisation of India's traditional industries and the British Empire's exploitation of its resources. Politically, it led to the imposition of British legal and administrative structures as well as the repression of Indian self-governance. Significant social changes resulted from it, such as the adoption of Western education and emerging a middle class that would later be vital to the fight for independence (Bayly, 1988). India's fight for independence was characterised by several uprisings and movements led by influential individuals like Jawaharlal Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi, and Subhas Chandra Bose. Gandhi's Satyagraha, or nonviolent resistance, concept served as a pillar of the independence movement and an inspiration for other conflicts throughout the Global South (Brown, 2008). India's path to independence was part of a broader movement of decolonisation that swept over Latin America, Africa, and Asia in the middle of the 20th century. Following its independence, India became a leading voice supporting the interests of the newly independent countries, known as the Global South.

The Bandung Conference in 1955, which brought together leaders from 29 Asian and African nations to condemn colonialism and neo-colonialism and to advance economic and cultural cooperation, was one of the first examples of this solidarity. Along with nations like Indonesia, Egypt, and Yugoslavia, India played a key part in the summit, a significant turning point in creating the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) (Prashad, 2007). India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, strongly supported non-alignment, which aimed to keep India independent throughout the Cold War and avoid siding with either the Eastern or Western blocs. The foundations of Nehru's vision were respect for one another, peaceful cohabitation, and opposition to imperialism. His attempts to promote unity among recently independent nations significantly influenced how many Global South nations formulated their foreign policies (Rosenbaum, 1975).

3. India's Policy towards Global South: A pursuit of Leadership

Over time, India's geopolitical relations with the Global South have changed dramatically, reflecting its increasing economic might, strategic objectives, and desire to play a key role in world affairs. With a foundation in historical, political, and economic settings, India's engagement with the Global South seeks to promote strategic cooperation, political solidarity, and mutual growth. India's post-colonial identity is fundamental to its interaction with the Global South. To give newly independent countries a platform to negotiate the Cold War without siding with the US or the USSR, India was one of the original members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in 1961. India's dedication to sovereignty, self-determination, and a fair international system was demonstrated by this initiative. India's NAM leadership strongly emphasised developing nations working together to solve shared problems and advance economic growth (Jain, 2014).

During the past few decades, India has prioritised strengthening trade and investment relations with the Global South in its economic strategies. The Indian government has started several projects to improve its economic ties with Southeast Asia, Latin America, and Africa. One example of India's dedication to developing political and economic ties with African countries is the India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS), which was started in 2008. To establish a mutually beneficial economic partnership, India has committed to making large expenditures in healthcare, education, and infrastructure throughout the continent through these summits (Vines & Oruitemeka, 2008).

India's aim to assert its own regional leadership and balance out China's influence is the strategic motivation behind its engagement with the Global South. Given its vital significance for international trade and energy security, India's strategic interests centre on the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). Initiatives like the Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) program, which attempts to strengthen economic and security cooperation with IOR nations, are part of India's maritime strategy. India aims to promote peace and balance China's forceful activities by establishing itself as a regional provider of net security (Pant, 2016).

Promoting political unity on global issues like trade negotiations, climate change, and international institution reform is part of India's geopolitical dynamics with the Global South. India supports a more equitable and inclusive global governance structure that considers developing nations' concerns as members of several multilateral organisations, such as the G20 and BRICS. India, for example, has been an outspoken supporter of changing the UN Security Council to represent the Global South better and reflect current geopolitical realities (Sidhu, 2018). A key component of India's interactions with the Global South has been the deployment of soft power. Development aid, educational exchanges, and cultural diplomacy are important components of this approach. Since its inception in 1964, the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) program has assisted developing nations with capacity-building and technical training. India hopes to foster goodwill, share its development expertise, and establish enduring connections through these activities (Pant, 2016).

India's involvement with the Global South is beset by many obstacles, notwithstanding its attempts. Significant challenges include economic inequality among partner nations, competition with China for influence in Africa and Southeast Asia, and geopolitical concerns. Furthermore, India's ability to perform its obligations is occasionally hampered by its own economic and developmental difficulties. Nonetheless, there are still a lot of chances for collaboration. India is uniquely positioned to deepen its connections with the Global South because of its expanding economic influence, technological innovations, and advantageous geographic location (Pant, 2016).

India and the Global South have complex geopolitical relationships, including political solidarity, economic cooperation, strategic objectives, historical legacies, and soft power diplomacy. India's interactions with the Global South will be essential to create a more inclusive and balanced international order as it continues to grow as a global force. India seeks to realise the goals of the Global South by tackling shared issues and establishing partnerships that benefit both parties to make the world more fair and just. India's active participation in the Global South demonstrates its dedication to a multipolar world where developing countries have a major say in international affairs. India is positioned to play a significant role in the changing dynamics of the Global South through persistent efforts in economic cooperation, diplomacy, and strategic relationships.

India's strategic goals and regional security concerns shape its geopolitical involvement in the Global South. Historical links and current political dynamics influence India's relations with nations in its immediate neighbourhood, including Afghanistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. India's dedication to regional stability and prosperity is demonstrated by its participation in regional organisations such as the Indian Ocean-Rim Association (IORA) and the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC). Further demonstrating its ability to strike a balance between promoting regional collaboration and thwarting new security threats is India's participation in larger geopolitical endeavours, such as the Indo-Pacific strategy. Maintaining its position as the leader of the Global South while negotiating complicated ties with superpowers like China and the US is frequently part of this balancing act.

4. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has entered a period of intense urgency, particularly for the Global South, where structural inequalities, external shocks, and governance constraints intersect to slow progress. Rising inflation, recurrent geopolitical tensions, and the cascading impact of food and energy insecurity continue to impede equitable development across the developing world. According to recent UN estimates, by the end of 2024, nearly 670 million people are expected to remain trapped in extreme poverty—highlighting a grim reality in which core SDG targets related to poverty alleviation (Goal 1) are significantly off-track (UN, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic further compounded the development crisis by causing massive economic disruptions, reversing gains in public health, and straining education and employment systems. As a result, the estimated financing gap to meet the SDGs by 2030 has widened considerably. The UN reports that approximately USD 4.2 trillion will now be needed, with a USD 500 billion annual shortfall particularly affecting the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) (UN, 2021). These figures reveal a critical disconnect between ambition and capacity—a gap that is most pronounced in the Global South, where the burden of global crises is disproportionately borne but the policy instruments to address them remain limited.

In light of these challenges, India's presidency of the G20 in 2023 offered a significant opportunity to recalibrate global efforts towards the SDGs. The G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration acknowledged that, at the halfway point to the 2030 deadline, only 12% of global SDG targets are on track. It called for enhanced multilateral collaboration to generate momentum during the "Decade of Action," aimed at accelerating progress across all 17

goals. India positioned itself not just as a facilitator but as a norm-setting actor, advocating for equity-driven global governance and SDG financing mechanisms tailored to the realities of the Global South (Kumar, 2024).

The G20's role in achieving the SDGs has been significant, particularly since the adoption of the G20 Action Plan on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2016. While the G20 does not serve as an implementation body, its political and economic clout has been mobilised to foster cooperation on macroeconomic frameworks, investment flows, debt restructuring, and technology transfer—all critical to the SDG agenda. The comparative advantage of the G20 lies in its ability to convene global stakeholders and facilitate cross-sectoral partnerships, thereby generating the enabling environment necessary to support sustainable development (Kumar, 2024). A major outcome of India's G20 presidency was the 2023 Action Plan for Accelerated SDG Progress, announced during the G20 Development Ministers' Meeting held in Varanasi from June 11–13, 2023. This plan outlined a comprehensive seven-year roadmap grounded in integration, coordination, and inclusivity. It placed particular emphasis on digital transformation, gender equality, and climate-resilient development as key accelerators of SDG implementation. Furthermore, the plan advocated for increasing the representation of developing countries in international financial institutions, aligning with long-standing Global South demands for democratised global governance structures (Kumar, 2024).

The prioritisation of gender equality and women's empowerment within the G20's SDG agenda marks a critical shift. Targeted interventions to support women in agriculture, digital economies, and education are increasingly viewed not as auxiliary measures but as foundational to the entire development architecture. Likewise, investments in digital public infrastructure, such as India's Aadhaar and UPI platforms, have been cited as examples of scalable models for financial inclusion and service delivery that can be adapted across the Global South. Simultaneously, the Global South's growing share of global economic output signals a structural shift in the world economy that holds both promise and risk. As of 2023, emerging economies account for 80% of global economic growth, a trend that began consolidating with the global financial crisis of 2008 and has since accelerated. The trade profile of these economies also reveals a significant transformation. Between 1990 and 2021, the total trade volume of the Global South increased from USD 140.75 billion to USD 9.36 trillion. Its share of global trade has surged from 31% to 55%, suggesting that developing nations are no longer marginal participants but key actors in shaping global markets (UN, 2021).

However, this quantitative expansion has not always translated into qualitative improvement in SDG outcomes. Much of this trade growth remains resource-intensive, environmentally unsustainable, and unevenly distributed. The lack of value addition and persistent reliance on low-skill manufacturing, extractive industries, and informal economies means that the SDGs related to decent work, innovation, and industrialisation (Goals 8 and 9) remain underperforming across many regions. India's SDG strategy attempts to navigate these tensions by promoting a model that combines technological innovation with developmental inclusion. Through initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance (ISA), the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), and the Digital Public Goods framework, India has proposed replicable mechanisms that align economic growth with climate resilience and social protection. These platforms represent a distinctive approach to development cooperation that seeks to reshape the terms of South-South engagement while contributing to global goals.

Nevertheless, the SDG framework's success in the Global South will depend on more than macroeconomic trends or high-level declarations. It will require greater fiscal autonomy for developing countries, equitable access to global public goods, and the dismantling of financial architectures that limit policy flexibility. Global solidarity, in this context, cannot remain rhetorical; it must translate into tangible commitments—especially from the Global North—in areas such as climate finance, debt relief, technology sharing, and fair trade. India's leadership during the G20 presidency, particularly through its articulation of a Global South-centric development vision, has foregrounded these priorities. Whether these initiatives will produce durable systemic change remains to be seen. What is certain, however, is that achieving the SDGs in their full scope will necessitate not only multilateral cooperation but a recalibration of global priorities, driven by those who have the most to gain—and lose—in the decade ahead.

5. DAKSHIN

In India's recent diplomatic initiatives signal a distinct strategic shift towards consolidating its leadership position within the Global South, not merely through symbolic participation but via institution-building and sustainable partnerships. A critical development in this regard was the Voice of the Global South Summit, held virtually in January 2023, shortly before India's presidency of the G20 Summit. This summit brought together leaders and representatives from over 120 developing countries, underscoring the necessity of amplifying the voices of

countries historically underrepresented in global governance structures. At this forum, the Indian Prime Minister announced the establishment of a Global South Centre of Excellence, an initiative aimed at facilitating the exchange of development experiences and policy innovations from India to other partner countries in the Global South (Kumar, 2025).

A cornerstone of this diplomatic effort is the launch of the Development and Knowledge Sharing Initiative (DAKSHIN), which seeks to create a sustainable and inclusive model of South-South cooperation. Hosted by the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), DAKSHIN was officially inaugurated following the second edition of the Voice of the Global South conference on November 17, 2023. This institutional initiative is intended to serve as a repository of developmental practices and innovations that have emerged from India's own experiences of managing scale, diversity, and resource constraints—factors common to most Global South nations (Chaturvedi & Kumar, 2022).

DAKSHIN's core vision is to “collect resources, experiences, and strategies to overcome developmental challenges the Global South faces and promote globally inclusive partnerships by fostering knowledge sharing and mutual learning for building capacities and developing sustainable, affordable, and locally relevant solutions” (Kumar, 2024). The initiative thus reorients the traditional paradigm of development assistance from a donor-recipient model to one grounded in mutual learning and shared responsibility. This is particularly significant as it contests long-standing global hierarchies in development discourse, where Global North countries have historically been positioned as providers of knowledge and capital, and the Global South as passive recipients.

Through DAKSHIN, India aims to institutionalise a model of triangular cooperation, in which development solutions are co-produced not only between India and other developing countries but also in partnership with multilateral organisations and other stakeholders. This modality is intended to facilitate context-specific solutions that are sensitive to local needs, capacities, and constraints, thereby avoiding the one-size-fits-all approach that has often plagued externally designed development programmes. The mechanism also seeks to reduce the cost of development innovation by encouraging the adaptation of existing models rather than importing expensive, and often incompatible, solutions from industrialised economies.

One of the most innovative aspects of DAKSHIN is its focus on capacity building and knowledge co-production as opposed to mere technical transfer. Among the operational strategies already identified are the sharing of affordable technologies, structured capacity-building programmes, reskilling initiatives, and the creation of policy toolkits that synthesise best practices from across the Global South. These include India's own scalable interventions in areas such as digital public infrastructure (e.g., Aadhaar and UPI), renewable energy (through the International Solar Alliance), and social protection (e.g., MGNREGA). The effort is not just to export these models but to adapt and recalibrate them in collaboration with partner countries to ensure local relevance. Moreover, DAKSHIN is designed to engage with the institutional ecology of development, which includes universities, civil society organisations, innovation hubs, and state-level administrative bodies. By drawing on this multi-level governance structure, DAKSHIN enables decentralised and diversified development partnerships that reflect the lived realities of the Global South. This is especially important given the heterogeneity across and within developing countries regarding institutional capacities, demographic profiles, and socio-political contexts (Chaturvedi & Kumar, 2022).

India's championing of DAKSHIN as part of its G20 presidency also reflects a larger diplomatic ambition—to position itself as a norm entrepreneur in global development discourse. Unlike earlier postcolonial solidarities based primarily on moral and historical grounds, India's contemporary outreach is increasingly technocratic and solution-driven. It is aimed at demonstrating that Southern countries can not only articulate grievances but also offer replicable models of governance, service delivery, and technology deployment. In doing so, India is asserting its agency as both a knowledge producer and a development partner, and not merely a geopolitical counterweight to other rising powers.

The establishment of the Global South Centre of Excellence under the broader rubric of DAKSHIN further demonstrates this commitment. While the institutional mechanisms are still evolving, the initiative's broad architecture is geared towards making Indian development experiences accessible to a wider international audience while enabling reciprocal flows of knowledge and innovation. It marks a shift from reactive diplomacy to a proactive, institutionally grounded approach that aligns with India's long-term vision of becoming a leading voice for the Global South in global governance forums.

The DAKSHIN initiative and its affiliated Centre of Excellence represent more than just development outreach—they are emblematic of India's aspiration to transform its domestic achievements into instruments of global influence, particularly in regions that share similar structural challenges. As such, they reaffirm India's

growing role not just as a participant in multilateral diplomacy but as a framer of developmental norms within the emerging world order.

6. Policy Challenges with Global South

India, a prominent voice in the Global South, deals with a distinct mix of environmental and socioeconomic problems that reflect and impact the more general problems in emerging nations. Mutual support, shared experiences, and cooperative efforts to solve shared issues define this partnership. To develop practical solutions accepted throughout the Global South, it is essential to comprehend India's social and environmental challenges from this perspective.

Poverty is one of India's biggest social problems. Even with notable economic expansion, a sizable section of the Indian populace is impoverished. About 10% of Indians, according to the World Bank, make less than \$1.90 per day (World Bank, 2020). Many countries in the Global South, where economic inequality is still a problem, have widespread poverty. Inadequate healthcare, lack of access to high-quality education, and unemployment all contribute to poverty in India. These problems contribute to a hard-to-break cycle of poverty that reflects the larger difficulties developing nations encounter.

Inequality is a significant socioeconomic issue. In India, there are glaring disparities in caste, economic, gender, and rural-urban differences. For example, the top 1% of the population owns four times as much wealth as the poorest 70%, according to the Oxfam India report 2021 (Oxfam, 2021). This degree of inequality is prevalent in many countries in the Global South, where socioeconomic, cultural, and historical factors exacerbate societal divisions. Comprehensive policies that support inclusivity and equitable chances are necessary to address inequality, and India and its Global South counterparts are working towards this objective.

India faces numerous and complex environmental problems, which are frequently made worse by the country's fast urbanisation and industrialisation. Air pollution is one major problem. India has some of the most polluted cities in the world, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2018). Vehicle emissions, industrial operations, and burning biomass for heating and cooking are the main causes of this pollution. Air pollution seriously affects health, causing respiratory conditions and early mortality. India is not alone in this environmental burden; many nations in the Global South struggle to strike a balance between environmental sustainability and development.

Pollution and water scarcity are other urgent problems. Due to its large population, India is seeing an increase in demand for water resources, which is causing groundwater to be over-extracted and natural water bodies to be depleted. According to the Central Ground Water Board of India, water stress is present in over 60% of Indian districts (CGWB, 2021). In addition, home garbage, agricultural runoff, and industrial effluents significantly contaminate rivers and lakes. Water management and pollution control are major issues in other Global South nations, and this situation is similar to those in such nations.

India's involvement with the Global South is essential to address these social and environmental issues. India works with other developing countries to exchange best practices, technology, and information through organisations like the International Solar Alliance (ISA) and the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa). For instance, by lowering reliance on fossil fuels and minimising environmental pollution, the ISA seeks to promote solar energy as a sustainable energy solution (ISA, 2018). Addressing climate change and advancing sustainable development throughout the Global South requires this cooperative strategy.

Furthermore, other developing nations frequently use India's social policies as models. Millions of rural Indians are employed by the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), which has received praise for its effects on social inclusion and poverty reduction. These kinds of programs show how focused social interventions can aid in addressing the structural problems of inequality and poverty.

7. Conclusion

India's contemporary engagement with the Global South represents a significant departure from its earlier postcolonial solidarity toward a more assertive and strategic leadership model grounded in developmental pragmatism and global diplomacy. Rooted in the legacy of the Non-Aligned Movement and postcolonial resistance (Prashad, 2007; Rosenbaum, 1975), India has progressively positioned itself as both a normative actor and a developmental interlocutor between the Global North and South. Its recent initiatives, particularly during the G20 presidency and through platforms like the Voice of the Global South Summit, signify a recalibrated diplomatic thrust towards inclusive global governance (Kumar, 2024; Chaturvedi & Kumar, 2022).

By foregrounding issues such as energy transitions, digital equity, and climate resilience, India has not only underscored its domestic developmental priorities but also aligned them with the collective aspirations of the Global South (Sidhu, 2018; NITI Aayog, 2025). Programs like DAKSHIN reflect an institutional shift toward mutual learning and capacity building among developing nations, moving beyond traditional donor-recipient paradigms (Chaturvedi & Kumar, 2022). Through initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance and digital public infrastructure frameworks, India demonstrates a model of South-South cooperation grounded in affordable, scalable, and context-sensitive solutions (ISA, 2018; Kumar, 2024).

However, India's ascent as a leader in this evolving architecture is not without challenges. Persistent structural inequalities, ecological vulnerabilities, and governance gaps continue to shape the domestic policy landscape (World Bank, 2020; Oxfam, 2021; WHO, 2018). The extent to which India can reconcile its global ambitions with its internal developmental asymmetries will ultimately influence the credibility of its leadership within the Global South. At the same time, India's multilateral engagements—from BRICS to the Quad—reflect its capacity to navigate competing global alignments while preserving its normative commitment to equity and multipolarity (Pant, 2016).

Looking ahead, the trajectory of Bharat's foreign policy under the current administration appears oriented toward constructing a new global narrative—one in which the Global South is not merely a recipient of global norms but an active architect of international policy regimes. The metaphor of *jambudwip*—a civilizational motif invoking plurality and rootedness—captures this aspiration for a multipolar world where developmental justice, strategic autonomy, and inclusive cooperation are central tenets.

For the Global South, India's role as a partner, mediator, and knowledge producer offers a template for developmental diplomacy grounded in shared realities rather than imposed frameworks. While systemic transformations will require consistent effort, sustained solidarity, and institutional innovation, India's current trajectory points toward a more participatory and representative global order. As Gray and Gills (2016) argue, genuine South-South cooperation must emerge from within—anchored in mutual agency and collective reimagination of development. India's evolving posture provides momentum to that vision, asserting that leadership in the Global South must be as much about shared futures as it is about sovereign agency.

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The author declares no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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