

India's Role in Leading the Global South

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India's Role in Leading the Global South: Aspirations, Challenges, and the Way Forward

Context

India has always played an important role in supporting **developing nations**, also known as the **Global South**. In the past, it was a key part of the **Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)**, which aimed to keep newly independent countries free from the influence of Cold War superpowers.

However, today, India's approach has changed. It now seeks to:

- **Expand its global influence** by actively engaging with both developed and developing countries.
- **Promote fair global governance**, where emerging economies have a stronger voice.
- **Balance its relationships** with traditional Western partners like the **United States and Europe** while strengthening its ties with the Global South.

This renewed commitment was reflected in Prime Minister **Narendra Modi's speech** at the **18th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (January 2025)** and the **3rd Voice of Global South Summit (August 2024)**. He emphasized that **India is not only asserting its own interests but also amplifying the concerns of the developing world**.

Why is India Re-engaging with the Global South?

1. A Shift from the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)

India's new approach is different from its earlier **NAM strategy**, which focused on:

- **Decolonization and anti-Western sentiment**.
- **Staying neutral** during Cold War conflicts.

Now, India is more **pragmatic and strategic**:

- It wants to **actively shape global policies** rather than simply avoid superpower politics.
- It maintains **strong ties with Western countries** while also **engaging developing nations**.

For example:

- **Jake Sullivan**, former U.S. National Security Adviser, visited India in January 2025,

highlighting India's deepening ties with the U.S.

- **Modi's visit to Poland (August 2024)** showcased India's efforts to build new alliances beyond traditional partners.

2. The China Factor - Is India Just Competing with China?

Many believe India's increasing involvement in the **Global South** is an attempt to **counter China's growing global dominance**.

Some key points to consider:

- **Investment in Africa:** India is investing heavily in African countries, **many of which already have strong economic ties with China**.
- **Strategic Alliances:** India is part of the **Quad partnership (Japan, India, Australia, U.S.)**, which promotes a **free and open Indo-Pacific**, often seen as a way to limit China's influence.
- **Support from the West:** Many developed nations are partnering with India to **contain China's expanding global footprint**.

However, **India is not simply reacting to China**—it is also creating its **own independent identity** as a global power by offering **an alternative to both the Western model and China's debt-driven economic strategies**.

3. The Need for an Alternative Global Leader

Many developing nations feel trapped between:

- **The conditions imposed by Western-led financial institutions**, which often come with restrictions.
- **China's economic influence**, which has led to concerns over sovereignty and unsustainable debt.

India sees an opportunity to offer a more balanced and equitable approach—one that does not dominate but **partners with nations as equals**.

How Can India Become a Stronger Global Development Leader?

1. Moving from "India-First" to True Partnerships

India often talks about **equal partnerships**, but its policies sometimes appear **too focused on Indian interests**.

- **Example: Global Development Compact**

- This initiative aims to support the **Global South**, but it is largely **based on India's experiences** rather than **learning from others**.

- **A Better Approach**

- Instead of just sharing its **own solutions**, India should also **listen and learn** from the

- experiences of other developing nations.
- **Countries are more likely to work with a nation that treats them as partners rather than just recipients of help.**

2. Prioritizing Human-Centered Development

India's **Mission LiFE (Lifestyle For Environment)** encourages sustainable living, but **a broader human-focused approach is needed** to make a real impact.

- **Skill Development & Entrepreneurship**

- Programs like **Skill India** and **women-led entrepreneurship initiatives** can help other developing nations grow their local industries.

- **Building Long-Term Institutional Capacity**

- India's **Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC)** program offers **short-term training**, but developing nations need **long-term solutions**.
- Instead of just **training individuals**, India should **help build institutions and systems** in partner countries.

- **Technology and Innovation as Growth Areas**

- India should focus on **digital infrastructure, renewable energy, water security, and food security**—all areas where developing nations need support.

3. Strengthening Global Governance and Institutions

India has pushed for **a more inclusive global system**, as seen in its **efforts to include the African Union in the G-20 (2023)**. However, to make a real impact, it must:

- **Use Existing Global Institutions**

- Work with **the United Nations, Germany, and France**, which have experience in development cooperation.

- **Develop Its Own Global Institutions**

- Instead of depending on Western-led systems, India should **create its own global initiatives** to shape development policies.

- **Form New Partnerships**

- India should **work with both emerging economies and developed nations** to learn and improve its global leadership skills.

Conclusion

India wants to be **the "Voice of the Global South,"** but to truly lead, it must also **listen** and

engage in meaningful partnerships.

- In the past, NAM gave developing nations an alternative to Cold War alliances.
- Today, India has a chance to redefine global cooperation by offering a fair, sustainable, and inclusive development model.
- To achieve this, India must:
 - Shift from an **India-first** approach to **true partnerships**.
 - Go beyond **symbolic speeches** and **deliver real development results**.
 - Build **strong institutions and long-term global engagement strategies**.

By taking a **strategic yet collaborative approach**, India can **not only grow as a global power but also become a trusted development leader in the evolving world order**.



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