

# Infusing LiFE in the Global South

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***Abstract:*** The term 'Global South' has had several iterations and meanings since its emergence five and a half decades ago, but has gained increasing currency in recent years. The term, despite its practical and operational success, lacks theoretical coherence due to the pluralistic understanding of 'Global South'. The increasing inequality and aggravated developmental challenges in general across the globe, particularly in the Global South, require inclusive global solutions. The term 'South' can perhaps be better used to address the concerns of the disadvantaged across the planet rather than dividing them into constituents of separate developed and developing worlds. Take SDGs, they are universal goals; the development dimension they address applies equally to all. Development solutions that include them all will bring wholesome results. Mission LiFE, a holistic approach proposed by India is another example. There need to be several more.

***Keywords:*** Global South; development solutions; SDGs, sustainable consumption and production; Mission LiFE.

## Introduction

The poly-crises of climate change, conflicts, pandemics, and food insecurity the world faces today need consummate action by everyone living on planet earth. There is a common view that the Global South is particularly impacted by these crises but does not have the resources to address them. There have been well-thought suggestions for transfer of greater power to the South even during the Cold War days, an endeavour that has been taken up in right earnest by several Southern initiatives that profess inclusive and post-Washington Consensus approaches to development. The concept of inclusivity demands shedding the development

divide, focusing on all the peoples of the world and evolve development solutions that positively impact all of them. Does it also call for widening the definition of the Global South?

This paper essays the concept of the Global South through the decades and attempts to instil such inclusivity by including all the poor based on their socio-economic situation, whether they reside in developed or developing countries. It begins with charting the evolution of the term Global South and goes beyond the lexicology debate towards focus on the horizontality of the development dimension, which is the most frequent reason for the use

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of the term. It then takes Sustainable Development Goals as an example of a global campaign applying to both sides of the development divide and suggests collective action to address several of them, but particularly SDG 12, through Mission LiFE - Lifestyle For Environment.

### **Evolution of the Global South**

The term Global South has come into frequent use in recent years since its synonyms like 'Third World' and 'developing' countries are not considered value free and indicate hierarchy. Also, in the post-Cold War scenario, 'Third World' seems passé, and 'developing' has been truncated into various sub-divisions.<sup>1</sup> It has also been used in an internationalistic sense to address spaces and peoples negatively impacted by contemporary capitalist globalisation.<sup>2</sup> Although the term was first used in 1969 by Carl Oglesby to distinguish poor countries from their antonymic 'western empires', it has reincarnated many times over the last five decades acquiring multiple meanings. More recently, western journalists may be getting tired of it, as is demonstrated by Alan Beattie of the Financial Times.<sup>3</sup> Without going into the various theories<sup>4</sup> of this development divide, the terminology has had traction for other reasons as well.

The term has been seen in the context of the endeavours of developing countries in the post-colonial world order to chart their own pathway to development and economic growth.

India has had a significant role to play in these endeavours. The Agreement on Trade and Intercourse between the Tibet region of China and India signed on April 29, 1954 enunciated Panchsheel, the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence, as an example of an initiative by two developing countries to manage their bilateral relations.<sup>5</sup> Two months later, leaders of the two nations envisioned Panchsheel as a framework for relations not only between them but with all other countries. The Asian-African Conference held a year later, well known as the Bandung Conference, built upon Panchsheel to forge solidarity, sovereignty, peaceful co-existence, and non-interference among the 29 participating newly independent nations from Asia and Africa. It also laid the foundation for the Non-Aligned Movement to avoid partisan politics of the Cold War and consequent bipolarisation.

The first formal conference of non-aligned countries was held in Belgrade in 1961. A year later, a Conference on the Problems of Developing Countries was held in Cairo where, going beyond the Asian and African regions represented at the Bandung Conference, several Latin American countries also participated. The first seeds of development cooperation among developing countries were sown in the Cairo Declaration<sup>6</sup> that came out of it. Issues of economic development, trade, technical assistance and regional economic groupings were also addressed. The entire Global South was now

debating development together. Recently, the Minister for External Affairs of India S. Jaishankar gave a conceptualisation of the Global South that may prove longer-lasting. “Contemporary challenges emanate from old forms of domination as well as new economic concentration... Global South is about a mindset, a solidarity and a self-reliance”. The transformation over the last decades has “enabled India to be an example, a partner and a contributor” to the overall needs and demands of the Global South.<sup>7</sup> The establishment of United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in 1964 provided a permanent forum for North-South dialogue and negotiations on issues of interest to developing countries. At the same time the Group of 77 was established as the common voice of the South. The New International Economic Order, and cooperation among and between developed North and developing South became the key discourse on development in the decade that came after UNCTAD. The following two decades were christened the First and Second Development Decades in the United Nations system, but development aid was a part of this discourse primarily as aid from the North to the South.<sup>8</sup> Given the questions being raised on the effectiveness of such development aid, in 1968 former Canadian Prime Minister Lester B Pearson accepted an invitation from the World Bank Chairman Robert McNamara to form a commission to review the previous 20 years of development assistance, assess the results, and make recommendations for the future.

The Pearson Report<sup>9</sup> found more critics than supporters in the next few years. In 1977 Willy Brandt, former Chancellor of Germany, was appointed chairman of the Independent Commission on International Development Issues, again by the World Bank President. The Brandt Report importantly suggested a new arrangement to meet the central objective of a transfer of greater power to the South, justifying it on the basis of ‘mutuality of interest’.<sup>10</sup> While the fate of the Brandt Report was not much better than the Pearson Report, its creature, the so-called Brandt Line, has survived the following four decades.<sup>11</sup> The Brandt Line circuitously divides the global North and Global South based on per capita GDP, defining the Global South as countries below the latitude of 30° N, passing between North and Central America, north of Africa, the Middle East and most of East Asia, but lowered towards the south to include Japan, Australia, and New Zealand above the line.<sup>12</sup>

The Cold War not only divided the world into the West and the East but secured this division for countries rather than their peoples. The post-Cold War and post globalization discourse has changed the lexicon; people, along with their countries, have started mattering. In addition, the computer and the internet have brought the world’s people and their ideas and thoughts together in one intellectual cauldron, scaling all man-made borders. The seemingly pejorative term Third World has fallen as much in disuse as use of the term Global South

has risen. Yet, the meaning ascribed to it remains coated with development parameters, even though the question whether emerging countries are North or South<sup>13</sup> muddies the waters.

People of the Global South may now also be defined in transnational social terms<sup>14</sup> thus transcending the nation-state related divisions. The complexity of the situation of poor people in the southern countries may not equally apply to the poor in the North as they are far less heterogenous culturally and socially. Can the term 'Global South', then, capture them and lead scholars to explore equity problem that can and should be taken care of through people-to-people transactions?

## **The developmental horizontality**

The chimera of economic development through structural adjustment programmes coupled with despondence about lack of anticipated benefits<sup>15</sup> from official development assistance provided by the North to the South led many experts to look for succour elsewhere, whether they belonged to the neo-Marxist camp, or post-colonial populists or neo-liberalists, particularly since the 2002 Monterrey Conference on the challenges of financing for development.<sup>16</sup> There is enough literature demonstrating that ODA is not only inefficient<sup>17</sup> but harmful<sup>18</sup>, as it allows recipient governments to delay necessary policies<sup>19</sup>. The impact of such aid on poverty alleviation or general wellbeing of the Southern populations left several

unanswered questions. There is also a view that globalisation challenges, such as violent conflicts, increasing migration and numbers of refugees, as well as climate change as a global challenge, have turned discourses on development cooperation away from development-oriented motives towards strategic interests of aid providers.<sup>20</sup> Aid for managing disasters and migration has taken a major portion of ODA in recent times with increased climate, conflict and migration crises: for example, the plausibly impressive 13.6 per cent growth in ODA in 2022 compared to the previous year goes down to 4.6 per cent if aid for in-country asylum seekers is excluded.<sup>21</sup> Aid to Ukraine sliced off another 7.8 per cent of ODA in 2022. The ODA aid matrix is changing.

The current disillusionment of development cooperation scholars with ODA is compounded by the North's own problems, not only of handling in-country refugees, but an ageing population and near-stagnant growth coupled with multiple crises such as the financial crisis of 2008-09<sup>22</sup> and, more recently, the crises of Covid, the Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Hamas conflicts, and climate change. Several developed countries are also struggling to meet their Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agreed to in 2015. Social inequalities, waste management, and environmental responsibility are high on their agenda, but even basic needs like poverty and hunger affect them. While the recent decline of San Francisco may be attributed to a mix of post-pandemic

degeneration, fentanyl and street-crime, the United Nations reported back in 2006 that indigence levels have risen in the most affluent countries.<sup>23</sup> The discourse is increasingly factoring in the global population rather than the now seemingly artificial East-West and North-South divisions. Is it time to widen the definition of Global South? A casual examination of some of the SDGs seems to suggest so. There are several SDGs of interest and concern to the citizens of both the developed and the developing countries in terms of the challenges that need to be addressed to achieve them. The next Section examines a few.

### **SDGs and the Global North**

One would not be faulted for thinking that the top two SDGs are targeted at developing countries, not the rich. But look at goal one: ending poverty; it is rising across the developed world and the depth of poverty is increasing due to stagnating wages, long-term unemployment and rising prices of essentials such as food and fuel.<sup>24</sup> According to the International Labour Organization, in 2012, 300 million people were living in poverty in the developed world.<sup>25</sup> Both the depth and breadth of poverty has increased in OECD countries in recent years.<sup>26</sup> While comparing poverty in Tamil Nadu, India with Glasgow, Scotland, Mari Marcel-Thekaekara, the human rights activist and journalist based out of the Adivasi terrain in the Nilgiris, says we should not look at poverty only from the point of view of material benefits.<sup>27</sup> Joblessness leads to social deprivation and mental

health problems much faster in the North due to inadequate cultural and familial affinities compared to the South.

Then look at goal two: zero hunger. The challenge in developed countries may be more of undernourishment in terms of nutritious food rather than its availability,<sup>28</sup> but pictures of the poor living on footpaths in Los Angeles or Chicago or Barcelona scrounging for food in dustbins are not uncommon. The contemporary framing of the solution to food insecurity in developed countries is that of diverting food waste to the hungry, but an estimated 60 million people or 7.2 per cent of the population in high income countries used food banks in 2013.<sup>29</sup> Recent studies have highlighted how food poverty is a rising problem in affluent societies, ranging from 8 per cent to 20 per cent of the population.<sup>30</sup> In the European Union (EU), one of the wealthiest regions on Earth, 22 per cent of its population—95.3 million people—are classified as at risk of poverty.<sup>31</sup>

Goal three – good health and wellbeing – has its importance for the developed world in different dimensions, from drug abuse in San Francisco to mental health elsewhere. Goal seven – affordable and clean energy – has surfaced as a major objective post Ukraine crisis, and goal ten – reduce inequality – is a growing concern as since 1990, income inequality has increased in most developed countries.<sup>32</sup> Goal eleven – making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable –

may have appeared a typically southern problem in the past, but recent evidence points to increasing homelessness in developed countries as well. Recent data indicates that about a million people are living rough, in shelters, or temporary accommodation in Europe every night.<sup>33</sup> The people in the developed world, thus, need to address SDGs as much as those living in the developing world.

Goal twelve: responsible consumption and production, is particularly relevant for this discussion. Consumption habits, particularly in industrial and developed countries, are unsustainable because they have a greater culture of consumerism. It is easy and expected to purchase goods and services that require too many resources to produce. Affluence, amplified by ease of consumer credit, results in levels of private material consumption that impose pressure on the planetary boundaries. This behaviour applies to the very affluent and the moderately affluent in all countries, and also to some of the less affluent people in the wealthy countries, contributing most to the globally unsustainable consumption levels.<sup>34</sup> Consumerism, widely prevalent in developed and industrialised countries, is spreading among the wealthy in developing countries, and is unsustainable.<sup>35</sup>

## **A Global Solution from the South**

The rise of the Global South is reflected by the major shifts in the international economy particularly since the end of 1990s. The average growth of real GDP

by decades (%) of the Global South has outperformed the economies of the Global North by a factor 2 in every decade since the 1990s.<sup>36</sup> The economic success of emerging economies in the Global South, particularly Asia, has largely increased its relevance of its markets. It is expected that by 2030, the Global South share of global consumption will increase from today's 33per cent to 40per cent.<sup>37</sup> Establishment of G20 in 1999 and BRICS in 2009 are testament to the growing Global South. In 1994, the G7 countries (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, U.K., U.S.) constituted 45.3per cent of world output, compared with 18.9per cent of world output in the BRICS countries (Brazil, China, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Iran, Russia, South Africa, United Arab Emirates). The tables have turned. The BRICS now produce 35.2per cent of world output, while the G7 countries produce 29.3per cent.<sup>38</sup> The institutionalisation of the New Development Bank, and special funding arrangements like the India-UN Development Partnership Fund, and the IBSA Fund for Poverty Alleviation, for development projects in the Global South at the behest of the Global South has also led to a greater and a meaningful presence of the South in global affairs. Apart from the rise of the Global South, it is now a global solutions provider as well.

In the Global South, economic rather than environmental considerations are the prime mover towards sustainable consumption and production<sup>39</sup>; people want cheaper products that last longer to

suit their pockets. Lifestyle practices in most developing countries demonstrate attachment of their people with nature, leading to a life that is naturally conducive to protecting the environment. Currently, only 7.2 per cent of used materials are recycled back into our economies. At the same time, material consumption has risen by over 65 per cent globally in the past two decades.<sup>40</sup>

Environmental degradation and climate change are global phenomena where actions in one part of the world impact ecosystems and populations across the globe. Estimates suggest that if requisite action is not taken against the changing environment, approximately 3 billion people globally could experience chronic water scarcity. The global economy could lose up to 18 per cent of GDP by 2050.

Over the last two decades, several macro measures have been implemented globally to address environmental degradation and climate change, including policy reforms, economic incentives and regulations. Despite their enormous potential, actions required at the level of individuals, communities and institutions have received limited attention. It is in this context that the concept of 'Lifestyle for the Environment (LiFE)' was introduced by the Prime Minister of India at the 26th Conference of Parties of the United Nations Conference on Climate Change in Glasgow in 2021 (COP26), calling upon the global community of individuals

and institutions to drive LiFE as an international mass movement towards mindful and deliberate utilisation, instead of mindless and destructive consumption. India's Mission LiFE initiative is a well thought step to move away from consumerism and towards a circular economy that is more sustainable.<sup>41</sup>

Mission LiFE contributes directly and indirectly to almost all the SDGs and is in sync with the global commitment to achieving the SDGs by 2030. The SDGs focused on sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), responsible production and consumption (SDG 12), climate change (SDG 13), life on land (SDG 15), and life under water (SDG 14) emphasize that all individuals ensure that their lifestyles are in sync with the resources available on the planet. Further, research from the New Climate Economy highlights that bold environmental action could create as many as 65 million jobs by 2030 (SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth).

The redefined Global South that includes the poor from both the North and the South can benefit from adopting the principles and practices of the LiFE programme.

## **Conclusion**

Though a very useful one, Mission LiFE is just one example of approaches that can be taken to address the challenges in meeting SDGs by 2030. In turn, SDGs is but one set of goals that needs prioritization in order to better address

the poly-crises the world is facing. But it does demonstrate that global goals need to be inclusive, and take into account all on the globe, not just a fraction, howsoever large.

It also points to the need to take into account the situation and the challenges of all people in the world, whether in developed or developing countries. The development dimension is a concept that often connotes a situational consideration meant to discuss challenges faced by the developing countries, or the Global South. However, there is a need to broaden this connotation to capture all similarly situated people, whether in the North or the South so that the development dimension becomes more inclusive, and actors get a greater agency to the search for solutions. If the poor of the developed countries feel their concerns are also in the minds of the policy community, there would be a better buy-in for the solutions that policies suggest.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Although the United Nations system allows countries to self-select their attribution as developed or developing countries, there is an insistent attempt to divide the latter into further categories such as least developed, developing and emerging markets. UN created only one sub-category, in 1971, that of least developed countries, who are deemed highly disadvantaged in their development process for structural, historical and geographical reasons and graduate to developing country status once they meet the prescribed threshold. The World Bank has divided countries into four categories based on per capita GNI.
- <sup>2</sup> <https://globalsouthstudies.as.virginia.edu/what-is-global-south>

- <sup>3</sup> The 'Global South' is a pernicious term that needs to be retired – Alan Beattie in the Financial Times, 14 September 2023.
- <sup>4</sup> Apart from the classic theory of the divide based on the colonising North and the colonised South, dependency, modernization and post-development theories have been propounded by various scholars
- <sup>5</sup> Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, History of Panchsheel. Available at [https://www.mea.gov.in/Uploads/PublicationDocs/191\\_panchsheel.pdf](https://www.mea.gov.in/Uploads/PublicationDocs/191_panchsheel.pdf)
- <sup>6</sup> The Cairo Declaration of Developing Countries, available at United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, at <https://repository.uneca.org/bitstream/handle/10855/7151/Bib-47253.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- <sup>7</sup> Global South is about a 'mindset, a solidarity and a self-reliance', says Jaishankar, news in The Indian Express dated 22nd January 2024, available at <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/global-south-mindset-solidarity-jaishankar-9122383/>
- <sup>8</sup> United Nations General Assembly Resolution 3201 (s-vi): declaration on the establishment of a new international economic order, available at <https://investmentpolicy.unctad.org/international-investment-agreements/treaty-files/2775/download>
- <sup>9</sup> Partners in Development. See <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/american-political-science-review/article/abs/partners-in-development-report-of-the-commission-on-international-development-by-lester-b-pearsonchairman-new-york-praeger-1969-pp-400-795/FB0A9C63380047BA84B4AB-B96A529826>
- <sup>10</sup> Briefing Paper No. 2 (1980) by Overseas Development Institute, available at <https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/6638.pdf>
- <sup>11</sup> Brandt, Willy (1980), North-South: A Programme for Survival: Report of the Independent Commission on International Development Issues, London: Pan available at <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/review-of-international-studies/article/brandt-line-after-forty-years-the->



- more-northsouth-relations-change-the-more-they-stay-the-same/8646CE553D2F986BD33B67352FFC5814#fn4
- <sup>12</sup> Kowalski, Arkadiusz, Chapter entitled Global South-Global North Differences, in Book entitled No Poverty, Springer Nature, 2020, accessed at [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342507407\\_Global\\_South-Global\\_North\\_Differences](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/342507407_Global_South-Global_North_Differences). Saroj K Pal also sees a geographical determinism in this North-South distinction by referring to the tropics, that is having mean annual temperature more than 25 degree Celsius, creating poverty. See Saroj K Pal, *Lexicon on Geography of Development*, Concept Publishing Company, 2005, page 43
- <sup>13</sup> Concepts of the Global South – Voices from around the world Global South Studies Center, University of Cologne, Germany, page 16, available at [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343141439\\_Discussions\\_on\\_the\\_Global\\_South](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343141439_Discussions_on_the_Global_South)
- <sup>14</sup> Andrew Hurrell, *Narratives of Emergence: Rising Powers and the End of the Third World*, published in the Brazilian Journal of Political Economy April-June 2013 issue
- <sup>15</sup> Niyonkuru, F., 2016. Failure of foreign aid in developing countries: A quest for alternatives. *Business and Economics Journal*, 7(3), pp.1-9.
- <sup>16</sup> Yadav, R., Tusasiirwe, S. and Gatwiri, K., 2023. Dead Aid: The Cases of International Development Agencies in Uganda, Kenya, and Nepal. In *Handbook of Critical Whiteness: Deconstructing Dominant Discourses Across Disciplines* (pp. 1-13). Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore.
- <sup>17</sup> Hook, S.W. and Rumsey, J.G., 2016. The development aid regime at fifty: policy challenges inside and out. *International Studies Perspectives*, 17(1), pp.55-74.
- <sup>18</sup> Carbonnier, Gilles (2010), Article titled 'Official development assistance once more under fire from critics' in *International Development Policy | Revue internationale de politique de développement*, Translated by Katharine Mann Jackson, available at
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>20</sup> Mawdsley et al, in *Exporting Stimulus and "shared prosperity": Reinventing Foreign Aid for a retro-liberal era; Development Policy Review*, 36(S1), O25-O43
- <sup>21</sup> ODA Levels in 2022 – preliminary data, detailed summary note by OECD, available at <https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/ODA-2022-summary.pdf>
- <sup>22</sup> Caudron, Louis (2020), Paper No 542 in *Foundation Robert Schuman: It is time to review public development aid goals*, available at <https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/european-issues/0542-it-is-time-to-review-public-development-aid-goals>
- <sup>23</sup> UN DESA (2006), *Social Justice in an Open World: The Role of the United Nations*, Document No. ST/ESA/305, ISBN 92-1-130249-8
- <sup>24</sup> Rahman, Mahfuzur (2002), *World Economic Issues at the United Nations*, Chapter 6: Poverty in Developing Countries, Springer Science
- <sup>25</sup> See [https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/sdg-2030/WCMS\\_510121/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/sdg-2030/WCMS_510121/lang--en/index.htm). ILO has not published more recent data on poverty in developed countries. It may be noted, however, that OECD measures 'relative poverty' rather than absolute poverty, and defines it as when households receive 50 per cent less than average household incomes in a country. More recently, the World Bank has introduced a new set of poverty lines that are tailored to the specific level of economic development of each country and are designed to measure "societal poverty", i.e., if they live on less than \$1 plus half of what the median person in their country consumes. Taking this as a measure of poverty, World Bank has assessed that societal poverty has declined at a much slower rate than extreme poverty – a measure used for absolute poverty assessment. See <https://datatopics.worldbank.org/world-development-indicators/stories/societal-poverty-a-global-measure-of-relative-poverty.html>.
- <sup>26</sup> Charlton, Emma (2018), *Forum Agenda Article in World Economic Forum* titled: Why Rich Countries Are Seeing More Poverty, available at <https://www.weforum.org>

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- <sup>30</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>31</sup> Eurostat Database on Income and Living Conditions, available at [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/income-and-living-conditions/database?node\\_code=ilc\\_pe](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/income-and-living-conditions/database?node_code=ilc_pe)
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- <sup>36</sup> *Global South: Beyond BRICS* <https://www.rolandberger.com/en/Insights/Publications/Global-South-Beyond-BRICS.html>
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>38</sup> *The Perils and Promise of Emerging Multipolar World* <https://www.commondreams.org/opinion/emerging-multipolar-world>
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