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Editorial

The world is at crossroads today. Uncertainties and unpredictability are at their highest levels. Some are talking in terms of an emergent new global order, while others are worried about the shifts in powers from the existing players. The second issue of Volume 8 of Development Cooperation Review (DCR) is getting published at this juncture. It is absolutely difficult to identify a particular concern. There are economic crises like increasing inequality – both within and among countries, loss in employment opportunities along with threats of stagflation and increasing indebtedness in the Global South. Extractive relationship between the planet and human beings is also a major issue pointing towards the threat to sustainable existence of either of them in near future. The political and social implications of such crises are visible through increasing tensions – wars and conflicts leading to increased hatred and loss of life – all over the continents. Incidentally, these crises are no longer found to be independent of one another. They have created a complex web of interrelated problems intimately linked to each other. Economic crises cannot be separated from the environmental and ecological threats. Nor can we understand the implications of rising tensions and hatred in the whole world without considering the threats to sustainable and resilient management of human welfare as a whole. It is true that no acceptable solutions to these problems are visible. Every sovereign country is trying to find some ways that may, to some extent, take care of their concerned problems temporarily. However, we are clear that long term resilient solution to such a complex set of problems cannot be realized unless there are multilateral negotiations to arrive at an acceptable pathway that will be mostly acceptable to all. The search for a new world order has to be realized with emphasis on access, affordability, inclusion and equity – a process that we have undermined for quite a long time, especially since the onset of colonization and the subsequent industrial revolution that divided the globe into distinct North and South. The new world order must reduce the gaps between these two groups through a model of development that takes care of human welfare irrespective of citizenship, class, gender, religion or language.

The present issue of DCR is a collection of contributions from scholars across the globe to search for such possibilities. The African continent has been evolving as a serious point of concern in the debate of new international order. The first article by Said Djinnit, Ibrahim Assane Mayaki and El-Ghassim Wane titled “This is a 1990 Moment – Africa Must Seize it” traces the future course of action as an extension of the 1990 report presented by Salim Ahmed Salim, the then Secretary General of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). With the liberation struggles largely over in African continent and the apartheid seen collapsing, the Report argued for finding a new reason for existence of pan-African solidarity. Thirty-five years after the report

was written, the concerns are more clear. Africa is still considered a continent full of natural resources to be exported in their rawest forms with prices being determined by oligarchic buyers. The governance structure in most of the African countries is elitist, not looking for the welfare of the common citizenry. The authors argue that if the imperative to act was already pressing in 1990s, it is even more urgent today, not driven by hope but by the necessity navigating a period of profound instability and uncertainty. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) can facilitate the integration in economic domain along with the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Right of Establishment. However, these economic tools are also necessary to be elevated to political, social and strategic imperatives. To be effective in the real sense of the term, the necessity is a paradigm shift in development perspective in continent where the African Union (AU) must occupy the central place.

The ongoing crisis in tune with the tariff war raised since the beginning of the year is raising efforts to identify new partners who can add complimentary inputs and values to countries in maintaining a resilient ecosystem to sustain their economic, social, political and even ecological landscapes. The next contribution by Manuel Gonzalo and Paloma Ochaá through their paper, “India and Argentina Agricultural Complementarity: An Agenda for Trade and Cooperation” argues in favour of opportunities around agricultural trade between Argentina and India. This is important from the reality that obtains that India’s economic cooperation with Latin American countries is yet to take a very prominent shape. Giving a somewhat broad understanding of India’s trade with MERCOSUR countries in the aggregate and more specific pattern in terms of India-Argentina trade structure, they observe that there are lots of complementarities in agricultural trade prospects between the two countries. Prominent sectors that may be considered immediately are sharing of agricultural technology, collaboration in strengthening traditional farming with special emphasis on ensuring food security. Such an effort, the authors feel, will facilitate cooperation among new partners in the spirit of offering horizontal mutual benefits to the partners.

The multifarious global crises require many resources to be accumulated and allocated judiciously. They include human, natural and technical resources. Obviously, these resources, in an economic system aligned to monetary exchanges, are to be expressed in terms of accounting units. This compulsion brings the issue of financing for development as one of the main planks of concern. The 2025 United Nations Conference on Financing for Development (FfD) was held in Seville to identify a renewed approach to engage in linkage between financial requirements and the state of development that is further relevant in our quest for a future road map to simultaneously save the planet. The contribution by Stefano Manservigi and Marion Pezzini titled “From Disillusionment to Strategy”, goes further in their argument that financing for development must not emphasize on the need to generate financial resources but engage in plans to ensure how they are spent. A strong institutional mechanism that ensures that the resources are accumulated and allocated judiciously

is a compulsory requirement for financial resources to be made available. It is argued that new alliances, institutional reforms and cooperative initiatives to not only respond to the systemic challenges but also simultaneously take care of national development priorities of the global south nations are the challenges facing the global humanity. This calls for a transformation from a unilateral financing tool into a co-designed platform for experimental variable geometry multilateralism. Taking the case of the Global Gateway initiative by European Union (EU), they propose a framework of cooperation where global south and Europe engage as equal partners in learning by doing and shaping an inclusive international cooperation system.

We are presenting interviews from two distinguished policy makers from global south in this issue. They have been engaged in constantly arguing in favour of equal space for the global south in global development scenario. The first one is by Carlos Correa and Sachin Chaturvedi provides the second one. Both of them emphasize the importance of south-south cooperation and triangular cooperation as important cornerstones of development processes in the coming days. They are not substitutes for aid-based North-South cooperation, but are engaging larger space in the sense that many challenges like poverty and climate change are being looked into by such processes. Dr. Correa argues that these complementary modes of cooperation are moves towards Bandung and beyond which are emerging as 21st century equivalent of the Bandung Principles of mutual interest that puts the Global South working together to cater to the problems of increasing debt faced by the developing world. However, further efforts are necessary to take care of the issues related to technology transfer that are yet to be achieved in reality. South-South Cooperation and Triangular Cooperation must make future actions to facilitate future of technology sharing among the southern countries. He also made a clear argument in favour of a clear balance between investment forthcoming from foreign partners and the environmental and domestic social implications for the concerned country. The balance should be geared towards achievement of sustainable development that simultaneously takes care of the planet and her people.

The interview by Prof. Sachin Chaturvedi is interesting in the sense that he argues in favour of 'de-silo'-ing North-South, South-South and Triangular Cooperation as time has come to show pragmatism towards global development. The silos are not going to solve our problems. We are required to fight the fragmentation and be clear that we cannot create more walls. In the context of countries participating in triangular cooperation Professor Sachin Chaturvedi argues that they should be free from conditionalities and the approach should be demand driven. Then only the development priorities of Global South will not be compromised. He also emphasized the importance of global development compact that brings harmony between the five modalities – capacity building, trade, technology transfer, concessional credit and grants. He also observed that the younger generation in global south is necessary to be engaged to the idea of global responsibility and not just think of running after the US and Europe. A good initiative runs in terms of bringing the younger generation

and teaches them about global responsibility is the University Connect Programme initiated in India by RIS.

Pratyush Sharma has reviewed a very interesting book, “The Palgrave Handbook of Ubuntu, Inequality and Sustainable Development”. It explores how the African philosophy of Ubuntu - I am because we are - can address contemporary global challenges, especially inequality, poverty, climate change and social exclusion. The book is divided into a number of thematic entities. The first theme deals with a thematic reflection on Ubuntu where the moral theory, ethics, leadership and reinterpretations of Ubuntu for contemporary contexts are examined in detail. Interestingly, rather than romanticising the concept, it is linked to the present day concerns about sustainable development. The next thematic area contextualizes the environmental and climate change in the light of climate justice. It also takes care of global inequality, status based inequality, racism, migration and xenophobia and gender inequality as different themes captured in this monograph. Each theme combines case studies, philosophical analysis and policy reflections to capture Ubuntu’s theoretical and practical implications. The book also identifies several operational challenges in implementing Ubuntu based policies. It observes that it is important to move away from including the idea as a policy rhetoric and employed symbolically without being matched by practical mechanisms for implementation. Such efforts are required to not only incorporating enforceable Ubuntu principles in constitutional and programme mandates but also well designed capacity building programmes for all necessary stakeholders with skills to translate Ubuntu ethics into practical strategies. This book attracts relevance from other regions that are also trying to engage their traditional knowledge, often lost sight of due to colonial imposition, in changing their policy perspectives.

The final section in this issue takes care of SSC Statistics. Titled “Public Debt Crisis in Global South: A Call for Urgent Actions”, it highlights the deepening debt crisis faced by the global South that threatens sustainable development and global economic stability. Tracking the trends in public debt in Northern and Southern world the concerns emerge in terms of a significantly faster rate of increase in indebtedness of the Global South, with a comparatively lower rate of growth of their collective GDP. Sushil Kumar also identifies the top 30 countries in Global South in terms of their public debt in 2023. It also brings to our notice that the government expenditure on interest payment linked to their loan obligation has been rising, even though the share of total government expenditure to GDP remained more or less stable between 2010 and 2023. This is no doubt a serious concern for the Global South.

The present issue is an attempt to capture some important concerns related to global development and the required roadmap for international cooperation. If these contributions enable further debates and discussions on our way forward, the efforts put up in presenting this issue will be successful.

This Is A 1990 Moment – Africa Must Seize It

As the world order is being reshaped, the continent must make its voice heard and defend its interests with unity and resolve

Said Djinnit*, Ibrahim Assane Mayaki and El-Ghassim Wane*****

In July 1990, nearly thirty-five years ago, Salim Ahmed Salim, then Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), presented a landmark report to the 52nd Ordinary Session of the OAU Council of Ministers entitled ‘The Fundamental Changes Taking Place in the World and Their Consequences for Africa - Proposals for an African Position.’

The idea for this seminal document was born in the early days of Salim’s tenure at the helm of the organization. Drawing on his deep diplomatic experience, both bilateral and multilateral - notably his decade-long service as Tanzania’s Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York and prominent roles within the UN’s intergovernmental structures, including the Security Council and the General Assembly, Salim was struck by the weakening commitment of

member states to the OAU’s founding ideals. The signs of this apathy were unmistakable: poor attendance at meetings, persistent delays in the payment of statutory contributions, and a waning interest in the mechanisms of pan-African solidarity. With the liberation struggle largely over and apartheid beginning to collapse, the OAU - long defined by its role in ending foreign domination and minority rule - now found itself in search of a new *raison d’être*.

And yet, the challenges had not disappeared - they had simply evolved. While some conflicts were coming to an end, others persisted or erupted, bringing with them the all-too-familiar toll of civilian suffering and, in some instances, the complete collapse of governance structures. Economic development and continental integration, despite the commitments made under the 1980

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Lagos Plan of Action and Final Act, remained more aspirational than real (here). The human rights situation was no less troubling, even though the adoption of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights a decade earlier - preceded in 1969 by the OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa - offered a glimmer of hope. Democracy, though gaining ground in several parts of the continent, remained fragile, its future uncertain.

The imperative for Africa to reorient and reposition itself had become all the more urgent - especially as the world underwent seismic transformations: the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 and the end of the Cold War, the wave of democratisation across Eastern Europe, and the acceleration of regional integration in Europe and the Americas. These transformations demanded Africa's adaptation and opened up new opportunities the continent could not afford to miss - lest it be relegated to the sidelines of the then emerging world order.

Salim did more than offer a candid diagnosis of the continent's predicament - he also advanced concrete proposals. These were structured around the key challenges he identified and were largely endorsed in the Declaration on the Political and Socio-Economic Situation in Africa and the Fundamental Changes Taking Place in the World, adopted by the 26th Ordinary Summit of the OAU held in Addis Ababa in July 1990. The Declaration became a catalyst for a broad spectrum of decisions and

initiatives across the organisation's areas of work, while also paving the way for subsequent institutional reforms. Notable among these were: (a) the Abuja Treaty of June 1991 establishing the African Economic Community; (b) the Cairo Declaration of June 1993, which gave rise to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution; (c) the Lomé Declaration of July 2000 on Unconstitutional Changes of Government; and (d) the Solemn Declaration on the Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa (CSSDCA), also adopted in Lomé and further reinforced by the Memorandum of Understanding agreed upon two years later in Durban, South Africa. This latter document introduced wide-ranging and, in many respects, groundbreaking commitments, particularly in the field of governance (here, here and here).

Many of the African Union's (AU) subsequent achievements can be traced directly to the foundations laid by these landmark documents. As underscored in the piece written on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the 1990 Declaration, it is both unfair and historically reductive to portray the OAU as nothing more than a "dictators' club" primarily concerned with mutual protection. In truth, the defining moment in the evolution of the continental organization occurred in 1990. The continuity between the OAU and the AU runs far deeper and is more consequential than is commonly acknowledged.

There is a striking parallel between that period and the one we are living

through today: the magnitude of the upheavals. The multilateral system conceived in the aftermath of the Second World War is arguably undergoing the most profound crisis in its history. This is evident in the dysfunctions of the Security Council - the cornerstone of the collective security architecture enshrined in the UN Charter; the erosion of the World Trade Organization's authority to arbitrate trade disputes, increasingly dealt with through unilateral tariffs and retaliatory measures; and the weakening of international disarmament regimes. A notable example relates to anti-personnel landmines, whose devastating impact spurred one of the most remarkable instances of multilateral and civil society mobilization in the 1990s, culminating in the Ottawa Treaty of December 1997. National self-interest is resurgent, reflected in the rise of anti-migrant sentiment and a sharp decline in development assistance. International law - never fully insulated from the realities of power politics - continues to suffer serious violations.

If the imperative to act was already pressing in 1990 - an era of post-Cold War optimism and renewed multilateralism - it is even more urgent today, not driven by hope but by the necessity of navigating a period of profound instability and uncertainty.

This new global context is fraught with dangers for Africa. As the poorest and most vulnerable continent on

the international stage, Africa is bearing the full brunt of the reduction in official development assistance, the effects of which are already being acutely felt on the ground. In several countries, this reduction is undermining the provision of basic social services and further weakening already fragile state systems. Geopolitical and other tensions are fueling renewed quests for influence in Africa, a frenzied race to control critical resources, and a growing internationalisation of the conflicts and crises that afflict the continent. The search for solutions is thus becoming more complex, more opaque, and often disconnected from local priorities - pushing into the background the African multilateral mechanisms patiently built over decades of effort. The weakening of the multilateral system affects Africa more severely than most other regions of the world. Imperfect though it may be, this framework enables the continent to make its voice heard, to build coalitions and to defend its interests. Its erosion risks further marginalising African countries, exposing them to bilateral power dynamics in which their structural vulnerabilities leave them at a severe disadvantage.

Nonetheless, this crisis may also present an opportunity. As devastating as the contraction in international aid may be in the short and medium terms, it could nevertheless serve as a salutary shock - reminding the continent of the urgent need to reduce its dependency and strengthen its resilience. The Covid-19 pandemic had already provided a stark preview of this structural vulnerability.

Amid fierce global competition for vaccine access, Africa found itself virtually abandoned - victim to an international order whose workings often echoed the Hobbesian logic that “man is a wolf to man.” A collective response did emerge, driven by the shared fear of impending disaster: joint vaccine purchasing initiatives, continental coordination mechanisms, and renewed calls for health sovereignty. Yet this flicker of collective action did not survive the fading of the immediate threat. Today, as external support dries up and uncertainties mount, Africa no longer has the luxury of reverting to a posture of passive expectation. It must learn to rely more fully on its own strengths and embed this resolve over the long term, while building concrete solidarities - particularly within the framework of the UN.

The ongoing reconfiguration of the global order - and the accompanying redistribution of power - can also be harnessed as an opportunity. When the post-war multilateral system was established, with the UN at its core, Africa was virtually absent. At the San Francisco Conference of 1945, only three African states were represented: Egypt, Ethiopia, and Liberia (the Union of South Africa, due to its system of racial discrimination, could not be considered a legitimate representative of the continent). All three bore, to varying degrees, the marks of the injustices and failures of the interwar international system. Africa cannot afford to be absent a second time. It is only by capitalising on its unity that the continent will be able to make a meaningful contribution to shaping the architecture

of the emerging global order. If the imperative to act was already pressing in 1990 - an era of post-Cold War optimism and renewed multilateralism—it is even more urgent today, not driven by hope but by the necessity of navigating a period of profound instability and uncertainty.

The good news - beyond the opportunities that persist despite today's many challenges - is that Africa now possesses assets it lacked in the early 1990s. At that time, it was necessary to build the political, normative, and institutional tools required for collective continental action. That foundational work, initiated in the early decades of the OAU, has largely been accomplished. Today, there is no strategic domain - peace and security, governance, democracy, human rights, economic and social development - in which Africa lacks a relevant continental framework. Agenda 2063, the strategic blueprint adopted in 2015 to guide the continent toward the future it envisions, brings coherence to these instruments and embeds them within a shared long-term vision.

In the economic domain, Africa's integration agenda is underpinned by major flagship initiatives, including the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM), launched in January 2018; and the Agreement on the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Right of Establishment, both adopted in March 2018 (here and here). These are supported by a wide array of continental sectoral strategies covering industrialisation, agriculture and food

systems, infrastructure, education, science and technology, and environmental sustainability, among others.

In the fields of peace and security, human rights, and governance, the norms adopted by Africa rank among the most advanced in the world. They form a coherent framework, including: (a) the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty (Pelindaba Treaty) of 1996, the Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism of 1999 and its Additional Protocol of 2004, the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of 2002 - which drew critical lessons from the functioning and limitations of the Cairo Mechanism, particularly the failure to prevent and halt the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, and the Non-Aggression and Common Defence Pact of 2005 (here, here, here, here and here); (b) several complementary instruments to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, addressing the rights of children and women, the protection of internally displaced persons, and the right to nationality and eradication of statelessness in Africa (here, here, here and here); and (c) the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance of 2007, alongside related legal instruments such as the Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Corruption, and the Charters on Public Service and on Decentralization (here, here, here and here).

These normative advances are reinforced by dedicated institutions, including the Peace and Security Council (PSC), the African Peer Review

Mechanism (APRM), the AU Advisory Board on Corruption, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, and the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (here, here, here, here and here).

Yet this impressive normative and institutional arsenal still struggles to deliver the expected results, despite the continent's immense natural resources, its large and dynamic youth population, and its globally recognized cultural and artistic creativity.

Africa doesn't lack tools. What is needed now is a paradigm shift: placing the execution of existing commitments at the core of the continental agenda. What is too often treated as a technical matter must be elevated to a political and strategic imperative.

The economic transformation of the continent remains unfulfilled. African exports are still dominated by raw materials, with the region contributing only a tiny share to global manufacturing value added. Intra-African trade stagnates at around 15 per cent - a figure that lags far behind other regions. Air transport remains limited and prohibitively expensive, with costs averaging 50 per cent more than in other parts of the world - even as sub-Saharan Africa is home to nearly 67 per cent of people living in extreme poverty. Infrastructure needs remain immense, with the current

annual deficit estimated between 70 and 110 billion dollars. Despite recent progress, African citizens continue to face significant obstacles when traveling within the continent, requiring visas for nearly half of all intra-African journeys - more than is often required for travelers from non-African countries.

Democratic processes are under strain, most notably due to the resurgence of unconstitutional changes of government - a symptom among others of the continent's persistent governance crises. On the peace and security front, the picture is equally alarming, several active armed conflicts are unfolding across virtually all regions, while the number of displaced persons exceeds 44 million - nearly 3 per cent of the continent's population. This unprecedented figure speaks to the scale of the fragilities that have accumulated over time.

This persistent gap between Africa's normative and political ambitions and the realities on the ground is, above all, the result of limited implementation capacity. Africa doesn't lack tools; it simply cannot afford to remain caught in an endless cycle of drafting new texts. What is needed now is a paradigm shift: placing the execution of existing commitments at the core of the continental agenda. What is too often treated as a technical matter must be elevated to a political and strategic imperative.

This imperative is all the more pressing given that the ideal of unity - once a powerful driver of pan-African progress - no longer seems to mobilize with the same intensity. A thread has broken: between institutions and citizens,

between the vision of integration and the fragmented realities experienced across the continent. Restoring trust in continental unity is essential - not as an abstract aspiration, but as a concrete and necessary condition for renewal. Without this shared conviction, it will be difficult to generate the coherence and momentum required to meet the scale of today's challenges.

In this light, Salim Ahmed Salim's 1990 intuition remains deeply relevant for the new AU Commission - which deserves the full support of all - as it embarks on the mandate bestowed upon it. The Commission stands at a pivotal juncture, with a unique opportunity to make an imprint through a bold, forward-looking initiative.

Specifically, the AU Commission must take the initiative of producing a founding report - akin in spirit to the landmark 1990 document. Such a report should offer a clear-eyed articulation of the challenges facing the continent, deliver an unflinching assessment of its current state, and, above all, put forward responses centered on one core priority: the effective implementation of commitments already made. The report should identify urgent priorities sector by sector, and propose concrete, actionable measures to address them. It should also reaffirm a truth that is widely accepted in principle, but too often not followed through in national practice: no African country can hope to prosper in isolation. Even united, Africa will likely remain on the margins of global power for some time - particularly as reform of the UN Security Council, where Africa is the

only continent without a permanent seat, still appears remote. But divided, the continent becomes easy prey in a world that has never spared the weak - and does so even less today. The moment has come for Africa to invest in its internal cohesion, even as it continues to engage the world and cultivate international solidarity.

While the 1990 report is to serve as inspiration, the initiative being proposed here must go further - both in the ambition it embodies and in the scale of mobilization it seeks to spark. The urgency of the current moment, the complexity of the challenges, and the weight of public expectations demand a response of equal magnitude.

In this effort toward renewal, the AU must occupy a central place. Nothing sustainable can - or should - be conceived outside of it. As the continent's legitimate institutional framework for unity, the AU is best positioned to articulate Africa's collective voice and ambitions, and to drive the implementation of its strategies in key areas: peace and security, democracy and human rights, integration, and sustainable development. In this regard, a troubling trend must be reversed: summits held with external partners - whether bilateral or multilateral - often attract more heads of state and government than the AU's own meetings.

The Commission, more specifically, must chart concrete and effective courses of action, identify levers capable of delivering real impact in the daily lives of the hundreds of millions of Africans who have waited far too long for better prospects, and work to generate political will wherever it is absent or faltering. In this task, imagination and creativity, agility and responsiveness will be its most powerful assets.

While the 1990 report is to serve as inspiration, the initiative being proposed here must go further - both in the ambition it embodies and in the scale of mobilization it seeks to spark. The urgency of the current moment, the complexity of the challenges, and the weight of public expectations demand a response of equal magnitude. To meet this bar, the development of such a report must be grounded in a process that is both rigorous and inclusive. It cannot be a technocratic exercise undertaken in isolation. Member States must of course play a leading role, as should the Regional Economic Communities. But so too must African civil society, youth and women's organizations, academic circles and think tanks, entrepreneurs and innovators. In short, all the segments of society whose full potential remains insufficiently tapped and are eager to be engaged.

Once finalised, the report should be presented at an extraordinary AU summit, convened at the Union's headquarters in Addis Ababa, and bringing together all heads of state and government. Only at this level of political endorsement can it become a genuine catalyst for action. The

momentum it seeks to generate must be collective, inclusive, and unwavering.

Of course, no report alone can resolve the continent's many challenges. In the end, it is just a document. But if well crafted - if it captures imaginations, is grounded in truth, and followed by real commitments - it can serve as a powerful driver of change. Recent history offers compelling examples. In 2021, amid a crisis of confidence in multilateralism and the shock of COVID-19, UN Secretary-General António Guterres released *Our Common Agenda*, which laid the groundwork for the 2024 Pact for the Future and other major initiatives. The European Commission recently tasked Mario Draghi with rethinking the foundations of Europe's global economic competitiveness. Further back, Boutros Boutros-Ghali launched *An Agenda for Peace* in 1992, reshaping the UN's approach to the promotion of peace and security. And at the turn of the millennium, Kofi Annan's *We the Peoples: The Role of the United Nations in the 21st Century* became the foundation of the Millennium Summit and its landmark Declaration.

The AU Commission cannot, on its own, guarantee the success of such an endeavour. However, it has a vital role to play: to frame the key issues, encourage member states to live up to their commitments, and engage the African citizenry as an active stakeholder. At critical junctures in history, the act of articulating a vision with clarity and ambition can inspire new momentum and help give rise - through the power of honest reflection - to a renewed collective resolve.

In May 1963, during the debate in Addis Ababa between those favoring a gradual approach to African unity and those advocating immediate political integration, Kwame Nkrumah may have erred by being ahead of his time. Yet history has since validated the essence of his vision: the limitations of the approach adopted at the founding of the OAU are now evident, and the consequences of deferred integration continue to adversely shape the continent's trajectory. It is now incumbent upon Africa's leaders - through sustained commitment and tangible action - to do justice to that early intuition, however belatedly.

India and Argentina Agricultural Complementarity: An Agenda for Trade and Cooperation

Manuel Gonzalo* and Paloma Ochoa**

Abstract: In the 21st century, India's economic growth and geopolitical relevance in the context of Asia's re-emergence has led the US, England, Germany and France, among other countries of the global north, to implement economic-military strategies aimed at the Indo-Pacific. In parallel, the spaces for cooperation for the countries of the Global South have expanded, with India having a leading voice in the G-20 and the BRICS. Although Latin America is not in India's first ring of foreign relations, these have grown and densified. In particular, the commercial, diplomatic and cooperation relationship between India and Argentina has gained volume in recent years, especially regarding agricultural trade. The aim of this paper is to introduce and demonstrate the relevance of agricultural complementarity between India and Argentina, presenting a portrait of the trade relationship and highlighting the potential for cooperation between the two countries. The document highlights the opportunities around the vegetable oils complex, agtech, no-till farming, familiar and traditional farming, and food.

1. Introduction

From a long-term perspective, the Indian economy has gone through a process of accelerating its economic growth since its independence in 1947 (Nagaraj, 2013a; Gonzalo, 2018, 2022; 2023a, 2023b). After experiencing a growth rate of around 3 per cent during the 1950s and 1960s, the 1980s marked an expedition, with the average growth of around 5 per cent, which then moved up to an average year-on-year growth of approximately 6 per cent during this century. In 2023-2024, the Indian

economy was the fastest growing among the G-20 countries, with a rate of over 7 per cent, ranking in 2024 as the 3rd largest economy in the world after the US and China, accounting for just over 8 per cent of the world's gross product measured in terms of purchasing power parity (IMF, 2024).

Although there are different views and interpretations about the causes of Indian growth, the indicators of the last three decades show an acceleration driven by the growth of consumption through credit and rural financial inclusion,

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an increasing weight of construction and real estate due to a process of constant urbanisation (although not as fast as China's), a participation of about 8 per cent of output from public and private investment in infrastructure, and the contribution of service exports as salient and relatively consensual elements (Nagaraj, 2023b; Rakshit, 2009; Ghosh, 2016; Gonzalo, 2018, 2022a; 2023a, 2023b).

In this framework of economic growth, and taking into account its population weight (India is today the most populous country in the world), there are a series of processes and circumstances that contribute to India recovering the geopolitical and geoeconomic centrality that it once had centuries ago, being one of the oldest civilizations in the world (Gonzalo, 2028, 2023a). Among these processes, the growth and geopolitical relevance of the Asian continent is today manifest and evident. This has led many Western countries to seek to articulate and link up with different Asian economies. India, in particular, is considered a main market in Asia and a relevant technological and military partner for the United States of America, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and other countries that frame their approach to Asia through the Indo-Pacific platform (Gonzalo, 2022b, 2023b, 2024).

India has also gained a place in the G-20, the BRICS+ bloc (and its New Development Bank), and is a voice of the so-called Global South. In these spaces, India establishes a bridge with other developing countries that includes an agenda of common issues such as

the just energy transition, food security, diplomacy on vaccines and health, and the different social challenges that the BRICS and the Global South still face. Thus, given its geographical location, demographic attributes, scientific and material progress, and economic and social challenges, which are still important, India is today positioned as a key player in the international cooperation agenda of many countries around the globe. In terms of international cooperation, a series of agendas stand out, such as nuclear power, energy, digital economy, ocean economy, agriculture and food security, among others.

Specially, economic relations between India and Latin America have grown in recent decades, mainly based on the exchange of agricultural, energy and mineral products by Latin America, and the pharmaceutical, automotive and computer services industries by India. In diplomatic terms, relations have also deepened. India has recently opened a new embassy in Paraguay, and another is planned to be opened in Bolivia, while India's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr S. Jaishankar, has recently visited the Southern Cone. Also, in terms of technical cooperation, India has increased its presence through, for example, ITEC scholarships.

In this general context, the objective of this paper is to account for and measure the relevance of agricultural complementarity between India and Argentina, presenting an updated portrait of the trade relationship and highlighting a series of items with potential for cooperation between the two countries.

To this end, the following section presents an outline of the relations between India and Latin America. Then, the work focuses on agricultural relations between India and Argentina within the framework of MERCOSUR. Finally, the paper highlights a series of possible working areas in the field of agricultural cooperation between the two countries.

2. Outline of India-Latin America Relations

Although India and Latin America are geographically distant and, consequently, this implies a significant logistical effort, India's economic growth and the economic complementarity between the two regions have led to an increase in trade, investment, and diplomatic relations, particularly in the last decade (CAF, 2023; Zerpa de Hurtado et al., 2021; ECLAC, 2016). In summary, the trade and investment relationship stands out for Latin America's contributions in terms of food and energy security, while India stands out in terms of information and communication technologies, automotive and pharmaceuticals.

Specifically, according to India's Ministry of Trade and Industry (2024), India's exports to Latin America were \$19.15 billion and imports were \$23.75 billion, totaling an exchange of \$42.9 billion for the 2023-24 fiscal year. The export basket from Latin America to India is mainly composed of crude oil, gold, vegetable oils, copper, timber, chemicals, and fruits and vegetables. Meanwhile, imports from India to Latin America include automobiles, chemical products, petroleum derivatives,

pharmaceuticals, textiles and cotton. Although the flow of foreign trade between India and Latin America does not exceed 4 per cent of the total traded by India and the world, there are some outstanding indicators. For example, India's exports to Brazil (for more than \$6,000 million) exceed those exported by India individually to Japan, Indonesia, Vietnam and Thailand, traditional and close partners.¹ Meanwhile, for several Latin American countries, such as Argentina, India is positioned among the top five trading partners in terms of exports.

In terms of investments, although there are no detailed statistics, the main Indian companies in Latin America are located in the automotive and motorcycle sector, through companies such as Mahindra and Mahindra, Bajaj Auto, Royal Enfield and Hero Cycles, among others; in the IT and business services sector with companies such as TCS, Wipro, Mphasis, Zoho, among others; in the pharmaceutical sector, through Dr Reddy's Laboratories, Sun Pharma, Hetero Laboratories, among others; in Lithium, through Khanij Bidesh India (KABIL); in electricity transmission, through Kalpataru; in the oil sector, through different state-owned companies such as Bharat Petroleum Corp (BPCL) and other Indian groups, etc. Meanwhile, from Latin America, the Argentine companies Globant, INVAP and Bagó operate in the computer services and software, nuclear reactors and pharmaceutical sectors in India, respectively. Brazil's Petrobras, WEG and Embraer have invested in the oil,

solar and aviation sectors, respectively. From Mexico, Bimbo² and Great Foods & Beverages are operating in the food sector; Tremec, Metalsa and Nemak in the auto parts sector, while cement giant CEMEX also has investments in India.

In terms of scientific and technological cooperation, the ITEC scholarship programme promoted by the Government of India has expanded strongly in Latin America over the last decade. There are also areas of excellence in some Latin American countries that maintain scientific cooperation with India. In Argentina, cooperation in the space, nuclear, defense, and agricultural sectors stands out, and recently, progress is being made in consolidating ties between universities in both countries. In Brazil, the main collaborations revolve around projects in ethanol, defense, conventional and renewable energy, and aviation. With Mexico, agricultural cooperation stands out. In the other Latin American countries, cooperation is more embryonic, although growing.

In short, trade, as usual, is the most dynamic dimension of the relationship between India and Latin America. The challenge there is to expand the basket of products, players and make it more sophisticated. In terms of investments, the main actors are state-owned companies and national groups, and there is a working space to ensure that smaller companies transcend the distances between the two regions and are encouraged to invest. Meanwhile, though scientific and technological cooperation exists, it should be expanded,

and endowed with continuity and greater resources.

3. Agricultural Exchange Between India and Argentina within the Framework of MERCOSUR

The domestic agri-food market in India is the sixth largest in the world, with a processing industry contributing 32 per cent of this sector (IBEF, 2023). Increased urbanization and economic growth have brought and will continue to bring changes in consumption habits in India, boosting the demand for certain foods. While global growth in meat and seafood consumption in the coming years is expected to be driven by China, India will play a key role in increasing the consumption of dairy products, vegetable oils, and sugars (OECD-FAO, 2024). In addition, the market for oils, in particular palm, rapeseed, soybean and sunflower oils, is expected to continue to grow. Projections by different organizations place this growth rate between 15 per cent (OECD-FAO, 2024) and 35-40 per cent (USDA, IVPA, Government of India) accumulated over the next decade (D'Angelo and Calzada, 2024; D'Angelo, 2024a).

Despite the above, India's agri-food exchanges with the rest of the world remain modest. This is explained by the importance that agriculture still has in India, both in social and economic terms. Although India carried out its green revolution in the mid-60s, agriculture is still today the main source of employment in the country, accounting

for approximately 45 per cent of the working population and, although its participation has fallen significantly in this century, it still represents 18 per cent of GDP (Gonzalo, 2018, 2022a).

India's agriculture, characterised largely by small-scale farms and the use of traditional techniques, faces significant challenges related to its productivity, its high dependence on fertilizers, and its extreme vulnerability to adverse climatic events, among other factors. These circumstances explain the variable policies around the opening and closing of import markets and the changes that regulations around imports usually undergo, which respond to the particular needs of the moment, including increases in tariffs and other restrictions, depending on the conditions of domestic production (IVPA, 2024; Argentine Embassy in India, 2022). Climate change will also have a significant impact on India's most vulnerable groups, such as farmers in rainfed areas, landless peasants and women, whose incomes could be reduced by 20-25 per cent (Economic Survey, 2017-2018). These conditions raise questions about the long-term sustainability of Indian agricultural production.

In this context, the Indian government has implemented, in recent years, various tools and initiatives with the aim of supporting farmers and modernising the supply chain in agro-industrial production. The main goals include increasing net grain production, improving productivity per hectare, and raising crop quality, both to strengthen food security and to favor exports to international markets (IBEF, 2023; CEI,

2022). As a result of these initiatives, India has established itself as a net food exporter, maintaining its interest in self-sufficiency in a context where agriculture remains essential for a large rural population that represents about 2/3 of the total.

While the Indian government has worked on removing tariffs, the use of non-tariff barriers, such as licenses, certifications, and labelling requirements, has increased significantly. Regarding agri-food products, it is relevant to note that those that benefit most from liberalising measures are also the most affected by restrictions, with soybean oil being the main example (Global Trade Alert, 2024). Another important aspect is that the Indian import market remains closed to genetically modified products, restricting their entry absolutely (Argentine Embassy in India, 2022).

India has a Complementarity Agreement with MERCOSUR, in force since 2009, which grants tariff preferences for 452 Indian products and 450 MERCOSUR products (Argentine Embassy in India, 2022). Mercosur's main export to India is soybean oil, with a significant share of Argentine exports, followed to a lesser extent by those of Brazil. Also relevant is the growth of sugar exports, mainly Brazilian, which represent 78 per cent of the total and are closely linked to the biofuels industry. MERCOSUR has little relevance as a destination for India's agricultural exports: the first 19 products exported by India to Mercosur are industrial goods (Ochoa and Ricca, 2024).

Table 1: Structure of Bilateral Trade MERCOSUR-India (average 2020-2023). In USD

MERCOSUR				
Exports to India	USD 9.9 MM			
Imports from India	USD 8.4B			
Amounts in USD	Brazil	Argentina	Uruguay	Paraguay
Exports	5.4 mm	3.4 mm	159 m	52 m
Imports	6.6 mm	1 mm	201 m	182 m
Products	Brazil	Argentina	Uruguay	Paraguay
Exports to India	Fuels (1.8 mm); oils (1.2 mm); Sugar (594 m)	Soybean Oil (2.4 mm), Seed Oils (412 m)	Rough wood (129 m), wool (4M)	Oils (32 m); iron and steel (11 m); aluminum (3 m).
Imports from India	Fuels (1.8 mm); chemicals (1.1 mm); nuclear reactors and machines (507 m); vehicles (403 m); pharmaceutical products (374 m).	Fuels (258 m); chemicals (121m); vehicles (108 m).	Vehicles (31 m), chemicals (20 m).	Iron or steel cast iron (32 m); chemicals (29 million); vehicles (25 m).

Source: ITC.

For Argentina, India is the main trading partner for the country's main export complex (D'Angelo and Terré, 2024). Moreover, Argentina is the only Mercosur country with a surplus trade balance with India. Agricultural products accounted for an average of 84 per cent of what India imported from Argentina between 2020 and 2023, with a strong share of soybean oil, of which India is the main buyer, being the destination of 53 per cent of the exports (average 2021-

2023) (Ochoa and Ricca, 2024; D'Angelo & Calzada, 2024). Argentina has been the dominant supplier of soybean oil for several years, accounting for more than 80 per cent of imports between 2019 and 2021, although falling in the following years to about 50 per cent (D'Angelo and Calzada, 2024). The production and export of soybean oil is highly concentrated, so exports to India originate mainly in three provinces: Santa Fe, Buenos Aires and Córdoba.³

In relation to sunflower oil, the conflict in Ukraine opened new possibilities for Argentine exports, which, in the last two years, accounted for about 20 per cent of Indian imports. India is currently the main destination, accounting for more than 60 per cent of Argentine exports (average 2021-2023) (ITC). Although with lower figures, Argentina also has a relevant participation as a supplier of other products of the soybean industry

and other oilseeds such as cakes and other vegetable residues and barley (Ochoa and Ricca, 2024).

While Argentine exports are predominantly agro-industrial and highly concentrated, imports from India are more diversified and mainly industrial (Argentine Embassy in India, 2022). Specifically, India is currently Argentina's ninth largest import origin (ITC, 2024).

Table 2: India-Argentina Agro-Industrial Trade

India Agricultural Imports	Thousands of USD (average 2021-2023)		Argentine participation
	From Argentina	From The World	%
Crude soybean oil	2.362.656	4.696.235	50,31%
Crude sunflower oil	505.385	2.931.672	17,24%
Cakes and other solid residues from the extraction of soybean oil	86.712	179.106	48,41%
Barley (excl. sowing barley)	25.542	54.816	46,60%
Cakes and other solid residues resulting from the extraction of vegetable fats or oils	10.742	40.515	26,51%
Beans of the species “Vigna mungo L. Hepper” or “Vigna mungo L. Hepper” or “Vigna mungo ...	2.475	609.151	0,41%
Frozen shrimp and prawns	2.026	28.332	7,15%
Hides and skins, raw	1.942	9.942	19,53%
Common beans “Phaseolus vulgaris”, dried and peeled	1.729	136.467	1,27%
Maize (excl. sowing crops)	1.525	10.421	14,63%
Fermented black tea and partially fermented tea	1.320	50.153	2,63%
Fresh apples	771	351.676	0,22%
“Citrus” juice	769	2.298	33,46%
Fresh pears	491	29.005	1,69%

Source: ITC.

Therefore, in relation to trade, although it is important to continue increasing the volume of total trade between India and Argentina, the greatest challenge should be focused on diversifying the export basket.⁴ This could include products such as pulses, corn, other oils (e.g. olive), fruits, wines, wood, dairy products, and hides (Ochoa & Ricca, 2024; Gonzalo, 2023). Meanwhile, one of the main challenges for Indian agriculture will be to encourage the mass adoption of climate-smart farming techniques and other adaptation measures, to maintain production and productivity, and ensure the continuity of food and nutrition security in the country. In this area, cooperation between the two countries can find significant opportunities.

4. An Agenda for Trade and Agricultural Cooperation Between India and Argentina

Based on India's economic and population growth and productive complementarity with Argentina, there are concrete spaces and opportunities to increase trade and international cooperation between the two countries. In fact, in the last decade, trade between the two nations has grown, many middle managers and first-line officials of the Argentine government have visited India, and various initiatives in agricultural matters have been launched due to the active role of the Embassy of India in Argentina and the Argentine Embassy in India, especially its agricultural attaché.

Different public organisations of the two countries have been maintaining relations for years. For example, in Argentina, at the national level, the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries; the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (MINCYT);⁵ the National Institute of Agricultural Technology (INTA); and the National Service of Agri-Food Health and Quality (SENASA), stand out. At the subnational level, the Government of the Province of Santa Fe, the main exporter to India, can be highlighted,⁶ whose governor visited India for the first time in 2023. Also INVAP, a provincially owned company belonging to the Government of Rio Negro, has developed different projects in India, including an attempt of agricultural technology transference, a joint initiative with Los Grobo Group known as Frontec.⁷

At the same time, despite the potential and progress made in recent years, the challenge remains of sustaining and enhancing both trade as well as international cooperation resources, capacities and programs between the two countries, aiming to achieve sustainability, articulation and consistency in the medium and long term. In this general context, the following are a series of areas on which trade and international cooperation efforts in agriculture can be concentrated, as well as opportunities to increase trade ties between the two countries in the future:

- Oil complex: Despite the goal of achieving self-sufficiency in oils by 2030 (IVPA, 2024), the growth in

- demand, coupled with low yields in local production, pose strong constraints (D'Angelo, 2024b). The level of self-sufficiency regarding oils in India is currently 43 per cent (IVPA, 2024). Argentina emerges as a natural partner in both soybean and sunflower oil, with production levels that far exceed domestic consumption and a modern, export-oriented industry (D'Angelo, 2024b). This provides opportunities to strengthen the strategic relationship between the two countries, both in terms of securing supply and contributing to food security, as well as in technology transfer (Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, 2024).
- **Agtech:** Argentina has a promising development in terms of incorporating technologies into production processes in agriculture with a strong growth of Agtech companies and the consolidation of a network of support institutions (Lachman et al, 2023). The growing incorporation of technologies arises as an opportunity to improve efficiency and productivity and generate practices that provide solutions to climate change (ECLAC, 2022). There are precedents of agricultural cooperation, such as the Agreements signed between the two countries in 2019 (Argentine Presidency, 2019). Likewise, it is worth noting the potential to advance in an agenda of missions and cross-incubation between companies and entrepreneurs linked to biotechnology and bioinputs, where Argentina's know-how could contribute to increasing productivity and caring for the environment in India (Gonzalo et al., 2023).
 - **Conservation Agriculture (No-Till):** India ranks eighth globally in terms of the adoption of conservation agriculture, although it is in the early stages of no-till or minimum tillage development. The Indian government is keen to expand the adoption of these practices, mainly because of the impact that stubble burning (e.g. rice) has on air quality and pollution, as well as water use and moisture retention in the soil. However, these practices have encountered resistance from farmers. The Indian government promotes and finances various programmes for the purchase of specific machinery and adoption by farmers in cooperation with international agencies and other countries (e.g. programmes already exist with Canada and Australia). The Argentine Agricultural Attaché Office in India is participating in meetings and technical visits to identify areas for cooperation in this practice in which the country is a pioneer (Beheran, M & Mishra, K, 2024).
 - **Family and traditional farming:** small and medium-sized producers, agricultural cooperatives and traditional farming practices have a very significant relevance in India, even employing a large part of its population,⁸ while in Argentina agricultural cooperatives, family farming and small rural producers also play a relevant role. Therefore, there are opportunities for joint work in terms of the transfer of best practices and technologies in different areas. In fact, in February 2019 an MoU was signed between the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare of India and the Ministry of Production and Labor of Argentina

aimed at sharing technical information on agricultural products looking for market access, in order to carry out the Pest Risk Analysis (PRA), evaluation, potential for development, soil erosion control, use of water for various crops, plant genetic improvement in legumes and other species, biological control of pests, among other topics. Currently, there is a broad work agenda in bio-inputs, best farming practices, use and preservation of soils, registration and patenting of IP in the field of traditional knowledge, etc.

- Food: India's population and economic growth will continue to generate new consumers, demands, and needs for food products of all kinds. Among the products in which Argentina could increase its trade are legumes, maize, olive and sunflower oils, nuts, citrus and other fruits, wine and dairy products, among others. There may also be interesting opportunities in specific niches, such as Halal-certified foods. Along with trade, there is also room for cooperation to transfer best practices, technologies and services between the two countries. For example, crop management techniques, technology transfer for the development of enzymes, etc.

5. Final Comments

With projections of rapid economic growth and an ever-expanding urban population, India is on track to become the world's third-largest economy by 2030. In this context of transformation and development, food consumption will increase and become more sophisticated.

Despite India's desire for self-sufficiency, the increase in demand, coupled with the structural constraints of the agricultural sector, make it difficult to foresee a scenario without imports. Argentina is in a privileged position, which can give rise to different opportunities. The two countries are united by historical ties and currently have a strong and mature relationship, strengthened by the Strategic Partnership Agreement.

In a global context marked by increasing volatility and geopolitical risks,⁹ ensuring food security as well as resilience to climate change will become increasingly central factors for all countries, but especially for those that, like India, will experience higher-than-average growth rates. Collaboration between India and Argentina can play a central role in addressing these issues simultaneously, consolidating itself as a supplier and strategic partner.

In this framework, it is essential to conclude long-term agreements with India, deepening existing relations, diversifying trade baskets, positioning Argentine products for Indian consumers, collaborating and investing in productive technology and logistics. Argentina has a wide range of opportunities to expand cooperation with India in the agricultural sector. These include legumes, dairy products, refined oils, agricultural machinery, production technology, etc. Agreements should explore, explicitly include and sustain these opportunities, in order to consolidate a broader and more diversified relationship with India.

Endnotes

- ¹ <https://latinamericanaffairs.blogspot.com/2024/05/indias-exports-to-latin-american.html>
- ² Bimbo has acquired a large stake in the company Ready Roti, the owner of the brand Harvest Gold.
- ³ For more details, you can see the videos of the three modules of “Santa Fe looks at Asia. India Section” (Module I, Module II and Module III) organised by the Government of the Province of Santa Fe within the framework of the Strategic Market Development Programme, in collaboration with the ICBC Foundation and the National University of Rafaela in June 2021, as well as the webinar “Opportunities and challenges for Argentine agriculture in India” organized by the CARI Committee on Agrarian Affairs and the CARI Working Group on India in June 2024.
- ⁴ Watch the webinar “Opportunities and challenges for Argentine agriculture in India” organised by the CARI Committee on Agrarian Affairs and the CARI Working Group on India on August 12, 2024 and the webinar “All the Indias, one India: opportunities for Argentina” presented by Manuel Gonzalo and organized by the ICBC Foundation.
- ⁵ For example, the Department of Science and Technology of the Ministry of Science and Technology of the Republic of India and the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation of the Argentine Republic (MINCyT) made a joint call in 2023 for research projects aimed at promoting cooperation between researchers from both countries in the areas of biotechnology and energy transition. See: <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/ciencia/financiamiento/arg-india-2023>
- ⁶ See the three modules of “Santa Fe looks at Asia. India Section” (Module I, Module II and Module III) organized by the Government of the Province of Santa Fe within the Strategic Markets Development Program, in collaboration with the ICBC Foundation and the National University of Rafaela in June 2021.

- ⁷ <https://argentinaenespacio.blogspot.com/2016/02/la-tecnologia-agro-satelital-de-frontec.html>
- ⁸ It should also be noted that India has a Ministry of AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy) created in 2014 that seeks to promote traditional medicine systems and even encourage international cooperation in these areas.
- ⁹ See Piñeiro, Illescas and VicentinMasaro (2024).

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From Disillusionment to Strategy

Stefano Manservigi* and Mario Pezzini**

Abstract: This paper builds on the debates and outcomes of the 2025 United Nations Conference on Financing for Development (FfD) in Seville to propose a renewed approach to international cooperation and multilateral reform. It argues that, in today's global context, neither nostalgia for hegemonic leadership nor defensive pragmatism can offer a viable path forward. While some actors see only a vacuum of leadership, others are actively proposing alternatives. These include new alliances, institutional reform, and concrete cooperative initiatives that respond to systemic challenges and reflect national development priorities. The paper outlines the respective expectations of the South and North. It then examines Europe's potential role, highlighting the crossroads it now faces. The paper also argues that if Europe wants to remain relevant, it must transition from traditional aid logic to strategic alliances based on joint ownership. The Global Gateway initiative is discussed as a case in point. The authors propose that it be transformed from a unilateral financing tool into a co-designed platform for experimental, variable-geometry multilateralism. Ultimately, the paper calls for a shift from abstract doctrines to a variable geometry multilateralism, where the Global South and Europe engage as equal partners in learning-by-doing and shaping a more inclusive and effective international cooperation system.

1. After Seville, a Renewed Multilateralism

The United States' increasing retreat from multilateralism is neither new nor surprising. In Seville, where the Fourth United Nations International Conference on Financing for Development took place this year, the absence of the US was, therefore, not a shock. Rather, it was perceived as confirmation of a change that is already underway. So what needs to be done?

With a sense of disenchantment, some simply describe a world without leadership and lower significantly their ambitions for global solidarity. They are generally convinced that a single hegemon is always necessary and remain attached to the existing one-sided order. At best, they ask how the damage caused by the power vacuum left by the United States can be 'pragmatically' contained, adapting to a dysfunctional less-than-optimal machine to be 'patched'.

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But another point of view also prevailed in Seville – one that calls for a revival rather than resignation. Here, the question is how to reinvent multilateralism without waiting for a hegemon (whoever that may be) to return to the stage. This second view is shared by many contributors to the latest issue of this Review.¹ They outline a ‘possibilist’ approach, which addresses the paradox of traditional multilateral institutions being at risk of collapse just when they are most needed.

These voices emphasise that no country, however powerful, can tackle today’s complex global challenges alone. While many contributions offer sharp critiques of existing institutions – e.g. highlighting their institutional fatigue and fixation on formal statutes, mandates and procedures to the detriment of actual impact – they also go beyond a mere diagnosis. They call for the reinvention of a more equitable multilateral architecture, in the medium term, while advancing actionable proposals for the short term. Among these are concrete cooperative missions – partial, thematic, and territorially specific – designed to be implemented through flexible coalitions and light governance. Such initiatives could enable states, local authorities, and non-state actors to test new forms of collaboration, observe results, and gradually reshape the practice of cooperation.

The ‘Plataforma de Sevilla’, promoted by the Spanish government during the conference, has a similar shift in approach. It does not merely attempt to fill a

leadership vacuum – it seeks to reshape leadership itself. First, by bringing together concrete and operational initiatives; and in the longer term, by paving the way for a new international cooperation architecture that is fairer, more legitimate, and more effective. The Plataforma is a starting point, not a finish line. After Seville, it invites to be updated, scaled up, and replicated. The same holds for the conversation opened in this Review: it should continue, broaden, and connect with other political processes.

In this context, we present the policy proposal we developed for FEPS and Fundación Avanza² during the Seville Conference. Like other initiatives emerging today, it builds on the idea of experimental³ multilateralism, grounded in flexibility and shared purpose. While it primarily addresses the European Union’s cooperation policy, its ambition is broader: to support political debate through concrete examples, enabling a coalition of actors to position themselves as re-inventors of development cooperation.

2. Respective Expectations Regarding Reinvention

Several countries of the Global South are explicitly calling for a reinvention of international cooperation. Many have long demanded – and in some cases achieved – a stronger voice in global forums. They seek greater alignment of cooperation with their national priorities and are actively working to create new spaces for action, new institutions, and new capabilities. These

countries are asserting themselves as key actors in defining the rules and practices of a renewed international cooperation. Yet this ambition faces a difficult and asymmetrical global context. Rising geopolitical tensions threaten to restrict their scope for action. If this process results in closed, juxtaposed, and competing spheres of influence, it could ultimately weaken the provision of global public goods - at a moment when they are more necessary than ever.

Reinvention requires at least two conditions: a meaningful role for the South in shaping development agendas, and new alliances between macro-regions to safeguard essential global goods and development perspectives. But who can act as a credible co-architect of this multilateral renewal? And around which missions should these efforts coalesce? Without clear answers and credible platforms for action, the risk is further fragmentation, fueling transactional dynamics. We could face, on one side, traditional institution with declining legitimacy; on the other, new Southern institutions struggling to fill the representational gap. To avoid this outcome, we need not only serious reflection, but pragmatic and inclusive solutions.

2.1. What the South Asks

Expectations across Africa, Latin America, and Asia are high. While they vary in form and focus, some recurring themes emerge. We highlight here three key areas where significant change is expected.

First, multilateral governance remains deeply asymmetrical. Institutions created under or associated with the Bretton Woods framework still operate according to exclusionary dynamics, with decision-making concentrated in the hands of a few - often without meaningful participation from developing countries. For this reason, the Global South calls for a profound reform of international governance. Priorities include the rebalancing of voting rights in international financial institutions and the redefinition of global tax and debt rules under UN leadership. In Seville, strong support was also expressed for overcoming the donor-recipient dichotomy, in favour of new instruments and operational principles: co-design, horizontal knowledge sharing, mutual learning, experimentation, and joint monitoring of shared missions.

Second, development paradigms, goals, and indicators need to be rethought. After decades of structural adjustment and fiscal orthodoxy, the priority is not enforcing financial stability, but identifying effective development strategies and expanding the public capacity and fiscal space needed to implement them. The notion of development has evolved. Southern countries - alongside the spirit of the 2030 Agenda⁴ - advocate for diverse development pathways. While many challenges today (climate, AI, health, migration, etc.) are global, the responses must be context specific. Yet much of today's cooperation remains rooted in narrow frameworks and GDP-based classifications, which exclude vulnerable

countries and overlook sustainability, cohesion, and structural transformation goals.⁵ There is also growing demand for fair access to green and digital technologies, reform of intellectual property rules, and greater policy space for national industrial strategies. Climate justice stands out as a central concern: Southern countries are calling for shared rules and clear operational responsibilities.

Third, the global financial architecture must be reformed. The Global South is advancing concrete proposals to address the systemic debt crisis that is stalling development: more effective restructuring processes, revised criteria for access to concessional finance, measures to curb illicit financial flows, and innovative instruments such as debt-for-investment swaps. The current system penalizes vulnerable countries with pro-cyclical ratings, fragmented access to finance, and rules that discourage long-term investment. There is an urgent need to mobilise resources - through fair taxation, remittances, guarantees, and de-risking mechanisms - while also reforming the Common Framework and going beyond the strictly prudential approaches of multilateral development banks. The Seville proposals show that change is possible - provided that the North engages in building a credible system that enables countries to invest in their future without being forced to choose between sustainability and solvency.

2.2. What the North Asks

The 'Global' North - like the South - is far from homogeneous. It lacks a

shared vision and is increasingly shaped by Atlantic geopolitical divergences, strategic ambiguities, and significant cuts in development aid. While United States withdrawal from international cooperation, a central question is understanding how other actors in the North respond - and whether they are willing to engage in renewed dialogue with the South. At this stage, we focus on the European Union, which remains the world's largest provider of official development assistance.

Europe faces a strategic choice. It can either retreat inward, believing that competitiveness and security can be achieved within its borders - thus aligning itself to 'global actors'. Or it can open toward the South, provided it redefines its international engagement not as a substitute hegemon, but as a strategic partner. The crossroads is now. If Europe does not wish to remain a subordinate observer of other powers' dynamics, it must strengthen both its autonomy and its alliances - and reimagine its approach to international cooperation. Choosing this path implies three major actions.

First, Europe should make a clear political decision. In the post-Seville phase, it should transform existing partnerships into genuine strategic alliances with the South, grounded in shared interests across ecological, digital, and social transformations.

Second, this political direction should orient resources. A strong EU external action budget should be sustained - if not increased. Without it, instruments like guarantees, de-risking, and blended

finance risk falling short, particularly in fragile countries and sectors. With recent cuts by other donors, the EU is now the largest provider of ODA - a role that will only grow in contrast with the current U.S. administration's choices. Moreover, the EU needs a reformed toolbox that integrates ODA, macro-financial assistance, export promotion, and investment support under a unified platform; establishes an external investment window in any future EU Competitiveness Fund; and transforms Team Europe into an upstream mechanism for joint resource mobilisation and decision-making.

Third, the EU should support Southern countries in accessing both public and private finance for sustainable public policies - shielded from speculation and recurring debt crises. This includes advancing UN-led negotiations on international tax cooperation and illicit financial flows, reducing fragmentation in climate finance, supporting mitigation and adaptation efforts, support risk-assessment reform, endorsing voting reform in the IMF and World Bank, and backing the Pact for the Future. It must also act on debt restructuring (including revising the Common Framework) and reduce remittance costs below 2 per cent.

Fourth, Europe must go beyond declarations and engage through action. This means demonstrating—in practice—its willingness to change not just the way it finances cooperation, but also the way it listens, decides, and acts. It should begin testing new forms of operational multilateral action to show

that more inclusive, flexible, and co-designed cooperation is possible.

3. A Testing Ground for Strategic Engagement

European cooperation has already begun to change in recent years.⁶ At the heart of this shift is the Global Gateway - an initiative focused on infrastructure and private investment promotion in the Global South. Launched in 2021 with the aim of mobilising up to €300 billion by 2027, the Global Gateway is the most ambitious expression of Europe's repositioning in development cooperation. Innovations include prioritising high-impact investments in key transition sectors, scaling up financing by mobilising private investment,⁷ facilitating blending with public financial institutions, and go beyond the logic of assistance⁸ and incorporate a strategic geopolitical approach to international engagement. Projects span Africa, the Indo-Pacific, the Balkans, Eastern Europe and Latin America, and address issues such as green hydrogen, digital education, energy corridors, and pharmaceutical production.

Several aspects of the Global Gateway could be improved. For example, many projects are still conceived in Brussels, or intangible dimensions (skills, institutions, ecosystems) are often secondary to large-scale infrastructures, etc. But the fundamental and turning point that the Global Gateway faces is another one. What is needed is not only some necessary improvements, but a clear shift of phase. Europe must send an

unequivocal message: its relationship with the Global South is entering a new stage - based on strategic alliance, mutual interest, and joint action, including at the multilateral level. This means transforming the Global Gateway from a unilateral financing tool into a shared platform, where priorities, evaluation criteria, and risk frameworks are co-defined with partner countries. Taking such a step would show that Europe has heard the messages from the South and is ready to act - not as a benevolent donor, but as a committed partner in building a fairer and more sustainable global system.

This transformation entails concrete actions, including:

- Establishing a permanent dialog platform co-led by Global South partners to design the operational architecture of the Global Gateway.
- Inviting regional institutions and development banks from Africa, Latin America and Asia in designing project pipelines and co-owning implementation frameworks.⁹
- Jointly setting rules, priorities and delivery methods ensuring that the public support targets strong environmental, social and development outcomes.
- Co-developing a new approach to risk assessment that, for example, includes governance and capacity indicators alongside traditional financial metrics.
- Agreeing on a robust certification and evaluation mechanism that ties public contributions to verifiable results.

These actions are not cosmetic adjustments. They respond directly to

long-standing demands from the Global South and aim to turn the Global Gateway into a credible laboratory for functional, fair, and forward-looking multilateralism.

The proposal recently presented by the European Commission as part of the future multiannual financial framework¹⁰ meets several of these conditions and should be supported in view of the negotiations with European member states. However, this is only a starting point. The debate on what should be done must be launched in parallel, and concrete signs of credibility must be provided. For example, considering President Trump's decisions on tariffs, the EU could propose to African countries to advance the EU-AU summit, planned for the end of the year, to define common lines of action. Good partnership is not enough; a genuine strategic alliance is needed. Similarly, urgent initiatives should be undertaken with India and Brazil to counter the effect of US decisions, which are not limited to trade but basically destroy the international governance framework and its rules. Partners should challenge the EU on this basis, considering the shared long-term interest. Political initiative is urgent.

In short, the Global Gateway is not an isolated case but a test bed to nurture an ecosystem of transformative alliances. It illustrates how international cooperation can be rethought - not by attempting to immediately build a new universal governance framework from scratch, but by experimenting with concrete initiatives rooted in common interests, co-decision, and shared responsibility.

The goal is not to impose ready-made solutions nor uniformity, but operational convergence on clear objectives, tailored to specific contexts - supported by light and voluntary governance arrangements and mutual learning. This form of variable-geometry multilateralism offers a pragmatic path forward to reinvent cooperation in today's fractured world.

4. Conclusions

In today's fractured and uncertain world, development is a shared imperative - more than ever before. The green, digital, and social transitions cannot succeed without credible global partnerships built on shared ownership. If the European Union wants to navigate this juncture and contribute meaningfully to the evolving global landscape - if it truly recognises that its own future depends on working with the Global South - then it must complete its strategic transition and formulate a broader, more inclusive policy offer anchored in joint priorities.

This means not only investing but investing differently. The clearest message Europe can send after Seville is that its relevance lies in upgrading partnerships into strategic alliances - with those countries willing to act now. Such alliances, built without preconditions, can create flexible geometries of cooperation and generate bottom-up momentum for systemic reform. External action is no longer a luxury - it is a strategic necessity.

In this context, successful experiences - even limited in scope - can become foundations for a more equitable and effective international architecture. If Europe wants to remain a relevant actor,

it must support and help legitimise these dynamics - linking experimental initiatives with a vision of the global system.

Endnote

- ¹ See the January-March issue of the Development Cooperation Review, entirely devoted to the Seville Conference. https://ris.org.in/newsletter/dcr/2025/DCR_January-March-2025.html
- ² FEPS, Europe's Strategic Role in Global Development <https://feps-europe.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/PB-Europes-Strategic-Role-in-Global-Development.pdf>. Special thanks for the discussion of the proposal's contents go to Manuel Escudero, President of Avanza, and Maria João Rodrigues, President of FEPS.
- ³ See the extremely fertile and helpful work of Charles Sabel and his idea of experimentalism in public policies and multilateralism.
- ⁴ Beyond discussing the SDG financing gap, it is urgent to confront a deeper issue: the SDGs have been reduced to updated MDGs, with targets for developing countries and external aid. This undermines their core principle: universality. Advancing the 2030 Agenda requires not just more resources, but strategic choices on shared priorities—especially global public goods—and the ability to define common agendas.
- ⁵ RIS has repeatedly emphasized—including in the context of the G20—that indicators going beyond GDP are needed, must be made available, and should be adopted. These indicators must reflect what truly matters for people, the planet, and the future.
- ⁶ Europe has already embarked on a reform path, as demonstrated by several initiatives. Already in 2017, the European Consensus on Development outlined a multidimensional approach: it acknowledged the interlinkages between development, migration, security, and climate change, and engaged all

policy sectors - not just foreign aid - in development efforts. Among other elements, it recognised the diversity of developing countries, including fragile states and middle-income countries, and encouraged tailored cooperation models rather than a one-size-fits-all approach. The NDICI-Global Europe instrument, launched in 2021, consolidated several previously fragmented funding channels into a single framework, enabling the EU to act more coherently and strategically - beyond the traditional constraints of Official Development Assistance (ODA). NDICI finances investments using guarantees and blended finance instruments to mobilise both private and public capital. The EU also introduced the Team Europe Initiatives (TEIs) to enhance the coherence and visibility of European external action, aligning the efforts and resources of EU institutions, Member States, and development finance institutions.

7 The Global Gateway is a multi-actor, multi-instrument platform that combines grants, guarantees, loans, and equity to leverage private and public resources through blended finance and de-risking instruments. This is primarily achieved through the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+), a leveraging instrument designed to attract private capital. Its primary innovation lies in offering partial guarantees to financial institutions to mitigate political, economic, and project-related risks and improve the bankability of projects.

8 The Global Gateway is not merely an investment funding platform; it maintains a commitment to the SDGs, reinforces regional integration, and supports green and digital transitions. Nor is the GGIA a traditional aid programme. Explicit references to assistance policies have been deliberately minimized - reflecting a shift

distancing the initiative from language and frameworks perceived as outdated.

9 The partnership established with national development banks around the world through the Finance in Common movement can play a crucial role in this regard.

10 Here the reference to the Global Europe proposal: https://commission.europa.eu/publications/global-europe_en. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52025PC0551>

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Interview with Professor Sachin Chaturvedi

Sachin Chaturvedi*

Development Cooperation Review (DCR): Welcome to our special series by RIS from the Conference on Triangular Cooperation in the Global South taking place in New Delhi, and I'm delighted to be joined by Professor Sachin Chaturvedi, one of the most influential voices to give us development cooperation policy. So, let's begin with the conference. What were the main takeaways for you today?

Professor Sachin Chaturvedi (SC):

The good idea about the conference, was around three broad conceptual frameworks that we have followed. The first and foremost is the growing fragmentation at the global level that we see, the disruptions that we see, the polarization that we see. So, the idea was to have north and south work together, though we come from a global South perspective - for almost forty years RIS has been focusing on the global south, its relevance, its ambit and mandate within which it should work. But now we realise that it is important for the Global

South to also provide support, helping hand, to the North, and this needs a bit of depolarization, and some effort to bring in north and south together.

The idea of triangular cooperation of north and South working together for the betterment of both and the other partners in the development trajectory where they are almost in the emerging markets. So, these two ideas strengthened it. Two more ideas that guided us in this conference, which we discussed today is not to make the conference only an exchange of ideas, but how do we turn those ideas into action? So, action labs were planned ideas and these action labs actually provided practical inputs to those who are going to take the ideas to the ground. And there the idea of connecting agriculture with entrepreneurship connecting health with the practical challenges that are there solutions.

So, Dakshin is mandated to get on to these tasks. We also had a network of think tank NeST (Network of Southern Think Tanks). We also had the University

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Connect. So it gets into pedagogy and gets into the practical lessons. So all the four stakeholders were there in the room and today's takeaways are largely around these four points.

DCR: You've been instrumental in shaping these platforms, such as the Delhi Process, and NeST. How do these initiatives influence the discourse and practice in South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation in recent years. And am I allowed to put those two forms of cooperation in the same sentence, SSC and Triangular?

SC: Definitely. There are some people who think that purity of South-South gets diluted if you think of triangular in the same way. In my own personal view, I feel that north-south, South-South and triangular cooperation this should be part of the same sentence because we need to show pragmatism. As we heard today, Abhay Karandikar said the Global South has more confidence now, and this confidence is not going to be influenced by using any phrase in the same set of lexica that we need. And from that perspective, north-south cooperation, South-South cooperation, triangular cooperation are a natural progression that the Global South should seek. Here, the idea probably would be to see that the practical contours go out in terms of finding some sort of reality check, and what is happening is to "de-silos" this - the idea of north-south into one silo, South-South into another silo and the triangular into the third one. These silos are not going to help the world. We are here to fight the

fragmentation; we cannot create more walls; we have to overcome them.

DCR: Having pioneered these platforms, how do you envision the next phase of institutional innovation in triangular cooperation and simultaneously uphold local ownership while scaling impact across diverse contexts in the Global South?

SC: Today, we signed this agreement with ICRISAT, which yet to have been the part of the CGIAR, the northern-led institution of frameworks. The Global South has to make more coming out from their collective efforts to have institutional frameworks. Dakshin and ICRISAT partnership create a joint centre for advancing India's development experience in agriculture with the Global South, collecting their experiences to collate and evolve a practical framework for agriculture knowledge exchange among Global South countries, give you the practical guardrail for agriculture innovation system, technology diffusion, to move forward, and that gives you the actual trajectory within which agriculture productivity, food security, nutritional security, etc. maybe adequately addressed by the countries who are engaged.

DCR: In the context of the Global South's evolving economic landscape, what strategies do you recommend for countries to effectively engage in triangular cooperation without compromising their development priorities?

SC: The Global South's cooperation is free from conditionalities, and that's the beauty of their retaining their decision-making space, the policy space. And here their own priorities are the top priorities. They are the ones where global south's engagement would be subject to the whole idea of demand-driven approach. So, the demand approach driven nature of the engagement of the global South may help them retain their priorities as the top priority.

DCR: For a Development Finance 2.0 model, one that r-orientes finance, not just around creditworthiness, but also around metrics such as sustainability, local innovation and inclusion and what role should India play, as it also becomes a beacon of hope for many in the global south, in spearheading this shift within south south and triangular cooperation frameworks?

SC: This is nothing more than the idea that Prime Minister Modi has talked about in his address at the Voice of the Global South Summit. He described this summit as a Global Development Compact and the Global Development Compact is largely an idea where the Global South brings in harmony between the five modalities that they usually engage with. For instance, they provide concessional finance – credit creation. If you are pushing countries against the wall, they do not have the capacity to return the money, so you have to create capacity; you need to transfer technology; you need to create some elements to give them grants

so that they don't just depend on your credit, on your loan; and you give them market access.

For instance, when Ethiopia thought of reviving their sugar industry. They approached India, because the Dutch had established sugar processing units in the early 60s there. Over the years, the sugar cane lost its productivity, sugar processing machines became outdated, and they were not able to compete. So, in 2011, they requested help from India, that provided fresh sugarcane germplasm for better productivity. India gave them new sugar processing units. India also provided packaging for export to Europe, because they were environmentally compatible with the way European consumers wanted it. But in fact, they were the issues in terms of how duty free, quota free access gives them scope for exporting their sugar.

So, the full range of five modalities of; technology; of trade access; of capacity building of the scientists to absorb new germplasm in their agricultural system; also the necessary credit for the transformation of the sector – they provided the support. And this is something which is going to be extremely relevant in terms of how all five modalities are to be combined. These are to be the command and the force.

DCR: As someone deeply invested in institutionalizing knowledge and youth engagement, how can the University Connect Hub and similar platforms help equip the next generation to think in terms of triangular cooperation and not just as a modality, but as a mindset, to help shift attitudes globally.

SC: That's important because as you know, 65 per cent of the Indian population is under 35 years old. So, we are a relatively young country, and this youth has to be exposed to the idea of global responsibility and not just thinking of running after the US and Europe. Those powers are creating the space for the rise of the Global South. With the rise of the global south, and the rising global influence of India, we also have to be responsible. So, triangular cooperation,

cooperation among developing countries of the Global South, has to be brought to the universities through the University Connect programme to educate them on global responsibility. That's the idea of bringing triangular cooperation and the Global South to the curriculum, to the education and exposure, and also connecting them with this wider "One family" idea of the world.

DCR: Thank you very much.

Interview with Carlos Correa

Carlos Correa*

DCR: Thank you for joining us in New Delhi. You mentioned on stage in the closing panel at the conference on the Global South and Triangular Cooperation organized by RIS that ODA has decreased by 0.71 per cent from 2023 to 2024, of which 30 per cent is deployed in developed countries. This is a surprise, I'm sure, for many. Could you share with us what you told the audience today?

Carlos Correa (CC): Yes. The point I made is that the Global South cannot, depend on what is called “official development assistance”. It is insufficient in the first place. And it is going down, as you may recall a target was set many years ago, at 0.7 per cent of the gross national income from the wealthier countries. And today it amounts to just 0.35 per cent, a half of what it was expected. Many of the least developed countries had actually received less support, and for them this aid is very important. That's why South-South and Triangular Cooperation becomes so important. Although we have always said that it is not meant to substitute North-South Cooperation, the fact is that without South-South and Triangular Cooperation, developing countries will not be able to address many

of their challenges regarding climate change events, poverty and many other challenges they are facing. Therefore, this conference actually addresses one of the important tools for development. This is not just speculation. We have heard about many real examples during the conference. Many years ago, we were talking about the potential of South-South Cooperation. Now we can talk about what it is actually achieving and how it can contribute in the future.

DCR: You also mentioned in your closing speech that you were very pleased to see that the opening panel of the conference on the Global South and Triangular Cooperation was about “Bandung and beyond”. What would you think a 21st century equivalent of “Bandung” principles look like today in today's multipolar context?

CC: Bandung set a number of principles, including the idea that working for the mutual interest and international cooperation was essential. As we know today, the world seems to be increasingly fragmented and there are many conflicts. What RIS has done over the years - insisting that South-South Cooperation is one important tool for development is crucial. Now it has greater recognition

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because the future is there. The future is in international cooperation, broadly speaking, but also in particular with the Global South working together. Bandung set the basic principles for such a cooperation. Of course, the situation has changed a lot since then. Now, we have new challenges, including increased debt, climate change and antimicrobial resistance, for instance. There are many challenges that our countries are facing. Still, the idea of international cooperation is the right way and in particular, cooperation among the countries of the South. Of course, there may be further elaborations and there are calls to revisit the Bandung principles. Indonesia has decided to make a commemoration of the 75 years of the adoption of Bandung. There will be some issues which should be put on the table, including, for instance, transfer of technology that has not been well dealt with by the international community. Still, the Bandung principles may provide the groundwork from which to elaborate.

DCR: You spoke of the fragmentation that we can all witness, whether we are involved in development cooperation or not, and multilateralism is also under scrutiny. What role should institutions such as the South Centre play in reshaping the global governance architecture, the development of public goods?

CC: The South Centre is a manifestation of South-South Cooperation in itself. It was created by developing countries and it works for developing countries. One of

our important areas of work is improving the institutional capacity of developing countries to engage in South-South Cooperation, both as providers and as recipients. In our view, all countries, including small countries, can actually provide technology solutions, for instance, new plant varieties that are resistant to particular pests or drought. Therefore, the South Centre is very much engaged in looking at the right narrative for developing countries to benefit from their own capacities. As it has been mentioned today, the Global South accounts for a significant part of global GDP. Some estimates indicate 46 per cent. The Global South trade has grown immensely. It's more dynamic than North-South trade, and therefore great opportunities are there.

The South Centre is considering how this fragmented scenario can be addressed in the interest of development and what actions need to be taken. We are very much an action-oriented organization. We look at the theoretical frameworks and at the narratives, but in the end we are looking for solutions to problems and this is done in cooperation with many countries. India is leading in many respects, as well as are other countries. Our ambition actually is to get developing countries to work together while understanding that there is diversity, because there are different strategies and policies; our ambition is to find common denominators for countries to work together and be assertive in international relations in a more effective manner.

DCR: Many developing countries are reconsidering their approach to trade-related investment measures in light of environmental and social goals. How can a developmental balance be struck between attracting investment and safeguarding public policy space?

CC: That's a very important issue because many countries, including India have signed in the past bilateral investment treaties with the expectation that they will attract foreign direct investment. But many of them, and India is one case, have suffered from the harmful effects of these agreements because they are essentially imbalanced. They actually give rights to the investors, but no rights to the host States. India has done a very important work in developing its own model for bilateral investment treaties, which put emphasis on the concept of enterprise as opposed to the concept of asset. We need a reform of the international investment regime to provide more balance to these agreements, including some obligations on investors, for instance, in relation to the protection of the environment - which are missing in most of those agreements. There is an important work to be done. The South Centre is actually very active in this field. We are supporting developing countries in the negotiations that are taking place in UNCITRAL in Vienna, sometimes in New York. We need to ensure that the investment regime attracts foreign investors, but at the same time, that it ensures that investment is aligned with sustainable development and the protection of the environment, and more broadly with the interests of the receiving

country, and not just addressing the interests of investors.

DCR: Perhaps from your perspective of the South Centre, which institutional gaps are still limiting the efficiency of Global South cooperation and how can these be bridged?

CC: There are many divergences, as I mentioned, among developing countries in terms of development strategy in the first place regarding, for instance, the role of the market and the State respectively.

DCR: Your country of origin, Argentina, being an example of how it has changed the role of the state recently...

CC: The government is liberal and the president feels that he has to suppress many of the State's functions. But we need the state to perform important functions and also to lead in economic development, in our view. For instance, developed countries are now coming back strongly to implement industrial policies, while in the past they were demanding developing countries to leave everything to the market. But now the United States and the European Union are very active in industrial policies, such as in semiconductors and pharmaceuticals, because they recognize that they have become weak or the competition from other countries is strong. And this is also a message for developing countries - you need industrial and investment policies in order to promote development.

Regarding the gaps and the obstacles for further cooperation, particularly in trade, there are many differences because not all developing countries have the same strength in agricultural production or other areas, and, therefore, it's normal that there be different interests. But in the end there are also common interests. As I mentioned, our ambition is to work on that and show that developing countries can organize in coalitions, in some cases dedicated or focused coalitions, to promote their interests.

DCR: How can the Global South collectively address the growing asymmetries in technology access, particularly with respect to intellectual property and governance?

CC: Technology is an important issue. In fact, the dominance of the countries of the North, in our view, has been based on two elements. One is the dominance of the U.S. dollar in financial transactions and trade, and the second one is in technology. Quite clearly, the intellectual property regime as adopted in the context of the World Trade Organization, actually supports that

dominance. It was established in order to freeze the competitive advantages of the developed vis-à-vis developing countries. That's one of the main issues I believe we need to address.

With some developing countries being more active in developing technologies and innovation, I think the scenario may change. In this respect, South-South Cooperation can play a major role in getting access to technologies that otherwise will not be available because the North's objective is to keep the technology for themselves. What is called 'techno-nationalism' can be seen in many fields. The participation of developing countries in global research and development (R&D) has increased significantly since the beginning of the century. In any case, technology transfer still remains an issue in many negotiations. Developed countries say it should be based on voluntary and mutually agreed terms. We need, however, to look for means to disseminate technologies which are essential for development.

DCR: Thank you very much.

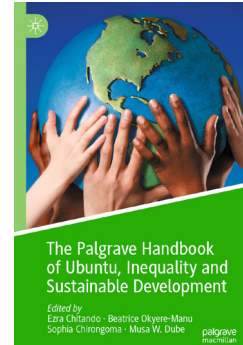
Citizenship Utopias in the Global South

Ezra Chitando, Beatrice Okyere-Manu, Sophia Chirongoma, and Musa W. Dube (eds.)

Title: The Palgrave Handbook of Ubuntu, Inequality and Sustainable Development

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Pratyush Sharma *

Abstract: This edited volume, *The Palgrave Handbook of Ubuntu, Inequality and Sustainable Development*, brings together an interdisciplinary range of scholars to examine how the African philosophy of Ubuntu can inform responses to global inequalities, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and Africa's Agenda 2063. Through theoretical explorations and diverse case studies – from restorative justice in South Africa to diaspora cooperation in Zimbabwe – the book positions Ubuntu's ethic of interdependence, dignity, and reciprocity as a guiding framework for policy, governance, and development practice. The contributors argue for Ubuntu's relevance beyond Africa, offering it as a critical alternative to individualistic and market-driven models. While acknowledging challenges of operationalisation and risks of rhetorical appropriation, the volume demonstrates Ubuntu's transformative potential when embedded in participatory, accountable, and culturally grounded policy processes. This handbook is a significant resource for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners interested in inclusive, values-based approaches to sustainable development.

1. Introduction

The Palgrave Handbook of Ubuntu, Inequality and Sustainable Development explores how the African philosophy of Ubuntu can address contemporary global challenges, especially inequality, poverty, climate change, and social exclusion. Edited by Ezra Chitando, Beatrice Okyere-Manu, Sophia Chirongoma, and Musa W. Dube, the volume brings

together contributions from diverse disciplines and regions, linking Ubuntu's communal, ethical, and humanistic values to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 10 on reducing inequalities, and African Union's Agenda 2063. The handbook is organised thematically, covering theoretical reflections, environmental and climate concerns,

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global and status-based inequalities, racism and migration, poverty, gender justice, and inclusive development.

By situating Ubuntu within both African and global contexts, the editors argue that it can serve as a transformative framework for justice, peace building, and sustainability, provided it is applied with critical engagement. The edited volume offers both theoretical reflections and applied case studies. The editors aim to position Ubuntu not only as a cultural heritage of Africa but as a globally relevant ethical framework. This book is a comprehensive and timely resource for scholars, policymakers, and activists seeking alternative, community-rooted approaches to inequality and development. It offers a balanced perspective – celebrating Ubuntu’s promise while rigorously interrogating its relevance and adaptability in addressing 21st-century global issues.

The book is organised thematically and covers a wide range of issue areas where Ubuntu is examined as a framework for addressing inequality and fostering sustainable development. The book begins with a theoretical reflections on Ubuntu where the philosophical foundations, moral theory, ethics, leadership, and reinterpretations of Ubuntu for contemporary contexts are discussed in detail. It positions Ubuntu, an African philosophy emphasising interconnectedness, dignity, and communal responsibility as a potential global resource for addressing contemporary inequalities. The editors link their discussion to SDGs, especially

SDG 10 on reducing inequality, while also drawing connections to poverty eradication, climate justice, gender equality, and peace building.

Rather than romanticising Ubuntu, the chapter acknowledges critical debates around its applicability, including concerns about patriarchal roots, rhetorical overuse, and relevance in modern contexts. It frames Ubuntu not as a flawless, static ideal, but as a living, evolving ethic that must be creatively reinterpreted to meet pressing global challenges – from racism and migration crises to environmental degradation. The authors advocate for Ubuntu’s expansion beyond Africa, arguing it can enrich intercultural philosophy and global development thinking. By combining philosophical reflection with practical urgency, the chapter invites scholars, policymakers, and activists to see Ubuntu as both a moral compass and a strategic framework. Its message is clear: when critically engaged, Ubuntu can inspire more inclusive, just, and sustainable societies across the world.

The next thematic area discusses issues of Environment and Climate Change through Ubuntu’s role in climate justice, environmental ethics, intergenerational solidarity, indigenous spirituality, sustainable resource management, and policy integration. The thematic area of Global Inequalities in the Distribution of Resources deliberates the topics of corporate social responsibility, equity, decolonisation, poverty, and solidarity across nations. The book then proceeds to consider the issue around

Status-Based Inequality by emphasising on health equity, pandemic responses, human rights, street children, sustainable cities, and links to the SDGs through the lens of Ubuntu. The next thematic area of Racism, Migration, and Xenophobia is dealt with the subtopics of anti-racism, immigrant integration, migration ethics, education inequalities, and coping mechanisms against discrimination through the philosophical understanding of Ubuntu. The discussion area then meanders towards the topic of Poverty and Ubuntu infused policies can assist poverty reduction strategies, including disability inclusion, and breaking the poverty-disability nexus. The book then discusses the global reach for Ubuntu by deliberating the issue of inequality within and across nations. The last section of the book deals with the thematic area of Gender which includes the topics of gender equality, feminist perspectives, gender justice in theology, combating gender-based violence, and women's collective action.

Each section combines case studies, philosophical analysis, and policy reflections to explore Ubuntu's practical and theoretical applications.

Ubuntu for the Perfect Storm

The book frames the African philosophy of Ubuntu not as a panacea for all global and domestic ills, but as a practical, ethical framework with concrete applications for global challenges. Its potential lies in the way it redefines relationships – between people, communities, nations, and the environment – by emphasising interdependence, dignity, and collective

well-being. The book discusses Ubuntu as an ethical compass for justice and inclusion by expanding on Ubuntu's central idea of *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* ("a person is a person through other people"), challenging exclusion, marginalisation, and inequality. The book claims that it promotes political and social inclusion, aligning with SDG 10's goal to reduce inequalities, and offers a basis for anti-racism, anti-xenophobia, and gender equality movements worldwide. The book deliberates that Ubuntu also offers a framework for peacebuilding and conflict resolution by valuing reconciliation over retribution by discussing the case study of how Ubuntu has been used in truth and reconciliation processes in post-apartheid South Africa and post-genocide Rwanda. Ubuntu as a philosophy seeks to repair relationships rather than deepen divisions, which can be applied to international diplomacy and post-conflict societies.

Ubuntu offers a strong foundation for sustainable development as it integrates human well-being with environmental stewardship, and challenges exploitative economic models by encouraging resource-sharing and cooperative problem-solving, vital for addressing climate change, biodiversity loss, and poverty. The book critiques neoliberal individualism, global crises like inequality, pandemics, and environmental degradation are worsened by hyper-individualism and profit-driven policies. Under this rubric, Ubuntu shifts the paradigm toward community - centered decision making, where the common good is prioritised over individual gain.

As a cross-cultural bridge, Ubuntu, while rooted in Africa's core values – compassion, reciprocity, and respect – are universally recognisable and thus, it can serve as a shared moral language in intercultural cooperation, allowing diverse nations to work from a common ethical base.

The book stresses that Ubuntu must be critically applied – not treated as a slogan, but adapted to real-world complexities. It's "born in Africa but relevant everywhere," capable of guiding responses to poverty, climate change, migration, pandemics, and systemic injustice through its insistence on **shared humanity and mutual responsibility**.

Ubuntu, SDGs, and Agenda 2063

The book frames Ubuntu as a valuable ethical and philosophical resource for advancing the SDGs, especially SDG 10 – Reduce inequality within and among countries. In the introduction, the editors link Ubuntu's core principles – interconnectedness, dignity, mutual respect, and communal responsibility – to multiple SDGs, including:

- **SDG 1 (No Poverty)** – using Ubuntu's emphasis on solidarity to address structural poverty and exclusion.
- **SDG 5 (Gender Equality)** – challenging gender-based discrimination through inclusive and respectful community values.
- **SDG 13 (Climate Action)** – applying Ubuntu's ecological sensitivity and respect for nature in climate change mitigation and adaptation.

- **SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions)** – fostering peace building, reconciliation, and inclusive governance through Ubuntu ethics.

The book emphasises that Ubuntu is not just a cultural artifact but a strategic framework that can shape policy and practice to meet SDG targets. It suggests that integrating Ubuntu into global development thinking could help create more humane, community-oriented approaches to inequality, migration, health equity, and environmental sustainability. At the same time, it stresses that Ubuntu must be critically engaged and adapted to modern challenges to remain effective in achieving the SDGs. In relation to Agenda 2063, the book notes that the African Union's vision is to reduce poverty, address gender inequality, overcome Africa's marginalisation, and position the continent as a major global player. Ubuntu is presented as a culturally grounded framework that can help operationalise these ambitions by promoting solidarity, justice, and community-centered development.

By connecting Ubuntu to both global (SDGs) and continental (Agenda 2063) frameworks, the editors argue that it can bridge local African perspectives with international development agendas, ensuring that strategies for progress are not only economically sound but also ethically grounded and culturally resonant.

The book further discusses the interconnectedness of the SDGs by stressing that the 17 goals are deeply

interlinked and cannot be achieved in isolation. Progress in one goal often accelerates progress in others, while setbacks in one can impede multiple targets. This interdependence calls for integrated, holistic approaches rather than siloed interventions. In this context, Ubuntu – with its core ethic of “I am because we are” – is positioned as a unifying philosophical and practical framework.

Ubuntu’s emphasis on interdependence, mutual care, and collective responsibility aligns closely with the integrated nature of the SDGs. It promotes solidarity across nations and communities, encourages inclusive decision-making, and fosters sustainable, people-centered development. The book suggests that embedding Ubuntu principles in SDG implementation can break down competitive or individualistic approaches, replacing them with cooperation, equity, and shared stewardship of resources. This, in turn, strengthens the synergies between goals, ensuring that progress is both socially just and ecologically sustainable.

The book through the chapter on contributions of Ubuntu inspired relational ethics towards foreign aid in Africa discusses SDG 17 – Global Partnerships. This chapter by Joyline Gwara, and Uchenna Ogbonnaya links Ubuntu to foreign aid and development cooperation by reframing them as relationships of mutual responsibility rather than one-way charity where Ubuntu promotes the idea that all nations are interdependent, so development

cooperation should be partnership-based rather than paternalistic. The chapter makes the connection between Ubuntu’s people-centered development with the view that aid and cooperation must prioritise human dignity, cultural respect, and community participation rather than focusing solely on economic metrics and further emphasising that listening to and co-creating with local communities, not imposing external solutions are Ubuntu philosophy that can assist better operationalisation of foreign aid on the ground.

Moreover, Ubuntu resonates strongly with South-South Cooperation principles of mutual benefit, equality, and shared learning. The Ubuntu principles can help ensure that triangular cooperation retains equity and avoids reproducing dependency dynamics. Also, the chapter critiques the technocratic approach to measuring aid success, suggesting Ubuntu offers a more relational and qualitative lens, focusing on whether cooperation strengthens trust, resilience, and shared well-being. The chapter ends on a note that Ubuntu provides a moral foundation for more ethical cooperation, but global development institutions are still dominated by competitive, individualistic logics that resist such a shift.

Ubuntu Case Studies and Ubuntu in Policy Making

One of the strengths of *The Palgrave Handbook of Ubuntu, Inequality and Sustainable Development* lies in its inclusion of diverse, real-world case

studies that bring the philosophy of Ubuntu to life. Rather than remaining solely in the realm of theory, several chapters illustrate how Ubuntu has been applied in concrete contexts to address pressing social, environmental, and governance challenges.

For example, the book showcases how Ghanaian Ubuntu principles, in dialogue with Malaysian Confucian leadership values, have informed sustainable plastic waste management strategies. In Zimbabwe, Indigenous spirituality intertwined with Ubuntu has guided community-driven responses to environmental degradation. Ubuntu ethics are applied to improve access to medicines and promote competitive pharmaceutical production in Africa, while women's water rights and participation in the blue economy in South Africa are framed through Ubuntu-informed advocacy. Other compelling examples include social work interventions for street children in Sub-Saharan Africa, the promotion of gender equality by Chief tainess Nkomeshya Mukamambo II in Zambia, and Zimbabwean diaspora communities in the United States drawing on Ubuntu to navigate the social strains of COVID-19. These grounded narratives demonstrate the philosophy's adaptability, revealing how Ubuntu can be a living, context-sensitive tool for building more just, inclusive, and sustainable communities.

The book further describes that Ubuntu has been used in policymaking, though mostly within Southern Africa rather than globally. In South Africa's Post-Apartheid Framework, the 1996

South African Constitution and subsequent policy frameworks drew on Ubuntu as a guiding philosophy for nation-building, social cohesion, and restorative justice. The post-apartheid constitution integrates Ubuntu into its preamble and Bill of Rights, framing it as part of the country's moral and ethical foundation.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) explicitly invoked Ubuntu principles – emphasising forgiveness, reconciliation, and community restoration over retributive justice. Official TRC documents cited Ubuntu as justification for amnesty in exchange for truth-telling, embedding it into transitional justice policy. In *S v Makwanyane* (1995), the court abolished the death penalty, explicitly referencing Ubuntu to argue that justice should be tempered with compassion and respect for human dignity. This legal reasoning has influenced later policy directions in criminal justice and corrections. Within the justice and legal systems in South African jurisprudence, Ubuntu has been referenced in Constitutional Court rulings, particularly in cases involving human dignity, equality, and community rights which has influenced policies in corrections, housing, and social welfare, encouraging more humane, community-based solutions.

White Paper on Corrections in South Africa (2005) incorporates Ubuntu in its vision of rehabilitation and community reintegration, shifting focus from punitive incarceration to rebuilding relationships between offenders and communities. In the realm of public

health and education policies, certain provincial public health strategies in Southern Africa have incorporated Ubuntu language to encourage collective responsibility in health promotion, especially during the HIV/AIDS crisis. Education policies in Zimbabwe has Ubuntu informed curriculum reforms promoting values-based education that integrates communal responsibility, empathy, and moral development alongside academic learning.

Both Zimbabwe and South Africa have operationalised Ubuntu beyond domestic policy – Zimbabwe in diaspora engagement and transnational cooperation, South Africa in **international** diplomacy. The book argues that in both cases, Ubuntu works best when values are matched by transparent processes and reciprocal respect, ensuring that moral rhetoric translates into practical, equitable outcomes.

However, the book also points out that outside Africa, Ubuntu's policy impact is minimal – it is more likely to appear in development cooperation discourse, academic debates, or NGO work rather than in binding legislation or state policy. It warns that even in Africa, Ubuntu's role in policy making is sometimes symbolic rather than substantive – used in rhetoric without robust mechanisms for implementation or evaluation that implementation often faces challenges as Ubuntu-inspired ideals can be undermined by political, economic, or institutional constraints.

Challenges in Ubuntu Inspired Policies and Ways to Overcome Them

The Palgrave Handbook of Ubuntu, Inequality and Sustainable Development identifies several operational challenges in implementing Ubuntu-inspired policies and suggests ways they can be overcome. In terms of operational challenges, the book describes that Ubuntu on many occasions is employed symbolically and without substance and is often included in policy rhetoric or mission statements without being matched by practical mechanisms for implementation. Institutional resistance in the bureaucratic systems, often shaped by colonial legacies or neoliberal models, have resisted the collective, relational decision-making that Ubuntu demands. Furthermore, political manipulation by leaders sometimes invoke Ubuntu to mask political agendas or legitimise unpopular decisions, which erodes public trust.

In terms of its global reach cultural misinterpretation is often identified as a problem as outside Africa, Ubuntu has been misunderstood, oversimplified, or romanticised, making it hard to apply meaningfully in multicultural or global settings. Ubuntu-inspired approaches, such as restorative justice or participatory governance, require time, funding, and skilled facilitators, which may be in short supply. And lastly, market-driven frameworks often prioritises individual gain over collective welfare, making Ubuntu's cooperative ethos hard to institutionalise.

Some strategies to overcome these challenges may include but not limited to embedding Ubuntu in legal and policy frameworks by move beyond symbolic references and incorporating enforceable Ubuntu principles into constitutions, laws, and program mandates. Capacity building and training could be employed to equip policymakers, administrators, and community leaders with skills to translate Ubuntu ethics into practical strategies. Aligning bureaucratic structures with inclusive decision-making models, reducing hierarchy and promoting collaboration by establishing accountability mechanisms to prevent Ubuntu from being co-opted for political expediency may be thought of. Contextual adaptation of Ubuntu principles to local realities, whether in African rural communities, global urban centers, or international organisations may be encouraged. And lastly, research needs to seep to develop new indicators of policy success (e.g., community trust, reconciliation levels) alongside traditional economic metrics.

The book's conclusion is that Ubuntu-inspired policy can only be transformative if it is operationalised through concrete systems, participatory processes, and accountability structures - otherwise it risks remaining "beautiful words with little real-world impact".

Critical Evaluation

While the book is ambitious in scope and rich in perspectives, it is not without its criticisms. One recurring concern is that, despite its critical intent, the volume at times leans towards idealising Ubuntu

as a near-universal solution, risking the very romanticisation it cautions against. Some chapters remain largely conceptual, with limited empirical evidence to demonstrate how Ubuntu-based interventions tangibly impact inequality or development outcomes. This can make the applicability of its proposals appear aspirational rather than actionable.

Another critique lies in the uneven treatment of gender and power dynamics. Although patriarchal roots of Ubuntu are acknowledged, a deeper engagement with how these might be dismantled in practice is sometimes missing. Additionally, while the book aims for global relevance, certain sections remain Africa-centric without fully exploring how Ubuntu can be meaningfully integrated into non-African cultural and policy contexts.

The sheer breadth of topics from climate change to digital governance while impressive, can dilute thematic cohesion, leaving some discussions less developed than others. Nevertheless, these limitations stem partly from the book's ambition to be comprehensive. Its willingness to acknowledge critiques of Ubuntu is a strength, but readers may wish for more concrete pathways from philosophical ideals to measurable change.

Conclusion

The Palgrave Handbook of Ubuntu, Inequality and Sustainable Development synthesises the core insights while charting future directions for research and practice. It reiterates that Ubuntu

- rooted in values of interdependence, dignity, and shared responsibility - offers a culturally grounded yet globally relevant framework for tackling persistent and emerging inequalities. The editors stress that Ubuntu's greatest potential lies in its adaptability: it must evolve to address modern realities such as climate change, digital transformation, migration, and shifting geopolitical power.

The edited volume underscores that Ubuntu's integration into development thinking should not be superficial or rhetorical. Instead, it must inform policy frameworks, institutional cultures, and grassroots initiatives in ways that deliver

measurable outcomes. The authors call for more empirical research to test Ubuntu-inspired interventions, emphasising that philosophical ideals need practical translation to create real impact. Finally, the conclusion highlights Ubuntu's resonance with both SDGs and Africa's Agenda 2063, framing it as a bridge between local ethics and global aspirations. It closes with an appeal for inclusive scholarship and cross-cultural dialogue, positioning Ubuntu not as a fixed tradition, but as a living, evolving ethic capable of shaping more just and sustainable futures.

Public Debt Crisis in the Global South: A Call for Urgent Action

Sushil Kumar*

Abstract: The Global South is facing a deepening debt crisis that threatens sustainable development and global economic stability. Between 2010 and 2024, public debt in the region surged from USD 8.6 trillion to USD 32.2 trillion, growing nearly fourfold and outpacing GDP growth, which increased only 1.8 times. As a result, the public debt-to-GDP ratio doubled to 76.2 per cent, driven by high borrowing costs, sluggish economic performance, and shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic. By 2023, the Global South accounted for 45 per cent of global GDP but carried 31.6 per cent of global public debt, with external debt tripling to USD 3.45 trillion and per capita debt reaching USD 166,762. Mounting interest payments - amounting to USD 921 billion and consuming 14.29 per cent of government revenue - are diverting resources from critical areas like health, education, and infrastructure, affecting 3.3 billion people. The financing gap for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has widened to over USD 4 trillion, exacerbated by a 7.1 per cent decline in Official Development Assistance (ODA) in 2024, and a sharp drop in debt-related ODA. While initiatives like the G20's Debt Service Suspension Initiative and Common Framework offered limited support, urgent reforms are needed. Expanding debt relief to middle-income countries, increasing ODA grants, and strengthening debt management are one of the possible ways to avert stagnation and support long-term development.

Keywords: Global South, Public Debt, ODA, SDG

1. Introduction

In 2023, the global economy was valued at approximately USD 93.52 trillion (based on constant 2015 prices), with the Global South contributing 45 per cent of this total-equivalent to USD 42.27 trillion across 148 countries (UNCTAD, 2024). Despite this substantial economic contribution, the Global South faces a growing debt crisis amid a volatile macroeconomic environment. The global debt stock reached USD 102 trillion in 2023, surpassing the size of the global economy and raising serious concerns about sustainability (UN, 2024). For many low-income countries and frontier

markets, the cost of servicing this debt is draining critical public resources. The number of countries in which interest payments accounted for 10 per cent or more of public revenues increased from 29 in 2010 to 54 in 2023, reflecting a sharp rise in fiscal pressures (UN, 2024). This financial burden has profound social consequences, with at least 3.3 billion people now living in countries where governments spend more on interest payments than on essential services like health and education (UN, 2024). Studies conducted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank indicate that 42 out of 66 developing

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countries would exceed external debt solvency thresholds within the next five years if they attempted to secure the external financing needed to meet the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement (IMF & World Bank, 2024). Another study found that in 92 out of 120 low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), the external public debt service costs projected for 2024 would exceed the investment required to achieve the non-climate-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UNCTAD, 2024). Between 2010 and 2022, the external debt stock for 118 LMICs (excluding China) more than doubled in nominal terms, increasing from USD 1.5 trillion to USD 3.1 trillion (World Bank, 2023). This surge in borrowing has not been matched by equivalent increases in economic productivity or domestic fiscal capacity, resulting in mounting fiscal stress. One of the most pernicious aspects of the crisis is the crowding-out effect, whereby governments are forced to divert public funds away from critical social investments to meet debt repayment obligations. From 2010 to 2023, interest payments in developing countries increased by 73 per cent, while spending on health and education rose by only 58 per cent and 38 per cent, respectively (OECD & World Bank, 2024). This skewed allocation of public spending weakens long-term development prospects and contributes to ongoing cycles of fragility and underdevelopment. Moreover, analysis of World Bank and OECD figures suggests that in 2024, countries

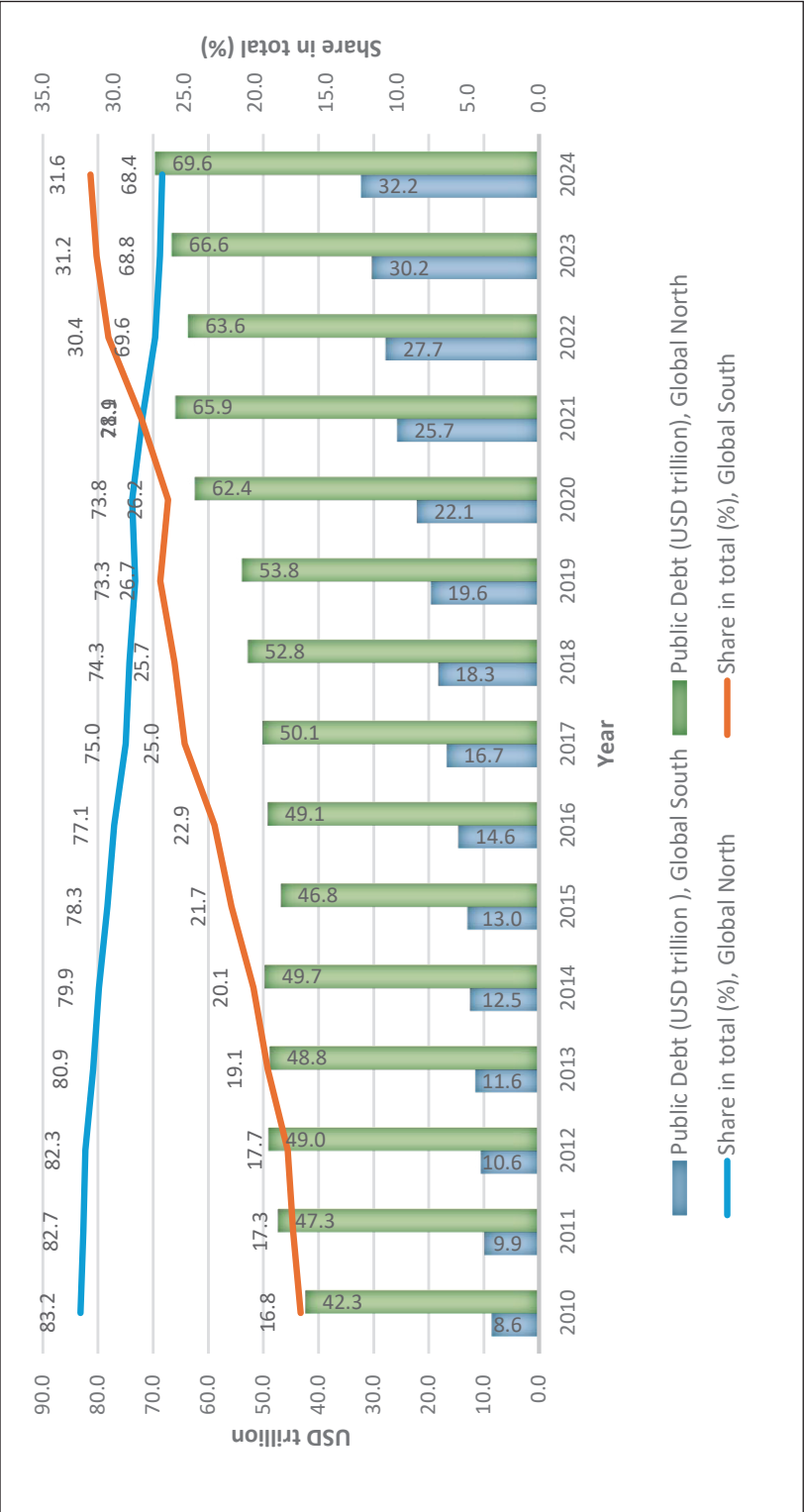
in the Global South are likely to pay out USD 50 billion more in debt service than they will receive in grants and loans - representing a net financial outflow that severely limits their ability to invest in sustainable growth (OECD & World Bank, 2024).

2. Explosive Growth in Debt Burden

Figure 1 illustrates the trends in public debt across the Global South and Global North from 2010 to 2024. During this period, the public debt in the Global South increased significantly - from USD 8.6 trillion in 2010 to USD 32.2 trillion in 2024 - representing nearly a fourfold rise. In contrast, the Global North's public debt grew from USD 42.3 trillion to USD 69.6 trillion, an increase of about 1.6 times. Notably, the total global public debt doubled, rising from USD 50.9 trillion to USD 101.8 trillion during the same period. This means that while the world's debt expanded substantially, the burden grew disproportionately for the Global South. Additionally, the share of the Global South in global public debt rose from 16.8 per cent in 2010 to 31.6 per cent in 2024, whereas the Global North's share declined from 83.2 per cent to 68.4 per cent.

This change highlights two major concerns. First, public debt in the Global South grew at a significantly faster rate - nearly 3.7 times - compared to the 1.6-fold increase seen in the Global North. Second, despite this rapid increase in debt, the GDP of the Global South only grew about 1.8 times during the same period. This growing gap between debt

Figure 1: ODA as Per cent of GNI in 2023, DAC Members Figure 1: Public Debt of Global South and Global North Between 2010-2024, USD Trillion



Source: UNCTAD and Author's Calculation

accumulation and economic output raises serious concerns about the sustainability of debt in many developing countries.

This trend (see Figure 1) is particularly concerning as many Global South economies continue to struggle with the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and face heightened risks from ongoing geopolitical tensions and external economic shocks. The combination of rising debt levels and relatively slower economic growth makes these economies more vulnerable to fiscal instability, currency fluctuations, and reduced access to affordable financing. Overall, the data in Figure 1 underscores a critical global economic imbalance: while public debt has doubled worldwide, the Global South is shouldering a growing share of the burden - raising urgent questions about fiscal resilience and the need for international support and debt management reforms.

3. Public Debt as a Percentage of GDP of Global South

The evolution of public debt in the Global South reveals a concerning upward trend. Between 2010 and 2024,

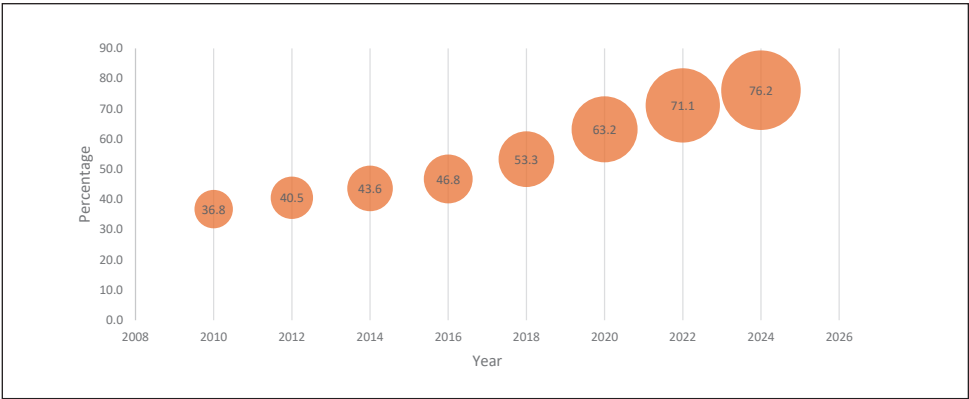
the average public debt-to-GDP ratio in developing countries more than doubled - from 36.8 per cent to 76.2 per cent. This sharp increase indicates that public debt has grown significantly faster than the economies themselves in over half of these countries. The most pronounced surges occurred after 2018, reflecting growing fiscal pressures.

This trend is driven by a combination of weak economic growth - further suppressed by heightened uncertainty and geopolitical tensions - and persistently high borrowing costs. These factors have undermined fiscal stability across much of the Global South, exacerbating debt vulnerabilities and raising serious concerns about the sustainability of public finances in the coming years (UNCTAD 2025).

4. Heavily Indebted Countries in the Global South

As shown in the figures, Figures 1 and 2 illustrate key aspects of public debt trends in the Global South. Figure 1 presents the share of Global South countries in total global public debt, while Figure 2 shows public debt as a percentage

Figure 2: Public Debt as a Share of GDP (%), Global South



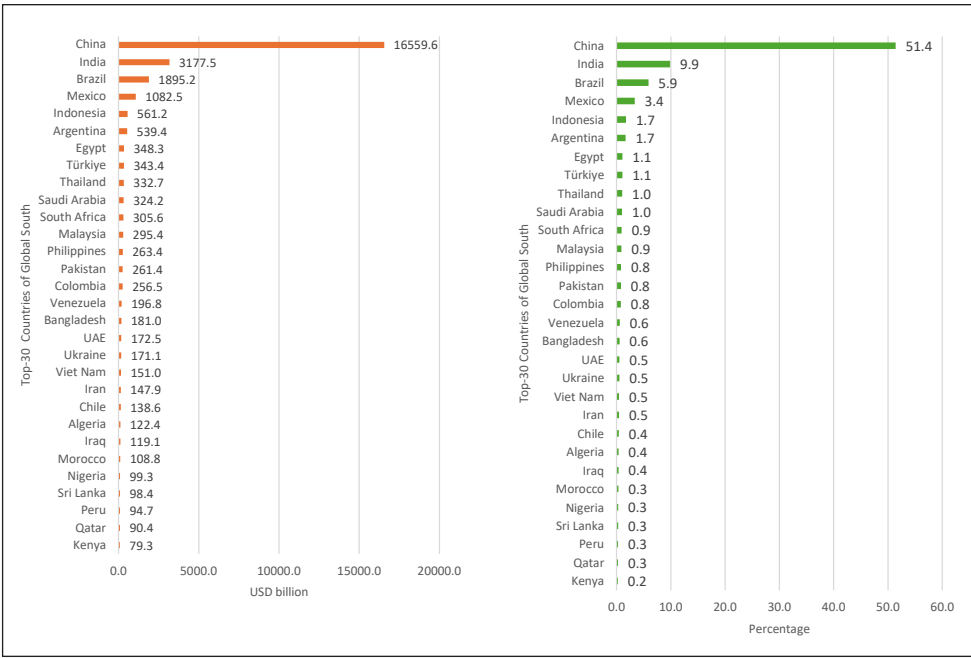
Source: UNCTAD and Author's Calculation.

of GDP for these countries. Together, these figures highlight the growing debt burden across developing economies. According to Figure 3, the debt burden is highly concentrated within a few major economies in the Global South. China alone accounts for 51.4 per cent of the Global South’s total public debt, with approximately USD 16.56 trillion in 2023. Other major contributors to the Global South’s debt include India, Brazil, Mexico, Indonesia, Argentina, Egypt, and Turkey. These countries collectively

represent a significant portion of the debt profile of the Global South and underline the increasing fiscal pressures faced by many emerging economies (see Figure 3).

The data in Table 1 reveals a concerning yet nuanced picture of the debt dynamics in the Global South over the period 2010-2023. Key indicators – ranging from external public debt as a share of GDP to per capita interest payments – show a persistent and growing dependence on debt to sustain public expenditure and economic functions.

Figure 3: Top-30 Countries of Global South High Public Debt in 2023



Source: Author’s calculation based on data UNCTAD.

This trend, while partly driven by economic development needs, has also led to increasing financial vulnerabilities.

5. Rising External Public Debt Burden

From 2010 to 2023, external public debt as a share of GDP rose significantly

from 26.29 per cent to 35.57 per cent. Although there was a peak during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 (41.54 per cent), the ratio has slightly declined but remains elevated compared to pre-2015 levels. Similarly, the total external public debt in absolute terms has nearly tripled from USD1.38 trillion in 2010 to

USD3.45 trillion in 2023. This increase highlights both the growing financial needs of developing countries and their increased exposure to foreign creditors and currency fluctuations.

6. Per Capita Debt Escalation

The per capita external public debt has also seen a sharp rise - from USD 80,852.46 in 2010 to USD 166,762.83 in 2023 - more than doubling over the period. Public debt per capita overall (including domestic debt) followed an even steeper trajectory, jumping from USD 385,014.55 to USD 807,783.87. This illustrates a widening debt burden on the average citizen, which may translate to reduced fiscal space for social spending or increased taxation in the long term.

7. Government Spending vs. Interest Obligations in Global South

While government expenditure as a share of GDP remained relatively stable (around 43–44 per cent), the share of interest payments on public debt as a portion of GDP increased from 1.84 per cent in 2010 to 2.76 per cent in 2023. More strikingly, interest payments as a share of government revenue rose from 9.23 per cent to 14.29 per cent, suggesting that a growing portion of public income is being diverted to debt servicing instead of development priorities like health, education, or infrastructure.

Additionally, the ratio of public interest payments to government expenditure increased from 7.58 per

cent in 2010 to 11.32 per cent in 2023, signaling rising fiscal pressures. This underscores a concerning trend: governments in the Global South are spending an increasing share of their budgets just to meet interest obligations.

The escalating debt crisis in the Global South, where the share of global debt has nearly doubled from 2010 to 2024, it grows per year by 9.93 per cent between 2010 to 2024, poses a severe threat to economic growth and sustainable development. During this period (2010-2024), while the GDP of developing countries grew 1.8 times, public debt surged fourfold, with net interest payments reaching US\$921 billion in 2023 - a 10 per cent increase from the previous year (UNCTAD, 2025). This mounting debt burden, with 38 per cent of developing countries - many in Africa - allocating over 10 per cent of government revenues to interest payments, diverts critical resources from essential sectors like education and health, affecting 3.3 billion people globally. Compounding this crisis, official development assistance (ODA) has significantly declined, dropping by 7.1 per cent in 2024, with debt-related ODA plummeting from 7.2 per cent in 2010 to just 0.2 per cent in 2023.¹ The financing gap for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals has widened from \$2.5 trillion in 2014 to over \$4 trillion in 2024, underscoring the urgent need for reform.²

To address this crisis, coordinated global action is imperative. The G20's Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI), which suspended USD 12.9

Table 1: Debt Indicators of Global South

Indicator	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
External public debt as a share of GDP	26.29	24.47	25.21	26.26	27.05	30.54	32.40	34.14	33.67	35.04	41.54	38.81	36.03	35.57
External public debt in US\$ billions	1379.31	1482.61	1675.19	1820.60	2026.86	2101.15	2259.08	2554.77	2762.34	2950.82	3185.77	3329.16	3318.29	3450.45
External public debt in US\$ per capita	80852.46	81443.86	88721.88	96814.13	101055.22	106919.83	114155.09	125218.85	130361.14	134513.72	145619.97	150913.28	152791.32	166762.83
Government expenditure as a share of GDP	42.96		42.87	43.22	43.85	44.76		43.69	43.22	43.42	47.17		44.13	44.38
Public debt in US\$ per capita	385014.55	438360.72	455556.24	465532.36	469346.40	476847.69	507585.03	551259.93	589314.90	618034.13	660681.79	729341.15	764585.73	807783.87
Public debt interest payments as a share of GDP	1.84	1.83	1.85	1.91	1.86	1.95	2.14	2.17	2.30	2.39	2.49	2.51	2.48	2.76
Public debt interest payments as a share of revenues	9.23	9.12	9.04	9.53	9.53	10.73	11.93	11.29	11.71	12.40	14.18	13.44	12.95	14.29
Public debt interest payments in US\$ per capita	9938.14	10665.23	10088.45	10279.02	8849.68	8759.00	9443.41	10584.91	11899.94	12037.69	10716.02	12882.07	14307.94	16606.61
Ratio of public interest payments to government expenditure	7.58		7.43	7.63	7.81	8.47		9.15	9.70	10.03	9.78		10.02	11.32

Source: UNCTAD (2024) and Author Calculation.

billion in debt payments from May 2020 to December 2021, provided temporary relief, but only four countries - Chad, Ethiopia, Ghana, and Zambia - have pursued restructuring under the G20's Common Framework for Debt Treatments. The Common Framework must be strengthened and expanded to include all middle-income countries,³ ensuring broader access to debt relief and restructuring mechanisms. Additionally, increasing the share of ODA grants, which fell to 63 per cent of total ODA in 2022, is critical to providing low-cost financing. Policymakers should prioritize coordinated strategies for debt financing, relief, restructuring, and sound debt management to alleviate fiscal pressures and support long-term resilience.⁴ Without a significant scale-up in financing and policy reform, the Global South risks further economic stagnation and setbacks in achieving sustainable development.

Endnotes

- ¹ <https://unctad.org/news/development-aid-hits-record-high-falls-developing-countries>
- ² https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/reportconfronting_the_debt_crisis_11_actions.pdf
- ³ https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Confronting-the-Debt-Crisis_11-Actions_Report.pdf

- ⁴ <https://financing.desa.un.org/sites/default/files/ffd4-documents/2025/Compromiso%20de%20Sevilla%20for%20action%2016%20June.pdf>

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