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# VOICES FROM THE GLOBAL SOUTH: REDEFINING GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

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The popular notion that the world is a global village negates the acute and persistent social, economic and political disparities particularly between the Global South and the North. While the two sides appear to be interdependent, their respective pace of growth and development has been profoundly unequal, leaving the Global South at a significant disadvantage. Current experiences ranging from the COVID-19 pandemic to the global economic crises, technological advancement and brain drain phenomenon continue to expose the structural vulnerability and disadvantages faced by the Global South. These experiences call for a change of strategy in the global governance structure that will protect the interests of all.

This is important considering the persistent social and economic realities in Global South countries. The unemployment rate in most Global North countries is single-digit, while in the Global South countries it remains abysmally high, often in the double digits. Similarly, the majority of the youths in Global South countries are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). In the Global South, productivity has been slow due to the use of outdated technology, and health statistics have also shown fearful records of high maternal and child mortality, low life expectancy and stunting, among others. This Global South and North dichotomy has been so for centuries and there is no better time to demand structural and systemic changes than now, for a more peaceful, just and egalitarian global society.

## THE CURRENT SITUATION IN GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

It is not until recently that the Global South, which refers to the collective identity of nations in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Oceania that share histories of colonization, exploitation, and underdevelopment, has come to understand that the battle between Washington and Beijing cannot resolve the underrepresentation of this region in the global governance space. Historically, global institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the United Nations were only established after World War II with the intention of promoting economic stability and development. However, these institutions have more often than not promoted the interests of the Global North with very little concern for the disadvantaged Global South. The Global South in fact is very relevant to these issues such as trade activities, health advancement, technology diversification and climate change.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the global landscape of vaccine development, production and distribution reveals significant imbalances, with resources predominantly concentrated in the Global North countries. At the same time, it is important to note that scientific approaches to pandemic control proposed by various regions, including Africa, have not yet received due attention and adoption. Such a situation highlights the need to enhance fairness and inclusivity within the global health governance system.

In a similar manner, climate change is another con-

current but very profound global phenomenon that reveals imbalances in global governance, which disproportionately burden the Global South. It is on record that the majority of the carbon emissions that pollute the air and create the global warming crisis are from the Global North, yet there is no compensation for countries in the Global South. The Global North, which accounts for a significant share of global carbon emissions, leaves countries in the Global South disproportionately affected by the consequences of global warming, while the Global South is equally expected to develop and contribute to adaptation and mitigation measures. Till date, no compensation has been put in place for the Global South for such magnificent damages. The recent US-waged trade war is another testament to the fact that the world is only a global community in theory but not in practice. The unequal and unfavorable trade dynamics between the Global North and the Global South are significantly rooted in the North's dominance in high-value manufacturing and its control over key technologies. On the other hand, the Global South is expected to continue to supply raw materials and cheap labor to the Global North, and not so much can be done by the Global South as the major trade institutions around the world are controlled by the Global North. This situation has made it difficult for the Global South to move up the global value chain and to adopt any meaningful trade policy that will protect its own interest.

In addition to the Global North's dominance across the global social and economic landscape, the colonial



(Photo/C Photo)

*On May 24, 2025, following the United States' withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency confirmed it was drafting a plan to remove all restrictions on greenhouse gas emissions from American coal-fired and gas-fired power plants.*

history of the Global North also gives it a strong diplomatic advantage over the Global South as it has wound major international institutions around itself and is able to shape global political narratives. The recent political rebirth in Africa's Sahel region demonstrates a pattern seen across the Global South, wherein nations are actively redefining their foreign relations by distancing themselves from former colonial powers and engaging with alternative partners. The legacy of colonial structures has scattered traces in the post-independence political systems in the Global South and sometimes hinders the emergence of a strong, independent and localized governance capability in these previously dominated regions. The intention to play the loyalty game has compelled some of these developing economies to be more committed to the interest of the former colonial powers than working towards their own growth. This tends to account for the leadership gap in some of these countries and this has also put diplomatic systems in the favor of the Global North. The current situation therefore points to the fact that the pillars of global governance are currently tilted more towards the Global North than the Global South.

And a change of strategy is required to create a truly equitable global governance system.

### **WHAT HAS STALLED THE GLOBAL SOUTH'S ENGAGEMENT IN GLOBAL GOVERNANCE?**

Generally, while there are external factors that have limited the rise of the Global South in global governance, there are also internal factors that need to be consistently resolved for any meaningful progress to take place. There is no doubt that the fate of the Global South is partly determined by the Global North with its firm grip over the global governance structure. For example, aside from China, the other four permanent seats on the UN Security Council are occupied by the United States, France, Russia and the United Kingdom, all of which are in the Global North. The influence of the Global North is also very profound in the global financial space as they are major contributors to global financial institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF, where countries from the Global North generally have major seats. This social and economic dominance makes the Global North a major hurdle for the Global South to rise to the occasion in terms of global governance.

However, beyond the external effect of the Global

North in the emergence of the Global South in the global governance system, there are internal factors that have made it difficult for the Global South to stand as a bloc and create a united system that will challenge the existing power structure. One of the major obstacles that has hindered the emergence of the Global South is the difference in national priorities. While the Global North has been able to secure a free trade system which has contributed to its economic sustainability, the Global South has not been able to achieve a unified interest. The economic interests of emerging world powers such as India differ from those of the developing economies in Africa. These imbalances have become a ground for competition rather than collaboration. While some countries in this region are focused on how to minimize the threat of climate change, others are racing towards dealing with national insecurity as well as the issue of trade imbalances. All of these complicate the possibility of a unified Global South governance agenda.

Similarly, the problem of political fragmentation and differences in governance models have also been a limitation to the growth and development of the Global South. There have been difficulties in achieving regional integration and establishing regional institutions that will compete favorably with others around the world. For example, since the establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) in 2018, only 48 countries have been able to ratify the agreement as of February 2025. This slow pace of regional collaboration has made it difficult for the region to make major global governance changes. Rather than coming together to pursue a common interest like in the Global North, the Global South has been more focused on competing for national influence and this has limited its ability to develop a collective bargaining power for global governance.

The history of colonization also stands as a major problem that hinders the Global South's participation in global governance. The colonial history has made some of the countries in the Global South to be more committed to protecting the interest of their former colonizers than forming a new coalition. The majority of the countries in the Global South that have gained independence still hold a strong affiliation to the countries from which they secured independence. These ties greatly influence trade agreements, security decisions and other diplomatic choices on the global scale. This has led to the notion that some of these countries were only granted independence by ver-

bal declaration but not in practice. It is therefore clear that historical and economic differences play major roles in making the Global South unable to make any milestone impact on the global governance landscape to date.

## PATHWAYS FOR BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE GLOBAL GOVERNANCE SYSTEM

Achieving an inclusive and equitable global governance system where both the Global North and the South are engaged in shared responsibility is possible if the right strategies are adopted. Some of the pathways to a more inclusive and equitable society include but are not limited to the following:

### Promoting Multipolar Systems

For several years, the world has moved from a unipolar, bipolar to a tripolar system which has always been to the advantage of a powerful few. The Global South can only be fully represented in the international governance arena when there is a multipolar system where each region has an advantage in contributing to global sustainability. However, for this to happen, there is need to first strengthen all regional institutions such as the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), the African Union (AU) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). These various blocs, which have the interests of member states at heart, can come together to form a stronger tie that will give the Global South more voice in global governance. Similarly, stronger ties



Photo/Xinhua

*The 36th Ordinary Session of the African Union Assembly kicked off on February 18, 2023, as African leaders, UN officials and leaders of various international organizations gathered in the AU headquarters, Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa.*

must be formed among Global South countries in the areas of technology transfer, trade, and financial assistance. This reform will move the world away from a system of single dominance in the global governance space to one with multiple centers of influence.

### **Institutional Reforms**

The need to give the Global South a voice in the global governance system cannot be overemphasized and one of the strategies to achieve this is to reform the power structure of most major international institutions. This will include improving representation of the Global South on major institutions such as the UN Security Council and other notable international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF. It is only through adequate representation that the voice of the Global South can be heard in international decision-making processes. More than ever before, the Global South should begin to see incremental representation on an international scale across major international institutions that will ensure that the needs and interests of the Global South are properly aligned with the global governance system. These reforms are needed in order to make these institutions a true representation of the interests of the global population in the global governance structure.

### **True Independence**

The question that has continued to resonate in the mind of most citizens in Global South countries is whether or not their countries are truly independent states. Year in and year out, there are millions of people from the Global South moving to the North in pursuit of education and healthcare, which are basic services that should be available to all societies. Similarly, most of the Global South countries are still unable to resolve internal crises such as insecurity, food scarcity, the shortage of financial aid for infrastructural development, etc. This system of dependence after independence depicts a system which some have termed “modern day slavery”. The narrative needs to be changed by giving Global South countries true independence. This involves creating an enabling environment where local capacity can be built in resolving local problems, and external assistance should be provided only when necessary. Granting these countries the freedom to develop is critical to realizing true independence. It is also indispensable for sustainable growth and development in the Global South.



*On September 12, 2023, the Brazilian government and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization signed a series of agreements aimed at strengthening food and nutrition security, ensuring inclusive development in the Amazon region, and promoting South-South cooperation.*

### **An Improved Social Contract**

The social contract that exists between the Global North and the South is still lopsided. Issues around climate change, trade agreements, financial aid agreements and access to basic services such as health, education and technology transfer must be seen as an issue of equity and not just assistance to the Global South. The fact that the majority of the global carbon emissions are traceable to the Global North and that the South also supports the growth and development of the world through the supply of raw materials and labor, calls for renegotiation of the existing contract where no partner is a winner or loser. A just and equitable global governance system is possible when the world thinks about collaborating rather than competing, especially in the process of creating access to basic services. It is this kind of relationship that can create the kind of global governance structure where no one is left out or disenfranchised.

### **Purpose of the Global North and South Integration**

One of the major questions regarding the global governance balance between the Global North and the South is what is the purpose of this reform. The answer lies in the fact that there is no part of the world without peculiar challenges. The integration of the North and the South in the governance process is critical for addressing shared challenges and gaining quicker solutions to global issues. Global challenges such as food insecurity, climate change, pandemic and the movement of the displaced around the world can be properly resolved based on

shared commitment between the North and the South.

Similarly, sustainable development can only be achieved through a more unified governance system. Each year, most of the countries in the Global North spend billions of dollars as aid to countries in the Global South, which has now been considered as a misplaced priority by the Trump administration through the withdrawal of support to key institutions such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and other UN organizations. The aid is released because the Global South continues to suffer from underdevelopment despite its rich human and natural resources. Creating a more just global governance process will go a long way to contribute to the sustainable development and prosperity both for the Global North and the South.



Photo/Xinhua

*On February 27, 2025, delegates attended the Finance in Common Annual Summit in Cape Town, South Africa, co-hosted by the Development Bank of Southern Africa and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, with the support of Agence Française de Développement.*



Photo/Xinhua

*On May 12, 2023, local farmers were harvesting hybrid rice in a high-yield demonstration field at the African branch of China National Hybrid Rice R&D Center near Mahicy town, Madagascar's capital Antananarivo.*

More than ever before, there is a continuous rise in the number of asylum seekers, refugees and displaced persons from the Global South to the North, which has intensified the pressure on the infrastructure and the security situation in the North. However, this border threat can be better resolved, particularly between Africa and Europe, if a more decent and habitable Global South is created through shared responsibility. It is therefore more appropriate to deal with these imbalances now through the building of a more dignified and habitable Global South, as it may become a huge global security threat in the future if left unresolved. Both the Global North and the South can achieve stability, peace and prosperity if every nation, whether in the North or the South, is provided with an enabling environment where everyone can thrive.

## CONCLUSION

One of the questions that have always been actively discussed by experts is whether the world has actually made significant progress in global governance since the First Industrial Revolution. This thinking, however, raises more questions than answers when opinions are weighed between scholars from the Global North and the South. This is because, more than ever before, the world is seeking a future world order that is more democratic, resilient and equitable in the global governance process. Most of the conflict for rights and privileges around the world can be attributed to the feelings of dissatisfaction between the Global North and South. The implication of this is that the current system seems to leave some groups more prosperous than others. And the current crises around the world will continue to balloon unless these differences are resolved.

Governance is about the people and true governance must take the interests of all groups to heart. This is the only way through which the Global North and South can be jointly prosperous. Efforts must be made to improve the Global South's capacity and strengthen their independence and sense of belonging, as this is important for Global South countries to bring their best ideas to the fore for sustainable global governance. No true prosperity can be realized in a world that is characterized by inequality, fear and undue dominance. It is only when the global governance system is reformed to be more equitable and effective that the world can be more peaceful and prosperous for all. 🇨🇳