

Artículo de opinión

India's G20 Presidency and IBSA Troika – Reaffirming Southern Leadership

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Introduction – Emergence of New Templates in Global Governance

India's G20 presidency has been a successful moment in global governance deliberations in the backdrop of geopolitical fragmentation and ongoing conflicts. With the unanimous adoption of the New Delhi Leaders' Declaration on the first day of the Leaders' Summit, India was able to showcase its diplomatic effectiveness; which generated goodwill for India as a trusted partner of the Global South given the fact that G20 so far had partial representation of developing countries.^[1] The 83 paragraph declaration, in essence has been solution centred and inclusive; and sets a definite way forward on a wide range of prevailing global challenges, from climate change to the reform of international financial institutions. Achievements include induction of the African Union (AU) as a permanent member of the G20 and wider recognition of the potential of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) – uniquely created and implemented at scale by India, and collective endorsement of a new Green Development Pact which addresses concerns of the Global South. New initiatives like the Global Biofuel Alliance and India Middle East Europe Economic Corridor were also launched by India on the occasion.

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The definite vision (motto) that inspired India in pushing for global governance reforms at the G20 and to suggest universally relevant solutions was that of '*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*', an ancient Indian verse which can be interpreted as 'One Earth, One Family, One Future'. Such guiding principle of universal responsibility in the conduct of multilateral efforts led India to propose a new theme called 'LiFE' – lifestyles for environment, as an agenda of India's G20 Presidency in order to create a space for all member countries to deliberate on transformative approaches, and on roles of individuals and institutions in dealing with challenges of climate change and inclusive development. This led to the eventual adoption of a set of nine High Level Principles (HLPs) on Lifestyles for Sustainable Development by the G20. In doing so India built on similar approaches taken by G20 in the past like G20 Resource Efficiency Dialogue (2017), Osaka Blue Ocean Vision (2019); Circular Carbon Economy (2020) and G20 Global Smart Cities Alliance (2021). Clearly, India set higher ambition and succeeded in addressing multiple sources of the problem through the HLPs wherein both development and sustainability concerns are taken together. This was done with specific needs of the Global South in perspective.

Brazil, the incumbent Chair of the G20, has most appropriately introduced another important theme – Bioeconomy as a new initiative to dedicate attention to science, technology and innovation; sustainable use of biodiversity; and the role of bio economy in promoting sustainable development. This not only suggests continuity between India and Brazil, in meaningfully engaging on the sustainable development agenda, but also reflects convergence when it comes to making special efforts to deliver objective outcomes linked with protection of nature and sustainable resource use through responsible human action. What sets the G20 presidencies of India and Brazil apart is the fact that high-income members of the G20 have

often lacked the enthusiasm and the spirit to address root causes of climate change – unbridled extraction and exploitation of nature through harmful economic activities and unsustainable consumption behaviour. From that perspective, the LiFE and Bioeconomy agenda of India and Brazil respectively has set new precedence of credible and action driven outcomes for the G20 in areas of sustainability and inclusion.

After India and Brazil, G20 Presidency would move to South Africa. In this regard, it is highly relevant to underscore that India, Brazil and South Africa has been a formal Southern grouping called IBSA that came into existence in 2003. For ensuring better coordination among subsequent G20 Presidencies, there is an established practice of forming a G20 Troika that comprises of the incumbent, immediate past and future Presidencies. Currently by coincidence it has come about to be a IBSA Troika for the G20. This occasion demands deeper reflection on how IBSA as a group may reconnect with its core values and offer new avenues for global cooperation through the G20. In this backdrop, this paper explores the implications of IBSA and G20 crossing paths; ensuring development as a key pivot to engagement with the G20; and way forward on reforming multilateralism.

IBSA and G20 crossing paths

As the G20 gavel passed from India to Brazil on December 1, 2023, it heralded a significant juncture for the IBSA nations—India, Brazil, and South Africa—each set to consecutively lead the G20, collectively forming a G20 troika. Established with the Brasilia Declaration on June 6, 2003, the IBSA Dialogue Forum is an international 3-member grouping for promoting cooperation among three large democracies and economies from three different continents. Serving as a 'central axis of the South', IBSA engages in South-South Cooperation (SSC), driving the narrative on reform of global economic and political governance while

emphasizing mutual respect and benefit.^[2] Empowered with the IBSA Declaration on South-South Cooperation (2018), the IBSA Joint Statement on the Reform of the Multilateral System (2019), and underscored by recent commitments made during the 2024 Ministerial Declaration, this occasion marks a significant turn of events for IBSA.^{[3] [4] [5]} And, presents an opportunity for these nations to shape the global agenda with fresh insights until December 2025.

Numerous global challenges continue: raging conflicts, rising inequalities and inflation, uneven recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, escalating climate threats, and worsening North-South divisions. These issues, compounded by financial instability and debt distress in developing nations, and a decline in multilateral cooperation, have significantly compromised the effectiveness of global governance, stalling meaningful progress. To address these fault lines, Brazil's G20 presidency appears to be focusing on specific developmental challenges and reform of multilateralism with clear vision of key outcomes. It must be noted that India while presenting its G20 roadmap suggested that the outcomes need to be action-oriented. Hence, there is significant convergence on how India or Brazil may be approaching their respective G20 Presidencies.

Under the theme 'Building a fair world and a sustainable planet', Brazil has prioritized three key areas to advance the Global South's interests: social inclusion and combating hunger and poverty; fostering energy transitions and sustainable development; and pushing for global governance reforms.^[6] Rooted in the principles set forth by the Brasilia Declaration, the foundational agenda of IBSA, focusing on UN reform, security, anti-poverty measures, and sustainable development, are now at the forefront of global policy discussions. These still remain grossly unfinished agendas and have attained unprecedented urgency reflected in

contemporary G20 priorities. This makes IBSA Troika for the G20 all the more relevant. In reinforcing this strategic alignment, the February 2024 meeting of the Foreign Affairs Ministers of IBSA, held on the side-lines of the G20 sessions, highlighted the urgent need to strengthen the IBSA Dialogue Forum.^[7] This effort underscores the commitment to enhance synchronization with the G20 framework, ensuring that IBSA's distinctive goals and strategies are fully integrated and influential within the broader global governance landscape.

Development as a Key Pivot to IBSA's engagement with G20

IBSA, as a G20 troika, can focus on key sectors where the three countries have natural complementarities: finance, digitalization, health, food security, energy transitions, trade, and multilateral reforms—areas of immediate importance and agreement, previously addressed during India's presidency. In a world already ravaged by the pandemic, global growth remains subdued, highlighting deep economic disparities. War disruptions in energy and food markets exacerbate global poverty and hunger, with 783 million people facing chronic hunger and the global poverty rate increasing from 7.8% to 9.1%.^[8] The urgent need for social inclusion and solutions to food insecurity is clear.

India and Brazil, are leaders among the Global South countries in healthcare and agriculture. They are well-positioned to lead on Universal Health Coverage initiatives, exemplified by India's Ayushman Bharat—the world's largest health assurance scheme and Brazil's Bolsa Família—the largest conditional cash transfer program globally. Their leadership in climate-smart agriculture, sustainable food production systems, and biofuels positions them to combat the global food crisis effectively and advance SDG 2. Furthering these efforts, Brazil has established a dedicated task force to launch the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty, an initiative inspired by its successful 'Brazil Without Hunger' program, aiming to extend its

proven strategies at a global scale. This is also bolstered by IBSA's longstanding commitments towards combating poverty and hunger globally, exemplified by the significance and achievements under the IBSA fund for poverty and hunger alleviation (IBSA Fund).

Another area where IBSA excels is in leveraging Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), which enhances financial inclusion, significantly reducing socio-economic inequalities and can boost GDP by up to 12% in regions with low financial inclusion. In 2021, 78% of Indians and 84% of Brazilians had bank accounts, a testament to the significant strides made in financial inclusion through robust DPI.^[9] During its G20 presidency, India initiated the Global Digital Public Infrastructure Repository and a Social Impact Fund to advance DPI, that have potential to enhance digital access and equity. Continuing this focus, Brazil has integrated DPI into its Digital Economy Working Group, strengthening IBSA's commitment to reducing the digital divide and fostering development across the Global South. Under the IBSA partnership, India and Brazil can utilize their success and scalability in DPI to provide scalable, affordable digital services, focusing on replicating these successes in regions like Latin America and Africa, where there is a significant need for enhanced digital infrastructure.

Finally, as illustrated earlier, India's G20 presidency distinguished itself by integrating development and climate change discourses, championing key environmental initiatives such as Lifestyles for Sustainable Development (which advocates among other things the need for a circular economy and responsible consumption, and encourages social enterprises and community initiatives). India's leadership also propelled significant advocacy for the reform of multilateral development banks, aiming to enhance availability of development finance

including green financing. In 2023 during Indian presidency, the G20, for the first time in history, recognized green financing needs of \$5.9 trillion for developing countries to meet their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) by 2030.^[10] Leveraging Brazil's expertise in climate diplomacy, a task force called the Global Mobilization against Climate Change has been proposed to establish a new, robust, collective quantified goal on climate finance. Tangible targets must be reached before Brazil hosts the Clean Energy Ministerial Meeting this year and COP30 in 2025. The G20 Troika engagement for IBSA also offers an opportunity to strengthen and broaden the scope of the IBSA Fund, a significant South-South cooperation initiative and enhance its relevance and visibility.

Reforming Multilateralism – A longstanding IBSA Agenda

Driven by a shared commitment to advocate for the interests of the Global South in key international forums such as the UN, WTO, and G20, IBSA has consistently emphasized the necessity for reforming global institutions. Key priority of Brazil's presidency is on reforming institutions of global governance, reinforcing the urgency and relevance of these initiatives. Central to IBSA's agenda has been the reform of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), which has ignored changed realities. As the G20 troika, IBSA countries emerge as a source of hope to set a firm timeline for initiating text-based negotiations by 2025, a critical juncture coinciding with the UN's 80th anniversary, just before the US assumes the presidency in 2026.

IBSA countries have consistently supported a rule-based, transparent, and non-discriminatory trading system within the WTO. Now, with the inclusion of the entire AU in the G20, IBSA must realign its trade priorities to further enhance and diversify economic relationships, focusing on promoting engagement through trade and investment. This expansion within the

G20 framework offers IBSA new opportunities to advance intra-regional trade, a potential that has been underutilized since its inception in 2003.^[11]

Therefore, G20 provides IBSA with a unique window to advocate for long-standing issues. With its rich history of advocating for a balanced and inclusive global order, IBSA is ideally positioned to steer these discussions effectively. However, key to this is revitalizing IBSA's framework, particularly by resuming the Leaders Summits that did not happen since 2011.^[12]

Enhanced diplomatic and official level engagements as part of G20 Troika offer IBSA new opportunity to bring greater cohesion within the group and prepare for a Leaders Summit.

The summit process is expected to recover the lost ground over the past decade, a period during which IBSA was often overshadowed by BRICS, sparking debates about its relevance and impact. As BRICS is poised for further expansion, the complexities of consensus building, differing priorities, and geopolitical undercurrents would become more pronounced. Yet, in contrast to BRICS' non-Western stance, IBSA may potentially carve a distinct path with its democratic ethos and a balanced approach that isn't necessarily anti-West. IBSA, bridging the North-South divide, now faces a crucial moment to elevate its cooperation, as they balance their IBSA, BRICS and G20 identities. This is underscored by the recent joint statement from the White House with IBSA, building on India's G20 presidency's success.^[13]

Conclusion

The current divisions within the G20—driven by trade-technology disputes, wars, migration, the declining effectiveness of institutions of global governance, deglobalization trends etc. present a strategic moment for IBSA to assert its influence. Over the next two years, as Brazil, South Africa, and India sequentially lead major international forums (G20, BRICS,

and COP30), IBSA is positioned to act as a formal caucus within these bodies, championing global democracy and sustainable and equitable growth.

G20 New Delhi Leaders Declaration has uniquely reflected an perspective of emphasizing universal, equitable, and inclusive model of growth. It sends out a clear message for peace, dialogue and diplomacy. This approach is a reflection of the shared values among IBSA countries, rooted deeply in traditional ethos rather than materialistic perspectives. Embracing concepts such as '*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*' (the world is one family) from India, '*Bom Vivere*' (living well or good living) from Brazil, and '*Ubuntu*' (humanity towards others) from Africa, IBSA underscores the importance of interconnectedness and unity in diversity. These philosophies, integral to their cultures, provide a solid foundation to promote a new kind of knowledge diplomacy in the G-20 setup, diplomatically balancing both national interests and contributing to wellbeing driven global outcomes. Thus, as these nations navigate their G20 presidencies, it's clear that possessing economic and political capital is a necessary condition. What perhaps sets IBSA apart is their distinct vision, right intentions, and the collective voice, offering a blueprint for a sustainable and equitable future world. It must be remembered that it is not the G20 but its member countries and host nations that truly shape the agenda and outcomes. This period represents a unique, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for IBSA to lead the agenda and steer it towards meaningful and positive change.

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