

Global South Knowledge Bridge

From local roots to vocal bonds

Dr. Natasha Agarwal

Following Washington's unilateral announcement of punitive measures, both uncertainty and unpredictability now loom large over the world economy. Although the United States continues to be a vital economic partner, the foundational trust rooted in respect for sovereignty appears increasingly shaken. Geopolitical predicaments are now being subjected to a profound test of economic sustainability and resilience.

Against this background, the ascent of the Global South is not only more pronounced but also increasingly inevitable. Leaders from across the Global South are sounding the alarm, urging a multi-pronged and coordinated strategic response to unilateralism. Policy discourses are converging around risk mitigation strategies that combine diplomatic and economic diversification with domestic economic reforms, all designed to bolster economic resilience.

That collective solidarity can serve as a foundation towards reconfiguring the world economic order is becoming amply evident. A quiet geopolitical revolution, rooted in shifting geoeconomic realities, is steadily taking shape. One that challenges and redefines the traditional core and peripheral dynamics of the global economic system. Where innovative forms of non-aligned international development cooperation and partnerships such as the Triangular Cooperation within the South-South framework, are being deliberated upon. More so, given

the rise of a Global South nation in China which has enabled her transition from primarily being an aid recipient to becoming a major donor and developmental partner. For instance, it was noted that with funding from China, China-IFAD South South and Triangular Cooperation “*has effectively leveraged knowledge, technologies, and resources from the Global South to accelerate rural poverty alleviation, enhance productivity, and drive rural transformation.*”

It is indeed a prudent strategy for the Global South nations to hedge their economic vulnerabilities by cultivating deeper and comprehensive economic partnerships within the Global South. Given shared developmental aspirations and developing realities, these partnerships encapsulate the core idea of collective solidarity - whereby Global South nations share their own developmental experiences, promote mutual learning through the pooling of complimentary strengths, and jointly develop innovative solutions that address both common and nation-specific developmental challenges.

However, mutual learning within these partnerships tends to be confined to specific project clusters, amongst project partners, which is inherently constrained by a selection bias. Ultimately limiting spill over benefits across the economy. And similarities in broad cultural values and ethos, largely touted as a Global South competitive advantage, does not necessarily trans-

late into an innate ability in knowing how each Global South nation thinks and performs.

Global South nations are characterized by unique geography, history, political system, governance framework and economic structure. The intricate interplay of these unique identifying factors would thus determine a nation's distinct national perspectives and priorities, strategies and approaches towards sustainable economic development. As a participant at the Global South Media and Think Tank Forum 2025, aptly puts it "*The Global South is home to many cultures and traditions, each with its own way of understanding the world.*"

This nuanced understanding and knowledge of each Global South nation should thus serve as the capital upon which the collective Global South builds. Accordingly, Global South nations must make consistent and deliberate efforts within the Global South to build and enhance knowledge infrastructure **by, of, and for** the Global South, so that knowledge localisation can support sustainable economic development across these nations.

Efforts by Global South nations toward knowledge enrichment and the establishment of a robust knowledge infrastructure are demonstrably underway and gaining significant momentum. This was vividly illustrated by China's hosting of the Global South Media and Think Tank Forum 2025, which brought together approximately 500 participants including journalists, scholars, government officials and entrepreneurs from 110 countries, as well as representatives from regional and international organizations.

Such efforts, however, need to be complemented with widespread diplomatic efforts that not only encourages greater people-to-people exchanges but also which leverages the potential that lies in people mobility across the Global South. People's diplomacy should, thus, serve as an enabler to strengthen social capital.

To this end, efforts in the short- to mid-term could focus on designing and deploying low-risk initiatives at the intersection of non-sensitive yet strategically aligned sectors - from businesses, scientific research to education and culture. Horizontal collaborations could, thus, involve cross-border institutional and multi-stakeholder collaborations involving academia, think tanks, businesses, policy institutions and government agencies. As an illustration, an Indian university in partnership with an Indian Chamber of Commerce, could jointly engage with their respective counterparts in Indonesia. Or, a Global South youth mobility initiative such as short-term academic study missions and exchange programs encompassing cultural immersions rooted in experiential learning.

Such collaborations not only integrate diverse insights and stakeholder expertise but also combine capabilities and resources encouraging knowledge exchange through various modalities. Some of these modalities could involve shared data repositories and knowledge sharing platforms, joint seminars and conferences, joint research projects, community-based activities and workshops, skill training workshops, field trips and studies, language training and cultural exchange programs, among others.

In essence, knowledge circulation through people mobility not only helps in building explicit and implicit knowledge, systematic integration of cross-cultural interdisciplinary knowledge but also facilitates the building of tacit knowledge, which in totality has a greater success in problem-solving.

To support the development of cross-border knowledge infrastructure, Global South nations would also need to liberalize policies in other areas. For example, knowledge flow via people mobility can be facilitated by adopting a liberal visa policy and establishing direct flight connections.

The proposed areas of collaboration and government policy support should move the

needle beyond rhetoric and perception management - where diplomatic outreach engagements within the Global South percolate tangible economic benefits at the grassroots across the wider Global South nations. Tactical adjustments cannot necessarily translate into economic policy convergences. More so, where the work-in-progress political mutual trust wanes strategic patiences, ultimately impacting the collective advancement of the Global South.

Conclusion

Perceptions drive engagements, which may not always be optimal. Therefore, to facilitate perceptual change - particularly at the grassroots - it is imperative to build bridges among Global South nations. In this context, people's diplomacy serves as

a foundational mechanism for fostering mutual learning, understanding and trust - key elements in establishing mutually beneficial cooperations.

Investment in building knowledge infrastructure should not be confined within national borders, but rather, should actively promote cross-border knowledge exchange and deliberations. Knowledge circulation through greater people-to-people exchanges, can thus be conceived of as a critical foundation for strengthening Global South's knowledge infrastructure. As one participant at the Global South Media and Think Tank Forum 2025 articulates, *"Knowledge must inform narratives, and narratives must reach people..so that civilizational dialogue moves beyond declarations and becomes daily practice."*

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