

# The G20 as a Multilateral Force

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**Abstract:** This paper highlights how the G20 as a grouping works against odds to bring forth voices from the Global South while balancing the requirements of the Global North. It also highlights the focus of the grouping on the Sustainable Development Goals and what it means to be halfway towards Agenda 2030. Most importantly, the paper explains how the G20 is slowly becoming a force to reckon with within the multilateral world.

**Keywords:** G20; India; Brazil; Global South; multilateralism.

The Group of Twenty as a forum offers a unique approach to multilateralism. Founded in 1999 and elevated to Leaders' Summit in 2008, the grouping has evolved into a distinct entity within the various multilateral forums prevalent today. In light of the BRICS expansion and the discussions about the African Union (AU) addition to the G20, the grouping has received more attention from analysts and observers.

As its inception began in the wake of the Asian financial crisis, the focus of the G20 has primarily been on finance. Before being elevated to the Leaders' Summit in 2008, the G20 would only meet under the Finance Ministers and Central Bank governors to engage in discussions. The importance of the Finance Track was further solidified at the 2009 Leaders' Summit, where G20 designated itself as the "premier forum for international economic cooperation" (G20 Research Group 2009). The Finance Track within the G20 engages in crucial discussions taken by the member States and the European Union. Some of the more recent successful outcomes of the Finance Track include the Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI), a Common Framework for Debt Treatment Beyond DSSI, the G20 Sustainable Finance Roadmap, the G20 principles for quality infrastructure investment, and a proposal to create a Financial Intermediary Fund (FIF) for pandemic Prevention, Preparedness and Response (PPR).

Success in the Finance Track does not mean that other aspects of the G20, such as the Sherpa Track and the different Engagement Groups (EG), that began in 2010, did not flourish in the last 18 years. Due to the unique model of G20 being a rotating Presidency and rotating Secretariat, each member State has chosen to add its flavor to the G20. Australia (2014) focused on gender, with the Brisbane Leaders' Summit Leaders endorsing the *Brisbane 25 by 25* goal to reduce the gender gap in the labor workforce by 25 percent by 2025. Germany (2017), on the other hand, launched the *G20 Compact with Africa* during its Leaders' Summit. Given the many necessities brought about by the pandemic, Italy's (2021) Presidency centered on the Matera Declaration, referred to as "a call to action in the time of the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond." Most recently, India's (2023) Presidency brought the focus on sustainability from a lifestyle perspective with LiFE or Lifestyle for Sustainable Development.

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Some have chosen to mock the G20 process, given its arbitrary nature and no set rules of procedure. Nevertheless, this arbitrary nature is what has worked for the G20 and is the reason why it is one of the most democratic multilateral forums that many States and groupings are keen to join. Decisions in the G20 are not binding, which sometimes means that implementation of the documents may not be at par with more structured multilateral organizations such as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) or the World Trade Organization (WTO). Nevertheless, G20 meetings are followed with equal interest, if not more, and the discussions are given significant weightage in bilateral and multilateral discussions.

This paper draws on the issues with multilateral institutions and explains how the G20's evolution from 2008 has led it to become a multilateral force. The policy paper defines the larger multilateral stalemate and explains how the G20 is slowly becoming more important within the multilateral world. Most importantly, it highlights how the G20 as a grouping is working against odds to bring forth voices from the Global South while balancing the requirements of the Global North.

## **STALEMATE IN OLD MULTILATERAL STRUCTURES**

Multilateral institutions were once considered the best place for State actors to come together and find means of cooperation on various issues. Guided by values of transparency, equity, and inclusiveness, these institutions focused on providing every State a voice, which later adapted to the times and provided space for civil society actors and multilateral corporations.

Many scholars often blame geopolitical tensions for the stalemate prevalent in almost all institutions (Pickford 2023). However, if they are the sole reason State actors cannot progress, why and how are multilateral groupings such as the G20 finding success in their dealings?

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Some specific parameters that have come to define multilateral institutions include a grouping of three or more State parties, rules of procedure that determine how State parties interact with each other, a Secretariat that looks after the documentation, and a “program of work” that outlines what would be discussed by the members of the specific grouping. The United Nations is the mother of all multilateral institutions, but many other multilateral institutions are currently running with these parameters as well. Some of these are the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

The aforementioned multilateral institutions, however, are functional due to their technocratic nature. They can execute work as part of their mandate while carefully engaging with the political discourse. For example, the visit of the IAEA Inspectors to the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant during the Russia-Ukraine conflict was successful as the inspectors stuck to the mandate of ensuring the safety and security of the nuclear power plant and its workers (IAEA 2023). The IAEA did not take sides in the conflict and focused on its mandate while engaging with both conflicting parties.

However, most other multilateral institutions do not come under the category of efficient execution of their “program of work.” The Conference on Disarmament (CD) is one such example. It has been unable to decide on the agenda for several years, with many calling for the CD (Rademaker 2023) to be revamped. The CD often gets stuck in procedural details, and the discussions refuse to proceed. The CD is only one example in multiple other such organizations that are currently unable to work either because they are bound by “rules of procedure” or because they are trying to find consensus between State parties, which in turn are bound by their national interests.

The significance of multilateralism was never in question, but the institutions and rules defining the contours of multilateral discussions have been weakening over some time. In the last decade, it has come to a stalemate. With national interests restricting cooperative decisions, States are finding alternative mechanisms to approach global problems. Some State parties attempted out-of-box solutions, such as the France and Germany-led Alliance for Multilateralism (EEAS

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2023) or the Blue Dot Network (United States Department of State 2023), which aim to strengthen checks and balances to mitigate infrastructure risks. Plurilateral initiatives between like-minded States such as QUAD are attempting to address common issues of concern, such as public health. However, their impact can be limiting at best, as factors beyond the control of these States would impact the issue at hand, something that would be beyond their decision-making. Global problems, thus, require global solutions.

Additionally, groupings such as the G7, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), or BRICS may make decisions that could potentially clash with each other. For example, the G7 decides that Data Free Flow with Trust (DFFT) is essential to ensure that data is not the purview of any one State (G7 Germany 2023). On the other hand, China decides that Cross Border Data Flows (CBDF) (Xudong 2022) is critical to ensure that security and development go together, which would lead to a further stalemate in prominent multilateral settings such as the United Nations.

The stalemate within multilateral institutions is triple-fold, with plurilateral initiatives lacking impact, multilateral institutions lacking action, and State actors bound by national interests.

With multilateralism swinging between consensus and efficiency between the Global North and the Global South, and between developed and developing States, the Group of 20 has become a multilateral force that sits comfortably between different vantage points.

## **EVOLUTION WITHIN THE G20**

The G20 is one of the few multilateral forums that changes shape yearly. While this fact has confused many multilateral experts and made them question the validity of the forum, it has worked well for this multilateral initiative.

The former G8 and now G7's 1999 annual Summit, which committed "to establish an informal mechanism for dialogue among systemically important countries, within the framework of the Bretton Woods institutional system," led to the selection of the G20 countries (MOFA 2023). The first ten years of the G20, from 1999 to 2008, were relatively low-key as the meetings focused on the aftermath of the Asian financial crisis. The meetings concentrated on building a more robust and healthier global financial structure. The Finance Track of the G20 found its footing during this period. Even in 2009, after the G20's elevation to a Leaders' Summit, the importance of the Finance Track was maintained, with the leaders terming

G20 as the “premier forum for international economic cooperation” (G20 2009). The Sherpa Track replicated the multiple meetings of the Finance Track planned throughout the year and has now outgrown the Finance Track in the number of meetings it holds throughout the year. However, the Leaders’ Summit was reduced to once a year from biannual meetings.

The G20 has worked like clay being molded by different potters every year. The Republic of Korea’s (RoK) Presidency in 2010 led to the development of the different Engagement Groups, which were designated non-government participants from each G20 member State, participating in the different working groups of the Sherpa Track, contributing towards the policy-making process and providing recommendations to the G20 leaders prior to the Leaders’ Summit. The idea for the Engagement Groups may have come through during the RoK’s Presidency, but multiple G20 Presidencies added different Engagement Groups over the years. The Business20 came into being during RoK’s Presidency (2010), the French Presidency (2011) recognized the importance of Labour20 in Cannes, the Mexican Presidency (2012) established the Think20 to engage with think tanks and research institutions within the G20 countries, the Russian Presidency (2013) recognized Civil20 as an official Engagement Group, the Turkish Presidency (2015) launched Women20, and most recently, during India’s G20 Presidency (2023), StartUp20 became an official Engagement Group.

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The Engagement Groups mirror the functioning of the Sherpa Track in varying degrees. One similarity between all the Engagement Groups (EGs) is that each has an Inception and Summit meeting, where the host country shares the outlines for the Engagement Group’s Presidency at the inception and the outcomes from its Presidency during the Summit. Each country’s addition to the EGs has provided an impetus to deeper ties between people from different walks of life, whether it is labor unions from the G20 countries that meet and discuss their issues or entrepreneurs

who engage in collaborations as part of the StartUp20. The success of the EGs is also evident in some non-official Engagement Groups, such as Values20 or News20, that meet on the sidelines of other G20 meetings and develop further engagement until they become official G20 Engagement Groups.

Similarly, the Sherpa Track currently consists of 13 tracks, all of which have come into being over the years. However, this may change with the Brazilian Presidency, which may bring some changes to the track, given its strong commitment to women empowerment. Traditionally, many of the tracks would be introduced first as a Task Force and then brought in as a full-fledged Working Group a year later. The Task Force would assist in setting up the Terms of Reference for the Working Group, which would determine the agenda of each meeting. Over the years, some of the Working Groups that have come about in different Presidencies are: the Development Working Group (DWG) works towards the G20 development agenda since its inception during the Republic of Korea's Presidency (2010); the French Presidency (2011) created the Agriculture Deputies Group; the Leaders' Declaration under the Australian Presidency (2014) led to the creation of an Employment Working Group; German Presidency (2017) established the Health Working Group; Argentina's Presidency (2018) began the Education Working Group (EdWG); Saudi Arabia's Presidency (2020) brought in the Tourism Working Group and the G20 Culture Ministers meeting; the Italian Presidency (2021) created the Digital Economy Working Group; and most recently, India's G20 Presidency started the Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) Working Group in 2023.

While the Engagement Groups were a part of each Presidency's call to further non-governmental interaction in a specific area, the introduction of the Working Groups represented not just the Presidency's call but also a global need for discussions on the specific topic.

Additionally, several "initiatives" were also launched by host nations to prompt conversations among member States. Government agencies primarily lead these initiatives. For example, the Space Economy Leaders Meeting (SELM), initiated during Saudi Arabia's Presidency, was led by the Saudi Space Commission (2020), then by the Italian Space Agency (2021), and followed by the National Research & Innovation Agency of Indonesia (2022). India's Space Research Organization (ISRO) followed by organizing the 4th SELM under Indian G20 Presidency. A new "initiative" of India's G20 Presidency was the Chief Scientific Advisors Roundtable (CSAR). The G20-CSAR brings together Chief Scientific advisors of the G20 Heads of State/Government intending to create an effective institutional arrangement/platform to discuss global science and technology policy issues.

While the G20 has space to bring new “initiatives” or launch new Engagement Groups and Working Groups as per the current Presidency, it needs to constantly be mindful of discussions happening in other forums on topics such as education, climate and environment, and employment; for example, keeping track of developments in the International Labour Organization (ILO) for the Employment Working Group or the impact of the Transforming Education Summit (TES) on the Education Working Group.

If compared with other multilateral institutions, the G20 can seem strange. The mechanism of adding new Working Groups to the Sherpa Track, initiatives launched by host nations, and the non-government Engagement Groups participating and giving statements in government-to-government discussions and handing over suggestions to the leaders prior to their Summit meeting are not a standard format for multilateral organizations or forums.

This, however, makes the G20 a successful multilateral institution. It may not have a permanent Secretariat or defined rules of procedure to determine the contours of the grouping. However, it provides space for State parties to take ownership of the Presidency in whatever manner they may deem fit. In other multilateral institutions, even if a member State becomes a chair, it is bound by the rules of procedure that limit the influence and agency of its chairship. This is not the case with the G20, which gives each member equal space to make the G20 its own. A case in point would be the Energy Sustainability Working Group, established during the Russian Presidency (2013). The Working Group continued with its agenda until the German Presidency (2017), when it became a part of the Climate and Energy Sustainability Working Group. This was because Germany saw the two concepts as interlinked. However, during the Argentine Presidency (2018), the two concepts were delinked and discussed under separate working groups—the Environment and Climate Sustainability WG and the Energy Transition WG. Each change reflects the inputs of the past, when Energy Sustainability and Climate Sustainability became Climate Sustainability and Energy Transition.

The G20 is a constantly evolving multilateral grouping that keeps it updated on international discussions of every topic, on issues of relevance for countries in the Global North and Global South, and the requirements of the developing and developed States.

## **GLOBAL SOUTH IN MULTILATERAL FORUMS**

Multilateral forums give equal voice to all State parties, whether it be the multitude of UN bodies or smaller groupings such as the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), Eur-

asian Economic Union (EEU), or the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF). Recent history, highlighted in the examples below, reveals that Global South countries or States that identify with the Global South have succeeded in different multilateral forums. They use these forums to voice their opinions as a collective, either in a multilateral forum like the UN or in smaller multilateral groupings.

One example of a smaller multilateral grouping that is also regional is ASEAN. It is the regional tone that determines the rules of procedure for ASEAN member countries. The ASEAN member States came together to form an institution that could help them collectively come forward while ensuring that internal problems would allow the multilateral processes of the forum. Article 2.2(e) of the ASEAN Charter states that members shall maintain a policy of “non-interference in the internal affairs of ASEAN Member States” (ASEAN Secretariat 2008). Thus, the multilateral forum, which consists of Global South countries, could engage in discussions within the forum, including on the maintenance of “peace and security” and preservation of “South-East Asia as a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone” while following non-interference in the internal affairs of the member States. This could be considered contradictory for some States in the Global North, but non-interference has helped these States come together.

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In some cases, it is particular issues that bring States together. In such cases, the membership may be wider than the Global South and could have members from the Global North. Given the thematic nature of the grouping, Global South voices are better articulated and responded to by the forum. The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) is a multilateral forum that focuses on fueling economic activity and investment and promoting sustainable and inclusive economic growth for its member States. Its member States include Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Japan, the Republic of Korea (RoK), Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand,

United States of America (USA) and Vietnam. While some States, such as Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and the USA, are members of the Global North, many others represent the Global South. States from the Global North and South have been able to come together as all members find their needs and aspirations being represented and understood by the forum.

Smaller groupings provide space for Global South countries to meaningfully engage in multilateral forums, whether regional or thematic. Another success story for the Global South States has been the success of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and their demand for climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies in the United Nations.

SIDS (United Nations 2021) consists of 39 member States, which span three geographical regions: the Caribbean, the Pacific and the Atlantic; the Indian Ocean; and the South China Sea. Although they represent less than 1% of the world's population, the Group faces unique social, economic, and environmental challenges. The threat and impact of climate change are not only long-term, as they may be for other States. Many within the SIDS are facing the devastation of climate change in their everyday lives, threatening their survival.

The SIDS adopted the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Accelerated Modalities of Action Pathway (or the SAMOA Pathway) in 2014 at the United Nations Third International Conference on SIDS. The Pathway is the dedicated, internationally agreed program of action for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) for the 2014-2024 decade.

Another example of a multilateral forum with strong Global South representation is the BRICS. It was initiated in 2010 and has chosen to follow a similar pattern to the G20. The topics discussed in the different tracks, as well as the BRICS Leaders Summit, are similar to the topics discussed in the multiple G20 meetings. While the member States largely mirror that of the SCO, the format and structure of the BRICS are similar to G20, even though the SCO and G20 came into being around the same time, i.e., 2001 and 1999, respectively.

The Global South voices its concerns by coming together (ASEAN, SIDS) by engaging with some members of the Global North (IPEF), and by engaging with other members of the Global North and South (BRICS). However, collective engagement with all P5 countries, essential members of the changing international order, and representative voices from the Global South are found only with the G20. Additionally, it is in the G20 that Global South States can lead the discussions during their G20 Presidencies and not only voice their concerns but also shape the agenda for discussions.

## INDIA AND GLOBAL SOUTH IN G20

The G20 comprises ten developing and ten developed members. This equal balance has worked intriguingly in the multilateral forum. One of the unique things about the G20 and its rotating Presidency is the process of choosing the Presidency.

The G20 Presidency is chosen based on a rotation model. A cluster of member States forms the five groups: Group 1 (Australia, Canada, Saudi Arabia and the United States); Group 2 (India, Russia, South Africa and Turkey); Group 3 (Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico); Group 4 (France, Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom); and Group 5 (China, Indonesia, Japan, and the Republic of Korea) (Parliament of Australia 2013). The EU, the 20th member, is not a member of any of these groups. As a regional organization, it does not host the G20 but is a participating member and a penholder in all official documents. As per the different groups formulated, each year the G20 Presidency moves from one group member to another.

Another unique aspect of the G20 Presidency is the concept of the Troika. This Troika consists of the past, present, and upcoming Presidencies. The purpose of the Troika is to ensure a seamless transition from one Presidency to another. This is vital given the rotating nature of the Secretariat.

Given the formation of each group and the division of members in each group, the G20 never had a Troika from the Global South until 2023. A Global North Presidency almost always follows a Global South country. The only time there were two continuous Global South Presidencies was in 2015-2016, with Turkey (2015) and China (2016). It was only during India's Presidency that the Troika was from the Global South (Indonesia–India–Brazil).

This trend will continue during Brazil's Presidency, with the Troika consisting of India–Brazil–South Africa. Saudi Arabia has elicited interest for the G20 Presidency after South Africa, as the Covid-19 pandemic overtook its 2019 Presidency. Thus, the Global South is getting more space within the defined structures of the G20, where it can shape the agenda and bring new dialogue to the discussions.

The impact of the collective Global South voice in the G20 could be seen most clearly during Indonesia's G20 Presidency. The suddenness of the Russia-Ukraine conflict deeply impacted Indonesia's Presidency in the multilateral forum. The strong support sentiment towards Ukraine resulted in the Global North antagonizing and harping the Russian Federation. Walkouts during Russian interventions were becoming the norm, and pressure was exerted on all other member States to join in boycotting Russia. This was only semi-successful as many of the Global South States, such as Brazil, South Africa, and India, chose not to take sides (Tri-

bune News Service 2022). The G7, which comprises the Global North, removed the Russian Federation from the erstwhile G8 in 2014, after the invasion of Crimea. However, this was not successful in the G20 in 2022. The Global South can claim a big success in ensuring the Russian Federation's continuation in the G20.

India understood the value of G20 long before its Presidency. It gave a significant boost to the G20, not only during its Presidency but also during other Presidencies, especially during the Saudi Arabian Presidency (2020) and Argentine Presidency (2018). During his remarks at the 2020 Leaders Summit, the Indian Prime Minister suggested creating a G20 Virtual Secretariat as a follow-up and documentation repository. The Indian PM also called for a new Global Index for the Post-Corona World that would comprise four key elements—the creation of a vast talent pool; ensuring that technology reaches all segments of the society; transparency in systems of governance; and dealing with Mother Earth with a spirit of trusteeship (Government of India 2020). The Indian Prime Minister believed such actions within the G20 could lay the foundation of a new world. During the Argentine Presidency (2018), the Indian PM called for “reformed multilateralism” and for “enhanced coordinated action against fugitive economic offenders and financing of terrorism” (The Times of India 2022). Additionally, the Indian assurance during the Bali declaration and the handover from Indonesia to India, that the G20 acts as a global prime mover (Modi, 2022), was maintained by the country.

The government of India's recent focus on providing leadership to the Global South can also be seen in the special virtual meeting *Voice of Global South Summit* under the theme Unity of voice, Unity of purpose, held at the beginning of its G20 Presidency in January 2023 (MEA, 2023). The two-day event concluded with India taking suggestions from the Global South leaders on topics of relevance that India could highlight in its G20 Presidency. No other G20 Presidency has taken suggestions in this manner. This action brought the Global South and India closer to each other and also made the Indian G20 Presidency more democratic in its theme while being representative of the Global South.

## **INDIA'S G20 PRESIDENCY**

The Indian G20 Presidency received much attention and fanfare from around the world. No Presidency before this garnered as many media bytes. Following in the heels of Indonesia's complicated G20 Presidency, primarily due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the Indian Presidency was closely watched and appreciated for delivering some of the vital outcome documents on Lifestyle for Sustainable Development (LiFE) and Action on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Additionally,

the relatively softer language on the Russia-Ukraine conflict, as reflected in the New Delhi Leaders' Declaration (G20, 2023), resulted in appreciation of the Indian Presidency for its attempts to build bridges between the conflicting parties.

During Indonesia's G20 Presidency, States could not agree on language for ministerial documents, and all G20 Working Groups released a Chair's Summary. A Chair's Summary, as the name suggests, summarizes the discussions and deliberation by the country holding the chair's position. It implies that member States could not agree on text language, and the document released would encapsulate the discussions. Most importantly, State parties cannot be held accountable for the document and its implementation. This was because the Russia-Ukraine conflict began influencing nearly all aspects of G20, from food to environment to education and to finance. Countries could not agree on addressing the Ukraine issue as part of the final documents. The problem was a new one, as no conflict impacted G20 deliberations before 2022. Due to the military action occurring in Europe's backyard, members of the G7 were keen to bring out all aspects of the conflict within G20 deliberations. Fortunately, the G20 leaders were able to negotiate the text of the Leader's Declaration, released at the Bali Summit in November 2022. This was primarily due to President Jokowi's intervention and engagement with world leaders prior to the Summit.

The issue that began with the Russia-Ukraine conflict persisted during India's G20 Presidency. Chair summaries became the norm for many of the ministerial outcome documents due to the inability of member States to engage within the G20 on conflicting areas. However, the success rate for India was higher than Indonesia.

The Indian Presidency's most meaningful victory was its theme of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, which translated into One World, One Family, One Future under the spirit of "the world is one family." The theme intended to make all parties understand that conflicts should not lead to a standstill in communicating with each other. It also centered on shifting the discussion from an "Us versus Them" approach towards a sense of shared community, which resonates more with the Global South. In light of Indonesia's G20 Presidency and the Russia-Ukraine conflict, all the G20 member States appreciated this theme.

Another key takeaway from India's Presidency was accepting the concept of Lifestyle for Environment (LiFE). Launched by the Indian Prime Minister as *In our LiFEtime* at a side event of the 2022 United Nations Climate Change Conference or Conference of the Parties of the UNFCCC, more commonly referred to as COP27, in October 2022 (Yadav, 2022), the idea was later floated as *Mission LiFE* within India (Luthra, 2022). The idea behind LiFE was to promote behav-

ioral changes in the everyday lifestyles of people, which would ensure less stress on the climate and environment while conserving energy. It was a significant part of India's Chairship of the Development Working Group (DWG), which released the High-Level Principles (HLP) on Lifestyle for Sustainable Development (G20 India, 2023).

While India's G20 Presidency was a success in many ways, there were compromises that India, as Chair, had to make to ensure that the G20 came together on all issues. Of the documents highlighted above, LiFE was introduced by the Development Working Group as a key deliverable. But convincing G20 members about the term was an uphill task and, after multiple negotiations, the document was released as the High-Level Principles (HLP) on Lifestyle for Sustainable Development. The High-Level Principles outline how States should approach the complex and intermingled issues of climate change and environmental degradation by working towards sustainable consumption and production. LiFE focuses on individual and community behavior from a bottom-up approach rather than the traditionally followed top-down approach used by State parties. It builds on the Indian Presidency theme of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (One World, One Family, One Future) by using a Pro-People-Planet approach. The latter (People, Planet, Prosperity) was also the theme for the Italian Presidency (2021), showcasing India's attempt to bridge the gap between the Global North and Global South.

Ensuring women-led development was one of the key priorities of India's G20 Presidency, translated as a successful outcome. Of the multiple G20 meetings in the different tracks highlighted in the text above, discussions on Women's issues were segregated into two spaces, as an Engagement Group titled Women20 and as an "initiative" titled G20 EMPOWER, which usually concluded with a ministerial document. G20 Leaders agreed to the creation of a Working Group under the Sherpa Track on the empowerment of women (PIB, 2023). The Brazilian Presidency will host the first meeting of this Working Group next year.

India also succeeded by ensuring various G20 meetings in different parts of India. International meetings are usually held in one or two key cities with the wherewithal to host such events. Indonesia followed this format by holding most of its meetings in the tourist-friendly city of Bali and its capital city of Jakarta. However, India chose to hold meetings in 60 different cities (PIB, 2023), opening multiple parts of the Global South world to international meetings and engagements. This decision was welcomed with open arms by the public, who ensured that the meetings were successful and that the cities were ready to roll out the red carpet for representatives of member States.

The G20 Summit 2023, held in New Delhi on September 9 and 10, was historic from an Indian perspective. It was the first time all world leaders assembled in New Delhi. It was in March 1983 that India hosted a Summit, i.e., the Non-Aligned Movement Summit, of similar proportions. The 1983 Summit did have world leaders but was bereft of the P5 States—U.S.A., UK, France, Russia, and China. India hosted 20 of the top world leaders together for the first time. It was able to successfully negotiate critical documents along with the Leaders' Declaration, upholding a specific Global South agenda.

## **THE WAY AHEAD WITH G20: BRAZIL'S MOVE**

Given that the G20 works on consensus, like most multilateral forums, the limitation of implementation has been challenging to navigate around. The complicated and ever-growing Working Groups in the Finance and Sherpa Track and the plethora of Engagement Groups and Initiatives often leave analysts and observers questioning the purpose of the G20.

If the G20 is nothing more than a Paper Tiger, why did it receive so much importance during the Indian Presidency? Furthermore, why are States such as Saudi Arabia keen to take up the G20 Presidency again when it just completed its Presidency in 2019? Do the outcome documents point towards sameness or a change in perspective?

In its role as a norm-setter and as a multilateral forum, the G20 stands tall. Especially after the Indian G20 Presidency, State parties are vying for their turn to chair the Presidency and add value similarly or more intensely. With representation from the G7, Russia, China, and the many important countries of the Global South, the G20 has found its footing as an organization that takes the Global South along with the Global North.

The G20 has established itself as a multilateral force that falls outside the traditional viewpoints of multilateral organizations. It can shape narratives and put the Global South as an equal partner in decision-making. As can be seen with the Indian Presidency, a lot depends on the host country and how much it is willing to invest into the process of not only conducting a successful G20 but also of adding substantive value representative of its State.

While other multilateral forums, such as BRICS, have a format of including new member States, the same does not exist for the G20. India's chairship of the G20 may have resulted in bringing the African Union (AU) as a permanent member (Chido, 2023), but it is Brazil that would decide the format of engagement. Brazil

would need to lead the discussions on whether the forum would now be called G21 or whether the AU would begin with penholder status in all meetings of the G20/G21. The South American State would also have to lead the decision on gradual participation in some tracks or complete integration of the AU.

The concept of Lifestyle for Environment has found many takers in the Global South representatives within G20. In taking forward the G20 Presidency from India, Brazil would be keen to be seen as a representative of the Global South. The Brazilian President promised to end deforestation by 2030 (BBC 2023). As per news reports, deforestation has drastically reduced. However, only a lifestyle change furthered during the upcoming Brazilian G20 Presidency can break the supply-demand cycle and help achieve Brazil's goal of ending deforestation. Brazil has announced the Bioeconomy Initiative based on: science, technology and innovation; sustainable use of biodiversity; and the role of bio economy in promoting sustainable development. The current G20 Presidency has also announced two Task Forces: Global Mobilization against Climate Change and Global Alliance against Hunger and Poverty. The initiative and task forces set the direction for the key priority areas of the Brazilian Presidency.

Other factors influencing the upcoming Presidency would be the choice of Working Groups that Brazil chooses to begin or reduce and the invitee countries it brings to the meetings. Invitee countries do not have penholder status but participate in the deliberations and provide inputs. As they are not regular participants, their inputs offer a new perspective than that of the G20 member States. Brazil has invited seven countries apart from Spain, which is a permanent invitee country. Of the seven States, six are from the Global South with the United Arab Emirates being invited the second year running.

Brazil is in the unique position of leading a Troika that is firmly rooted in the Global South. The impetus provided by India could lead to an even more impactful Brazilian G20 Presidency, with each Global South country bringing in more representative ideas that provide a legacy for the next one to take forward. ■

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**To cite this work:** Rakhra, Kanica. 2023. "The G20 as a Multilateral Force." *CEBRI-Journal* Year 2, No. 8: 77-94.

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.54827/issn2764-7897.cebri2023.08.03.05.77-94.en>

Submitted: November 6, 2023

Accepted for publication: December 19, 2023

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