

Multilateralism refers to the practice of coordinating and working together between multiple countries to address global issues that transcend national borders. It is a key feature of the post-World War II international order and has facilitated cooperation among nations on a wide range of issues, including trade, finance, security, and climate change. However, the current multilateral system has been criticized for being outdated, insufficiently representative, and dominated by a few powerful countries. As a result, there is a growing consensus that the system needs to be reformed to better reflect the changing geopolitical realities and the emergence of new powers like India.

Why is a reformed multilateral system important for India, and what benefits would it bring to India's position in the international system?

For India, a reformed multilateral system is important for several reasons. First and foremost, India is the world's largest democracy and a growing economic power, and it seeks a greater role in the international system. A more representative multilateral system would enable India to have a greater say in global decision-making and to advance its national interests more effectively.

Secondly, as a developing country, India is particularly vulnerable to global challenges like climate change, pandemics, and economic crises. These issues require global cooperation and coordination, and a reformed multilateral system that is more effective and inclusive would better enable India to contribute to and benefit from such cooperation.

Thirdly, India has a long-standing commitment to the principles of international law, the UN Charter, and a rules-based international system. A reformed multilateral system that is based on these principles would help India to achieve its foreign policy objectives, including promoting peace and security, economic development, and regional and global stability.

Finally, a reformed multilateral system that is more representative and effective would benefit all countries, including India. It would promote greater collaboration and mutual understanding between countries, and help to address the global challenges that affect us all. Therefore, India has a significant stake in pushing for a reformed and inclusive multilateral system that better reflects the changing geopolitical realities of the 21st century.



What actions is India taking during its G20 presidency to drive reforms in the multilateral system, and how is India working to achieve greater representation and cooperation among member nations?

India, being the largest democracy in the world and an emerging economic power, holds significant influence in shaping the direction of multilateralism. Its position as President of the G20, effective December 1, 2022, places it in a position to bring about reforms in multilateralism. Here are a few examples of how India aims to bring these reforms about during its G20 presidency-

- 1. Push for Reforms in International Institutions:** India is using its presidency to push for much-needed reforms in international institutions such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In fact, this matter was widely discussed during the Think20 India Inception Conference, where, for instance, they talked about how these global institutions are out of sync

with contemporary global realities, how multilateral institutions lack credibility, and how their reforms are delayed. Apart from this, India is also advocating for a more inclusive and representative system, with a greater role for emerging economies in decision-making.

- **Focus on Climate Change:** Climate change is one of the most pressing global challenges today, and India is using its presidency to prioritise this issue. India is encouraging G20 countries to adopt ambitious targets to reduce GHG emissions, increase investment in clean energy, and support developing countries in their efforts to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change. For instance, during the 1st Environment and Climate Working Group Meeting, which was held from February 9-11, the Secretary of MoEFCC, Ms. Leena Nandan, highlighted that India intends to address matters of environment and climate change through an action-oriented and consensus-driven approach. She also described how the ECSWG will work closely with other G20 key working groups to address environmental, sustainability, and climate change issues holistically (Bureau, 2023).
- **Promote Digitalisation:** The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the shift to digital technologies, and India is using its presidency to promote the digitalization of the global economy. This includes improving digital infrastructure, enhancing cybersecurity, and promoting digital literacy to bridge the digital divide. For instance, out of the four themes on which deliberations were held during the First Agriculture Working Group Meeting, one was “digitalization for agricultural transformation.” Similarly, to promote digitalization, extensive discussions were held on priority areas regarding digital public infrastructure (DPI), cyber security in the digital economy, and digital skills during the 3-day meeting of the first DEWG meeting.
- **Address Global Health challenges:** India is leveraging its experience in the pharmaceutical sector and its robust healthcare infrastructure to address global health challenges. India is also encouraging G20 countries to increase investment in healthcare, improve access to vaccines, and strengthen global cooperation in the fight against pandemics. In addition to this, India has also identified the three priorities for the G20 Health Track. These are: health emergencies, prevention, preparedness, and response (One Health and AMR); access and availability to affordable medical countermeasures (vaccines, therapeutics, and diagnostics); and digital health.
- **Encourage International Trade** International Trade is a vital component of the global economy, and India is using its presidency to encourage G20 countries to reduce trade barriers, promote free and fair trade, and strengthen the multilateral trading system.

What are some of the obstacles that India may encounter as it works to promote reformed multilateralism, and what strategies can it use to overcome these challenges?

India's vision of reformed multilateralism presents several challenges that it may face while working towards achieving its goals. One of the biggest challenges India may encounter is resistance from other major powers, who have historically dominated the multilateral system and may be reluctant to give up some of their influence. This may make it challenging for India to promote its ideas and gain support for its proposals. Another challenge that India may face is limited resources, which may be a barrier to promoting greater economic development, human capital, and cooperation among countries. India's domestic political challenges, including regional tensions and ongoing conflicts, may also complicate its efforts to promote reform in the multilateral system.

Additionally, the G20 member countries have diverse priorities and interests, which may make achieving consensus on reforms challenging, particularly given the many economic and political factors at play. Resistance to change is another potential challenge, as the multilateral system is deeply entrenched and has been shaped by decades of institutional history and practices. Changing it will require significant effort and may be met with resistance from those who are comfortable with the status quo.

Despite these challenges, India has shown a strong commitment to reforming the multilateral system and promoting greater inclusivity, cooperation, and coordination among countries. By continuing to engage with other nations and pushing for reforms, India can work towards its vision of a more effective and responsive multilateral system.

In order to address these challenges, India may need to engage in careful diplomacy and dialogue with other major powers, as well as find innovative ways to mobilize resources and support from international organizations and civil society. India may also need to prioritize its initiatives and proposals based on its capacity and resources, and work to build consensus and coalitions among like-minded countries to promote its ideas. Finally, India may need to be patient and persistent in its efforts, recognizing that change in the multilateral system is likely to be incremental and take time. By maintaining its commitment to reform and engaging constructively with other countries, India can play an important role in shaping the future of multilateralism.

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