

# How India scaled mount G20

**An insider's account of how Indian negotiators delivered geopolitical consensus for the New Delhi Leaders' Declaration. And how there are big implications in it for the Global South**

--Amitabh Kant\*

In July 2022, Prime Minister Narendra Modi appointed me as his Sherpa to the G20. The very quiet G20 Secretariat housed in Sushma Swaraj Bhawan was a far cry from the bustling environment of NITI Aayog which I was accustomed to. In those initial weeks, I felt that this was not a job with much content or scope for implementation. After all, I had spent my entire career immersed in grass root implementation on the domestic front. However, my perception changed rapidly. A team of energetic young officers soon began to throng my new office and what I had initially deemed as uninspiring turned into the most challenging and fascinating experience of my life.

At the beginning of the G20 Presidency, the mandate from Prime Minister Modi was clear – this had to be an ambitious and inclusive presidency, one which has the interests of the Global South at the heart of every discussion. Working under this directive, we converted all hurdles into opportunities and delivered a 100 per cent consensus on all our priorities, bringing all countries to the same page. With 83 paragraphs and absolutely no dissent, no footnotes, no chair summaries - the New Delhi Leaders' Declaration symbolizes unprecedented global consensus. India has emphasized that a divided world cannot fight common challenges.

At its core, the NDLD is cross-cutting and driving transformative action in an integrated manner. The presidency's ethos of human-centric development and leaving no one behind began with a mission to take a progressive and future-oriented approach to women empowerment. This was done by bringing to the fore, Women-Led Development, a vision that we have championed domestically. A collective vision on economic and social empowerment, bridging the digital divide, driving gender-inclusive climate action, and securing women's food security, nutrition, and well-being make the NDLD the most ambitious communique in terms of driving gender equality and women-led development.

The arc of history is now firmly traveling through the Global South, a region that will provide the labour force and investment opportunities to drive the bulk of global growth for the rest of this century. The latest IMF forecast confirm that for the foreseeable future over two-thirds of global growth will come from the Global South. If the Global South is to play a greater role in upholding global growth, it will need more financing to grow. India has delivered as the voice of global south by reaffirming that no nation should have to choose between fighting poverty or fighting for our planet. Keeping in mind the needs of the Global South, we have matched ambition on climate action with ambition on climate finance, especially adaptation finance. The need to deliver and build upon our ambitious goals on climate and development finance while keeping human-centric development at the core.

We will also work towards better, bigger, and more effective multilateral development banks (MDBs) that can deliver finance and support for 21<sup>st</sup> century issues. Global South's call for

enhanced representation and voice in multilateralism as a whole was brought forward including by calling for reinvigorated multilateralism.

We have committed to policies that enable trade and investment to serve as an engine of growth. The role of private enterprise, startups, and MSMEs, in driving growth has been recognised as crucial. The Jaipur Call to Action will help MSMEs integrate in international trade, through facilitating access to information. G20 countries have also committed to addressing skill gaps, promoting decent work and ensuring inclusive social protection policies for all.

India's experience has shown how technology can be leveraged to drive socio-economic transformation as well as boost growth. By evangelising digital public infrastructure (DPI) we have built consensus on the G20 Framework for Systems of DPI, which will allow countries across the world to develop and deploy DPI. We will also assist LMICs in building DPI through the One Future Alliance. The NDLD's focus on fostering digital ecosystems provides avenues for implementation of DPI for MSMEs, trade, and welfare. The NDLD takes a forward-looking view on artificial intelligence, calling for a pro-innovation approach, while taking into account the risks posed by AI.

Acknowledging that the world is sliding back on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the G20 2023 Action Plan on Accelerating Progress on SDGs comes at an opportune time. Through this Action Plan, G20 countries have committed to undertake strong steps towards realising the 2030 Agenda. In this context, the importance of Data for Development (D4D) has also been recognised. The Deccan HLPs on Food Security and Nutrition will enhance global food and nutritional security.

G20 nations have committed to a Green Development Pact for a Sustainable Future. Furthering energy security in energy transition, we have agreed on high-level principles (HLPs) of hydrogen, to build a sustainable and equitable global hydrogen ecosystem. We have also launched the Global Biofuels Alliance. G20 countries will also pursue efforts to triple renewable energy capacity globally. To ensure reliable supply of critical minerals for clean energy transition, we have agreed on HLPs for collaboration on critical minerals.

India has achieved a historic consensus on the geopolitical issue at the G20 New Delhi Summit. The geopolitical language in the Delhi declaration delivers a message of peace and calls on all powers to respect international law and norms. In line with Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, NDLD has called on all states to refrain from the threat or use of force to seek territorial acquisition against the territorial integrity and sovereignty or political independence of any state and the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons is inadmissible. PM Modi's call that today's era must not be of war continues to resonate even in today's complex geopolitical situation. Indonesia, Brazil, and South Africa supported us in strategy, process, and persuasion.

I had written at the beginning of our presidency that Prime Minister Modi envisages India as an impassioned interlocutor between the developed world and the Global South and we have delivered on this. Six of the twelve fastest growing economies among emerging and developing economies are from Africa. Africa's demographic dividend, minerals, and visionary

leadership provided by the African Union makes them an integral and rising economic power that needed to be included into the G20. We successfully built a coalition of emerging markets which began with members of the troika – Indonesia, Brazil and South Africa and expanded to all emerging markets in G20. The inclusion of the African Union into the G20 as a permanent member has bolstered multilateralism and enriched the forum. This has made the G20 representative of 80% of the world's population.

Our G20 Presidency was not contained within the four walls of meeting rooms. The rich democratic ideals and cultural elements of India infused life into the Presidency, across 220 meetings held in 60 cities, covering every state and union territory. We have also witnessed the largest ever participation with over 100,000 delegates and participants across these meetings, truly making it a presidency representative of diversity.

In a time when faith in multilateralism has been progressively eroding, India's G20 Presidency has driven a renaissance for global cooperation. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century India is a sturdy multilateral player and will solve the biggest problems for the world. The G20 Leaders' Summit in India has scripted a new narrative of global cooperation in a heavily polarized world and the credit lies completely with Prime Minister Modi. His global stature and standing enabled us to be bold and take courageous risks in negotiations which helped us unlock historic consensus. Looking back on my steep learning curve over the last ten months, it has truly been an honor for me to be his Sherpa to the G20.

*\*The author is India's G20 Sherpa and former CEO, NITI Aayog. The views expressed are personal.*