

# India and the Global South: Relations with Africa and Latin America; Leadership Role in the Demand for NIEO and WTO Negotiations

## Introduction

India's engagement with the world has always been shaped by its unique historical experience of colonialism, its deep civilizational ethos, and its aspiration for an equitable international order. Nowhere is this more visible than in India's dynamic relations with the **Global South**, particularly its interactions with **Africa** and **Latin America**, and its leadership role in championing systemic reforms such as the **New International Economic Order (NIEO)** and fairer rules within the **World Trade Organization (WTO)**.

The term **Global South** broadly refers to the group of developing countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America that share common historical experiences of colonial exploitation, underdevelopment, and marginalization in global governance structures. For India, solidarity with the Global South is not merely strategic but deeply ideological — rooted in a belief that international relations must be restructured to better serve the needs and aspirations of the majority of the world's population.

India's relations with **Africa** and **Latin America** — two vital pillars of the Global South — have expanded significantly across political, economic, and cultural dimensions. Through initiatives like the India-Africa Forum Summit and expanding engagement with Latin American economies, India seeks to build South-South cooperation that is based on mutual respect, non-interference, and collective empowerment.

A central expression of India's leadership within the Global South was its pioneering role in advocating for a **New International Economic Order (NIEO)** during the 1970s. The NIEO was a political and economic proposal made primarily by developing countries, seeking a restructuring of the global economy to correct the historical injustices of colonialism and ensure fairer terms of trade, better access to technology, and greater decision-making power in international financial

institutions. India's advocacy for the NIEO at platforms like the United Nations reflected its broader commitment to democratizing global governance and promoting a more just and equitable world order.

This leadership continued into the trade domain with India's active engagement in World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations. The WTO, established in 1995, is the principal international body regulating global trade. While it promised to create a rule-based, predictable trading system, developing countries soon realized that the system often privileged the interests of advanced industrial nations. India has played a critical balancing role in the WTO — striving to safeguard its own national development priorities in areas like agriculture, intellectual property, and services, while simultaneously leading broader coalitions of developing countries to defend the principles of fairness, inclusivity, and developmental justice.

## India's Relations with Africa

### 1. Ancient and Colonial Roots: Foundations of Solidarity

India's engagement with Africa dates back over two millennia. Historical records show that Indian traders traveled across the Indian Ocean to the eastern African coast, exchanging textiles, spices, and beads for African gold, ivory, and exotic goods. Archaeological finds at sites like the ancient port of **Sofala** (in present-day Mozambique) and Indian artifacts in Madagascar validate these early connections.

During the colonial period, both regions faced European exploitation. India under British rule and Africa under multiple European powers endured economic extraction, racial discrimination, and cultural subjugation. This shared experience sowed seeds of solidarity.

The Indian diaspora in Africa, numbering over 2.7 million today (MEA, 2023), particularly in countries like South Africa, Kenya, Uganda, and Mauritius, has served as a living bridge. Indians arrived initially as indentured laborers and later as traders and professionals.

Mahatma Gandhi's stay in South Africa (1893–1914) was pivotal. His experiences fighting racial injustices influenced his philosophy of Satyagraha, which would later inspire anti-colonial movements both in India and Africa.

Thus, ancient trade ties and colonial-era solidarities created a historical framework of empathy, cooperation, and shared identity between India and Africa.

## 2. India's Support for African Liberation Movements

### 2.1 Political and Diplomatic Advocacy

India was among the earliest supporters of Africa's decolonization. At the **United Nations**, India championed African causes and condemned apartheid. India's credentials as a moral leader were reflected in its early support for liberation movements in Namibia (SWAPO), Mozambique (FRELIMO), and Zimbabwe (ZANU-PF).

India imposed a voluntary trade embargo on South Africa in **1946**, much before mandatory UN sanctions in **1962**. It was also one of the few countries to recognize the exiled government of Namibia during its struggle against South African occupation.

Through consistent diplomatic efforts, India upheld the principles of racial equality and self-determination, placing itself firmly on the side of African liberation.

### 2.2 Bandung Conference and Non-Aligned Movement

At the **Bandung Conference** (1955), India worked alongside leaders like Kwame Nkrumah and Gamal Abdel Nasser to articulate Afro-Asian solidarity against colonialism and neo-colonialism.

This initiative culminated in the formation of the **Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)** in **1961**, where India and African nations rejected Cold War bipolarity. NAM's emphasis on sovereignty, non-interference, and peaceful coexistence resonated deeply with newly independent African nations.

This collective political voice helped establish the Global South's identity and India's place as a leader within it.

## 3. From Idealism to Pragmatism: Modern Development Partnerships

India's Africa policy has evolved from the early idealism of solidarity to a more pragmatic approach focused on mutual development.

### 3.1 India-Africa Forum Summits (IAFS)

The launch of the **India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS)** process in 2008 marked a turning point. The summits institutionalized engagement with structured dialogues on political cooperation, economic partnerships, and capacity building.

- **IAFS-I (2008, New Delhi)** focused on building political consensus.
- **IAFS-II (2011, Addis Ababa)** emphasized economic cooperation and development partnerships.
- **IAFS-III (2015, New Delhi)** was historic, with participation from all **54 African countries**. India announced **\$10 billion** in concessional credit and **\$600 million** in grant assistance.

The IAFS process has led to over **200 capacity-building projects** and **education initiatives** across Africa.

### 3.2 Lines of Credit and Project Assistance

India has extended over **\$12.26 billion** in Lines of Credit (LoC) to Africa through the **Export-Import Bank of India** (as per MEA Annual Report 2022–23). Major projects funded include:

- **Water supply projects** in Tanzania and Mozambique.
- **Agriculture mechanization** in Senegal and Rwanda.
- **Solar electrification** under the International Solar Alliance (ISA).

## 4. Economic and Trade Ties: Towards Mutual Prosperity

### 4.1 Bilateral Trade

India-Africa trade has grown steadily, touching **\$98 billion** in **2022–23** (India Exim Bank Report). India is Africa's fourth-largest trading partner, after China, the EU, and the USA.

Major trade commodities include:

- **Imports from Africa:** Crude oil (Nigeria, Angola), gold (South Africa, Ghana), cashew nuts (Ivory Coast).
- **Exports to Africa:** Pharmaceuticals, automobiles, electrical machinery, and textiles.

The India-Africa Growth Corridor (IAGC), jointly initiated with Japan, aims to boost economic connectivity between eastern Africa and India, focusing on **infrastructure, maritime cooperation, and human resource development**.

## 4.2 Duty-Free Tariff Preference (DFTP) Scheme

Launched in **2008**, India's DFTP scheme allows exports from **38 Least Developed African Countries (LDCs)** to access Indian markets duty-free. According to the **WTO**, this has contributed to a **25% rise** in African exports to India.

## 4.3 Investment Flows

Indian investments in Africa, particularly in **telecommunications (Bharti Airtel in 14 African countries)**, **pharmaceuticals (Sun Pharma in South Africa)**, and **agriculture** sectors, are increasing.

As per the CII-EXIM Africa Conclave (2023), Indian companies have invested over **\$75 billion** in Africa cumulatively.

# 5. Strategic Cooperation: Security and Maritime Partnerships

## 5.1 Defense and Peacekeeping Cooperation

India has been a long-standing contributor to peace and security in Africa:

- Indian troops have participated in 12 UN Peacekeeping Missions across Africa, from Congo to South Sudan.
- India has provided training to African military personnel at institutions like the National Defence College and the Indian Military Academy.

Recent defense initiatives include:

- The **India-Africa Defence Dialogue (IADD)** at the DefExpo 2022.
- Offering defense Lines of Credit to African nations for procurement of Indian-made defense equipment like patrol boats and radar systems.

## 5.2 Maritime Cooperation

Given the growing threats of piracy and maritime insecurity in the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Guinea, India's maritime partnerships with Africa have strengthened:

- Mission Sagar deployments (2020–2021) provided medical and humanitarian aid to Mauritius, Seychelles, Madagascar, and Comoros.
- Bilateral agreements with Mauritius, Seychelles, and Madagascar on coastguard cooperation and surveillance.
- Africa's participation in the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) enhances collective maritime security.

## 6. Cultural Ties and Diaspora Diplomacy

### 6.1 Indian Diaspora as a Connective Bridge

The Indian diaspora in Africa, around **2.7 million strong** (MEA 2023), is concentrated in countries like South Africa, Mauritius, Kenya, and Tanzania. They have integrated into local societies while maintaining distinct cultural practices.

- In Mauritius, people of Indian origin constitute about **68%** of the population and play a dominant role in politics and economy.
- The descendants of Indian laborers in South Africa continue to influence culture, business, and politics.

### 6.2 Cultural Diplomacy

Indian cultural centres operate in countries like South Africa, Kenya, and Egypt, promoting:

- **Yoga**, which is popular across East Africa.
- Indian music and dance, which blend seamlessly with African artistic expressions.
- Bollywood movies are highly popular in Nigeria and East Africa, often dubbed into local languages.

India's scholarships under the ICCR and training programs under ITEC also contribute to cultural and educational exchanges.

## 7. Contemporary Challenges and the Way Forward

### 7.1 Contemporary Challenges

Despite the successes, India's engagement with Africa faces some hurdles:

- **Chinese Competition:** China-Africa trade crossed \$282 billion in 2022, dwarfing India's trade figures.

- **Implementation Delays:** Several Indian projects, like the e-network initiative, face delays due to bureaucratic bottlenecks.
- **Security Risks:** Instability in the Sahel region, piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, and extremist threats (e.g., Al-Shabaab) affect India's investments and citizens.
- **Diverse Priorities:** Africa's 54 nations have varied interests; one-size-fits-all policies are ineffective.

## 7.2 Way Forward

India needs to:

- **Enhance Project Delivery:** Ensure timely execution of development projects.
- **Expand Diplomatic Presence:** India has opened 18 new embassies since 2018 but needs further outreach.
- **Boost Private Sector Investment:** Encourage Indian companies in sectors like digital economy, renewable energy, and agritech.
- **Advocate for Africa Globally:** Support African Union's permanent membership in the G20 (achieved in 2023) and in the UN Security Council.
- **Strengthen Maritime Security:** Deepen maritime ties through joint naval exercises and capacity building.

# India's Relations with Latin America: A Strategic Awakening

## 1. Historical Overview: From Limited Contact to Renewed Interest

The relationship between India and Latin America has often been likened to that of two travelers journeying on parallel roads — aware of each other's existence, yet seldom crossing paths. In the years following their respective struggles against colonialism, both regions were consumed by the challenges of internal nation-building. Their foreign policies were largely shaped by immediate neighborhood concerns, and the vast oceans between them seemed to symbolize a natural distance.

Diplomatic ties formally began taking shape in the late 1940s, with India opening its first mission in Argentina in 1949. Ideologically, India and Latin America found resonance in their shared commitment to sovereignty, non-alignment, and social justice. Both championed the cause of the Global South in multilateral platforms like

the **Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)** and the **Group of 77 (G77)**. Yet, despite this ideological kinship, practical engagement remained sparse.

It was only after India's economic liberalization in 1991 that Latin America began to emerge on New Delhi's strategic radar. Globalization opened India to new geographies, and Latin America — rich in energy, minerals, and agricultural wealth — beckoned with untapped potential. What began as tentative steps has, over the past three decades, matured into a strategic awakening.

## 2. Political and Diplomatic Engagement

### 2.1 Strengthening Bilateral Ties

In the evolving tapestry of India's foreign relations, Latin America has gradually secured a more vivid presence. Today, India enjoys diplomatic relations with all **33 countries** in the region, and maintains over a dozen embassies and consulates across its vast expanse.

High-level visits have become critical milestones in this journey. Prime Minister **Narendra Modi's participation in BRICS Summits** in Brazil and External Affairs Minister **S. Jaishankar's multiple tours** to the region underscore India's intent to deepen political dialogue. In 2020, Brazil's President **Jair Bolsonaro** was invited as the Chief Guest for India's Republic Day, a symbolic affirmation of political trust.

These engagements have translated into a growing architecture of agreements — covering cooperation in fields as diverse as space research, defense production, agriculture, information technology, and renewable energy. Regular Foreign Office Consultations (FOCs) have been institutionalized with key partners like **Mexico, Brazil, Chile, and Colombia**.

### 2.2 Multilateral Platforms

Beyond bilateralism, multilateralism offers a powerful avenue for collaboration. India and Brazil, as members of **BRICS, IBSA, and G20**, advocate for reforming global governance structures, including a more representative United Nations Security Council.

Engagements with regional blocs like the **Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC)** have further broadened India's outreach, allowing dialogue with the collective leadership of Latin America. The India-CELAC Forum, though still evolving, holds the promise of collective action on global challenges — from pandemic management to climate resilience.

Through these political and diplomatic ventures, India and Latin America have crafted a relationship that is no longer episodic, but increasingly consistent and strategic.

## 3. Economic Engagement: Trade and Investments on the Rise

### 3.1 Bilateral Trade

The economic story between India and Latin America is one of steady ascent, though still marked by vast untapped potential. Bilateral trade, once negligible, has grown to over \$53 billion in 2022-23 according to the **Export-Import Bank of India**.

The complementarity between the two regions is striking. Latin America offers India vital commodities:

- Crude oil from Venezuela, Brazil, and Mexico.
- Copper and lithium from Chile, Peru, and Argentina.
- Soybean oil from Argentina, which helps meet India's edible oil demands.
- Sugar, beef, and iron ore from Brazil.

Conversely, India supplies Latin America with:

- Affordable pharmaceuticals, with Indian generics commanding trust for their quality and price.
- Automobiles, particularly two-wheelers and compact cars from Tata, Mahindra, and Bajaj.
- Engineering goods, IT services, and textiles.

**Mexico** has emerged as India's largest trade partner in the region, with annual trade surpassing \$10 billion. **Brazil, Argentina, Chile, and Colombia** closely follow, making Latin America an important non-traditional market for Indian exporters.

### 3.2 Investments

Indian investment in Latin America is robust and multi-sectoral, estimated to exceed \$20 billion. Key areas include:

- **Energy Exploration:** ONGC Videsh has stakes in oil fields in Brazil and Colombia. Reliance Industries sources crude from Venezuela.
- **Automobiles:** Tata Motors and Bajaj Auto have manufacturing and assembly operations in Mexico and Colombia.

- **Pharmaceuticals:** Sun Pharma and Dr. Reddy's Laboratories have carved out a strong market presence, especially in Brazil.
- **Information Technology:** IT giants like Infosys, TCS, and Wipro operate large delivery centers in Mexico, Uruguay, and Brazil, providing services to North and South American clients.

The potential for investment in sectors like **renewable energy**, **infrastructure**, and **agro-technology** remains significant and largely underexplored.

## 4. Energy Security and Natural Resources

For India, energy security is not merely about supply but about securing diversified, stable, and sustainable sources. Latin America fits perfectly into this broader calculus.

- **Oil and Gas:** Countries like Brazil and Mexico are emerging as reliable suppliers. Petrobras, Brazil's state-run oil major, and India's ONGC Videsh are deepening collaborations in offshore exploration.
- **Lithium:** As the world transitions to electric mobility, the "Lithium Triangle" — encompassing Argentina, Bolivia, and Chile — holds strategic allure. India has signed MoUs with Argentina for lithium sourcing and is negotiating joint ventures with Bolivia and Chile.
- **Copper and Rare Minerals:** Renewable energy expansion, particularly solar and wind, demands copper. Chile and Peru, the world's top copper producers, are key for India's resource security.

In this race for critical minerals and clean energy, India's engagement with Latin America is not just timely, but crucial for its own sustainable development goals.

## 5. Cultural and Educational Ties

### 5.1 Cultural Diplomacy

Culture often forges bonds where politics and commerce cannot, and here too, India and Latin America are discovering a deep kinship.

**Yoga** has become a beloved cultural export. Cities like Buenos Aires, São Paulo, and Mexico City host mass yoga events, particularly on the **International Day of Yoga**. Indian music, dance, and cinema — though niche — enjoy passionate followings. Bollywood, in particular, has found surprising audiences in Mexico, Peru, and Colombia.

Institutions like the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) have established cultural centers that teach Indian dance, music, Hindi language, and yoga. Annual cultural festivals and film weeks foster greater understanding and goodwill.

## 5.2 Educational Cooperation

Education has emerged as a quiet bridge of connection. Under programs like ITEC and ICCR Scholarships, Indian universities host hundreds of Latin American students every year. Academic collaborations are flourishing in fields like biotechnology, agriculture, renewable energy, and information technology.

Universities in Mexico, Argentina, and Brazil have Indian Studies Centers, while Indian universities are exploring student exchange programs. As these ties deepen, a new generation of Latin American youth with first-hand knowledge of India is slowly taking shape.

## 6. Strategic Convergence: Global Governance and South-South Cooperation

India and Latin America are natural partners in the quest for a fairer global order. Their strategic convergence is visible across key domains:

- **Reforming Global Institutions:** Both advocate for an expanded and democratized United Nations Security Council. Through the **G4 grouping** (India, Brazil, Germany, Japan), they press for greater representation of the developing world.
- **Trade and Development:** At the WTO and other forums, they call for fair trade rules that account for the needs of developing economies.
- **Climate Action:** Both emphasize the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR), insisting that historical polluters must bear a greater share of the burden.
- **South-South Cooperation:** Platforms like the IBSA Fund finance development projects across Africa, Asia, and Latin America, showcasing solidarity among emerging economies.

## 7. Challenges and Opportunities

### 7.1 Challenges

The road ahead is promising but not without obstacles:

- **Geographical Distance:** The physical distance remains a significant barrier. Limited direct flights and shipping routes make trade costly and slow.
- **Awareness Deficit:** Despite growing engagement, Latin America still remains a "forgotten continent" in Indian popular imagination, and vice versa.
- **Competition from China:** China's deep economic inroads — with trade volumes nearing **\$450 billion** in 2022 — dwarf India's presence, raising the stakes for Indian diplomacy and business.
- **Political Volatility:** Political instability and frequent policy shifts in some Latin American countries can affect the consistency of partnerships.

## 7.2 Opportunities

Yet, the opportunities are equally compelling:

- **Energy and Mineral Security:** Collaboration in oil, gas, lithium, and copper can future-proof India's energy needs.
- **New Markets for Exports:** Latin America's large middle-class offers fresh opportunities for Indian automobiles, pharmaceuticals, IT services, and textiles.
- **Agricultural Technology:** India's low-cost innovations in farming, irrigation, and dairy can revolutionize agricultural practices in Latin America.
- **Cultural Diplomacy:** Strengthening people-to-people ties can build a durable foundation for political and economic cooperation.

# India's Leadership in the Demand for a New International Economic Order (NIEO)

## 1. Context: The Unequal Global Economic Order After Decolonization

The mid-20th century witnessed a paradox. While decolonization granted political independence to nations across Asia, Africa, and Latin America, it did not translate into economic empowerment.

The global economic architecture — built around institutions like the **Bretton**

**Woods twins (IMF and World Bank)** and trade regimes like **GATT** — remained fundamentally skewed.

Developing nations were locked into the role of raw material suppliers, suffering from volatile commodity prices, limited access to finance, and technological dependence. Their exports faced protectionist barriers, while multinational corporations (MNCs) exploited their natural resources with minimal returns.

In this unequal world, **economic sovereignty** became the next frontier of the freedom struggle. The demand for a **New International Economic Order (NIEO)** arose not just from economic grievances but from a deeper moral conviction — the belief that political freedom must be complemented by economic justice.

India, having fought its own long battle against colonialism, was naturally at the forefront of this new global struggle.

## 2. The Birth of NIEO: India's Early Initiative and Thought Leadership

The concept of NIEO formally entered the global agenda during the Sixth Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly in 1974.

However, the seeds were sown earlier — particularly at the forums of UNCTAD (1964) and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

India's leadership during these early years was characterized by:

- **Articulating collective Southern concerns:** India emphasized that the international economic system must reflect the realities of newly independent nations, rather than perpetuate colonial hierarchies.
- **Bridging ideological divides:** India played a balancing role between radical demands from certain Latin American and African states and the more moderate positions of Asian countries.

India's diplomacy was rooted in a clear historical narrative — the argument that the existing economic order was not the product of natural evolution but of centuries of colonial domination.

Thus, India became one of the principal authors and promoters of the **Declaration for the Establishment of NIEO (1974)** and the accompanying **Programme of Action** adopted by the UN.

### 3. India's Vision of NIEO: A Holistic Economic Reordering

India's proposals were not piecemeal reforms but aimed at a comprehensive restructuring of global economic relations across multiple dimensions:

#### a) Trade Justice

India argued that the international trade system disadvantaged developing nations:

- **Commodity dependence** meant that developing economies were vulnerable to price shocks.
- **Tariff and non-tariff barriers** in developed countries restricted access for agricultural and manufactured goods from the Global South.

Thus, India advocated for:

- **Preferential treatment** for developing country exports.
- **Stabilization of commodity prices** through international agreements.
- **Elimination of protectionist barriers** in rich countries.

India's push here sowed the seeds for later concepts like Special and Differential Treatment (SDT) in WTO negotiations.

#### b) Sovereign Control Over Natural Resources

India strongly supported the Permanent Sovereignty over Natural Resources doctrine:

- Developing countries should have full rights over exploration, management, and benefits from their resources.
- Nationalization of industries and regulation of foreign direct investment (FDI) should be legitimate under international law.

This was crucial at a time when Western MNCs, especially in mining and oil sectors, dominated resource extraction in the South.

#### c) Technology Transfer and Capacity Building

Recognizing that technological dependence perpetuated economic backwardness, India advocated:

- Facilitated transfer of technology to developing countries on favorable terms.
- Building indigenous capacities in science, research, and innovation.
- Curbing restrictive practices like patents that denied access to critical technologies.

This emphasis foreshadowed later debates on issues like **TRIPS (Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights)**.

#### **d) Reforming Global Economic Institutions**

India demanded that governance structures of the IMF, World Bank, and GATT be reformed to provide equitable representation to developing countries.

- Voting rights based on financial contributions were seen as unjust.
- Decision-making must reflect demographic realities, not just economic weight.

India's call for democratization of global governance institutions continues to be a theme in contemporary international politics.

## **4. India's Leadership Strategies: Building Coalitions and Narratives**

India realized early on that it could not achieve these sweeping changes alone. Its leadership was marked by deft coalition-building:

### **a) Within the G77**

The Group of 77, formed in 1964 at UNCTAD, became the principal platform for India's leadership:

- India worked to harmonize different interests — between raw material exporters and importers, between oil producers and consumers.
- It consistently emphasized **solidarity** over short-term national gains.

### **b) Role in Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)**

At the same time, India's leadership in NAM gave political heft to the economic demands:

- India linked the NIEO to the broader anti-colonial and non-aligned struggle.

- Leaders like **Indira Gandhi** framed economic injustice as a violation of the principle of sovereign equality.

## 5. Challenges, Limitations, and Pushbacks

Despite the initial success, the NIEO agenda encountered serious obstacles:

### a) Western Resistance

- Developed countries, led by the US and Western Europe, resisted what they saw as demands for a **redistribution of wealth**.
- They argued that the free market, not international regulation, was the path to prosperity.

### b) Economic and Political Changes

- The 1980s saw the rise of neoliberalism under leaders like **Reagan** and **Thatcher**.
- The **debt crisis** crippled many developing economies, making them more dependent on Western financial institutions.

### c) Fragmentation within the Global South

- Divergences emerged between oil-rich states and non-oil states.
- Some developing countries pursued bilateral deals with the West, weakening the collective bargaining power.

## 6. Enduring Legacies and Contemporary Relevance

Though the full NIEO vision was not realized, India's leadership had a lasting impact:

### a) Mainstreaming Developmental Justice

- Ideas like **Right to Development** and **Differential Treatment** in trade have become widely accepted norms.

### b) Institutional Reforms

- There have been incremental reforms in global institutions — e.g., **quota reforms in IMF** and the growing importance of G20 over G7.

### c) South-South Cooperation

- India continues to champion Southern solidarity through forums like **BRICS, IBSA, and the Global South Summit**.

#### d) Contemporary Echoes

India's leadership in global climate negotiations (Common but Differentiated Responsibilities), vaccine equity during COVID-19 (Vaccine Maitri), and calls for reform of the UN Security Council are all modern manifestations of its NIEO-era ideals.

## India's Engagement in WTO Negotiations: Balancing National Interests and Global South Solidarity

India's journey through the WTO negotiations is not merely a story of trade bargaining; it reflects **the evolution of India's identity as a rising yet responsible global actor**. Balancing the pursuit of national development priorities with solidarity for the Global South has been at the heart of India's nuanced WTO diplomacy.

### 1. India's Early Approach: From Reluctance to Assertiveness

When the WTO was born in 1995, India, though a founding member, approached it with **deep caution**. Coming out of decades of inward-looking economic policies, India viewed the rapid tide of globalization with suspicion.

Initially, India feared:

- **Loss of policy autonomy:** Binding WTO commitments could restrict India's sovereign right to support domestic industries, agriculture, and vulnerable populations.
- **Uneven Playing Field:** Developed countries had historical advantages—India feared that liberalization would reinforce global inequalities rather than bridge them.

Despite these reservations, the pressures of economic liberalization post-1991 reforms and the realities of an increasingly interconnected world pushed India towards a more proactive stance.

The turning point came during the:

- **Seattle Ministerial (1999):** India vocally opposed the launch of a new round of negotiations without first fulfilling promises made to developing countries under the Uruguay Round.
- **Doha Development Round (2001):** India supported a development-centered trade agenda, seeking to align global trade more closely with poverty eradication and capacity building.

From a reluctant participant wary of entrapment, India grew into an assertive negotiator, learning to use the multilateral platform to both shield national interests and push systemic reforms in favor of equity.

## 2. The Battle over Agriculture: Food Security vs Market Liberalization

Agriculture is the most politically sensitive sector for India in WTO negotiations, touching upon economy, society, food sovereignty, and electoral politics.

### India's Complex Agricultural Reality:

- **Smallholder Dominance:** Over 85% of India's farmers are small and marginal (Agriculture Census 2021).
- **Livelihood Dependence:** Agriculture supports 42% of the workforce but contributes only around 18% to GDP.
- **Food Security Imperatives:** Programs like the National Food Security Act (NFSA) guarantee subsidized food to nearly two-thirds of India's population.

Against this backdrop, WTO disciplines on subsidies and tariffs have posed critical threats:

- **Subsidy Caps:** Under WTO rules, domestic support ("Amber Box" subsidies) must be kept within 10% of the value of production — a cap increasingly breached as India expanded its food programs.

- **Market Access Pressures:** Pressure to lower import tariffs could flood the domestic market with cheap foreign agricultural goods, devastating livelihoods.

### India's Strategic Moves:

- **Public Stockholding:** India spearheaded the demand that food security programs should be protected, leading to the **Peace Clause** at Bali (2013), ensuring no legal challenge to India's food procurement till a permanent solution is found.
- **Special Safeguard Mechanism (SSM):** India pushed for the right to temporarily raise tariffs in case of import surges threatening rural farmers.

India framed agriculture not as a narrow commercial issue but as a **humanitarian, developmental, and livelihood concern**—challenging the commercialized lens of developed countries.

India's stand gained resonance across the Global South, creating broad alliances with African and ASEAN nations that share similar food security concerns.

## 3. Intellectual Property Rights and Access to Technology

The WTO's **TRIPS Agreement** brought intellectual property firmly into the trade regime, with **profound consequences** for health, agriculture, and technology access in developing countries.

For India, the stakes were stark:

- **Affordable Medicines:** India's generic pharmaceutical industry, a "pharmacy of the world" for the Global South, was at risk from stringent patent protections.
- **Traditional Knowledge Protection:** India feared the biopiracy of indigenous knowledge, biodiversity, and agricultural practices.
- **Technology Diffusion:** Restrictive IP regimes could prevent access to critical technologies needed for industrialization and digital transformation.

### India's Negotiating Strategy:

- **Domestic Legislation:** India amended its Patent Act (2005) to conform to TRIPS but inserted critical safeguards:
  - **Section 3(d)** prevented evergreening (minor tweaks to existing drugs to renew patent protection).
  - **Compulsory Licensing** allowed the government to authorize the production of patented products during health emergencies.
- **Global Advocacy:**
  - India championed the **Doha Declaration on TRIPS and Public Health (2001)**, affirming that public health must override commercial interests.
  - During the COVID-19 pandemic, India, with South Africa, proposed a **TRIPS waiver** to ensure affordable access to vaccines, therapeutics, and diagnostics.

India's approach to IPR negotiations exemplifies **developmental pragmatism**: adapting to global norms while carving out flexibilities to preserve **public health, food security, and technological sovereignty**.

## 4. Special and Differential Treatment (SDT): Preserving Policy Space

**Special and Differential Treatment (SDT)** is the lifeline that allows developing countries to adjust to trade liberalization at their own pace.

For India, SDT is not just a concession — it is an expression of developmental justice.

### India's Key Contentions:

- **Structural Vulnerabilities:** Despite impressive economic growth rates, India remains home to the largest number of poor people globally (~228 million, UNDP, 2023).
- **Infrastructural Gaps:** Large parts of rural India still lack access to roads, electricity, and digital infrastructure.
- **Human Development Challenges:** India's Human Development Index (HDI) rank (134th in 2023) reflects ongoing socio-economic deficits.

Thus, India rejects the idea that GDP size alone should determine obligations within the WTO framework.

At Geneva MC12: India led resistance against attempts to curtail SDT, emphasizing that true fairness must consider developmental needs, not just trade competitiveness.

By defending SDT, India also upholds a **broader principle** — that multilateralism must be anchored in **solidarity, not uniformity**.

## 5. South-South Cooperation and Coalition Building

Realizing that numbers mattered, India has consistently focused on **coalition diplomacy** within the WTO.

### Major Coalitions India Has Led:

- **G-20 (Agriculture):** Advocating for the reduction of developed countries' trade-distorting farm subsidies.
- **G-33:** Advocating for food security flexibilities.
- **G-90:** Representing the interests of Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) nations.

### **Cancun Ministerial (2003):**

India, along with Brazil, China, and South Africa, successfully blocked the EU and US push for new issues (investment, competition, government procurement) — marking a dramatic show of developing world solidarity.

### **Strategic Importance:**

Coalitions amplify India's voice, legitimize its positions as collective demands, and reshape global perceptions of the WTO — from being a North-dominated forum to a more pluralistic platform.

Thus, coalition-building is not just tactical but also ideologically aligned with India's vision of a multipolar, inclusive global order.

## 6. Contemporary Challenges and India's Evolving Strategy

The WTO is undergoing a profound crisis today, and India's strategy is evolving accordingly.

### **Major Contemporary Challenges:**

- **Dispute Settlement Crisis:** The US blocking appointments to the Appellate Body has crippled the WTO's judicial function.
- **Rise of Plurilateralism:** Rich countries increasingly prefer "coalitions of the willing" on new issues (e.g., e-commerce, investment facilitation).
- **New Trade-Environment Linkages:** Issues like carbon tariffs and sustainability standards risk becoming new forms of protectionism.

### India's Tactical Adjustments:

- **Selective Plurilateral Engagement:** India engages in exploratory talks (e.g., digital economy) without binding itself prematurely.
- **Vocal on Trade and Development Linkages:** India resists green protectionism and demands that new issues must consider developmental impacts.
- **Pushing for Inclusive Reform:** India insists that WTO reforms must address asymmetries, revive the dispute settlement system, and refocus on the original development mandate.

India's approach reflects pragmatic realism — engaging where necessary, resisting where principled, and always pushing for a WTO that serves as a forum for development-oriented globalization.

## 7. India's Vision for WTO Reform

For India, WTO reform is not just a technical necessity — it is a **political and moral imperative**.

### Key Pillars of India's Reform Vision:

- **Restore Rule-Based Dispute Resolution:** A credible Appellate Body is essential for fair adjudication.
- **Revive Development Agenda:** Issues like agricultural reform, SDT, and technology transfer must regain center-stage.
- **Democratize Decision-Making:** Greater voice for LDCs and smaller economies, moving away from decision-making monopolized by a few.
- **Balance Traditional and Emerging Issues:** Ensure that digital trade, environmental standards, and labor issues are negotiated fairly, without marginalizing developmental needs.

India envisions a WTO that **works for the many, not just the few** — a platform where trade contributes to **shared prosperity**, not **deepening divides**.