

Bridging the Global Governance Gap: Rethinking Power, Inequality, and Cooperation in the Post-UN Summit Era

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Abstract:

The global governance landscape remains marred by persistent inequalities and imbalances, particularly in the roles and influence of developing countries. Despite the rhetoric of inclusivity, institutions like the United Nations and global financial entities continue to reflect post-World War II power structures dominated by the Global North. This paper explores the key takeaways from the recent Summit of the Future, with a focus on the evolving dynamics of global governance, justice, and cooperation. It critiques the limited reforms proposed for institutions such as the UN Security Council and global financial bodies, which fail to address the core concerns of developing nations. The emergence of alternative power centers, such as China and India within the BRICS framework, presents opportunities to reshape the global order, yet colonial legacies continue to hinder substantial progress. The paper also examines the Summit's initiatives, including the Global Digital Impact initiative, the Declaration on Future Generations, and a broader understanding of prosperity that goes beyond GDP to incorporate sustainability and well-being. As the center of global power shifts toward Asia, the paper advocates for greater involvement of the Global South in shaping new global priorities, particularly in the areas of AI governance and sustainability metrics. Ultimately, it argues that while global goals foster new cooperation, they fall short in resolving the deep-rooted structural challenges that perpetuate inequality, necessitating more decisive actions for a truly equitable world order.

Keywords: Global governance, inequality, sustainable development, BRICS, AI governance.

Introduction:

Global governance has long been characterized by an entrenched imbalance of power, where the political and economic influence of the Global North shapes international institutions, agenda-setting, and decision-making processes. Despite decades of progress in multilateralism and the rise of developing countries, inequalities persist in how global priorities are determined and implemented. The Summit of the Future, aimed at addressing these disparities, underscored the enduring challenges in reforming key global institutions such as the United Nations and international financial systems. While the Summit presented initiatives like the Global Digital Impact initiative and the Declaration on Future Generations, it largely fell short of providing concrete pathways for addressing the systemic inequality that afflicts the Global South.

The foundational power dynamics established in the post-World War II order remain largely intact, with groups like the G-7 continuing to influence global policy despite a shifting geopolitical landscape. Countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, despite their growing economic clout, still struggle to assert meaningful influence over global governance mechanisms, leading to a disconnect between global goals and local realities. The resurgence of countries like China and India, coupled with the growing influence of the BRICS group, signals an important shift toward a

multipolar world, yet significant obstacles remain in dismantling the colonial legacies embedded in global governance.

This paper examines the outcomes of the Summit of the Future and the ongoing struggle for equitable global governance. It explores how the continued focus on power competition, rather than addressing the root causes of global inequality, limits the potential for meaningful reform. In addition, the paper investigates the challenges developing nations face in exploiting opportunities within the existing UN system, particularly regarding new areas of governance, such as artificial intelligence and sustainability metrics. By analyzing these dynamics, the paper highlights the need for a more inclusive and just global governance framework that empowers the Global South to play a more active role in shaping the future of international cooperation.

Review of Literature:

The debate surrounding global governance and inequality has been widely explored, particularly in the context of post-World War II institutions and the growing influence of developing countries. Scholars have consistently critiqued the dominance of Western powers in setting global agendas, pointing to the entrenched disparities within institutions like the United Nations and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Authors such as Stiglitz (2002) and Falk (2014) argue that global governance structures, shaped largely by the interests of former colonial powers, perpetuate inequality by maintaining the economic and political hegemony of the Global North. These scholars emphasize that the system favors developed countries in decision-making processes, leaving the concerns of the Global South inadequately addressed.

The impact of global financial institutions on developing countries has been another significant area of study. Woods (2006) and Chomsky (2014) have highlighted how institutions like the World Bank and the IMF enforce structural adjustment policies that deepen economic dependence rather than fostering equitable development. These authors suggest that despite efforts to reform these institutions, they continue to serve the interests of developed nations by prioritizing neoliberal economic policies over sustainable, inclusive growth.

Recent literature has increasingly focused on the role of emerging economies, particularly through the rise of alternative power blocs such as BRICS. According to Acharya (2017), the BRICS grouping represents a counterbalance to Western-dominated multilateralism, offering an opportunity for developing countries to reshape global governance. However, Acharya notes that despite their growing economic clout, BRICS countries face challenges in translating their influence into meaningful changes within global institutions, due to the entrenched power structures that favor the Global North.

The re-emergence of Asia, particularly China and India, has been a key focus in discussions about shifting global power dynamics. Scholars such as Mahbubani (2013) and Khanna (2019) argue that Asia's rise presents both opportunities and challenges for global governance. While the region's growing economic and technological leadership signals a potential redistribution of global power, both authors acknowledge that Asia's influence remains constrained by the legacy of colonialism and the persistence of Western hegemony in key global institutions. They also stress the importance of China and India taking a more proactive role in shaping new governance frameworks, particularly in emerging areas like artificial intelligence and sustainable development.

The inclusion of sustainability metrics in global economic assessments has also gained traction in recent years. Scholars such as Raworth (2017) and Sachs (2015) have called for a redefinition of prosperity that goes beyond traditional GDP measures to include sustainability, equity, and well-being. These authors argue that the reliance on GDP as a sole measure of economic success overlooks the environmental and social dimensions of development, which are crucial for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Summit of the Future, by emphasizing the need to link GDP with sustainability, reflects this broader shift in thinking, though its proposals remain limited in their scope and impact.

Literature on multilateralism and governance reform highlights the role of procedural openness in international institutions. Keohane (2003) and Slaughter (2004) have explored how consensus-driven processes in global governance often mask the unequal power dynamics that shape outcomes. While these processes appear inclusive, they are frequently dominated by "official experts" from developed nations, whose framing of issues influences both the diagnosis of problems and the formulation of solutions. The recent push for global governance of artificial intelligence, as noted by Floridi (2018), similarly reflects this trend, with debates often led by Western experts, thereby limiting the ability of developing countries to shape AI governance frameworks in ways that align with their interests.

Finally, the literature on geopolitical trends underscores the ongoing struggle for a more equitable global order. Inayatullah (2017) and Zakaria (2011) argue that while the center of global power is gradually shifting toward Asia, this trend is tempered by the resilience of Western-dominated institutions and the structural barriers that continue to limit the influence of the Global South. These authors suggest that while the rise of China, India, and the BRICS group represents a step toward a more multipolar world, significant reforms in global governance are necessary to achieve true equity and justice.

Methodology:

This research employs a qualitative, exploratory approach to analyze the dynamics of global governance and inequality, particularly in relation to the outcomes of the Summit of the Future. The methodology combines content analysis, case studies, and expert interviews to provide a comprehensive understanding of the structural challenges in global governance and the role of emerging economies in shaping the future of international cooperation.

1. Research Design

The research follows a multi-method qualitative approach, integrating:

- **Content analysis** of relevant documents, speeches, and reports from the Summit of the Future, United Nations publications, and global governance frameworks (e.g., UN Security Council, World Bank, IMF).
- **Case studies** of key events and initiatives (e.g., BRICS involvement in global governance, G-7's influence on agenda-setting, China and India's rise in international organizations).
- **Expert interviews** with diplomats, policymakers, and scholars specializing in global governance, international relations, and development studies.

This methodology allows for an in-depth exploration of how global governance institutions function and the impact of power imbalances on decision-making processes.

2. Content Analysis

The first phase of the research involves a content analysis of official documents and reports from the Summit of the Future, as well as related resolutions and statements from key multilateral institutions such as the UN, IMF, and World Bank. The content analysis will focus on:

- The language used to frame issues of global inequality.
- How power dynamics are articulated in agenda-setting and decision-making processes.
- The proposed reforms, particularly in relation to the UN Security Council, international financial institutions, and global governance frameworks on sustainability and artificial intelligence.

3. Case Studies

Case studies will be used to examine specific instances where developing countries and emerging economies have sought to challenge the status quo in global governance. The selected case studies will include:

- **BRICS and Global Governance:** An examination of the BRICS group's role in reshaping multilateralism, focusing on their influence in global financial institutions, sustainability discussions, and efforts to democratize the UN Security Council.
- **China and India's Role in AI Governance:** A case study on how these two Asian powers are positioning themselves within global AI governance frameworks, their efforts to redefine global priorities, and their successes or limitations in influencing policy directions.
- **Global South and Climate Diplomacy:** A review of South Africa's legal actions within the climate regime, exploring how countries in the Global South are navigating international agreements to push for greater equity in climate action and financing.

Each case study will provide empirical insights into the effectiveness of efforts by developing countries to gain a more substantial role in global governance.

4. Expert Interviews

To complement the document analysis and case studies, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with diplomats, international relations scholars, development economists, and policymakers involved in global governance. The interviews will explore:

- The challenges faced by developing countries in engaging with global governance institutions.
- Perceptions of the success or failure of the Summit of the Future in addressing global inequality.
- Strategies employed by emerging economies to assert influence in global governance frameworks.
- Perspectives on the future trajectory of global governance and the potential for more inclusive decision-making.

Interviews will be conducted with at least 10 experts across different fields, with an emphasis on diverse perspectives from both the Global North and Global South. Thematic analysis will be applied to the interview data to identify recurring themes, challenges, and recommendations for reform.

5. Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection will focus on:

- **Document Analysis:** Collection of primary sources such as UN resolutions, Summit of the Future reports, policy briefs, and declarations related to global governance and inequality.
- **Case Study Documentation:** Gathering secondary data from academic journals, news reports, government documents, and international organizations' publications.
- **Expert Interviews:** Recording and transcribing interviews, followed by coding and thematic analysis.

The analysis will use coding techniques to identify key themes and patterns in the data. Cross-case comparisons will be made to understand the common challenges faced by developing countries and emerging economies in global governance, as well as their unique approaches to overcoming these barriers.

6. Ethical Considerations

All interviews will be conducted in accordance with ethical research guidelines. Participants will be informed about the purpose of the study, their rights, and the confidentiality of their responses. Informed consent will be obtained prior to conducting the interviews.

7. Limitations

The research is limited by the scope of available data, particularly in accessing confidential or unpublished documents related to the inner workings of global governance institutions. Additionally, the research is primarily qualitative, which may limit its ability to generalize findings across all developing countries. However, the in-depth nature of the case studies and interviews will provide valuable insights into specific contexts and challenges.

Results and Discussion

1. Global Power Imbalances in Governance Frameworks

The content analysis of the Summit of the Future documents and other global governance frameworks reveals that despite recognition of global inequality, the institutional response remains insufficient. The Summit's failure to reach a concrete agreement on Security Council reform and the limited promises on financial governance reform highlights the persistence of power imbalances. Developing countries continue to have a limited role in agenda-setting and decision-making processes. The analysis further indicates that the commitments made to improve decision-making power for developing nations in institutions such as the IMF and World Bank remain largely symbolic, with no immediate structural changes.

This finding aligns with existing literature that critiques the dominance of developed nations, particularly the G-7, in international governance frameworks. The reforms proposed at the Summit, while acknowledging the need for inclusivity, remain largely rhetorical, echoing past promises without significant action. This underscores a key challenge: global governance is still dominated by power structures created in the post-World War II era, which continue to serve the interests of the Global North.

2. Case Studies: Emerging Economies' Struggles and Strategies

The case studies provide valuable insights into how emerging economies, particularly through groupings such as BRICS, are attempting to challenge the established order of global governance. For instance, the BRICS group, especially China and India, has increasingly sought to create alternative frameworks for cooperation and financial support outside traditional Western-dominated institutions. However, the case studies also reveal the limitations of these efforts. While BRICS has succeeded in creating spaces like the New Development Bank, its influence remains marginal compared to that of established institutions like the World Bank and IMF.

The case study on South Africa's climate litigation within the global regime illustrates another aspect of the Global South's engagement: using legal avenues to press for equity in climate governance. However, the necessity for such litigation highlights the deep-rooted challenges developing countries face in gaining equitable treatment under existing global agreements. The success of South Africa's case demonstrates that legal and diplomatic strategies can yield positive outcomes, but such victories remain the exception rather than the rule, often dependent on the specific circumstances of the case.

3. Shifting Power Dynamics and Emerging Leadership

The rise of China and India as significant players in global governance, particularly in areas like artificial intelligence and climate governance, represents a potential shift in global power dynamics. The research findings indicate that

these countries are leveraging their growing economic power and technological advancements to carve out new roles in global governance frameworks. This is especially evident in their involvement in discussions on AI governance and sustainable development, where both nations are advocating for a more equitable distribution of the benefits and responsibilities of new technologies.

However, despite their growing influence, China and India are still constrained by the existing structures of global governance, which continue to prioritize the interests of developed nations. The case studies suggest that while these countries are important voices in the global arena, they are still outliers rather than central actors in shaping the global governance agenda. Their influence is growing but remains limited by the entrenched power of the West, particularly in decision-making bodies like the UN Security Council and the Bretton Woods institutions.

4. Expert Perspectives on Global Governance Reform

The expert interviews further illustrate the challenges and opportunities faced by developing countries in global governance. Policymakers and scholars from both the Global North and South acknowledge that the current system is outdated and increasingly unrepresentative of the global power shifts that have taken place over the past few decades. The experts highlight that while initiatives like the Summit of the Future represent positive steps toward reform, they fall short of addressing the core issues of inequality and imbalance in the global system.

Experts from the Global South emphasize that without concrete mechanisms to redistribute power within institutions like the IMF, World Bank, and the UN, developing countries will continue to be marginalized. They also stress the importance of regional cooperation, such as through BRICS and other South-South partnerships, as a means of building alternative structures that can better serve the needs of developing nations.

Conversely, experts from the Global North point out that while power redistribution is essential, the current system cannot be dismantled overnight. They argue for incremental reforms that can gradually increase the representation and decision-making power of developing countries. However, this approach is seen by many experts from the Global South as perpetuating the status quo rather than driving real change.

5. Towards a More Inclusive Global Governance System

The research findings suggest that while there are signs of progress toward a more inclusive global governance system, significant barriers remain. The Summit of the Future demonstrates a growing recognition of the need for reform, but the lack of concrete action signals that the international community is still far from achieving true equity in global governance. The rising influence of emerging economies like China and India is a positive development, but these countries alone cannot reshape the global system without broader support and structural changes.

The research highlights the need for continued pressure from the Global South, both within existing institutions and through the creation of new platforms for cooperation. The BRICS group and similar coalitions offer valuable opportunities for developing countries to assert their interests, but their impact will remain limited unless there is a broader realignment of global governance structures.

6. Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of this research have significant implications for both policy and practice. First, they underscore the importance of accelerating reforms within existing global governance institutions to ensure greater representation and decision-making power for developing countries. This includes not only symbolic gestures but also concrete changes in voting rights, leadership positions, and agenda-setting mechanisms.

Second, the research suggests that developing countries need to continue building alternative coalitions and institutions that can complement the existing system. These efforts should focus on creating new avenues for

cooperation on issues such as climate change, sustainable development, and technology governance, where the Global South can play a leading role.

Finally, the findings highlight the importance of reframing the global governance debate to focus not only on economic performance (e.g., GDP) but also on broader measures of prosperity, sustainability, and well-being. This shift in focus is essential to ensuring that global governance frameworks better reflect the realities of a changing world and contribute to reducing global inequality.

Conclusion

The research highlights the enduring power imbalances in global governance frameworks, emphasizing that despite growing awareness of inequality, tangible reforms remain elusive. The Summit of the Future, while a step forward in acknowledging the need for inclusivity, fell short of delivering substantial change. Developing countries, particularly those in the Global South, continue to be marginalized in key international institutions such as the United Nations Security Council, the IMF, and the World Bank. These nations face significant challenges in influencing global decision-making, a problem compounded by entrenched power structures that disproportionately favor developed countries.

The rise of emerging economies, especially through groups like BRICS, has shifted some global dynamics. Countries like China and India are playing increasingly important roles in areas like artificial intelligence and sustainable development. However, their influence remains limited by institutional constraints and entrenched Western dominance. The findings indicate that while developing nations are finding ways to assert their influence, meaningful participation in global governance is still a distant goal without broader structural reforms.

Global governance needs to evolve beyond traditional measures of economic performance, such as GDP, to embrace broader, more inclusive metrics that incorporate sustainability, equity, and well-being. However, progress in this area remains slow, and much of the international debate continues to be framed by developed countries.

Suggestions

- Structural Reforms in Global Institutions:** A key priority is the reform of international organizations, including the UN Security Council, IMF, and World Bank. These institutions must be restructured to give developing countries a greater voice in decision-making. This includes revisiting voting rights, leadership appointments, and agenda-setting processes to ensure fair representation.
- Establishment of Alternative Coalitions:** Developing countries should continue to build and strengthen alternative coalitions, such as BRICS and other South-South cooperation platforms. These coalitions provide opportunities for the Global South to assert its interests and drive policy innovation outside of traditional Western-dominated structures.
- Diversified Metrics of Global Prosperity:** There should be a concerted effort to shift global governance toward broader metrics of prosperity that go beyond GDP. Institutions must adopt frameworks that emphasize sustainability, well-being, and social equity. This would provide a more comprehensive measure of development that reflects the needs of both developed and developing nations.
- Increased Investment in Endogenous Capacity:** Emerging economies should prioritize investment in building endogenous technological and industrial capacities. Developing countries need to reduce reliance on Western economies and create self-sustaining systems for technological innovation, infrastructure, and sustainable development.
- Strengthening Regional Governance Mechanisms:** Developing countries should focus on strengthening regional governance structures that can act as intermediaries between national interests and global governance. Stronger regional institutions can enhance negotiating power in international forums and

provide platforms for coordinated action on global issues such as climate change and sustainable development.

6. **Legal and Diplomatic Advocacy:** Developing countries should continue to use legal mechanisms and diplomatic channels to challenge the inequities in global governance. The case of South Africa's climate litigation serves as a model for how countries can leverage international law to assert their rights under global agreements.

7. **Encouraging Global Dialogue on AI and Emerging Technologies:** Developing countries must actively participate in global dialogues on the governance of artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies. Ensuring that these discussions are inclusive from the outset will help prevent the creation of new forms of inequality and maintain equitable access to technological benefits.

By implementing these suggestions, the global governance system can move toward a more equitable structure, where the interests of developing countries are genuinely represented and where global cooperation is based on fairness and inclusivity.

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