

A Stronger South: The Condition for a New Multilateralism

Statement from the 2025 Southern Voice Conference

“It is not about bringing the marginalised to the centre, but rethinking the centre itself.” - Participant of the Southern Voice Conference 2025.

In October 2025, members and partners of the Southern Voice network gathered in São Paulo, Brazil for the [2025 Southern Voice Conference](#), under the theme “Reimagining the Global Development Architecture.” As a network of 71 think tanks across 35 countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean, Southern Voice works toward a **vision of balanced multilateralism**. Our mission is to enrich global development debates by addressing power asymmetries and amplifying perspectives that remain underrepresented in global arenas.

We met at a pivotal moment. With five years remaining before the agreed 2030 deadline for the Sustainable Development Goals, the world is not on track. Inequality continues to rise; conflicts and environmental disruptions affect millions; trust in an increasingly fragmented multilateral system is weaker; and the countries most in need face growing financial constraints. In this challenging global economic and geopolitical context, it is important that we actively **rethink the dynamics and priorities of the global development architecture**.

The Southern Voice Conference offered an important space to articulate a vision of more representative, fair, and effective multilateral decision-making processes; to reflect on how the Global South can leverage its strengths to achieve this vision; and to understand where Southern Voice can play our most meaningful role.

Where We Want to Go

We urgently need a global order that reflects today's realities, empowers Southern actors, and is rooted in cooperation. Achieving this requires a shift — from seeking greater inclusion in existing structures, to further strengthening and exercising our leadership and agency in defining the structures themselves. Through the conference's two days of exchanges, participants stressed that:

1. The current context requires us, more than ever, to exercise a **stronger Southern leadership** and to **be proactive in shaping the future of multilateralism that we need**. With the deadline to the SDGs approaching, we need to **ensure that our priorities shape the post-2030 global sustainable development framework**. This next agenda must place equity and justice at its core. It must recognise planetary boundaries and the urgency of climate resilience. It must strengthen democratic governance and the rule of law. Lastly, it must revisit how development is defined and measured — on terms that reflect the realities and priorities of those it seeks to serve. To bring this future agenda forward, participation in global spaces remains important, but is no longer sufficient on its own. **Advancing Southern leadership means creating and investing in new spaces for global dialogue**, grounded in local knowledge, and designed to influence the future of multilateralism.
2. **Reducing dependency and strengthening South-South cooperation** are essential to building a more resilient and influential Global South.

It is critical that we now recognise **South-South Cooperation** as an imperative, and adequately invest in it. Our discussions emphasised the importance of institutional collaboration; of Southern-led measures and definitions of success; and of ownership of data. Stronger **regional cooperation** will also be crucial — both to accelerate progress on priority issues that are specific to each region, and as a core element of a more effective and equitable multilateral system. This includes diversifying partnerships, expanding policy options, and strengthening domestic and

regional capacities, so Southern countries and regions can exercise greater agency in shaping their own development pathways.

In addition, the conference underscored the importance of the Global South **creating more financial space to invest in their own priorities**. The responsibility of Global North countries to deliver on financial commitments remains central, along with the need to accelerate progress towards an equitable international financial architecture (particularly regarding debt management, concessional finance, and global tax cooperation). However, strengthening domestic resource mobilisation, building more resilient tax systems, expanding regional trade, and further exploring development financing options from Southern institutions are all necessary steps to **reduce financial dependency and enhance ownership of the development agenda**.

3. **Global development needs relevant, timely, and high-quality evidence that is grounded in local realities.**

Southern think tanks are essential to this effort. They bring context, credibility, and rigour to global dialogues, helping ensure that policymaking is shaped by lived experiences and grounded analysis. Their role is increasingly important at a time when misinformation spreads rapidly, trust in science and policy institutions weakens, and artificial intelligence reshapes how knowledge is produced, shared, and contested.

For think tanks to sustain this role, they need financing models and institutions capable of supporting long-term collective research and policy engagement. High dependence on Northern-based development financing can lead to a misalignment of knowledge with development priorities. In addition, current shifts in development financing—and especially reductions or reallocations of official development assistance—directly affect the sustainability of many organisations across our network. Participants stressed the need to explore new ways of mobilising and diversifying resources, building institutional resilience, and innovating within a rapidly

evolving knowledge ecosystem. To advance the global development goals, **we must make the most of every asset at our disposal: financial resources, intellectual capital, and human talent. Southern institutions must be central to this effort.**

Where Southern Voice Will Play a Proactive Role

- **Shaping agendas and spaces for dialogue:** Southern Voice has a unique opportunity to provoke necessary shifts in how global development and the multilateral system are understood, shaped, and advanced. This includes reframing fundamental questions and concepts, such as what development means through diverse Southern lenses, and how we can build a more human-centred, context-grounded climate agenda. As a network, we will continue to emphasise the importance of shaping joint narratives, collective agendas, and shared recommendations to strengthen our unified voice where it is most needed. We remain committed to creating spaces for North-South dialogue rooted in evidence from our countries, so that we may together identify or shape the solutions this moment demands. In the coming years, we will be working within the context of our flagship *Southern Voice on Global Development* initiative to not only inform global debates, but to actively shape them. With the evidence our institutions have produced and will continue to generate, we are poised to contribute to shaping the post-2030 development agenda and to ensure it reflects Southern priorities, realities, and aspirations.
- **Creating new avenues for South-South cooperation:** Southern Voice is also uniquely positioned to foster cooperation across research institutions in the Global South. Strengthening connections among think tanks —through collaborative research, joint fundraising, shared methodologies, and the use of emerging technologies— will remain a priority. Through these connections we can exchange lessons, share skills, and organise collective advocacy, all towards building a more cohesive Southern research ecosystem able to anticipate and respond to new challenges. In the coming years, we will continue exploring new ways in which we can facilitate meaningful

cooperation among members of our network, partners and beyond.

- **Strengthening institutional resilience:** Finally, we commit to strengthening the resilience of Southern think tanks by advancing actionable and impactful research, enhancing evidence-informed policymaking, and co-creating shared solutions. We are currently developing a resilience and sustainability self-assessment tool for think tanks, as well as a Leadership Community of Practice to support collective learning and coordinated action in the years ahead. We are also committed to creating new spaces for reflection and peer learning. This includes supporting one another in strengthening institutional sustainability, innovating for greater impact, and navigating changes in the broader ecosystem in which policy research takes place.

Stronger Together

Across the conference, our exchanges revealed a shared thread of hope despite the complexity and uncertainty of the moment. This reminds us that **meaningful cooperation and collective action are essential** — not only to navigate the current context of crisis, but to emerge from it stronger, with a more inclusive and resilient global development architecture.

The coming years will demand persistence, creativity, and a clear sense of shared purpose. But the conversations in São Paulo affirmed that the foundation for this work is already in place, and that together we can help shape the future we need.

This is Southern Voice's call to action: we must not let this moment of flux pass us by. We must harness it to rethink the development system and to reposition institutions from the Global South as indispensable actors in collectively shaping the future of the global development architecture.