*Research Article*

# The Dynamics of Soft Power Diplomacy in The Global South: A New Development Initiative For Developing Countries of The South

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## About Article

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## ABSTRACT

Development cooperation between the North and the global South undergoes dynamic process of change due to the strategic struggle over control of global resources and markets to determine who gets what, when and how. In the pursuit of these goals, bilateral cooperation between the North and the South is gradually been replaced with multilateral cooperation among countries of the global South. Therefore, the study seeks to analyse the model of soft power as a tool for stimulating economic, diplomatic and development cooperation among countries of the global South. This changing context encourages horizontal partnership among developing countries based on the ethics of equity, mutual benefit and long term economic relations. Such economic partnership provides an alternative to USA and Western European development initiatives and ideology. Considering these two-dimensional premises, the study adopts the dependency theory to describe the dynamic variables of South-South cooperation. The application of this theory shows that South-South collaboration is a group effort to break free from the exploitative economic ties with the North and redress the imbalance in the global capitalist system. Therefore, the study reveals that the new dimension of South-South cooperation is gradually replacing the vertical relation between the North and South with a new form of horizontal partnership founded on the philosophy of multilateralism. Based on the findings, the researchers conclude that South-South cooperation with its mechanism of soft power diplomacy is a valuable system that fosters favourable balance of economic power between the North and the South by getting through the challenges of inequality, food security and de- industrialization in the global South.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary diplomatic systems of states and in international politics, soft power has emerged as a key concept in the struggle for hegemonic influence to get a comparative advantage in furthering national goals, prestige, and regional cooperation. Therefore, state actors today use soft power as a strategic foreign policy weapon to protect their spheres of influence, build confidence, establish diplomatic relations, promote interregional economic cooperation, and further their foreign policy objectives and tenets. The importance of soft power as a non-coercive instrument for achieving foreign policy objectives and core values is increasingly recognized by countries (Blair *et al.*, 2022, Yağci, 2018). Joseph Nye argues that soft power is an essential component of modern diplomacy, based on the aforementioned premise, whereas Santos (2021) argues that soft power is embedded in a country's institutions and values. For this reason, Haynes (2022) says that two ways soft power may be used to influence others are via economic cooperation and diplomacy.

However, soft power strategy has become an essential component of U.S. foreign policy, which has placed American exceptionalism and the advancement of its own interests above alliances and the advancement of shared values. Therefore, it is thought that the United States and the West are more focused on maintaining their hegemonic status than on promoting peace, stability, and prosperity on a global scale (Smith, 2011). According to Matheson (2020), the United States' soft power strategy has been weakened in recent years due to its reliance on military operations and hard power. Examples of this include the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, the continuing crisis in Gaza, and the United States' use of military action in the Middle East. There is humanitarian help for Palestine and military weaponry for Israel. This shows how the United States and the West use physical force more often than soft power to achieve their national goals, values, and interests (Jones & Petersen, 2022).

But it is impossible to deny the importance of soft power, particularly when traditional hard power institutions in the West face challenges and new soft power actors emerge in the South via interregional cooperation, particularly the BRICS. According to Jones and Petersen (2022), the BRICS soft power approach is the most effective institutional framework for modern diplomacy in the areas of political-economic relations. It operates via persuasion and attraction. The establishment of BRICS aims to achieve a balance between the hard and soft power of the West and the South in a world order that is changing quickly. Success in foreign policy requires the development of policies that promote harmony, cooperation, and understanding amongst developing nations. Consequently, the significance of BRICS as a strategic alliance of soft power in contemporary diplomacy must be recognized in any analysis of West-South or South-South relations (Wilson, 2008).

However, the BRICS countries have become a focus point for the countries in the South. The BRICS countries are characterized by their large landmasses, middle-class salaries, and rapidly growing economies, according to Jim O'Neill. Through soft power diplomacy, O'Neill predicted that the BRICS nations will have some of the world's strongest economies by 2050. Now,

the BRICS together make up 45% of the world's population. Together, their country GDPs total $28.5 trillion, accounting for 28% of the global economy. 15% of the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) voting power is held by BRICS, who produce 45% of the world's crude oil (Melih, 2024).

By using the soft power theory of persuasion, the BRICS want to alter the existing structure of global financial institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF in order to give the growing countries of the South more representation and voice. With $250 billion in capital, the New Development Bank (NDB) was founded in 2024 to support development projects in emerging South American countries using its soft power approach (Melih, 2024). The BRICS also share the goal of adopting a single currency similar to the EU's (European Union) euro. These successes and the success of its soft power theory of attraction led to the addition of other South African countries to the multilateral bloc, including Egypt, Iran, Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, increasing the number of BRICS countries to 10. Undoubtedly, the BRICS South-South partnership has attracted attention from Turkey, Nigeria, and other southern countries. Investigating the issues, dynamics, and challenges of soft power diplomacy in the global South is the goal of this chapter in order to strengthen the framework of South-South cooperation.

# 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1. A conceptual discourse on soft power diplomacy

Soft power and diplomacy are interdependent factors that state actors utilize interchangeably to achieve their foreign policy goals, interests, and ambitions in a militarized and belligerent international order. Although soft power and diplomacy are often used interchangeably, they are not the same thing. While soft power offers the strategic framework for actors to impose their will on others via attraction and persuasion, diplomacy is employed to optimize a state's comparative advantage without the danger and cost of utilizing force. To this degree, soft power is seen as diplomatic hearts and minds that are intended to achieve certain goals by using attractiveness as a tool rather than force or military action. A state's ability to have many lines of communication, prevailing ideas, and improved domestic values and policies determines its ability to accomplish the intended results. Internal beliefs and behaviors that are likely to appeal to dominant global norms are the source of soft power in international politics (Nye, 2004).

Soft power resources may often take years to provide the intended results and frequently operate indirectly by influencing the policy environment. One of the main pillars of soft power is the attractiveness of a nation's political culture and how its values and orientations are seen internationally. Broadly based on same values and interests, orientations and cultures are more likely to foster collaboration and reciprocal advantages, which serves as the impetus for soft power diplomacy. Therefore, by coopting rather than forcing others to seek the results you want, soft power changes the policy environment. The foundation of soft power is the capacity to influence other people's choices.

In a similar vein, Joseph Nye maintains that attraction, not force, is the source of power in his work "Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics." He contends that although

political players in democracies depend more on attraction and persuasion as carrots to achieve their goals, leaders in authoritarian nations utilize coercion and demands as sticks to maintain order. Because it depends less on the sticks of hard power and more on the principles of carrot diplomacy, soft power is seen as a mainstay of everyday democratic politics. Intangible assets like a desirable personality, a culture, political principles, institutions, and policies that are seen as legitimate or morally authoritative are linked to the capacity to create preferences for carrot diplomacy. Because soft power is attractive power, it will be less expensive to lead if a leader has an appealing personality that embodies ideals that people want to emulate (Nye, 2004).

 Furthermore, while influence often depends on the hard power of threats and payments, soft power is not just the same as influence; it is the capacity to attract and attract, which results in acquiescence. The influence that France and Britain had over Germany before to the fall of France in 1940 was based on their military might, yet even though they had more military resources, the intended result did not fairly represent their strength or influence. Therefore, soft power encompasses more than simply persuasion, influence, or the capacity to persuade others. Nye (2004) asserts that "by threatening me with force or economic sanction, you can command me to change my preferences and do what you want." Nye contends that persuasion fueled by raw force may not always provide the intended result. "You can use threats to get me to do what you want, but can you get me to get the desired outcomes?" In behavioral terms, soft power is simply appealing power since it is based on assertions that generate this kind of attraction, which can be quantified via focus groups or opinion polls. In a similar spirit, Adam Smith notes that in a free market influenced by forces of attraction, individuals are guided by an unseen hand while making choices. According to Nye (2004), the invisible hand is one of the intangible components of soft power that influences others to support their goals without using overt threats or coercion.

Nye (2004) asserts, based on the ideals of attraction, that a nation's soft power originates from three main sources: its political orientations and values, foreign policy, and culture. He divides culture into two categories: popular culture and high culture. While popular culture is often thought of as the mass entertainment sector, high culture includes things like literature, art, and education. Political values are a nation's internal values, policies, and ideology. Nye claims that a nation's foreign policy serves as a catalyst for the creation of attractive values that other players in the global political system view as legitimate, making it the third soft power resource. Based on this categorization, Nye developed a resource-based methodology for examining soft power among international political players. But in his contribution, Li (2009) contends that, in international politics, Nye's (2004) resource-based soft power method does not always result in attraction, persuasion, appeal, and emulation since, more often than not, hard power may also result in these outcomes. Li (2009) asserts that social environment is crucial since it either promotes or inhibits the development of soft power. Li (2009) continues by saying that the behavioral approach best embodies soft power as it focuses primarily on the utilization of resources rather than considering the ownership of material soft power tools. This presumption supports Nye's contention that having resources does not guarantee that actors will achieve their goals. Nye used the Vietnam War as an example to bolster Li's argument, pointing out that the US Army, which was more powerful and well-equipped, was unable to prevail. In the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas, Israel is struggling to defeat Hamas and rescue all of the captives in Gaza, which are the main military goals or anticipated results of the conflict, despite Israel's superior military capabilities and the strategic military assistance of the United States.

Similar to this, Shin-Wha Lee briefly reviewed Nye's (2004) and Li's (2009) analyses of soft power resources and concluded that it is critical to consider the three main aspects of soft power—cognitive, affective, and normative resources—when assessing a nation's soft power assets. The way other states see a country in the international arena is known as the cognitive dimension. The way that other nations see a particular nation-state, regardless of its political, economic, and military advantages or disadvantages, is known as the emotional dimension. Whether or if other countries see a nation's policies and international position as acceptable and legitimate is the normative component. Lee claims that it is difficult to evaluate a state's soft-power capability in its whole and that it is essential to take these factors into account when examining their interrelationships. Lee uses the following example to illustrate this point: someone may dislike the US overall (affective dimension), criticize the US for its foreign policy because it is seen as being too unilateral (normative dimension), and wish for their children to attend an American university because the US is seen as the most powerful nation in the world (cognitive dimension) (Lee, 2011).

Nonetheless, nations in the global south use soft power instruments and mechanisms in diplomacy and foreign policy contacts to further the fundamental goals of their national interest. As nations in the global south realize how crucial it is to establish ties with the West and foster mutual cooperation, soft power has grown in significance as a weapon in conventional diplomacy. Soft power may contribute to a more favorable perception of the global South and improve its standing on the international scene by highlighting South-South collaboration (Melissen, 2005). The capacity of soft power to foster collaboration and cooperation on matters of shared interest is one of its main advantages in South-South diplomacy. Soft power may foster trust and motivate South-South nations to collaborate on matters like trade and economic growth by highlighting shared values and interests). Additionally, soft power may foster understanding between nations with disparate viewpoints and ideologies and assist the global South in reaching agreement on challenging problems. Soft power may aid in bridging the gaps that often exist between South-South nations with disparate political systems and societal norms by highlighting economic trade and communication. This can promote more empathy and understanding between them (Nelaeva, 2018). Soft power can help the global South improve each nation's standing on the international scene and foster greater trust and collaboration between South-

South countries by encouraging cooperation and collaboration on issues of mutual interest and by fostering consensus and understanding on challenging issues (Sukma, 2011; Goldsmith *et al.*, 2021).

As a major political and economic player in the BRICS multilateral South-South cooperation, China employs soft power strategy as a crucial part of its attempts to increase its worldwide influence and accomplish its foreign policy goals. China has attempted to advance its traditional cultural values and strengthen its reputation as a responsible world leader by funding cultural and educational exchanges (Li & Xue, 2022). Furthermore, China has attempted to utilize its economic might to advance its objectives in other global south nations, especially via the Belt and Road Initiative, which intends to improve connectivity and infrastructure development across the global south and beyond.

By establishing regional multilateral organizations and institutions, China leverages the tools of multilateralism to increase its soft and normative influence. Additionally, China targets regional powers for a strategic partnership to expand its spheres of influence, and the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) is the main multilateral mechanism through which China coordinates diplomatic and economic efforts with the African region of the global South to support its interests (Murphy, 2022). China's endeavor to fortify South Africa's and Ethiopia's standing as diplomatic centers in Africa and in international affairs is another example of its strategic cooperation (Bharti, 2023). China's pledge to provide funding for the building of the African Union's (AU) headquarters in Addis Ababa and South Africa's hosting of the FOCAC VI summit in 2015 serve as examples of this (Alden and Wu, 2016). Additionally, China collaborates with South Africa in the BRICS and G20, which has improved the representation of developing South African nations and is consistent with China's goal of influencing the global agenda while promoting its own interests (Maphaka & Shai, 2021).

Additionally, India's soft power diplomacy is a catalyst that propels the framework of South-South cooperation, much as China's. Soft power diplomacy has grown in importance as part of India's foreign policy under the Narendra Modi administration. This is accomplished by promoting Indian technology, education, and culture. India has worked to expand its sphere of influence and build ties with nations both within and outside of the South. The Make in India campaign, which aims to position India as a center for innovation and industry, has been one of the main projects of India's soft power diplomacy. India has established connections with other BRICS nations and drawn in international investment via this drive, especially in fields like aerospace and defense. The promotion of yoga and Ayurveda, two ancient Indian practices that have become more popular worldwide, is another significant component of India's soft power diplomacy. In an effort to forge closer links with other Southern nations, India has also tried to capitalize on their common history and culture. Through cultural exchanges and cooperation on the Chabahar port project, which seeks to provide an alternate commercial route to Afghanistan and Central Asia, India, for instance, improved its relations with Iran. Additionally, India has addressed international concerns

including climate change and sustainable development using soft power diplomacy (Rohit, 2023).

Nonetheless, multilateralism and education provide the foundation for South Africa's soft power strength. The International Education Association of South Africa's (IEASA) efforts and the globalization of higher education have made South Africa more appealing and influential among the nations of the global south. After the 1994 democratic era, South Africa, which had previously been isolated worldwide due to apartheid, started to actively participate in the globalization of higher education (Ogunubi & Shawa, 2017). With the emergence of democracy, South Africa was able to rejoin the global community by joining institutions like the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the African Union (AU), and the United Nations (UN). These international organizations gave South Africa the chance to use its soft power assets to draw in foreign workers and students, especially from neighboring African nations and, more especially, the global South. Universities in South Africa developed an internationalization policy by offering grants, scholarships, and bursaries to worthy international faculty and students in order to maximize the benefits of these multilateral soft power policies. They also implemented equal employment opportunities. The purpose of these incentives is to increase South Africa's soft power diplomacy's appeal in the global south (Ogunubi & Shawa, 2017).

However, Nigeria strategically positions the Technical Aid Corps Scheme (TACS) as a resource to promote the appeal of Nigeria's educational system and skilled labor in the development of the economies of South-South cooperation, while South Africa uses its International Education Association of South Africa (IEASA) as a tool of soft power diplomacy. The plan is a good way to support Third World and African development activities within the framework of South-South Cooperation. The economic crisis that is engulfing Africa and the necessity for these nations to provide an African alternative to externally imposed economic reform programs make the Technical Aid Corps Scheme crucial to the continuation of South-South cooperation. The TACS is also intended to improve Nigeria's reputation outside, especially in light of the western media's persistent campaign of defamation against the country. According to Akpuru-Aja (2006), the plan was the result of Nigeria's economic soft power diplomacy, which extended the spirit and soul of South-South cooperation by providing African, Caribbean, and Pacific nations with an alternative to direct financial aid. Consequently, it strengthens Nigeria's diplomatic ties with the ACP nations of the global south.

Similarly, Aremu (2011) supports the opinions of Akpuru-Aja (2006) and maintains that TAC is a prime example of South-South cooperation and a significant component of Nigeria's economic soft power diplomacy. This represents the use of financial resources and diplomatic appeal to provide personnel assistance to the less wealthy ACP nations in the South. She contends that in order to reap economic benefits in the receiving states, Nigeria should strategically implement the TAC strategy. For example, it should be mandatory for nations who receive Nigeria TAC medical staff to get their pharmaceutical requirements from Nigerian producers. Additionally, they

must to promise to back Nigeria's stance in international forums. Nonetheless, the TACS is seen as a useful instrument for achieving Nigeria's foreign policy goals, such as increasing civilian ability to carry out the fundamental principles and orientations of South-South cooperation.

As a result, the global South's move toward soft power marks a substantial break from the North's historical emphasis on hard power strategies, which is seen in its realism approach. The use of attraction, persuasion, education, and cultural influence to accomplish foreign policy goals is emphasized by the concept of soft power in South-South cooperation. The world's growing interconnection has contributed to this change by making it more difficult for nations to accomplish their goals using just conventional hard power methods (Ohnesorge, 2019). Soft power has become much more visible and influential in international relations as a result of the growth of digital communication technology, social media, and other online engagement platforms. This has made it possible for nations in the global south to influence the global conversation on significant problems and to convey their values and views globally. In order to influence public opinion and establish enduring ties with other countries in the North, soft power has emerged as a vital instrument for the South (Hunter, 2009). Additionally, the move in international relations toward soft power is a significant acknowledgement of the influence that culture, ideas, and values have on world politics. The framework of South-South cooperation demonstrates the value of attraction and persuasion over force and coercion in soft power diplomacy. Thus, in order to create a more stable and peaceful international system, soft power may encourage better understanding and collaboration amongst countries in the global south.

While existing literatures discuss soft power and diplomacy as interdependent factors that state actors utilize interchangeably to achieve their foreign policy goals, interests, and ambitions in a militarized and belligerent international order. Hence, soft power and diplomacy are often used interchangeably by these scholars as reviewed above to show the ideals of attraction and political orientation in the pursuit of a nation's foreign policy objectives and values. Therefore, this study aims to critically evaluate the principle of soft power as a tool for interregional cooperation to promote common interests among states in the Global South. The findings provide valuable insights for strengthening economic and political collaboration among developing countries in their quest to redress the structural imbalance in the global capitalist system.

## 2.2. A theoretical overview of south-south cooperation

South-South cooperation has become a very lively site for theoretical speculation. Hardly a year does not pass that someone does not come up with a new theory and, even more surprisingly, manages to convince a group of other scholars to produce a collective volume extolling virtues of South-South cooperation. Such theories like multi-lateral governance, institutionalism, rationalism, constructivism and liberal inter-governmentalism has been adopted by scholars to explain the nature and structure of South-South cooperation. In order to identify the appropriate theory for South-South cooperation,

all these theories should be placed within a two dimensional prism:

*i. Ontology:* whether the theory presumes a process that reproduces the existing characteristics of South-South cooperation, its interstate system and their relations with each other.

*ii. Epistemology:* whether the evidence gathered to monitor the processes of South-South cooperation focuses on dramatic political events, or upon prosaic socioeconomic-cultural exchanges or cooperation.

Considering the two-dimensional premises mentioned above, we conclude that dependency theory is the best theory to describe the dynamic variables of South-South cooperation. Its epistemology is based on the observation of gradual, normal, and unobtrusive exchanges among a wide range of socioeconomic and cultural cooperation in the global South; its ontology is transformative in that it assumes that both actors and the "games they play" will significantly further the course of integration process and inter-state cooperation.

Researchers in the social sciences from a variety of fields have become interested in dependency theory. These exchanges and their causes have sparked interest in multidisciplinary studies of the contribution of collaboration to the development of the global south. According to dependency theorists, South-South collaboration is a group effort to break free from the exploitative economic ties with the North. The historical evolution of the capitalist system, according to dependency theorists, has led to economic development in the northern metropolitan centers, which appropriate that surplus for their strategic comparative advantage, while producing underdevelopment in the peripheral satellites, whose economic surplus is expropriated (Frank, 1971). As a result, only drastic measures can bring about growth in the South. Through collaboration, developing nations might evade the declining terms of trade and the dependent relationships that maintain their underdevelopment and subordination to the North (Haq, 1980). From the perspective of dependency theory, South-South collaboration seems like a counter to the current quo and an almost revolutionary approach to bolstering the political and economic power of developing nations.

Hans Singer and Raúl Prebisch noted that economic expansion in the North's highly developed industrialized nations did not always translate into economic prosperity in the South. Their research revealed that the global South's economic issues were often caused by the North's economic activities. As a result, the two groups of nations that make up the international system are the dominating (North) and dependent (South). Interactions between the dominant and dependent states are dynamic processes that subtly promote the perpetuation of inequitable patterns. Based on this assumption, the dependence theory contends that national inequality is an inherent component of the current patterns of interconnections between the North and the South. According to dependence theory, the world is divided into an exploited periphery (referred to as the South) and a capitalist or imperialist core (referred to as the North).

However, dependency theorists contend that the fight for resources, influence, and supremacy among nations in the international system has been sparked by interactions between the North and the South, which explains the link between the

core and the periphery. Center of the Center (CC), Periphery of the Center (PC), Center of the Periphery (CP), and Periphery of the Periphery (PP) are the four divisions into which they contend that states carry out distinct tasks within the global economy. France, the United Kingdom, and the United States make up the CC. The PC comprises developed and industrialized nations including Spain, Italy, Japan, and Canada. The CC nations are wealthier and more powerful globally than the countries in this category. Additionally, there are CP nations like Saudi Arabia, Brazil, India, and South Africa. Despite the fact that these nations are still in the process of developing, they are rather wealthy. The Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Zimbabwe, Burundi, and many more nations are among the PP countries, which are the least developed and poorest in the world. The CP and PP nations are on the perimeter, while the CC and PC countries are in the center. The foreign interests that originate in the core nations really control the periphery countries. Underdevelopment may be addressed, but doing so requires severing the global South's ties to the core nations' supremacy via the framework of South-South cooperation and the calculated use of soft power diplomacy.

Dos Santos (1970) concurred with Prebisch and Singer that the industrialized nations of the North do not always cause the economies of the global South to flourish. He describes reliance as a state in which the core north's development processes influence the global south's economy. This indicates that the integration of the southern "satellites" into the capitalist liberal system, which is dominated and governed by the "metropolis," has led to an imbalanced relationship between the North and the South, maintaining the southern nations' economic reliance on the North.

Based on these theoretical assumptions, Rodney (1972), Amin (1974), Santos (1970) and Ohno (1998) affirm that the central assumptions of the Dependency theory should include the following:

i. Underdevelopment, which is different from un-development, deals with the active extraction of resources from periphery countries (South) for the benefit of the core countries (North).

ii. The world is polarised into two: the highly industrialised wealthy core nations and less industrialised poor peripheries.

iii. The periphery countries are poor because they are forcefully integrated into the international division of labour where they functioned as producers and suppliers of raw materials or repositories of cheap labour.

iv. Resource diversion is maintained through active collaboration of local elites and dominant states who share common interests (Namkoong, 1999)

Nonetheless, the international system, founded on the principles of liberalism and capitalist labour division favouring the core North, perpetuates inequality between the South and the North. This persists despite the progress achieved by China and East Asian nations, the emergence of new alliances such as BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), and the relative decline in influence of former economic powerhouses like Italy, Spain, and Portugal. Despite the significant reduction in China's absolute poverty rate, the Global South continues to exhibit the highest concentrations and numbers of destitute countries and persons relative to the Global North. Many

countries in the Global South are becoming more reliant on the Global North for economic and political survival, owing to their persistent dependence on the sale of primary commodities and their resultant vulnerability to trade-related external shocks. The conditions of trade for most states in the Global South remain significantly dependent on the economic liberalization policies of the Global North, which are deliberately enforced via structural adjustment programs devised by the World Bank and IMF (Ushewedu & Ingrid, 2017). This is an additional component that exacerbates the disparity between the North and the South.

Numerous advocates of dependency theory assert that the primary factors contributing to Africa's developmental crisis and the inequality between the Global South and North are the classical liberal economic theories of Adam Smith and David Ricardo, which are manifested in the structural adjustment programs of the IMF and World Bank in specific Global South countries, particularly Nigeria, Ghana, and Kenya. The disparity between the North and the South illustrates that the former is seen as the "cause," whilst the latter is viewed as the "effect." Dependency theorists assert that the South's function in the global system is restricted to providing inputs for the industries of the global North. The socioeconomic frameworks of Less Developed Countries (LDCs) in the South are not the fundamental cause of their stagnation. Dependency theorists neglect to consider internal institutional factors such as corruption, unproductive land ownership, wealth concentration, and unresponsive political systems as contributors to underdevelopment in the Global South; thus, dysfunctional institutions in less developed countries are not the root cause of their backwardness. In order to diminish economic inequality in the global system, many dependency theorists propose social revolution and south-south cooperation (Amin, 1976).

Amin, however, regards the dependent state as a weapon employed by the local and global bourgeoisie to exert supremacy. According to this perspective, a national and socialist revolution would inevitably follow from the outside pressure imposed on the elites in the periphery to take advantage of the population and export economic surpluses to the center. He claims that the bourgeoisie in the center exploits the peripheral proletariat, which leads to underdevelopment in the periphery. Stated differently, Amin is showing an inter-state war that is a symptom of a global class struggle. Amin contends that the peripheral's absorption into the capitalist system is responsible for its underdevelopment and the expanding economic disparity between the core "North" and the periphery "South". Amin therefore advocates a delinking strategy, which requires establishing an autonomous development objective and breaking away from the capitalist global division of labor. Delinking, as described by Amin, is an effort that aims to push the system to adapt to peripheral demands rather than adjusting to the requirements of the core. It is not the same as autarky (Amin, 1977).

Furthermore, the international arena is a system that is partitioned between a center and a periphery, according to Amin (1977). In other words, a vertical dynamic rather than horizontal interactions defines the international system. Thus, dependence theory underlines the necessity for peripheral

nations to reach independent development by exiting this position via reforms or revolutions. For instance, the benefits that developed nations in the global north—primarily the United States and Canada—would receive at the expense of Latin American nations in the global south were a major topic of discussion during the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) negotiations in the late 1990s and early 2000s. According to this opinion, the FTAA is "a far-reaching American strategic operation with long-term political, economic, and military objectives," according to Brazilian ambassador Samuel Pinheiro Guimarães (Grogogui, 2006).

According to Guimarães, Washington's principal instrument in the economic arena would be to encourage Latin American governments to accept hemispheric commercial and financial deregulation and embrace neoliberal policies, which would destabilize developing nations by deregulating their economies. "The American economic objective is to establish a unique economic territory in the Americas, with free movement of goods, services, and capital, but without free movement of labor, especially that of less qualified workers," he stated. "The progressive adoption of the dollar as a hemisphere currency, whose issue and circulation would be under exclusive American control" (Grogogui, 2006). Due to criticism from numerous Latin American states, particularly Brazil and Venezuela, the FTAA never took off. Later, in an attempt to develop the area from within, regional economic integration programs would be formed for Latin America and the Caribbean, excluding the United States and Canada. Among these is the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), which aspires to serve as a forum for political consultation and development partnership, therefore setting the framework for South-South cooperation as a reaction to the North's vertical domination (Grovogui, 2006).

In contrast to the Latin American countries that built CELAC as a multilateral institutional framework to curb vertical attempts by the United States over the imposition of neoliberal policies, African nations, notably Nigeria, cave in to these demands. In order to weaken developing nations, Washington pressured Africa to embrace the Washington Consensus, which calls for deregulation, privatization, the elimination of subsidies, the devaluation of national currencies, and the adoption of the dollar as the sole hemisphere's currency, whose issuance and circulation are controlled by the United States. As a consequence of colonialism and neo-colonialism, Africa has been exposed to the rise and expansion of the North, which has conditioned the economics of African states. As a consequence, the connection of dependency between industrialized nations in the global north and Africa in the global south takes the character of inequality and reliance.

However, while other dependent countries in the global south, such as Nigeria, Kenya, Rwanda, Ghana, and others, record high levels of poverty, inflation, low-valued currencies, and high migration rates, dominant nations like the United States, Britain, France, and Germany continue to grow and be self-sustaining in the global economy. The World Bank forecasted that 40.7% of Nigerians would fall below the international poverty line by the end of 2024, while the headline and food inflation rates were 33.95% and 40.66%, respectively, according

to the National Bureau of Statistics' May 2024 Report. Aliko Dangote remarked that despite Nigeria's enormous crude oil reserves, international oil companies (IOC) in Nigeria are reticent to transfer crude to his refinery, preferring to sell it for dollar foreign currency. Due to this, the refinery has been obliged to import petroleum from the global north, mainly the United States, and limit its output (Sahara Reporters, 2024). This highlights the dollar's hegemonic power and the global south's economic dependency on the north. The situation in Nigeria is consistent with Santos' (1979) thesis that the growth and development of industrialized nations determines the status of developing countries' economy.

Based on the following theoretical presumptions of Santos (1979), it is obvious that Nigeria only obtained political independence in 1960, indicating that while direct control of the national apparatus stopped, the global north continues to retain economic domination. In other words, Nigeria won political independence but not economic independence; as a consequence, her dependent on other nations is enhanced, and underdevelopment remains. It is an irrefutable reality that many efforts and programs put in place by established northern countries are essentially a return of neo-colonialism in Nigeria, obstructing the country's political, sociocultural, and economic independence and leaving it excessively dependant on developed northern nations. Nigeria and the Western countries have an unbalanced relationship; Nigeria is disadvantaged by the status quo, notably in terms of its economy. This is evident in Nigeria, where certain foreign-oriented policies, such as the National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS) and the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), have demonstrated that, because they are financed by loans from international financial institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), they contribute to the underdevelopment of Third World nations like Nigeria. Nigeria's free economic policies prioritize international Western economies over Nigerian interests as they are foreign-oriented. In summary, the Nigerian state and other African nations have been profoundly damaged by this continuous dependence on Western liberal economies (Adekunle, 2019).

Dependency theorists consider cooperation between the south and the north as a viable method of escaping the exploitative economic links with the north, which are regulated by liberal Washington Consensus principles. Dependency theorists claim that "historical developments of the capitalist system have generated economic development in the metropolitan centers which appropriate that surplus, while generating underdevelopment in the peripheral satellites whose economic surplus was expropriated" (Frank, 1971). Therefore, collaboration with growing countries in Asia and Latin America would be vital to adopt bold steps that would lead to improvement in Africa. From the standpoint of dependence, developing countries may escape the dependency linkages that keep them underdeveloped and susceptible to global capitalism by working together and avoiding the decreasing terms of trade with the north. As a consequence, South-South collaboration (SSC) has grown into a manifestation of collaboration and partnership between southern countries willing to share, learn from, and explore their complementary advantages in

order to transcend their customary positions as raw material suppliers or recipients of aid. A paradigm where "Horizontal Partnerships," focused on equality, trust, mutual benefit, and long-term connections, arise as an alternative way of assuring development cooperation in the global south is made feasible by this transforming context. One of the most vigorous components of South-South cooperation, knowledge exchange has expanded into a third pillar of development cooperation, supporting governments in Africa, Asia, and Latin America with technical assistance and financial support.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology as it allows for an in-depth examination of the various perspectives and contextual variables inherent in South-South cooperation particularly the issues of soft power diplomacy. Because of the specific focus of the study, a historical-analytical approach was adopted to understand the issues and dynamics of soft power diplomacy as a development initiative for the global South. In applying the qualitative method of data collection, secondary method was used to systematically review and analyse existing documents, reports and publications relating to the case study. Reviewing the official reports and documents give insight into the structure of South-South Cooperation and the impact of soft power diplomacy on its development goals and strategy.

The secondary data were sourced from existing transcribed interviews, focus group discussions, books, academic journals, institutional websites, annual reports as well as text-based documentary sources. In analysing the data, the study used qualitative content analysis method primarily to analyse and interpret the contents of textual, interview transcripts and document data, so as to give insight into the meaning and context of development initiatives of countries in the global South. This method provides a deeper understanding of the perspectives of soft power diplomacy and the experiences of the global South in the pursuit of their common goals and aspirations.

The study employs thematic method of qualitative data analysis to explore and interpret data collected from interviews, documents, and case studies. This approach gives a deeper understanding of the economic, social, and political phenomena of soft power diplomacy in the global South. In the process of data analysis, the researcher examined and interpreted data to identify patterns, themes, and insights through the systematic process off data organization, coding, categorization and thematic analysis. The focus is to understand the relationship and factors that influence South-South cooperation. By applying this method, the study unravels the dynamics of soft power diplomacy among developing countries of the global South.

This study adopted the validity criteria developed by Coleman (2021). These are credibility, authenticity, criticality, and integrity. The researcher ensures that all the results are true to the meaning of the participants and carried out a critical evaluation of the respondents' opinion, by supporting every opinion with the findings from empirical studies. To ensure reliability, the findings from the interviews were compared with data from published materials to ensure accuracy and objectivity of the findings. The justification for adopting this method is to ensure that the weakness from one source of data collection will be complemented with the strength from the other source which is likely to produce better evidence for the integrity of the research conclusions.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Having reviewed relevant literature on soft power diplomacy, South-South Cooperation, and its conceptual relationship to the variable of development initiative in the global South, this section provides an objective analysis of the contextual variables by examining the issues, challenges, and prospects as well as the discussion and interpretations of the results and findings as follows:

### 4.1. South-south cooperation: issues, challenges and prospects

The strategic competition between the North's hegemons for control of the South's markets and raw materials, as well as the components of global politics that define who gets what, when, and how in the allocation of power and resources, has changed development cooperation in the international system. In light of this, the days of bilateral cooperation are past, as countries in the south are turning to multilateral cooperation to trade inventive, adaptable, and economical solutions to cope with their development challenges and dependency on the north. The liberal capitalist system, which was formed by the core countries to govern international economic and political connections between the north and the south, has made such dependency the norm. Countries in the south are now aware that effective cooperation should extend far beyond regionalism and North-South technical assistance to issues of inter-regional cooperation in order to address this culture of dependency and assert the values of self-reliance and develop fresh and creative solutions to their social, economic, and political problems.

The term "*South-South Cooperation*" refers to the cooperation and partnership between nations in the South that are eager to share, learn from, and explore their complementary strengths in order to transcend their conventional roles as aid recipients, raw material suppliers, and possible markets for industries in the global north. In addition to providing financial and technical support to countries in the global south, knowledge sharing, one of the most active aspects of South-South collaboration, enables the developing industrialized nations of the south to realize their full potential and serve as a third pillar of development cooperation. A paradigm where "*Horizontal Partnerships*," focused on equality, trust, mutual benefit, and long-term connections, emerge as an alternative method to development cooperation is made feasible by this transforming environment. Emerging actors are not the only ones embracing this new strategy; traditional donors who aim to become more successful by engaging in triangular collaboration or directly sponsoring South-South development projects are also involved. The developing countries are increasingly playing a fundamental role in redefining the development cooperation agenda by initiating and sponsoring sustainable horizontal partnerships. This helps to speed the fulfillment of both national and international development objectives, increasingly replacing the vertical connection between the North and South

with horizontal partnerships among governments in the global south. South-South collaboration has shown to be a helpful counterweight to North-South development cooperation, even if it cannot replace it. This is particularly relevant when facing emerging development challenges like poverty, inequality, exploitative liberal economic policies, food security, and the North's deindustrialization plans.

In order to ensure that international economic and political connections are established on equality and collaboration between the countries of the South and the North, south-south cooperation is therefore vital. To strengthen reciprocal comparative advantage for states in the north and south, such coordination is important to change the path and content of international trade discussions, global responses to financial crises, and restructure the global liberal economic order. In this context, the South Center Report (2009) asserts that the following are the guiding principles of South-South cooperation:

i. South-South cooperation as a common endeavour of peoples and countries of the South and must be pursued as an expression of South-South solidarity and a strategy for economic independence and self-reliance of the South based on their common objectives and solidarity;

ii. South-South cooperation and its agenda must be driven by the countries of the South;

iii. South-South cooperation must not be seen as a replacement for North-South cooperation. Strengthening South-South cooperation must not be a measure of coping with the receding interest of the developed world in assisting developing countries;

iv. Cooperation between countries of the South must not be analysed and evaluated using the same standards as those used for North-South relations;

v. Financial contributions from other developing countries should not be seen as Official Development Assistance from these countries to other countries of the South. These are merely expressions of solidarity and cooperation borne out of shared experiences and sympathies;

Thus, according to the aforementioned tenets, south-south cooperation is considered as a sort of horizontal collaboration centered on equality, respect, and mutual benefit and meant to protect national sovereignty within the framework of shared responsibility. South-south cooperation encourages the sharing of best practices and support among developing nations in their pursuit of shared development goals encompassing all facets of international relations because it offers a collective framework for bolstering multilateralism in the direction of promoting an action-oriented approach to development challenges in the global south. In order to achieve sustainable development and collective self-reliance, south-south cooperation attempts to enable developing countries to engage more actively in international policy and decision-making processes. Bilateral, sub-regional, regional, and interregional collaboration and integration, as well as multilateral cooperation, serve as the basis for the modalities and procedures utilized to enhance South-South contact.

South-South Cooperation, which strives to develop bilateral connections between the southern nations and supply them resources to aid the South thrive and increase its collective bargaining power, may also be considered as an expression of the middle-income countries' expanding capacities. In order to secure national self-sufficiency and create solidarity among growing countries, South-South cooperation aids the South as it integrates into the global economy. The following qualities of South-South cooperation are stressed in order to participate in the global economy and assist accomplish the Millennium Development Goals:

*i. Capacity development:* South-South technical cooperation should strongly focus on capacity development as a tool for technical cooperation and mutual learning.

*ii. Broader horizontal partnerships:* South-South technical cooperation offers a different type of relationship aimed at improving the diversity of choices for technical cooperation at the country and regional level, while also creating more horizontal forms of development partnerships.

*iii. Cost effectiveness:* South-South Cooperation should draw on regional and national resources to improve technical cooperation and superior value for money.

*iv. Demand-driven character:* Given the scarce resources and the horizontal relations between the partners, South-South technical cooperation is more aligned with recipients' priorities and needs.

*v. Adaptability:* Since recipient and provider share similar development challenges, South-South technical cooperation should generally provide highly-adapted and relevant solutions, especially in terms of relevant technology and cultural understanding.

*vi. Southern knowledge:* South-South technical cooperation diversifies knowledge and expertise beyond industrialized models.

These fundamental traits distinguish South-South Cooperation unique from traditional North-South Cooperation and enhance its potential to be customized to national requirements. As a consequence, South-South collaboration is generally regarded to be more cost-effective and influential than typical North-South cooperation, making it a better value. With a higher emphasis on technical collaboration and knowledge transfer than North-South conditionality-based projects, programs, or financial aid, South-South technical cooperation is also typically driven by reciprocal economic and commercial links. In light of this, South-South collaboration is a necessary and useful component of development cooperation and completes and balances international cooperation, making it complementary to rather than additional to North-South cooperation.

Moreover, South-South Cooperation occurs in a number of ways. There are numerous varieties of South-South collaboration that may be classified depending on the criteria that have been employed. These features include, for example, the location in which the collaboration happens, the purpose of each member, and the way in which the cooperation is sponsored. The UNESCO Report notes that the global south has the following sorts of cooperation:

*i. Sharing experiences and good practices:* one or more developing countries with experience and expertise in a certain domain exchange its experience and expertise with one or more other developing countries.

*ii. Institutional networks:* this type of cooperation encourages

institutions from developing countries to form a collective network to promote mutual interests and technical cooperation.

*iii. Capacity-building:* Capacity-building in the context of South-South Cooperation is about increasing the ability of a southern country to promote development. This type of cooperation helps countries in the global south to build up their capacity to promote development. For example, capacity-building can include the training of personnel and the purchase of equipment.

*iv. Partnership development:* this prompts developing countries in the south to start a partnership and set up a common project to build on development goals and initiatives.

After talking about the conceptual flaws with the way south-south cooperation is constructed, it is crucial to explore the centrifugal elements that obstruct or distort developing countries' efforts to encourage bilateral, multilateral, or even interregional collaboration among governments in the global south. Realist and neo-realist scholars think that states in international politics are uniform entities involved in a never-ending war for domination and survival. Since peace is completely reliant on an international balance of power and international institutions are perceived as being dominated by the interests of hegemonic countries, true cooperation in the global south is implausible under this framework (Mundy, 2007). Based on Mundy's thesis, the aspiring hegemonic states in the global south employ south-south cooperation as a method to balance power with the hegemons in the area. Thus, the south leverages partnership with the south to acquire power. Since dominance is essentially inherent in their ambitions, it could also be a political tool adopted by aspiring hegemons (such as China, India, South Africa, and Brazil) to dominate minor governments in order to grow their power and prestige worldwide.

Even though the purpose of south-south cooperation was to prevent the core states in the north from oppressively dominating economically and politically minor countries, the stronger nations in the South were unable to resist the impulse to exploit their weaker friends. Through its Road and Belt development strategy, China has persistently abused the resources of semi-peripheral governments in the global south under the pretext of partnership. China's road and belt model of infrastructure development has been the key instrument for trade and partnerships in the global south in the majority of African states. China unfairly and disproportionately gains from bilateral and multilateral cooperation agreements with African states. For example, China Railway Corporation was granted a contract by Kenya to build the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR). The arrangement stipulated that China would fund 90% of the money, with Kenya repaying the remaining balance over time with interest. If payment is not paid within the specified term, a 90-year lease will be enforced. The lone modern railway in Kenya that is presently in operation may be owned by China as the nation does not appear to be able to pay the bills. The airport in Zambia experienced the same issue. Additionally, China does not engage locals to carry out these projects. China is the fountain of all labor. China Power Ltd. is presently developing an electrical infrastructure in Juba, the capital of South Sudan. Every single engineer, electrician, and support staff is Chinese. The same is true of the road

construction initiatives in Nigeria and Kenya. Because it denies local inhabitants the chance to receive work they need and deserve, this has a substantial detrimental affect on South-South cooperation. China generally passes over the infrastructure to the proper authorities after a project is concluded.

As a consequence of the contracted Chinese company's inability to increase capacity, the government finds it difficult to maintain the project because there is no local staff to undertake maintenance. The bulk of the projects ultimately become decrepit (Jacob, 2018). These cases illustrate China's purpose as an emerging hegemon in leveraging the frameworks of south-south cooperation to strategically balance power with the global south's hegemons and build domination in the global south.

Furthermore, according to Frank (1971), the global South has undeveloped and is unable to form a durable network of cooperation or institution free from inequality as a result of the capitalist system's international division of labor. He claims that as a consequence of this divergence, the interests and ideologies of the major countries of the global North determine the political, economic, cultural, and social values of the global South. He also thinks that the tremendous desire of the dominant governments to benefit from the surplus capital of dependent countries is the reason why this divergence will endure. Following the conclusion of the Cold War, the ideology of liberal democracy and economic ideals was promoted into Africa in order to steal this surplus money. This was done in an attempt to make the global south's nations depend completely on the north, which produced divisiveness and lowered willingness for collaboration between the two areas. For instance, according to statistics from Euratom, the Niger Republic was the second-largest supplier of uranium to the European Union in 2022, delivering 2,975 Tu, or 25.4%. Canada finished in second with 2,578 Tu (22.0%), Russia with 1,980 (16.9%), and Kazakhstan with 3,145 (26.8%). Due to the institutionalization of the French bourgeois economic model and democratic system in Francophone African states, Niger's economy continues to be dependant on the outside despite its massive uranium resources. This was one of the remote reasons of the military takeovers in Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso, which led in the Alliance of Sahel States—a new multilateral cooperation—forming within the ECOWAS subregion. The structure and issues of South-South cooperation in West Africa have been transformed by this new alliance.

Therefore, it is feasible to interpret liberal economic and democratic values as a method to perpetuate a "*chain of exploitation*" in the global south and keep some states destitute in order to undermine its cooperative efforts. In addition to weakening the peripheral state compared to the core states, this "*chain of exploitation*" impedes the emergence of democracy in the global south. Grieg (2007) goes on to contend that the north has a comparative advantage in deciding how to divide up the world's resources and power because "*the same developmental process that facilitated liberal economy and democracy in the core also set in train authoritarianism and dictatorship in the periphery*." In light of this, David Ricardo says that the notion of "*comparative advantage*" drives the north to focus on industrial production while pushing "post-colonial" states in the south to continue producing basic products, resulting in a high degree

of dependency on the global north. As a consequence, the global south is further split into peripheral and semi-peripheral governments that actively seek out support, grants, loans, and foreign direct investment (FDI) from the north. The goal and pursuit of south-south cooperation are undercut by this sort of financial and technological dependency.

## 5. CONCLUSION

After establishing a connection between the idea of south-south cooperation and soft power diplomacy, it can be argued that the intersection of international development cooperation, comparative multilateral relations, and dependency theory has emerged as a field of study in the social sciences, with a focus on the global south. Interdependence is the driving force behind south-south cooperation as a neo-functional integration process, which has surely aided exchanges between various countries in their fight for independence from the global north's hegemonic influence and control over global resources. Although economic and financial exchanges have been the most noticeable among the peripheral states, it is undeniable that as the global south grows more cohesive through the institutional framework of cooperation and partnership, exchanges involving the transfer of policy knowledge have also been stimulated. Policy transfers may now successfully occur from the South to the South, as shown by the BRICS countries, rather than just from the North to the South as exchanges, communication, and collaboration opportunities increase. In order to create a collaborative process that enables learning and experience sharing, we have posited in this research that soft power diplomacy promotes south-south collaboration. However, given the ambitions of aspiring hegemons like China, Russia, India, Brazil, and South Africa to use the framework to balance power with the hegemons in the global north and assert their independence in their struggle for survival and dominance in international politics, the myth that south-south cooperation is a partnership between equals may not always be true. Since the majority of African nations are categorized as semi-peripheral governments with significant debt to China and other financial institutions in the global south, they are on an uneven playing field when attempting to establish cooperative partnerships with actors in Asia, Eastern Europe, and Latin America. The term "south" is also a Western invention, and nations that are grouped together as such are urged by the north to embrace liberal economies and democracies so that they may exchange policies and experiences with the global north. The semi-peripheral nations associate more with the global north and less with countries in the south out of concern of falling behind in the new, developing liberal international order. This stymies south-south cooperation. We conclude that, to this extent, south-south cooperation can significantly sharpen the understanding of nations in the global south to build an economic and political bloc to assert their independence in world politics and generate more cooperative efforts to end the inequalities in the global distribution of power and resources through the effective use of soft power diplomacy.

Based on the aforementioned analysis and conclusion, the study suggests that the countries in the global south should re-strategize and develop new collective economic development initiatives based on promoting the principles of multilateralism among and between members of the global south. This is because the Trump Administration introduced a new world order that is based on the principles of bilateralism over multilateralism, neo-mercantilism over liberal economy, and economic nationalism over free trade. Trump's "America First" ideology and the ensuing tariff war will be undermined by this strategic ingenuity. In order to demonstrate its economic independence and sovereignty from the whims and fancies of Western ideology and diplomacy, the Global South should make these ideals a cornerstone of its soft power diplomacy.

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