

BAR

BRICS ACADEMIC REVIEW



BRICS & Africa:

PARTNERSHIP FOR MUTUALLY ACCELERATED GROWTH, SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, AND INCLUSIVE MULTILATERALISM

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CHAIR'S NOTE

BRICS 2023, celebrating our broader BRICS alliance



As we cast our gaze toward the 2024 BRICS Russia Chairship, the early months of this new year provide a valuable opportunity for reflection. The year 2023 left an indelible mark within the BRICS framework, characterised by both achievements and challenges. This issue of BAR pays homage to the year that was, and highlights key developments worth noting as we move forward.

The year was not without its challenges for South Africa, as we faced external pressures from the Western international community regarding Russia's participation in the event. These geopolitical dynamics required deft diplomacy and strategic decision-making. Domestically, South Africa grappled with its own complexities while ensuring progress within the BRICS Agenda. Balancing these dual responsibilities was no small feat. Sufficed to say, some of the key successes throughout the year include the first in-person Leaders' Summit, as well as the first in-person BRICS Academic Forum, since the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent travel restrictions across the

world. This physical gathering allowed for candid discussions and strengthened bonds among the member nations. I am especially grateful to our members across the BRICS Think Tanks Council for joining us in Cape Town, as their presence and engagements enriched the dialogues across the various sessions. I am also appreciative towards the members of the South African delegation, and to all those who contributed towards the successful execution of the Forum.

In line with the overall theme set before us by the Presidency, *Partnership for Mutual Accelerated Growth, Sustainable Development, and Inclusive Multilateralism*, the face-to-face discussions across the five priorities that

BRICS come to pass, culminating in Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and The United Arab Emirates accepting invitations to join the bloc. Throughout the year South Africa carried the vision of BRICS as a champion for the needs and concerns of the Global South, with this vision emphasising sustainable development, the reform of multilateral systems and beneficial economic growth, all the while upholding a commitment to an inclusive multilateralism and international law. Other highlights across South Africa's BRICS 2023 chairship also include showcasing the Global South, through deeper collaboration and dialogue, and a focus on shared goals.

“This physical gathering allowed for candid discussions and strengthened bonds among the member nations.”

underpinned this theme focused on fostering further collaboration among BRICS members with a view to finding solutions and ways forward. As the BRICS Think Tanks Council convened in Cape Town for the 15th BRICS Academic Forum, entities across track I, track II and track III also convened their respective events. The South African Chapter of the BRICS Business Council, which celebrated the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the BRICS Business Council, also convened on the sidelines of the Leaders Summit, as well as the BRICS Women's Business Alliance, which engaged with leaders during the Summit. The year 2023 also saw the much-awaited expansion of

South Africa's chairship leaves a legacy of collaboration, advocacy, and commitment to global well-being. With Russia now at the helm, I am confident that lessons learned will shape future chairships, ensuring continuity and progress. In summary, South Africa's 2023 BRICS chairship exemplified the spirit of partnership, mutual growth, and inclusive multilateralism. It was a year of resilience, dialogue, and collective action within the BRICS family. **BR**

PROF SARAH MOSOETSA
Chief Executive Officer
Human Sciences Research Council
Interim Chair of the South African BRICS
Think Tank (SABTT)

TIME TO TALK?

We'd love
to hear
from you!

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ED'S NOTE

AURIEL NIEMACK
Acting Director: Office of the CEO



January, in Roman mythology, draws its name from Janus, the deity of doors, thresholds, looking back to the past and forwards, to the future. In this new quarter of 2024, we must acknowledge that BRICS continues to strive towards greater representation, more enriched engagements across the Global South, or global majority, as referred to in some circles. The BRICS bloc stands at the threshold of even greater relevance, and this eighth issue of the BRICS Academic Review, evokes this liminality, as the BRICS family of members grows, and continues to grow. Expansion has arrived, and perhaps institutionalization beckons. Our news roundup of key developments [pp 8-16] considers the implications of this expanding BRICS universe for the global economy, the return of the BRICS New Development Bank to the South African bond market, amidst various interesting and relevant

developments across the BRICS landscape.

In evoking the liminal, in looking back over the year that was (2023) and the year that is (2024), we recap the successes and highlights of a phenomenal year. The 15th BRICS Academic Forum embodied the three pillars of BRICS, especially people to people exchange, we renewed old ties and embraced the prospects of new members. The support of the Department for Higher Education, Science and Innovation, as well as the Department of International Relations and Cooperation, towards the success of the South Africa BRICS Think Tank's (SABTT) engagements and milestones, is valued. The contribution made by HE Prof BE Nzimande, Minister for DHET, and the DIRCO Deputy Minister Alvin Botes, in their respective opening address and keynote plenary address at the forum, make for worthwhile reading on [pp 37] and [pp 40]. Minister Nzimande's insightful noting of the four critical issues wherein BRICS needs to play its role and make its presence felt are important and necessary considerations for policymakers as we navigate the global zeitgeist. Complementary to this is Deputy Minister Botes' keynote address, imploring us to explore issues related to research, innovation and development, and to foster deeper collaboration among our research communities. From the people to people perspective, our guest writer Dr Mary Lange, on [pp 28-31] offers a fascinating, thought-provoking account of the BRICS Academic Forum, reflecting on the inclusivity, diversity and robustness of policy engagement as espoused throughout the three day event.

As evidenced throughout the Academic Forum, and across the various SABTT Dialogues and engagements, evidence-based research continues to be a necessary cornerstone. A critical priority within

South Africa's thematic overview, Strengthening Post-Pandemic Socio-Economic Recovery and the Attainment of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development, and the navigation thereof, is discussed comprehensively by Mr Soumya Bhowmick, a research fellow at the Observer Research Foundation, on [pp 25-27]. The BRICS bloc is critical to the attainment of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, as noted in Mr Bhowmick's article as well as in an exciting book publication edited by Professor Fulufhelo Netswera which we have profiled on [pp 57], *COVID-19 and climate change in BRICS Nations: Beyond Paris Agreement and Agenda 2030*.

Our very own SABTT colleague, Dr Babalwa Siswana, explores the overall economic performance the new members of BRICS on [pp 17-21], providing food for thought in consideration of the pivotal role the expanded BRICS bloc can play in shaping the future trajectory of the global economy. Likewise our NIHSS staffer Mr Katlego Scheepers reviews the pertinent contributions and insights shared at one of our SABTT dialogues focused on the African Continental Free Trade Area [pp 42-45]. Taking the necessity and valuable inputs of our economic pillar of BRICS into consideration, we also look across the Track II landscape, towards reflections of the 2023 SA BRICS Chairship, as shared by our colleagues in the South African chapter of the BRICS Business Council [pp 32-33]. Similarly, the diligence and dedication towards youth capacity building within BRICS, as reflected on by our colleagues in the South African BRICS Youth Association [pp 34-35], continues to inspire us. We commend and salute the work across all tracks, and look forward to the continuation as the Russian Federation has taken helm, over the course of 2024.



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The BRICS Academic Forum, the main expert event of Russia’s BRICS Chairship, will be held in Moscow from 22 to 24 May.

The Forum will bring together more than 200 representatives of the BRICS expert community under the motto of ‘BRICS: New Figures at the Global Chessboard’ to discuss pressing issues of global governance and develop co-operation on different levels. The forum will submit recommendations for the BRICS Summit scheduled for 22–24 October in Kazan.



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OVERVIEW

INSIGHTS, NEWS AND COMMENTARY ABOUT BRICS

COMPILED BY KATLEGO SCHEEPERS



New Development Bank returns to South African bond market, once again trusting Standard Bank in its capacity as co-arranger

 Africa's largest bank by assets, Standard Bank, has been appointed by the New Development Bank ("NDB") as the debt capital market co-arranger for their second local currency bond issuance.

NDB has raised R1.3 billion in its latest oversubscribed bond auction, bringing the cumulative total volume raised to R2.8 billion since its debut in the South African bond market in August this year.

NDB raised the funds across two tranches of notes on offer. The notes

listed on the JSE interest rate market on 8 December 2023.

"The successful outcome of both the inaugural New Development Bank bond and recent bond is a clear illustration of the aligned values and desire the market has in driving sustainable growth in infrastructure for South Africa," said Carl Wiesner, Head of Syndicate South Africa, Debt Capital Markets at Standard Bank Corporate & Investment Banking.

With over R1.6 billion in bids on both the 3- and 5-year tranches, the book was

well-supported once more, allowing NDB to exercise its option to upsize the trade from R1 billion to R1.3 billion. The 3-year tranche priced at the tight end of guidance, 5bps tighter than the last auction. The 5-year tranche cleared at the midpoint of guidance with 97% of bids being within or lower than price guidance.

The multilateral development bank will deploy the funds raised into infrastructure and sustainable development projects to facilitate growth and development within South Africa.

"The New Development Bank is looking to expand its local currency funding programmes to support lending in its member countries. This second ZAR Bond issuance continues to pave the way for NDB to further fund much needed infrastructure and sustainable development projects in South Africa," said Allister Lamont-Smith, Transactor in the Debt Capital Markets team at Standard Bank Corporate & Investment Banking.

Established in 2015 by BRICS countries, NDB has focused on six priority areas: digital infrastructure, social infrastructure, environmental protection, water and sanitation, transport infrastructure and clean energy and energy efficiency.

"Standard Bank has also supported NDB on this transaction across various agency roles on the programme, including debt sponsor and paying, settlement, transfer, calculation and issuer agent."

"New Development Bank's strategy of lending in rands significantly reduces risks to local borrowers. The Bank will be a regular issuer in the local market to fund its pipeline of rand-denominated loans for the development of infrastructure projects in South Africa," said Paul Hoffman Treasury and Portfolio Management, New Development Bank.



BRICS condemns Israel war on Gaza in signal to the West

AL-JAZEER



Leaders of major emerging economies called for an end to Israel's war on Gaza on Tuesday, and for a cessation of hostilities on both sides to ease the rapidly deteriorating humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip.

In a virtual summit chaired by South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, the BRICS grouping denounced attacks on civilians in Palestine and Israel, with many leaders calling the forced displacement of Palestinians, within Gaza or outside the territory, "war crimes."

"We condemned any kind of individual or mass forcible transfer and deportation of Palestinians from their own land," a chair's summary read. The group, which did not issue a joint declaration, also "reiterated that the forced transfer and deportation of Palestinians, whether inside Gaza or to neighbouring countries, constitute grave breaches of the Geneva conventions and war crimes and violations under International Humanitarian Law."

The BRICS is made up of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, all major

emerging economies looking for a greater say in a global order long dominated by the United States and its Western allies. These countries are often viewed as leaders of what is referred to in international policy speak as the "Global South".

But it wasn't just these five countries that spoke on the war on Tuesday. Earlier this year, the BRICS had agreed to expand and add Egypt, Ethiopia, Argentina, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Iran as members from 2024. The leaders of these six countries also participated in the meeting called by South Africa. United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres joined the summit too.

The chair's summary — in essence a gist of the mood in the room — highlights growing calls from the Global South to end the war on the Gaza Strip. The conflict began after an October 7 attack on Israeli communities by the armed group Hamas that saw 1,200 people killed and 240 others taken hostage. In response, Israel has incessantly shelled Gaza, targeting hospitals, schools and refugee camps and killing more than 13,000 people, many of them children, in violation of international laws.

Since then, millions of people across Africa, Asia and the Middle East have marched for a "Free Palestine" and called for a ceasefire. Experts in Africa and elsewhere have accused the United States, United Kingdom and European Union of hypocrisy for claiming to be bastions of democracy and human rights while supporting Israel's war in Gaza.

A 'growing assertiveness'

While the chair's summary appeared "mild and somewhat balanced" according to Steven Gruz, an analyst at the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA), some countries were more combative in their presentations.

In his opening statement at the meeting, the current BRICS chair, President Ramaphosa of South Africa, said that Israel's actions "are in clear violation of international law" and that the "collective punishment of Palestinian civilians by Israel "is a war crime ... tantamount to genocide". Ramaphosa also said Hamas had "violated international law and must be held accountable".

India's stance was comparatively softer,

“ In a virtual summit chaired by South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, the BRICS grouping denounced attacks on civilians in Palestine and Israel. ”

with Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar saying there was “a need for restraint and immediate humanitarian support”, as well as “peaceful resolution through dialogue and diplomacy”.

Many of the member states, including Russia and Brazil, have previously criticised Israel’s non-stop bombardment and now, ground invasion of the Gaza Strip. China, for its part, this week hosted a delegation of Muslim countries, officials and organisations seeking a ceasefire, including the Palestinian Authority (PA).

India, though, has not been as vocal and has in fact cracked down on pro-Palestine marches at home, seemingly siding with Israel and its biggest benefactor, the US, in what is seen as a split within the BRICS itself.

But that split did not seem glaring at Tuesday’s summit, which experts say is a first-of-its-kind meeting for a group that has previously focused on economic issues.

“I am not sure I recall a similar

Still, many BRICS nations — not just India — have established ties with Israel that they will be wary of severing.

China has huge investments in Israel, Gruzd notes, while India has even deeper historic ties with the country and enjoys military and technological partnerships with it. But with a fiery Iran set to join the group, India might not be able to influence how a new BRICS+ will react to Israel, Gruzd said.

South Africa, currently the smallest BRICS country, and one that itself experienced oppressive apartheid rule for more than four decades, sees its own struggle reflected in that of the Palestinians and has consistently been one of the loudest calls for a ceasefire, said analysts.

At the same time, it has long been Israel’s largest trade partner in Africa. On Tuesday, that relationship appeared to have reached a turning point.

Parliament members voted to shut down the Israeli embassy in Pretoria, signifying

A turning point?

On Monday, South African Minister in the Presidency Khumbudzo Ntshavheni applied further pressure, calling for an ICC warrant against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, adding that it would be a “total failure” if the court did not investigate the leader.

Earlier this year, South Africa had managed to convince Russia not to send President Vladimir Putin to the annual BRICS Summit in August because of an ICC arrest warrant issued against him for war crimes committed in Ukraine. If Putin had attended the summit in South Africa, the country, an ICC signatory, would have been obligated to arrest him.

Tuesday’s BRICS stance, instigated by South Africa, might push more countries to be vocal in denouncing the war, said Muhammed Desai of Africa4Palestine, an advocacy group.

“South Africa is a significant economic and political powerhouse on the African continent as well as a country with one of the most embassies and high commissions in the world,” Desai said. “Thus, its stance and position does have clout within the diplomatic arena.”

But the coalition’s political weight is not significant enough to have any real impact on the direction of Israel’s war, others say. “Frankly, I do not think they have much leverage on Israel directly,” said Gruzd of SAIIA. “I also do not think it will have much effect on the West, besides adding to voices calling for a ceasefire.”

Their leverage is, however, growing. Dozens of nations have applied or shown interest in joining BRICS, a major reason for the expansion earlier this year, as countries seek to reduce their dependence on the US-led Western financial system.

Russia, which will hold the group’s presidency in 2024, is expected to push to use local currencies for international trade payments, as opposed to the dominant US dollar.

That platform, some say, is necessary for the voice of the Global South to be heard. “Within the global world order, BRICS offers another voice,” Desai of Africa4Palestine said, and “that is necessary to counter the current Western hegemonic view”.

“In his opening statement at the meeting, the current BRICS chair President Ramaphosa of South Africa, said that Israel’s actions “are in clear violation of international law” and that the “collective punishment of Palestinian civilian by Israel “is a war crime..... tantamount to genocide”

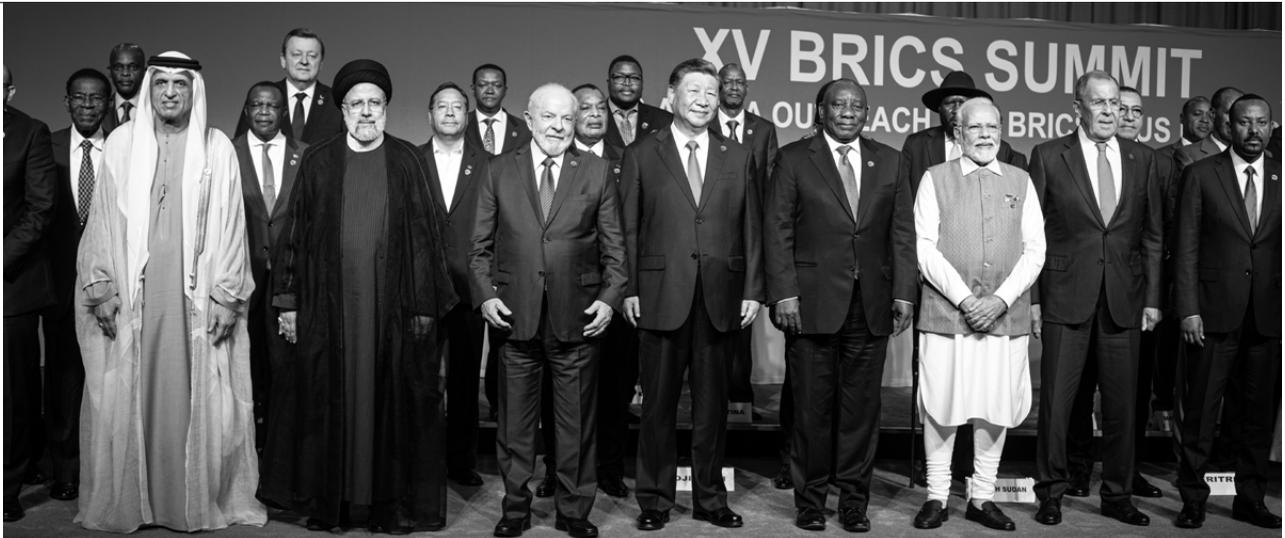
extraordinary summit being called,” Gruzd told Al Jazeera. “It does reflect on the growing assertiveness and confidence of the BRICS grouping, not waiting for the West. BRICS has generally shied away from political and security issues; this meeting goes against that trend.”

Together, BRICS countries represent 40 percent of the world population and a quarter of the global economy.

President Ebrahim Raisi of Iran – Israel’s archenemy – said Palestinians should hold a referendum to determine their fate.

a turning point in the crisis. Diplomats from the country had already been recalled from Israel on November 6. Israel recalled its ambassador to South Africa, Eliav Belotserkovsky, for “consultations” on Monday in response to Pretoria’s growing hostility.

Alongside Bangladesh, Bolivia, Comoros and Djibouti last week, South Africa also submitted a referral to the International Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate whether war crimes have been committed in Gaza.



BRICS expansion holds threats and opportunities for SA business



The expansion of the Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) bloc, announced during the fifteenth yearly BRICS Summit in August, has raised questions about South Africa's role in the group and whether the perceived spurning of its more traditional allies and trade partners will have adverse effects going forward.

The new members, which have been invited to join from 2024, are Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. The general consensus is that the BRICS expansion is meant to enhance the group's global influence and aid a transition to a "multipolar world", in part by reducing the dominance of the US dollar.

South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA) African Governance and Diplomacy Programme head Steven Gruzd notes that bolstering numbers is a tried-and-true method of expanding clout, noting that both the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation sought to increase membership to elevate their reach and scale of influence.

"The more countries behind you, the louder your voice becomes. So, expansion, in this instance, translates to more political clout. But make no mistake; the Group of Seven States are likely to remain dominant for now, although China is exerting its diplomatic heft to a much greater degree."

Further, the expansion of the BRICS market reinforces the group's economic power, "even if it remains a loose club rather than a firm, exclusive alliance". Gruzd adds that the inclusion of several major oil producers and some of the members' geographical importance on major sea lanes, including the Suez Canal, the Straits of Hormuz and the Bab-el-Mandeb Straits, will "add to the club's overall power".

Gruzd tells *Engineering News & Mining Weekly* that, while the new entrants want to be part of something "successful, with momentum" and which seems to have an ideological affinity with strengthening a multipolar world, "some tensions will be imported into BRICS".

These include issues pertaining to the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam and the resulting "standoff" on the Nile between Ethiopia and Egypt, as well as the Middle Eastern rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia. There is also the continued tension relating to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the escalation of the long simmering Israel-Hamas conflict, as well as friction between India and China on numerous issues.

Gruzd says that the BRICS organisation clearly believes that issues between members can be contained or "ever ameliorated"; however, the members' individual relationships with the rest of the global community are trickier to manage, especially when many of the new members, and a significant chunk of the old ones, have been critical of the existing West-orientated world order.

"For example, as international geopolitics

becomes an ever-more-complex web, closer relations with Iran through BRICS could place strain on South Africa's fragile relations with the US vis-à-vis Ukraine, and now the Israel-Hamas war too. There is much speculation that African Growth and Opportunity Act membership could be in jeopardy, although the South African government has tried to dispel this, including by sending special envoys to Washington.

"International Relations and Cooperation Minister Naledi Pandor visiting Tehran will not be seen as constructive in the West, nor will her telephone calls to Hamas leadership."

He notes that, while the inclusion of Iran may "make things more complicated", South Africa maintaining relationships with 'controversial' countries is nothing new, as it has had strong ties with Iran for decades, including defending it in international fora regarding its nuclear programme and on sanctions.

Gruzd says that the long-term security and trade implications of the BRICS expansion are challenging to identify at this stage.

"From a trade perspective, it's hard to tell whether there will be adverse impacts on future trade for South Africa. We needn't see this as a stark 'either or' choice between new BRICS members and other trading partners. It can be 'both and'. It's nonbinary. The expansion may even improve South African trade with the new BRICS States and should not be detrimental to existing trade."

The North-West University Business School's Professor Raymond Parsons agrees that the inclusion of the new members, while inevitably necessitating a different

collaborative “mix” within the group, can create opportunities for South Africa.

“The BRICS Summit can be regarded as a valuable enabler and facilitator of new trade and investment opportunities generally, both for existing BRICS members and the newcomers.

“Importantly, the first day of the summit was allocated entirely to the business sector, and the ‘network effects’ and positive spillovers should not be underestimated, particularly as they enabled various business networks to explore areas of common economic interest and/or immediate transactional value,” Parsons comments.

However, Free Market Foundation contributing author and political analyst Nicholas Woode-Smith, in his piece titled ‘BRICS: Unmasking SA’s supposed ‘nonalignment’ and neutrality’, is far more pessimistic about South Africa’s prospects.

He notes that this year, South Africa recorded a trade deficit of \$14.9-billion in

to gauge perceptions on whether BRICS could offer South Africa opportunities for trade, investment and technology exchange that could contribute to the nation’s economic growth, with the results showing that just over half of the South African CEOs surveyed do not view BRICS as a remedy for the country’s economic woes.

Similar to Woode-Smith, one of the prominent concerns voiced by the CEOs is that BRICS members are not substantial trading partners for South Africa, compared with other key partners such as the UK and the US. The other is that closer ties with BRICS might alienate existing trade partners.

Nevertheless, if South Africa is able to retain its existing trade relationships, while increasing trade with the new and existing BRICS partners, it will be extremely well positioned for growth.

BRICS – according to the International Institute for Middle East and Balkan Studies’ (IFIMES)’ 2023 World:BRICS – De-

its national interests are indeed protected, as events continue to unfold in the global economy,” comments Parsons.

To that end, he stresses the importance of South Africa helping to expedite the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Agreement, given the current geopolitical environment.

From a BRICS perspective, the new African States are ranked second (Egypt) and seventh (Ethiopia) in terms of African countries with the highest GDP size, while South Africa is ranked third. All three were among the first to ratify the AfCFTA Agreement, which is indicative of their willingness to expand intra-African trade.

“The World Bank has said that implementing the AfCFTA Agreement could improve incomes in Africa by nearly 10% by 2035, if trade barriers could be reduced. The success of AfCFTA, therefore, is an important pillar on which to expand intra-African trade and investment,” says Parsons.

Banking services provider Standard Chartered in its report titled ‘Future of Trade 2023: Africa Spotlight on the African Continental Free Trade Area’, published last month, notes that exports from Africa, currently amounting to \$645.3-billion, are set to reach \$952-billion by 2035, through rapidly growing connections with South Asia, East Asia and the Middle East.

“Intra-Africa trade is also expected to flourish – flows within East and West Africa will grow by 15.1% and 13.2% respectively, far outpacing the global average of 4.2%,” the report notes, adding that the AfCFTA Agreement, if implemented effectively, could “radically reshape future growth and development”.

The Dollar Question

In 2014, BRICS countries established the New Development Bank to help fund infrastructure and sustainable development projects. BRICS also established a contingency reserve arrangement for its members.

The IFIMES’ September analysis describes both initiatives as a demonstration of intent to establish institutions that “constitute an alternative to the existing global financial institutions that are dominated by the West”.

It further suggests that “the establishment of a single currency or use of local currencies in trade exchange among BRICS countries is

“From BRICS perspective, the new African States are ranked second (Egypt) and seventh (Ethiopia) in terms of African countries with the highest GDP size, while South Africa is ranked third.”

its trade with BRICS partners. Conversely, South Africa’s balance of trade with the US was \$991-million in South Africa’s favour, in addition to “other profitable trade partners in Europe”.

“We profit from trade with the West. Yet, we are closing ranks and forming a trade [bloc] with nations which don’t want our goods and just want to sell their imported goods to us.”

Woode-Smith is not alone in his scepticism; the Merchantec CEO Confidence Index indicates that 55% of CEOs that were surveyed harbour doubts about the potential benefits of South Africa’s association with BRICS.

As reported by the *Engineering News* website last month, the questionnaire sought

dollarization Summit’ analysis, published in September – accounts for 23% of the global gross domestic product (GDP), 42% of the global population and more than 16% of global trade.

The IFIMES notes that, by 2040, the BRICS group is expected to account for more than 50% of the global GDP, owing to the integration of several sizable economies through the BRICS Plus framework.

African Continental Free Trade Area “South Africa will need to rigorously interrogate what it needs to do to enlarge its share of BRICS’ trade and investment flows. Also, with BRICS’ geopolitical dynamics about to change, South Africa will be required to strategise afresh to ensure that

an effective way to oppose the monopoly of the US dollar and address its consequences and limitations”.

The general consensus among political analysts is that BRICS is hoping to dent the strength of the dollar, and while most agree that the introduction of a single currency is highly unlikely, very few dismiss the possibility outright.

“I don’t think a single currency can be introduced at this stage – there’s too much geographical, political and economic diversity in the group. While the BRICS countries are definitely keen to de-dollarise and trade in local currencies, I cannot see any currency dethroning the dollar any time soon, and the experiment with local currencies still has some way to run,” says Gruzd.

Parsons adds that the prospect of a BRICS common currency must be placed on the back-burner, and that South Africa should instead ensure that BRICS members aim to expand trade in local currencies in a manner that can benefit the rand.

Woode-Smith, meanwhile, believes that both the single currency idea and the experiment with local currencies is “foolish”.

“Using local currencies will become a costly and inconvenient affair. Single currencies being used between many economic agents just makes trade simpler. The use of the US dollar for global trade helps . . . in the same way that a single currency helps facilitate trade within a country.” Further, he suggests that even exploring the possibility of a single BRICS currency is “was[ting] time and money, changing things that don’t need to be changed”.

However, as to whether BRICS eventually succeeds in reducing the dominance of the dollar, it is generally accepted that such success is far off. As the IFIMES notes, “while the BRICS bloc can have significant influence, it will not be sufficient to [cause] a revolution in the existing international relations. It is rather unlikely that BRICS will shake the globalisation trend or the US control in the current balance of power. Nevertheless, one must admit that the BRICS bloc is a first serious attempt in that direction”.



Deforestation hits record low in Brazilian Amazon in November



Deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon hit a record low for the month of November, according to figures released Friday, as President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva’s government touted its environmental record at the UN climate talks.

Satellite monitoring detected 201 square kilometers (78 square miles) of forest cover destroyed in Brazil’s share of the world’s biggest rainforest last month, a drop of 64 percent from November 2022, according to data from the national space research agency’s DETER surveillance program.

It was the lowest on record for the month since monitoring began in 2015.

Veteran leftist Lula, who returned to office in January vowing “Brazil is back” in the climate fight after surging deforestation

under far-right predecessor Jair Bolsonaro (2019-2022), proudly presented his administration’s «dramatic» progress on curbing the destruction of the Amazon this week at the COP28 climate talks in Dubai.

Lula has vowed to achieve zero deforestation by 2030.

But the good news on the rainforest—whose carbon-absorbing trees are key to the climate race—was offset by record-high deforestation for November in the Cerrado savanna, a biodiverse region below the Amazon that has been hit by a recent surge in clear-cutting, mainly for farming.

There, deforestation rose 238 percent from November 2022, to 572 square kilometers.

Increased environmental policing by Lula’s government has “drastically reduced deforestation in the Amazon, though many challenges remain,» said Ana Carolina Crisostomo of the World Wildlife Fund’s Brazil office.

But “it is urgent to prioritise action in the Cerrado,» she told AFP.

Brazil's economy grows 2.9% in Lula's 1st year, beating expectations



Brazil's economy grew 2.9% in 2023, beating expectations in the first year of the administration of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, according to the government statistics institute Friday.

The number announced by IBGE impressed many economists, whose overall

forecaste early last year was for only 0.8% growth in 2023.

Brazil's economy grew 3% in 2022, partly due to government spending programs pushed by then-President Jair Bolsonaro amid his failed reelection bid.

The credit rating agency Austin Ratings said Brazil's economy is now the ninth biggest in the world, based on the preliminary gross domestic product numbers announced Friday. Reaching \$2.17 trillion in GDP last year moved the South American nation ahead of Canada and Russia, it said.

The Brazilian statistics agency said Brazil's record production of soybeans and corn helped the overall results.

"Agriculture represented about a third of all the growth of Brazil's economy last year," Rebeca Palis, a coordinator at IBGE, said in a statement.

The government said after the results that it expects 2024 growth to be at 2.2%, which would again above market expectations. Lula has said in public forums he wants to push the number above 3% this year by drawing more foreign investment to Brazil.

Source: africa.com



Egypt plans to issue bonds in local currencies of BRICS' NDB members

At the beginning of this year, Egypt officially joined BRICS. Egypt plans to issue bonds in currencies of the members of the BRICS-founded New Development Bank (NDB). According to Egypt's Minister of Finance Mohamed Maait, this will include green, blue, social, and sustainable bonds.

Green, blue, and social bonds

Maait said in a press statement on Sunday that Egypt aims to issue green, blue, social, and sustainable bonds that meet the ambitions of Egypt's Vision 2030. The

bonds will add new projects with a social dimension to Egypt's sustainable portfolio.

At the beginning of this year, Egypt officially joined BRICS which includes: Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. The group seeks to enhance trade in local currencies among member states.

Maait, who is also the governor of the NDB, explained during his meeting with the bank's Vice President, Vladimir Kazbekov, that his country seeks to build a strong and sustainable strategic partnership with NDB. Hence, it aims to attract more development investment flows to support its efforts in building comprehensive sustainable development that improves the lives of citizens.

Cooperation with NDB

Maait added that there are promising prospects for cooperation with NDB in

clean energy projects, transportation, and social and environmental protection. Moreover, Egypt seeks to collaborate with the bank in information infrastructure and water and sanitation, especially in light of its enormous financing capabilities and advanced international expertise.

The minister also highlighted that Egypt looks forward to holding joint and sustainable discussions on strategies to enhance economic development. This also falls in line with NDB's plans to expand its activities in Egypt. Moreover, NDB will explore more promising investment opportunities and provide soft development financing to the private sector. Thus, this collaboration will set Egypt on the road to recovery and sustainable economic growth, especially in light of it adopting measures that support the business climate by providing tax, customs, and investment incentives.

International debt markets

In the same context, Egypt continues to move towards international debt markets and is currently considering offering bonds in Gulf currencies. That is at a time when the high cost of financing is one of the government's most prominent challenges after Egypt's sovereign debt credit rating was lowered.

Maait recently explained in a statement that Egypt is considering offering bonds in Gulf currencies during the coming period. However, this requires coordination with advisors and lawyers, and the matter is not easy.

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What the expanding BRICS universe means for the global economy

BY CARY SPRINGFIELD,
INTERNATIONAL BANKER

Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) were the six new additions to BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) announced on August 24 during the economic bloc's landmark 15th summit in Johannesburg, South Africa. With the 2023 summit held under the theme "BRICS and Africa: Partnership for Mutually Accelerated Growth, Sustainable Development and Inclusive Multilateralism" and two of the six new additions based on the African continent, the expanding BRICS universe provides yet another major stepping stone on the inexorable path toward global economic multipolarity.

With the expansion set to come into effect in January 2024, the current BRICS group of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa will be more than doubling its membership list shortly. And given the identities of the six new additions, BRICS+—or whatever moniker will now be applied to this 11-strong bloc—is set to become a mighty economic force on the global stage.

"BRICS has embarked on a new chapter in its effort to build a world that is fair, a world that is just, a world that is also inclusive and prosperous," Cyril Ramaphosa, president of host nation South Africa, said of the expansion. "We have consensus on the first phase of this expansion process, and other phases will follow." Among the most enthusiastic supporters of BRICS's expansion, China's President Xi Jinping described the membership enlargement as "historic," adding that it shows "the determination of BRICS countries for unity and cooperation with the broader developing countries". Brazil's president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, hailed the admission of the six countries as "the driving force of the new international order".

With the most important multilateral groupings of the last few decades dominated



by advanced Western economies, the propulsion of BRICS to the forefront of global influence seems to portend a seismic shift in the international economic order. This grouping of developing and emerging economies has been most frequently compared with the West's G7 (Group of Seven) forum of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States. The expansion involving six additional economies, however, puts daylight between the two respective groups in terms of economic might, and even more so when accounting for purchasing power parity (PPP), with BRICS+ now representing 37 percent of global gross domestic product (GDP) and the G7 accounting for just 30 percent.

Regarding the populations represented by the two groups, meanwhile, BRICS has always had the edge thanks to the approximate 1.4 billion people in each of China and India, easily the world's two most populated nations. With Ethiopia (126.5 million people) and Egypt (112.7 million people) added to the mix, moreover, the population gap between BRICS+ and the G7 will only further widen. Concerning the geography of BRICS+, it is worth noting that five of the six new members are located

near each other, with the three oil-producing nations of Saudi Arabia, Iran and the UAE accompanied by Egypt situated in the Western Asia region and Ethiopia located not too far from this group.

Indeed, including three of the world's biggest crude-oil producers—Saudi Arabia, Iran and the UAE (the world's second, seventh and eighth largest producers, respectively)—is perhaps the most startling feature of this new crop of nations. According to 2022 figures from the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), these additions will propel BRICS's oil production from 19 percent to 41 percent of the world's total. With two of the world's three biggest oil consumers (India and China) already represented in BRICS in addition to the existing membership of the world's third-largest oil producer (Russia), this expansion will set the stage for a decidedly robust oil-trading bloc. And with boosting trade and economic cooperation among member nations arguably BRICS's main goal, adding several leading oil producers to a group containing such insatiable oil consumers makes sense. It will also position the group's trading activities as leading influences on global commodities and financial markets.

But perhaps the most significant implications of this enlargement on the global economy will come via the use of local currencies to conduct bilateral trade and the corresponding reduction in the employment of the US dollar. Opposition to the dollar-dominated financial system has grown in recent years within the developing world, with countries observing how the dollar has been weaponised to enforce economic sanctions against several vulnerable countries, including freezing Russia's assets and cutting it off from Western-dominated financial systems. The Federal Reserve's (the Fed's) aggressive monetary-tightening regime has also led to periods of pronounced dollar appreciation, inflicting considerable pain on developing nations, particularly those with dollar-denominated debt and those relying on essential imports, such as food and fuel, priced in the US currency on international markets.

a challenge against the Western-dominated financial system. Despite representing a significantly larger share of the world's population, developing countries receive relatively paltry voting power in international organisations, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which continue to hold significant financial powers in allocating capital toward global development.

"We call for greater representation of emerging markets and developing countries, in international organizations and multilateral fora in which they play an important role," the BRICS's official summit declaration ("15th BRICS Summit: Johannesburg II Declaration") asserted, whilst also calling for more quota power for emerging markets and developing countries (EMDCs) and greater protection for the voices of the poorest members. "We call for reform of the Bretton Woods institutions,

summit chair, South Africa, confirming that more than 40 countries—such as Bolivia, Cuba, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Kazakhstan—have expressed interest in joining. Of those countries, 16 have reportedly applied for membership, including Algeria, Indonesia, Palestine and Vietnam. While this growth will bolster the group's influence within the global economy, coordinating and agreeing on policy will also become more challenging.

Nonetheless, the clamouring from such nations to join BRICS+ demonstrates not only the group's bright prospects over the next few years but also the potentially substantial transfer of economic power from the Global North to the Global South. How will Western powers respond to this trend? "For China and Russia, this is a win. They have been pushing for this for five-plus years now," Ryan C. Berg, the head of the Americas Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), told *The Guardian*. "For China, it allows them to continue to build what they hope is a Beijing-centric order. For Russia, who is hosting it next year, it sees this as a tremendous opportunity in its current moment of significant isolation."

But some also believe this "win" for China and Russia does not necessarily have to come at the expense of the United States and that win-win solutions for everyone can still be achieved. "It's a reminder that the US needs to think more about how it's engaging the rest of the world in a way that advances the interests of both [itself and other countries]," M. Taylor Fravel, an expert on China's foreign policy and security strategy and director of MIT's (Massachusetts Institute of Technology's) Security Studies Program, recently opined. "I don't view this as a zero-sum situation. It would be counterproductive for the United States to take a hostile approach to the BRICS, in part because it has friends within it. If you're thinking strategically, having friends in the BRICS group is not a bad thing, so a low-key response is probably most effective."

Reference

1 International Banker: "Why Saudi Arabia's Imminent Membership Is Crucial for the BRICS' New Development Bank," Nicholas Larsen, July 31, 2023.

“Nonetheless, the clamouring from such nations to join BRICS+ demonstrate not only the group's bright prospectus over the next few years but also the potentially sustainable transfer of economic power from Global North to Global South.”

BRICS members had accelerated their dollarisation efforts before the Johannesburg summit. Brazil and China struck a deal in late March to trade in local currencies, while India and the UAE began trading in their respective currencies in July. According to President Ramaphosa, BRICS members' finance ministers and central bank chiefs have been tasked with determining ways to accomplish this shift away from the greenback. "There is a global momentum for the use of local currencies, alternative financial arrangements, and alternative payments systems," he said.

This shift can also be viewed in the context of the bloc's wider efforts to mount

including for a greater role for emerging markets and developing countries, including in leadership positions in the Bretton Woods institutions, that reflect the role of EMDCs in the world economy."

BRICS's response to such institutions was to create the New Development Bank (NDB) in 2015, aiming to make development finance more representative of the developing world's needs and less punitive on debt-distressed countries. Including new members in the NDB¹ should help raise its profile and creditworthiness in international lending markets.

Looking forward, BRICS+ can expect further expansion soon, with this year's

GLOBAL AFFAIRS



BRICS expansion and economic performance

BABALWA SISWANA
Programme Coordinator, NIHSS



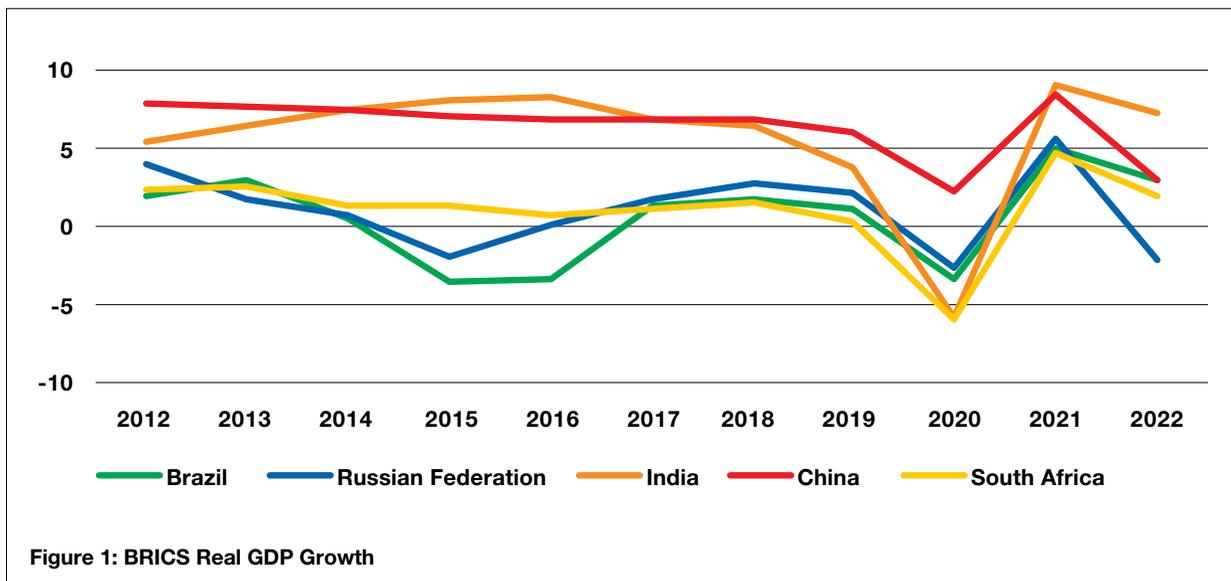
Brazil Russia India China and South Africa (BRICS), a group of emerging market economies, was founded in 2009 and has since been a well-known voice for better representation of the Global South and developing countries in **international affairs**. All BRICS countries focus include economic cooperation and increasing multilateral trade and development. All the BRICS countries are part of the G20

of major economies. The BRICS bloc represents around **40% of the world's population** and more than a quarter of world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Several countries have expressed interest to join the bloc. The BRICS bloc convened for its annual leaders' summit in Johannesburg, South Africa, from 22 to 24 August 2023. The fifteenth summit marked a pivotal moment as the member nations reached a consensus to welcome six new countries: Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). However, Argentina, rescinded the invitation to join the bloc. This expansion, a testament to the bloc's commitment to fostering international cooperation, was formalised in January 2024 when the countries above will officially become members of the BRICS group. This decision underscores the bloc's dedication to inclusivity and the pursuit of shared goals in the global arena. Additionally, the expansion of the bloc also

reflects the steadfast commitment of BRICS nations to unity and development. With the inclusion of the new members, there is a projected increase in the GDP, notably with the addition of three of the world's largest oil producers-Saudi Arabia, the **UAE, and Iran**.

BRICS countries have become important in the global economic dynamic because of their combination of economic power. With its large population, abundant natural resources and rapid economic growth, BRICS has become a major force behind global economic growth and play a role in shaping global policy. During the XV BRICS summit, the BRICS nations declared a notable initiative to promote the utilisation of local currencies in international trade and financial transactions within the BRICS consortium and with their respective **trading partners**. Furthermore, the summit focused on reinforcing the New Development Bank (NDB) and tackling



“The economic performance within the group has exhibited variation.”

pivotal challenges confronting the Global South. These challenges include food security, sovereignty, climate change, the digital divide, and matters related to multilateralism and the World Trade Organization (WTO) reform.

Against this background, the next section will focus on economic performance of the BRICS countries, looking at how this bloc has been performing over the years and examining the real economic performance of the new members as well as the larger BRICS plus population.

Economic performance of BRICS countries

Since 2009, the BRICS bloc has evolved into a significant player in the global economy. The economic performance of the BRICS countries has been uneven despite the bloc’s growth, influenced by factors such as trade dynamics, divergent rates of productivity growth, technological advancements, distinctive economic policy concerns, and shifts in population and demographic trends. The preceding three years have presented worldwide challenges,

notably exacerbated by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Numerous nations continue to grapple with the aftermath of the pandemic. Moreover, the escalation of geopolitical tensions is the contributing factor that may intensify challenges in economic performance. Since 2022, there has been an observable elevation in the consumer price index, exerting adverse effects on economic growth. Many households face financial hardships, particularly as the prices of essential commodities, including food, have surged to unprecedented levels.

The economic performance within the group has exhibited variation. Figure 1, presented above, depicts data from 2012 to 2022. South Africa, Russia, and Brazil experienced fluctuations below 5% throughout this period. Specifically, Brazil encountered a **recession** between 2014 and 2016, precipitated by a confluence of political and economic **uncertainties**. Simultaneously, **Russia underwent a recession** attributable to the decline in oil prices and economic constraints imposed subsequent to the annexation of Crimea.

During the same period, India and China’s economic growth demonstrated resilience until the year 2020. China consistently maintains the pre-eminent position in the economic landscape of the BRICS bloc. Its remarkable expansion has propelled it to become the second-largest economy globally, closely trailing the United States.

Moreover, China’s growth has surpassed that of its fellow BRICS nations. However, in 2022 India surpassed economic growth of all BRICS countries. Among BRICS countries, South Africa currently demonstrates the lowest Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and is characterised by the slowest growth rate. This deceleration in GDP growth can be attributed to a convergence of external and internal factors, with recurrent power outages—mainly the increased frequency of load shedding—playing a significant role in contributing to the enduringly sluggish GDP growth in South Africa.

In 2020, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth across all BRICS countries witnessed a downturn as the world grappled with the COVID-19 pandemic. Notably, during both global financial crisis in 2008 and the subsequent the pandemic in 2020, all BRICS nation experienced a contraction in GDP growth, except for **China**, which achieve a modest increase of 2.2 percent in 2020. COVID-19 led to a global economic crisis and exacerbated unemployment,

poverty, and inequality vulnerabilities. The world continues to recover from the impact of the pandemic, supply chain constraints and subsequent rising inflation.

In 2022, Brazil's GDP growth of 2.9% surpassed the initial predictions, while Russia's GDP experienced a contraction of 2.1% which was attributed to geopolitical tensions and resultant sanctions, significantly impeding GDP dynamics from the **second quarter of 2022 onward**. The primary economic constraint for Russia in 2022 was its exports. India maintained its status as the most resilient economy within the BRICS, achieving a growth rate of **7.2%**. Despite the persistent impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated measures, China managed GDP growth of **3% in 2022**. Meanwhile, South Africa's GDP exhibited a lingering **slow growth trend**.

Despite the challenges BRICS encounter it continues to grow. With the recent inclusion of five additional member countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Ethiopia, Egypt, and United Arab Emirates (UAE), the block is poised for further growth. Figure 2 below shows the real GDP growth of five new countries.

The real GDP growth of Saudi Arabia, Iran, Ethiopia, Egypt, and United Arab Emirates (UAE) is impressive.

“ Notwithstanding the global challenges, encompassing factors such as interest rates, inflation and geopolitical tensions, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, distinguished as two of the world's most affluent nations by GDP per capita, have adeptly sustained economic growth. ”

Notwithstanding the global challenges, encompassing factors such as high interest rates, inflation, and geopolitical tensions, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, distinguished as two of the world's most affluent nations by GDP per capita, have adeptly sustained economic growth through a strategic focus on economic diversification. According to the World Bank 2023, Saudi Arabia's economy demonstrated a notable expansion of **8.7% in 2022**, representing the highest annual growth rate among the top 20 economies

globally. Concurrently, the UAE's economy witnessed substantial growth, **registering a rate of 7.9%**.

Comprising a collective population of 3.5 billion individuals, the BRICS nations command a significant share of global demographics, constituting **45% of the world's population**. Encompassing one-third of the Earth's landmass, these nations collectively contribute to 44% of the total global oil production and account for nearly one-third of the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), amounting to

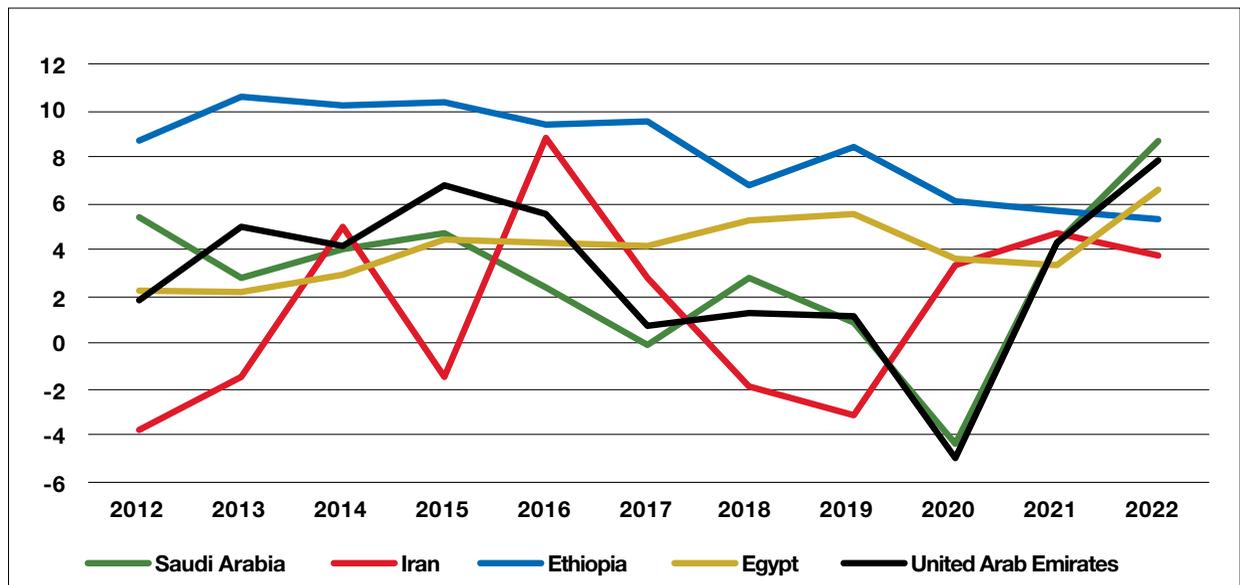
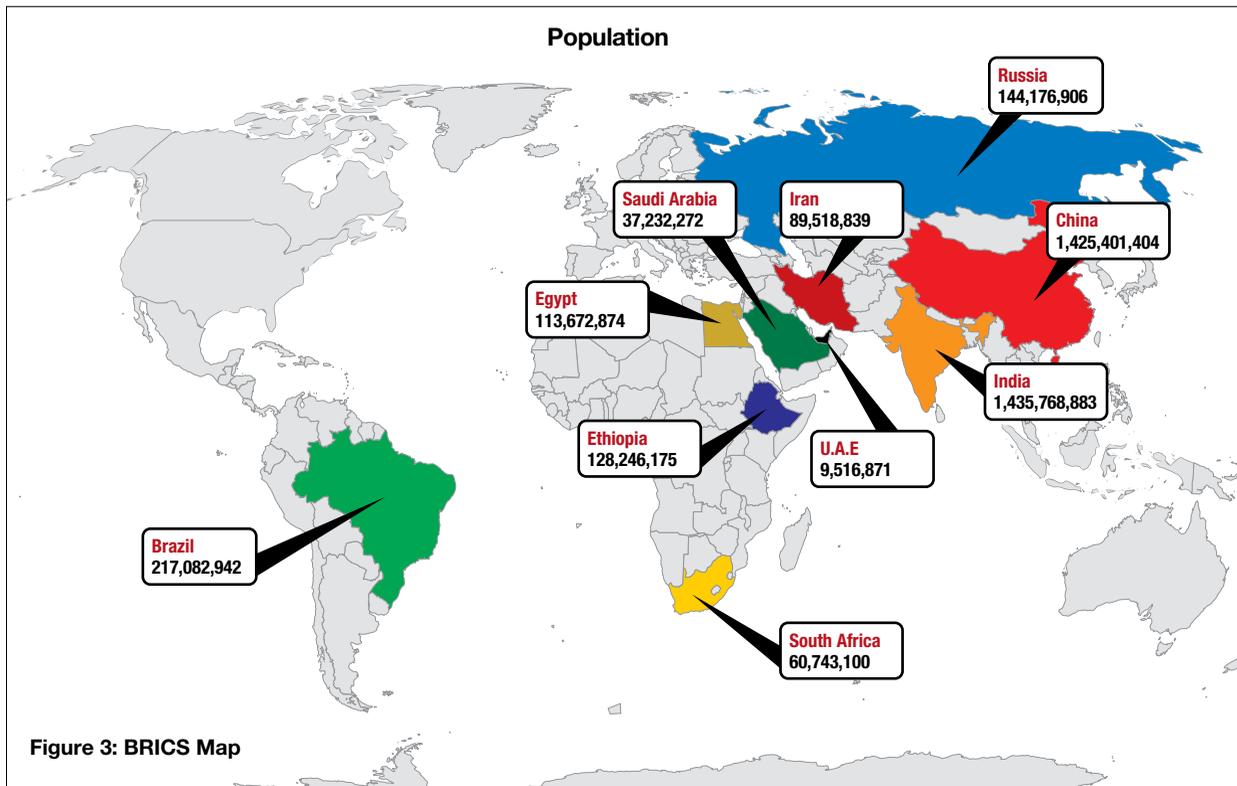


Figure 2: Saudi Arabia, Iran, Ethiopia, Egypt, and UAE's Real GDP growth

Source: World Bank, 2023



approximately **US\$29 trillion**. Notably, in terms of purchasing power, the **BRICS group has surpassed the G7**, representing the seven most influential economies in the developed world.

BRICS is consist of countries from different regions. Figure 3 above shows the population of the BRICS countries including the new five members.

Egypt is situated in northeastern Africa and partially on the Sinai Peninsula, serving as an isthmus to southwestern Asia, thus earning its classification as a transcontinental country. Recognised as a significant power in North Africa, the Mediterranean Sea, the Islamic world, and the Red Sea, Egypt boasts a substantial **population of 113 million**. As a historically rich Arab nation, it holds a prominent cultural heritage and stands as Africa’s most potent military force, maintaining control over the strategically vital Suez Canal. Egypt possesses extensive natural gas reserves, estimated at 2,180 kilometres, with its liquefied natural gas being a key export to various nations.

Ethiopia, located in the **Horn of Africa**

“This expansion is poised to enhance the group’s economic prowess, particularly with the addition of major oil-producing nations such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Iran.”

at the eastern extremity of the continent, is home to a population of **128 million**, making it the second most populous country in Africa after Nigeria. Notwithstanding its status as a developing nation with economic challenges, Ethiopia holds considerable **geostrategic importance in Africa**. Notably, it contributes 41% of its GDP through agricultural production and possesses the largest water resources across the entire continent. Ethiopia is a leading producer of coffee in Africa and the second-largest producer of corn.

Iran, positioned in southwestern Asia, is considered a major Middle Eastern country

with a population of **89.5 million 2022**. Iran is recognised as a regional power and is pivotal in global energy policy and economics, driven by substantial oil and natural gas reserves. In 2022, Iran ranked as the eighth-largest oil-producing country worldwide, producing **3,822,000 barrels per day**. Additionally, Iran boasts formidable armed forces and a significant scientific presence in strategic global locations, including the Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf.

Saudi Arabia, situated on the Arabian Peninsula, **occupies around 80%** of its landmass and is bordered by the Persian

Gulf to the northeast and the Red Sea to the west. With a population of 37.2 million, 30% of whom are non-Saudi citizens, **Saudi Arabia's economy** relies heavily on oil. Approximately **75% of its budget revenues and 90%** of exports are from oil. In 2022, Saudi Arabia ranked second globally in oil production, producing **12,136,000 barrels per day**, and holding 17% of the world's total proven oil reserves.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE), a federal state consisting of seven emirates at the southeastern tip of the Arabian Peninsula, is bordered by the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, with Saudi Arabia and the Sultanate of Oman as neighbouring countries. With a **population of 9.5 million**, the UAE has substantial oil and natural gas deposits. Its residents enjoy a standard of living comparable to that of developed Western countries. In 2022, the UAE ranked as the seventh-largest oil producing country globally, producing **4,020,000 barrels per day**.

The BRICS group, founded in 2009 as a coalition of emerging market economies, has emerged as a significant player in the global economic landscape, championing the cause of increased representation for the Global South in international affairs. Additionally, the group has been instrumental in promoting economic cooperation, fostering multilateral trade, and addressing shared developmental challenges. The recent expansion of BRICS, marked by the inclusion of five new countries— Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates—underscores the bloc's commitment to inclusivity and international cooperation. This expansion is poised to enhance the group's economic prowess, particularly with the addition of major oil-producing nations such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Iran.

Notwithstanding global challenges, including the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and geopolitical tensions, BRICS continues to be a driving force in shaping global economic policies. The XV BRICS summit in Johannesburg emphasised initiatives such as promoting the use of local currencies in international trade, reinforcing the New Development Bank, and addressing critical issues like food security, climate change, the digital



divide, and multilateralism reform. The expansion of BRICS not only signifies a commitment to unity and development but also presents an opportunity for the Global South to assert itself on the world stage.

Examining the economic performance of BRICS countries reveals a dynamic landscape influenced by diverse factors such as trade dynamics, productivity rates, technological advancements, and demographic shifts. Despite challenges, the group has demonstrated resilience, and with the inclusion of new members, there is a projected increase in GDP. The real GDP growth of the five new BRICS members—

Saudi Arabia, Iran, Ethiopia, Egypt, and the UAE—presents an impressive picture. Notably, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, among the world's wealthiest nations per capita, have successfully navigated challenges through economic diversification, sustaining substantial growth rates.

Therefore, BRICS stands at the forefront of global economic dynamics, representing a challenging collective force with diverse strengths and capabilities. As these nations collaborate and navigate challenges, they are poised to play a pivotal role in shaping the future trajectory of the global economy and international relations. **BR**

GLOBAL AFFAIRS

15th BRICS Academic Forum – an African embrace

PROF SARAH MOSOETSA
Chief Executive Officer, HSRC



The voice of South Africa's iconic storyteller, Gcina Mhlophe, rang out in welcome as the introductory film visuals swept over vast and inspiring African landscapes. It was fitting that an African storyteller should ring in this prestigious 15th BRICS Academic Forum event on May 14 to 17, 2023, at Century Conference Centre, City Cape Town. The characteristics of African storytelling that promote understanding and memory recall were evident throughout the BRICS Academic Forum, as each delegate's meaningful gestures echoed the ambitions of the collective, creating a resounding rhythm.

People First

This BRICS Academic Forum of 2023, *BRICS and Africa: Partnership for Mutually Accelerated Growth, Sustainable Development and Inclusive Multilateralism*, formed part of South Africa's year-long BRICS Chairship. The 2023 Forum was a significant event that provided a dialogical space to engage with relevant themes that laid the groundwork for the BRICS Leaders' Summit from 23 to 25 August 2023 and the subsequent 2023 BRICS Summit Declaration.

Aligned with South Africa and the BRICS' emphasis on transparency and openness, the forum provided a public space for scholars and civil society to discuss



global governance issues. This dialogical platform facilitated the hearing of diverse voices and contributed to bridging the gap between the ongoing intellectual conversations on these critical topics and policy solutions. Thereby sustaining a process that the BRICS forged in 2009.

Openness and transparency were not the only principles of South Africa's Batho Pele (People First) policy that were evident

at the 2023 BRICS Academic Forum that dovetailed with a broader BRICS approach. Process echoed priorities, whereby people-to-people exchange principles were integral to the preparation, process, outcomes and outputs of the 2023 BRICS Academic Forum. As the custodian of the South African BRICS Think Tank (SABTT), the National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS) skillfully

ensured that high service standards tapped into the need for inclusivity advocated by South Africa and the BRICS. The host treated delegates from all countries courteously and considered cultural influences on refreshments, information and entertainment provided, ensuring that the interpretation of delegates' insights in diverse languages was available at the click of a button. They also ensured meaningful access to this BRICS platform by including visible representation from Africa, the Global South, women and youth.

An emphasis on such inclusion and diversity was prevalent in the South African and African arts, culture, heritage, and tourism engagement that the 2023 Academic Forum offered to the delegates beyond what was embedded in the daily Forum proceedings. These took place on the evenings of the 14th to 16 May and on the final day excursion of the 17th of May. The vibrant and conscientising activities included a South African afro-jazz band at the opening banquet, a visit to the opening of the NIHSS Humanities Hub of the University of the Western Cape in Woodstock, Cape Town, dining on food and entertainment from all over Africa and excursions to Robben Island and Constantia Wine Estate. The impact of these people-to-people exchanges that play an essential role in BRICS Academic Forums was evident in the closing remarks, which positively commented on the inclusion of the culture beyond intellectual engagement. It was suggested that future BRICS Academic Forums follow South Africa's lead in including such cultural activities.

Beyond people-to-people engagement, the Forum's priorities particularly responded to needs and demands regarding growth, sustainable development, and inclusion of the Global South in the world system. The five priorities that drove the robust conversations in plenary and parallel sessions fell under the broader theme above and were *Developing a partnership towards an equitable—Just Transition, Transforming Education and Skills Development for the Future, Unlocking Opportunities through the African Continental Free Trade Agreement, Strengthening Post-Pandemic Socio-Economic Recovery and the Attainment of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development*;

Strengthening Multilateralism, including Working Toward Real Reform of Global Governance Institutions and Strengthening the Meaningful Participation of Women in Peace Processes.

These priorities of the 2023 Forum, aligned with the BRICS cooperation within an inclusive multilateral approach, responded to the needs and demands of the larger international community while remembering the impact of progressive policy on the local context and individuals. The consideration of local context and individuals was particularly evident in the dialogue on Just Energy Transition, and the South African Minister of Higher Education, Professor BE Nzimande, called for development to have a human face with politics to be set aside.

150 delegates. Delegates who delivered over 35 presentations chaired by senior South African scholars. The meeting of intellectual minds was rooted in BRICS solidarity, while the divergence encouraged the delegates to present innovative and practical ideas that sometimes challenged traditional diplomatic negotiation norms. This was in response to the Forum leaders' call to not be led by politicians but to be proactive and forward-thinking.

The solidarity of purpose reflected an African Ubuntu spirit that mirrored the respect, dignity, and support displayed for each other by the BRICS country leaders in the opening and closing plenary sessions. My own approach, throughout BRICS engagements, has been that of solidarity

“From a bird's eye view, BRICS family huddled together with their branches meeting and diverging, comprising over 150 delegates. Delegates who delivered over 35 presentations chaired by senior South African scholars.”

A cluster of trees

A West African Akan proverb refers to “a cluster of trees that, when seen from afar, appear huddled together, but which would be seen to stand individually when closely approached.” This analogy is appropriate for the 2023 Forum reflecting the larger BRICS. This was not a random huddle of trees but a family. The term ‘family’ was also used to refer to the BRICS, initially by myself in the inaugural address, and then subsequently reiterated by leaders in their closing remarks.

The beginnings of the BRICS Academic Forum sought new ways to address contemporary issues as reflected in the priorities, and the 2023 Forum was no different. From a bird's eye view, the BRICS family huddled together with their branches meeting and diverging, comprising over

and compassion, especially towards Russia's presence at the Forum. The preparations for the 2023 Academic Forum were dogged by speculation in Western media on Russia's attendance and whether the event would even occur in South Africa. Despite this, the success of representing all five BRICS countries, Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa and additional African countries, including Angola, Kenya and Nigeria, served to defy the sceptics.

By providing a nurturing space where delegates and leaders can engage meaningfully, formally, and informally, the BRICS Academic Forums bolster the reciprocity of intellectual thought. This was evident at the 2023 Forum, where reciprocity moved from thought to identifying potential academic exchange, technology support, innovation and

collaboration on actionable solutions.

Actionable policies that would improve lives are precisely what the BRICS Think Tank Council (BTTC) considered at the 2023 BRICS Academic Forums and included in their recommendations to the BRICS leaders. The divergence and agreement evident in a family resonated in the leaders' intense deliberations over the Forum's days. As one of the leaders noted ironically, "Just because we are family does not mean that we always agree". This is where the countries stand as individuals but seek ways to grow together while acknowledging that this does not mean they may not conjoin with other groupings. As Nelson Mandela once emphasised, it is a common mistake for political analysts to assume that "their enemies should be our enemies". During the year, and especially

Innovation. Sixth, Transforming Education, Innovation and Skills Development for the Future. Seventh, Unlocking Opportunities through the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA). Eighth, the New Development Bank and the BRICS financing; and ninth, People-to-people Exchanges.

The recommendations put forth by the BTTC were grounded in the historical context of prior recommendations. They proposed new solutions and aimed to create an instrument to monitor the practical application of previous and current recommendations. The suggestions acknowledged the significant impact of previous BRICS Academic Forums, such as the increased number of projects across the Global South and the institutionalisation of recommendations like the BRICS New Development Bank and the Vaccine

applications to be considered positively but within established membership principles, reinforcing the original goals and intentions of setting the BRICS.

Attention to growth in the BRICS cooperation on research of social relevance while solidifying scholars' conversations and initiating new research projects and exchange programmes resulted in a milestone BTTC recommendation. This recommendation fell under the broader recommendation of *Strengthening Post-Pandemic Socio-Economic Recovery and People-to-People Exchanges* and called for establishing a BRICS Academy of Humanities. Such an Academy would also ensure the dissemination of academic research and knowledge generated at critical BRICS events such as the Academic Forum.

The 2023 BRICS Academic Forum did not solely feed into recommendations for the Leaders' Summit but also led to the development of academic insights that were both nationally and internationally beneficial. The insightful academic presentations in the BRICS Think Tank Symposiums and Dialogues organised by South Africa's BRICS Secretariat. Delegates from the Academic Forum were often invited to participate in these events as panel experts. This created opportunities for branches to be outstretched by the Academic Forum delegates to the broader family of students and civil society representatives in a collaborative pursuit of practical solutions and implementation strategies to address various issues.

Suppose we consider the successful impact of BRICS Academic Forums on informing actionable policies as echoed in Summit Declarations over the past years. This success could be replicated in BRICS Academic Forums in the future, whereby attention was similarly paid to implementation strategies. In this way, research and dialogue would inform BRICS policies and address the need for implementation plans for these policies. They would note meeting points and divergences of unique national, local and individual socio-economic, emphasising cultural and political contexts. In this way, the BRICS Academic Forum would address the African saying, "When deeds speak, words are nothing," and move from ideas to policy to action. **BR**

“The 2023 BRICS Academic Forum did not only solely feed to recommendations for the Leader's Summit but also led to the development of academic insights that were both nationally and internationally beneficial.”

at the 2023 Academic Forum, the BRICS Think Tanks Council (BTTC) was able to address divergences through cooperative, in-depth deliberation and successfully complete its collaborative draft recommendations by the end of the 2023 Forum.

The recommendations focused on nine themes that fed into the nine policy priorities of the BRICS. The recommendation themes were *Strengthening Multilateralism and Reform of Global Governance Institutions*. Second, *Strengthening Peace and Security Processes*. Third, *Strengthening Post-Pandemic Socio-Economic Recovery, the Attainment of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development*. Fourth, *Climate challenges for BRICS Countries*. Fifth, *Developing a partnership towards an Equitable Just Transition and African Agenda on Science, Technology, and*

Research Centre. The latter was an outcome of South Africa's previous chairmanship of the BRICS in 2018.

Old trees and new saplings

A saying by the Indigenous people of the southern Kalahari emphasises the critical role of old trees in nurturing saplings by offering shade and sustenance as they grow at their roots. Growth was a crucial element of the 2023 deliberations, as made evident in the final recommendations made by the BTTC to the BRICS Leaders' Summit 2023. Notable to this growth was support for the physical growth in the number of countries aligned to the BRICS. The BTCC acknowledged that because of the thriving nature of multilateralism, several countries had applied for BRICS membership. The recommendations included encouraging

| Sustainable Development Goals | Economic Linkages |
|---|---|
|  | <p>To improve the conditions of the labor market, quality of life: Human Capital.</p> |
|  | <p>Focus on markets, growth and innovation: Physical Capital.</p> |
|  | <p>Protection, conservation and optimal use of environmental resources: Natural Capital.</p> |
|  | <p>Fair, equitable and strong societies: Social Capital.</p> |

Table 1: SDGs and Capitals

closures, and disrupted trade. At the midpoint of the Agenda 2030 timeline, it is evident that significant strides are required to meet the SDGs by the 2030 deadline. Aligning the SDGs with demographic, labour market, output market, and innovation parameters can enhance market conditions and stimulate business competitiveness across the BRICS economies.

The interplay of specific SDGs underscores their **collective impact** on various facets of development. As highlighted by Table 1, SDGs 1-6 focus on demographic parameters that enhance labour market conditions, while SDGs

7,8 and 9 centres on output markets and innovation. SDGs 12-15 delve into natural capital, while SDGs 10, 11, 16 and 17 concentrate on reducing inequality and minimising social conflicts.

Realignment with the SDGs emerges as a strategic approach for governments to catalyse business and investment within the BRICS framework.

A reciprocal relationship exists between business performance and SDGs. The **private sector** and multilateral entities are increasingly recognised as pivotal forces in the global pursuit of SDGs. Notably, the private sector is moving beyond the

singular objective of short-term profit maximisation, instead prioritising sustainability metrics as a cornerstone of its long-term business strategy.

The systemic design of the SDGs not only provides a comprehensive response to the pandemic but also offers **tangible benefits to businesses**. These advantages encompass the reduction of long-term risks stemming from environmental, political, and social factors, the mitigation of information asymmetry through positive externalities, the enhancement of market resilience through SDG integration into budgets, and the potential for market expansion and job creation via new business solutions aligned with the SDGs.

Secondly, the SDGs provide a holistic approach to business environments, which would be crucial for the BRICS and ‘BRICS plus G’ economies in the longer horizon. Statistical evidence substantiates a robust causal relationship between SDGs and the business environment

“The interplay of specific SDGs underscores their collective impact on various facets of development.”

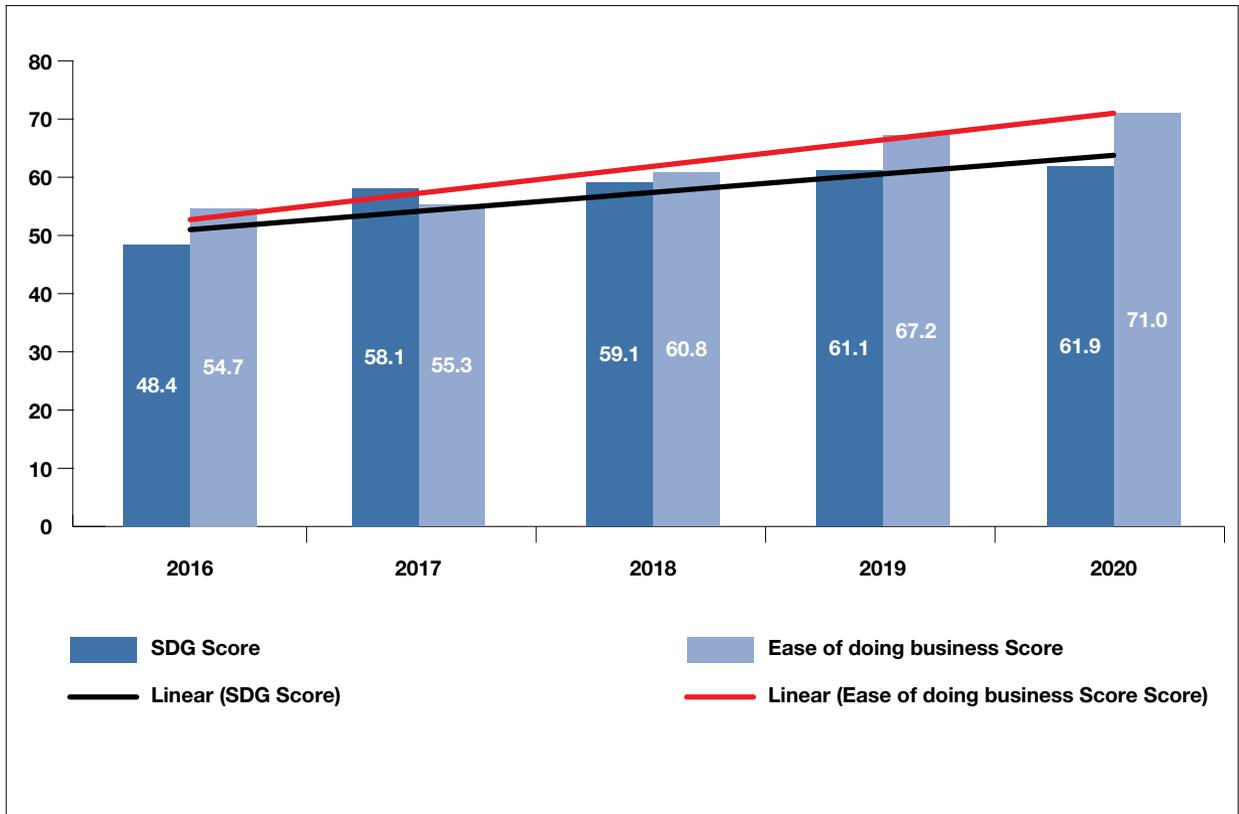


Figure 1: India's SDG and EDB Index Scores (out of 100)

across nations. In fact, this theory holds at the **subnational levels**, too. For example, Figure 1 illustrates a consistent upward trend in India's SDG and Ease-of-Doing Business (EoDB) indices from 2016-2020, offering indicative evidence of the interconnectedness between the two.

Therefore, post-pandemic policy planning must extend beyond traditional forms of capital to encompass natural and social capital. Economic models should realistically portray the limits of substituting humans for natural capital and account for the critical role of ecosystem services and marketing natural resources. This inclusive approach ensures that policy actions consider social, environmental, and economic factors in upholding sustainable development without compromising on the intra-generational and inter-generational equity aspects.

The correlation between sustainable development and the business climate lays the foundation for an objective decision-making instrument. This

“The correlation between sustainable development and the business climate lays the foundation for an objective decision-making instrument.”

approach seeks to reconcile the trinity of equity, efficiency, and sustainability, offering significant policy implications. By advocating for a holistic policymaking approach, especially in developing countries like BRICS, it is critical that a departure from growth-focused policies can mitigate negative social and environmental externalities, fostering resilience against macroeconomic shocks such as those stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic or the impact of the ongoing geopolitical conflicts on the world energy and food markets.

Finally, a country's development policy should be intricately linked to its investment and business promotion strategy. The absence of a robust business case for SDGs within the BRICS framework necessitates renewed political will and global engagement. As we navigate the challenges of the 'decade of action,' scepticism, difficulty in achieving goals, and a widening resource gap, collaborative efforts among BRICS governments and other global players are essential for realising the transformative potential of the 2030 Agenda. **BR**

REFLECTIONS



The 15th BRICS Academic Forum, 2023, closing remarks and reflections

The 15th BRICS Academic Forum, successfully chaired by South Africa, ended on 16 May 2023. The BRICS Think Tanks Council members presented their closing addresses at the plenary session, which was skillfully moderated by Prof Nirmala Gopal, School of Applied Human Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal. Dr Fabio Veras Soares, Director of International Studies at the Institute of Applied Economic Research represented Brazil and Dr Vyacheslav Nikonov, Chairman of the Executive Board at the National Committee on BRICS Research, represented the Russian Federation. Dr Samir Saran, President of the Observer Research Foundation represented

India, while Dr JIN Xin, Director-General of the Research Office, International Department of CPC Central Committee represented China. Prof Sarah, Mosoetsa, interim Chairperson of South African BRICS Think Tank Council presented the final closing remarks. The Council members' remarks included thanks, highlighted challenges, offered solutions and suggestions. They called for "new and better ways", based on research while emphasising opportunities, such as provided by a BRICS Academy, and ended with generous invitations.

Thanks

The BRICS' representatives all heartily thanked and congratulated South Africa, for

hosting the face-to-face Academic Forum, where they could continue with their "journey as a community". Dr Nikonov, from Russia, referred to the host's hospitality as "unbeatable" and stated that the grounds were set for "the most fruitful, interesting discussion". Dr Soares, from Brazil noted that, from a personal perspective, it was the first time that he had attended a BRICS Academic Forum and as such it was special for him as a researcher and in his academic capacity. Dr Soares experienced the Forum as a "learning experience in all senses, both interacting with the Council and also learning from the academics from the other countries and from my own institute that have contributed to all the sessions during this Forum". The representative from China, Dr JIN Xin, highlighted that they observed a gathering of selfless sharing of scholars that went to the original meaning of the BRICS. Dr Saran, from India, singled out Prof Sarah Mosoetsa and her team for their warmth and hospitality and "for allowing us to celebrate our difference, for feeling loved, for feeling comfortable and for feeling at home". Dr Saran agreed with Prof Mosoetsa's statement that the BRICS is a 'family' and that this concept is important. However, he added wryly that it "does not mean that families are not dysfunctional". Dr JIN Xin confirmed that there was not always consensus but that in finalising the recommendations consensus *was* reached through effective negotiations led by Prof Sarah Mosoetsa.

Prof Sarah Mosoetsa in turn thanked all who had contributed to the success of "a collective initiative". Her thanks embraced all, from the chair of the closing session to the relevant government entities and in particular the Minister of the Department of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, Prof Blade Nzimande, whose "keynote address laid the foundation for the success of this conference". Prof Mosoetsa also expressed her gratitude to the friends of the BRICS, in the form of chairs of sessions and delegates present. She expressed her

appreciation to the staff of NIHSS, SABTT and the service providers, with whom she felt it was a privilege and honour to work every day.

The occasion was lightened when Prof Mosoetsa, referring to her fellow Council members, controversially stated that “not all men are chauvinists” but then went on to state that “it has been a privilege and honour to work with all four of you.” Prof Mosoetsa went on to clarify this statement by referring to the “absolute respect” with which the fellow Council members had treated her as she chaired the Council meetings. Further that they had cooperated when she had reigned them in from their “own robust conversations about their own countries” in order to “come back to what we needed to do”.

Challenges and solutions

Dr JIN Xin, referring to the 2023 recommendations, highlighted that the Council’s recommendations do not cover everything but that nevertheless the document will still assist the leaders. Dr Soares reiterated that sometimes the leaders and the Forum did not have consensus but what marked the progress achieved in the three days was that “we have highlighted some of the challenges that we have.” Moreover that they were “at least able to discuss pros and cons of different approaches and different views on the issues that we discuss during the Academic Forum.”

Dr Nikonov stated that a major challenge and shortcoming was that “we are, lagging behind the leaders. They are coming out with ideas, they’re coming out with initiatives, and we oftentimes avoid discussions, even here.” Dr Saran similarly cautioned that “we must not parrot what the leaders already say. We are not their amplifiers.” He stated that the Forum should rather lead based on their own thinking and “that needs to be an innovation we need to introduce now.” Dr Saran proposed further that “we should also discuss the difficult things that are happening within the house.” Towards this he envisaged “having scholars from all of our countries, coming in and airing their thoughts and views and possible solutions, outcomes and directions”. Dr Saran stressed that they are academics and not political leaders, “who should not be making political statements in outcome documents. We should be making research-based statements. We do not want to be the

B team of the political leadership. We want to be the A team of the ideas leadership.”

Research and discussion areas

Dr Saran, echoed Dr Nikanov’s point on “the urgency of research” that was more than headlines but that will rather “rewrite our trajectory designations.” Prof Mosoetsa summarised the main areas on which the “BRICS family, as academics, as scholars” need to focus. These include pressing matters such as technologies and “human centered artificial intelligence.” Currencies and “the big question around currencies and the dollar, and our own currencies in relation to all of those currencies.” Prof Mosoetsa proposed

in a manner that was different to how it was previously done, so too “should we now be looking ahead to the 21st century and writing norms, rules and indeed principles that will define domains that have not yet been governed, where no incumbent has any significant power of position.” This will allow the BRICS community “to become the front runners and actually be the harbingers of the frameworks and of the governance models that will define the 21st century”. Dr Saran continued that the models built should be exemplars of the reforms to which the BRICS aspires in that they are inclusive, plural and democratic, recognise culture and civilization sovereignty and indeed celebrate diversity.”

“ Dr Saran stressed that they are academics and not political leaders, “who should not be making political statements in outcome documents. We should be making research based-statements” ”

that “we also need to talk about our expansion and possibilities of expansion and the criteria.” Lastly Prof Mosoetsa stressed the need “to talk about how we measure our own progress in relation to our SDGs.” Dr Nikonov added a need for discussion on conflict resolution, sanctions and common values.

Technology

Dr Saran confirmed that all the BRICS community engaged technology in their industries: “Our world is digital, our governance will be digital, our rules will have to manage this new digital age.” Further, Dr Saran referred to specific critical technologies such as Artificial Intelligence in the form of systems such as ChatGPT and AI language model that are “moving at a rapid pace.” He called for the BRICS’ community to work on this cutting edge and to aid policy makers who “do not have time to necessarily get their teeth into the problem and come up with frameworks that would keep society safe”. Dr Saran stated that even as they looked back to correct what was wrong in the 20th Century,

Dr Saran emphasised the latter “as we build the new templates for our digital futures and technology”. Dr JIN Xin confirmed that there is a need for the coordination of industrial policy but also for sources of Green Fund.

Common currency

Dr Nikonov raised the question, “What is hard currency?” This was in line with his discussion the previous day on language, and the manipulation thereof by the west. He elaborated that the term, ‘hard currency’, is very difficult to use presently in Russia considering that if you have a Master card or Visa card you cannot use it in their country. Dr Nikonov stated that “what we have now is a confrontation between the real economies, which we represented, and the economy of financial bubbles, which is the Western economy”. Dr Nikonov highlighted the irony of the Western economy referring to “the freedom of market economy and private property,” which he considers “fake, because they can freeze whatever, and take out whatever, money” as they decide, merely

because someone is “Chinese or Russian or Indian or South African”.

Dr Saran called for academic action as he highlighted that it is not enough to only say “that the dollar system is not good enough... we know about it”. He reiterated that the weaponisation of the dollar “has happened in front of our eyes multiple times, on multiple occasions”. He elaborated on the weaponisation of currency, “the SWIFT system has been weaponised, sanctions have been used as weapons of conflict and contest.” He motivated that “as an academic community, we need to find the better way, the better path, its implications, its costs, its benefits. And have we done it in the last one year? We must do it in the next.”

Expansion and multi-lateralism

Dr Nikonov noted that “around 20 countries are now knocking at BRICS’ door. They are sovereign, big, important countries.” He posed questions on whether the present BRICS’ leaders should ignore these countries or discuss criteria “for potential membership or formats for BRICS+?” Dr Saran agreed that the BRICS should agree upon the who was to be chosen and who kept out and the ‘how’ of expansion in regard to “format, arrangement, criteria”. He also noted that the ‘why’ should be addressed regarding “the purpose of expansion”. Dr Saran brought it back to the need for research as he noted that “saying that we will become BRICS+ is not good enough, that is a leadership statement. A researcher needs to do more.”

Extending the discussion on the ‘how’ of expansion Dr Nikonov introduced the Russian term “integration or integrations”. He suggested that “there are many forms of cooperation which are thinkable and which we avoid discussing.” Dr Nikonov highlighted how each country present “is the centre of some integrative group” whether in Latin America or of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement, the Eurasian Economic Union or the many international groupings of which China is in the centre. Dr Nikonov emphasised how “promoting dialogue between those groups” holds the potential to enhance the importance and reach of the BRICS. Dr Nikonov proposed that the creation of a report on this would be of worth.

Further areas of international relations and the BRICS’ research and discussion

that Dr Nikonov introduced were conflict resolution and sanctions. Dr Nikonov inquired why conflict resolution was not a BRICS discussion point. Particularly in the light of South Africa’s President Ramaphosa’s discussions with Russian and Ukrainian leaders and the “peace proposals on behalf of a group of African countries”. In regard to sanctions Dr Nikonov stated that there are sanctions imposed by the United Nations Security Council and that “there are lots of illegal sanctions.” In light of this Dr Nikonov posed the question, “should the BRICS ignore that or react somehow?”

Dr Saran built on Dr Nikonov’s allusion to “the benefits that we can as individual nations offer to the partners that engage with the group as a whole.” Dr Saran expounded that “all of us are in some ways a pole in the multipolar world. The 21st century will not have a neat single multilateral system underwritten by one or two superpowers. It will have a confluence of multilateral systems that would be engaging with each other based on the relationship of these multiple poles.” Dr Saran proposed that all the BRICS’ countries will need to serve as “bridges in some sense, removing the distance and difference in critical domains by reaching across these particular networks”. He emphasised that each country within the BRICS would all have a “bridging function” and that importantly they would need to understand “that there is going to be no homogeneous group that will be able to manage a diverse world such as ours.” Considering this, Dr Saran cautioned that BRICS’ countries “engagement with others is not a burden on the group. We have to stop treating our partnership with others as a problem for the richness of this group.” Dr Saran rather envisaged that engagement within a multilateral world through “multidimensional relationships” will create a two-way enrichment for the BRICS and for the other groups.

People-to-people and the BRICS’ values

Dr Saran when concluding his discussion on multidimensional relations emphasised that “the BRICS is not a cult” but rather that “the BRICS is ground zero for us to go and engage with others and take the message of pluralism, of diversity, of celebrating difference. And this time around

last night we celebrated exactly that.” The celebration to which Dr Saran was referring was also hailed as a success in people-to-people engagement by Dr JIN Xin. He referred to these “colourful activities” of the Forum as including historical heritage performances that stimulated curiosity and assisted in the realisation of the diversity of South African culture and resulted in a mutual respect of innovation.

Dr Nikonov applauded the performance of “refinement of art and music” and “traditional Indigenous culture” in which the Forum had participated the previous evening. He noted that it had resonated with not just “the soul of the people” but also with “the spirit of the nation and with the spirit of the BRICS.” This nudged Dr Nikonov to consider “how little we know about the cultures of each other.” Dr Nikonov shared that he had found very few books from the BRICS’ countries in a South African bookstore and how this was probably a pattern within other BRICS’ countries too. This highlighted for Dr Nikonov “the need for more research on each other.”

Dr Nikonov referred to the BRICS’ capability of promoting “BRICS values” as an alternative to the “fake” Western values, which are not “universal”. The BRICS values, proposed Dr Nikonov, are “the values of absolute majority of humankind. And this is equal rights of the people around the world, multi-polar world and equal rights of the nations. Democracy as the opportunity to build the world in accordance with the will of your own people and not the American State Department or the CIA.” Dr Nikonov expanded on the BRICS values as “non-interference in domestic affairs of each other. Freedom as independence from the external diktat. Justice as truth. Dignity and honour. Respect to yourself and your partners. Respect for tradition, cultural and civilisational multiplicity of the world. Seeking for consensus and trying to find decisions at the negotiation table.”

The BRICS Academy

All the Council members agreed that a more systematic way of research was needed going forward. Dr Soares confirmed that the Council members “had agreed, finally, to ask our leaders during the summit to approve the idea put forward by the South African president of this Council to have

a more systematic way for this academic interaction and learning process.” Dr Nikonov reiterated that this South African proposal was not only a “great idea” but that it “should be supported”. Dr Saran confirmed that the South African initiative is something that “all of us wholeheartedly support, endorse and want to take forward”. Dr JIN Xin too voiced his support for the idea of a BRICS Academy and emphasised that it was much needed. Dr JIN Xin suggested that such an Academy should be based in South Africa but that it should belong to the BRICS family.

Dr Soares stated that the Academy proposal included working together regularly and their own creation of a memory bank. He noted the latter as “it is a little bit embarrassing, that we find many things about the BRICS actually in university in other countries, summarising

into conversations with which we want to engage.” Dr Saran was emphatic that the BRICS community should be leading research topics rather than parroting newspaper headlines and magazine articles such as on BRICS Plus and a BRICS currency: “Where are our research papers? Where are the scholars from our countries who have put together the pros and cons, the merits and the implications of doing any of these? Unless we invest in research that is indigenous to the group, we are only parroting someone else’s market-based mantra. We need to invest more in research, research within this family, research that comes out of this family.”

Dr Mosoetsa expressed that she was “humbled at how some of the recommendations, especially around the BRICS Virtual Academy, have been not only received by my friends but also by

countries, general visits to each other’s countries, and to specific BRICS’ related events. Dr JIN Xin invited all the countries to visit China whereas Dr Samir Saran projected that the many points raised by Dr Nikonov “should result in a flurry of papers being produced by the BRICS community.” Towards this Dr Saran offered, on behalf of his Foundation, that “any of you who want to write, I’m very happy to commission papers, to give you incentives to write.”

Dr Vyacheslav Nikonov extended an invitation to “everyone present here to come to Russia next year—because next year is the year of the Russian presidency. We know the place where the summit will take place, it is Kazan. The capital of Tataristan, a beautiful city on the Volga.” He emphasised that Russia would host the event at various places as they wanted to show “the greatness of Russia and to make people acquainted with many parts in my country.” In generous, good humour, Dr Nikonov stated that Russia “will try, of course, to beat the unbeatable hospitality of South Africa, which I think will be very, very hard to do. But we will welcome all of you, all our BRICS’ friends, to Russia in the year 2024. See you in Russia.”

In closing

Prof Mosoetsa closed with uplifting insights into the unity that was displayed by the BRICS. She referred specifically to the crisis that had been “very difficult for Russia”. However, Prof Mosoetsa pointed to how out of that crisis “something very powerful” had emerged in that now everyone knows about the BRICS. Importantly, the crisis also resulted in “all of us coming together and saying we are coming to South Africa and we will have difficult conversations but we are coming collectively as the BRICS. And indeed, as China has mentioned, we did not fall apart. We stood together.”

Prof Sarah Mosoetsa wished all present a safe journey back to their homes. She however reminded everyone that the South African presidency did not end on the last day of the Academic Forum but would end in December 2023. Therefore, Prof Mosoetsa urged, “the dialogues, the conversations and the research should continue as we hand over to Russia. I note we are coming to Russia in 2024. I will certainly be there and I wish you well.” **BR**

“The creation of BRICS Academy Dr Soares foresees as an opportunity for the Academic Forum’s official following, of academics and institutes, to ensure that their conversations and debates, not only occur on key dates but rather “a continuous process and a continuous learning process”

our documents and our discussions.” The creation of the BRICS Academy Dr Soares foresees as an opportunity for the Academic Forum’s official following, of academics and institutes, to ensure that their conversations and debates, not only occur on key dates but rather are “a continuous process and a continuous learning process.” This interaction would develop the research in terms of reference, concept notes and methodology that resulted in conclusions submitted “as recommendations to our governments”.

Dr Saran agreed that the BRICS Academy “gives us a chance to put teeth

my colleagues here”. Dr Mosoetsa urged that in line with the creation of the BRICS Academy that research papers should be commissioned with immediate effect and that “South Africa will be happy to lead with all your support.” Further, Dr Mosoetsa urged that “we can also have a follow-up symposium on all those four thematic that we think are urgent.” Dr Mosoetsa offered to lead on this with the Forum’s support.

Invitations

The closing remarks of the Council members were marked by warm invitations for sustained interaction between the BRICS’

REFLECTIONS



Outcomes of the August 2023 BRICS Business Council (BBC) Summit

The five chapters of the BRICS Business Council (BBC) officially handed over the 2023 Annual Report to the BRICS Heads of State, with recommendations from the nine sectoral-facing working groups through which it executes its mandate.

The handover was preceded by a successfully executed business programme of events which started off with the Africa Caucus on 18 August 2023, hosted by the South Africa Chapter of the BRICS Business Council (SABBC). This series of mostly sectoral-facing engagements culminated to the BRICS Business Forum held on the 22 August at the Sandton Convention Centre, which saw 1200 business and government leaders from Brazil, Russia, India, China and Africa gather at the Sandton Convention Centre.

Under the theme, *Making Accelerated Growth and Sustainable Development a Reality*, the BRICS Business Forum was a curated programme of thematic discussion areas anchored on the strategic focal areas of the BRICS 2023 business Chairship posture, which included the unlocking of BRICS trade and investment opportunities in BRICS markets, just energy transition and greening of the economy in emerging markets, market access for small to medium businesses and the promotion of the Africa



Continental Free Trade Area as a tool to develop Africa. The session also honed in on the promotion of Agriculture across BRICS markets and sustainable development in agriculture across BRICS Nations.

At the official handover of the BRICS Business Council 2023 Annual Report to the Heads of State of BRICS, the global Chairperson of the BBC Busi Mabuza, highlighted the priorities that the council focused on, which included:

- *Developing a partnership towards an equitable just transition*, a key outcome of this commitment is the establishment of the BRICS Centre of Excellence in Africa, a platform that will evolve into a BRICS Energy Agency to drive increased collaboration, enhanced research and innovation in energy; provide skills development and capacity building; energy trends; collaborate with international organizations; data and statistics repository and be the leader policy formulation centre for the BRICS energy community and beyond.
- *Transforming education and skills development for the future*, which focuses on intensifying programmes of

knowledge, skills exchange, and work within the BRICS partners. Through this programme of work, the council has identified more education and empowerment driven opportunities to unlock the potential that resides in our developing nations.

- *Unlocking the opportunities in the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)*, remains a key pillar in the council's trade and investment posture. This historic trade agreement envisages a single market encompassing the entire African continent, facilitating trade and investment on an unprecedented scale. With a projected GDP growth approaching \$4 trillion and 1.3 billion people, the SABBC, is committed to catalyzing the advancement of trade relations between BRIC and Africa.

In a joint statement by the five partner chapters, the BBC has collectively pledged to drive trade and investment promotion, across all sectors, to contribute towards the fair-trade balance, and inclusive trade practices, while encouraging investment flows that benefit all our economies.

Consensus was reached in a hallmark agreement in the form of a signed Intra

Working Group MOU. The agreement serves as a critical instrument for enhancing coordination and cooperation within the council. The Intra Working Group MOU will facilitate better collaboration among the nine working groups, ensuring efficient communication and exchange of ideas.

Of notable importance in the annual report are the various recommendations from the nine working groups. The SABBC acknowledged the collaborative efforts put forth by all partner chapters in finalising these recommendations, an achievement which underpins the unity and shared aspirations of the BRICS nations.

The official BRICS Business programme concluded as President Ramaphosa prepared to host the BRIC Heads of State for the XV BRICS business Summit on August 24th, at the Sandton Convention Centre, under the theme: BRICS and Africa: Partnership for Mutually Accelerated Growth,

to bring more benefits for sustainable and inclusive economic development in the bloc and promote industrialisation on the African Continent,” said Mabuza.

The next ten years of the BRICS Business Council’s posture will anchor on the advancement of economic partnerships, mutual prosperity among BRICS countries, and building a BRICS Business Council that not only serves the interests of our member nations but also acts as a catalyst to drive an upward economic change across the world.

BRICS expansion

On January 1, 2024, BRICS officially welcomed five (5) new members. The SABBC is excited about the opportunities to expand the market presence and seek investment opportunities in Ethiopia, Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates for SA businesses. These countries are emerging economies with a growing middle class and a substantial

line with Africa’s Advancement Agenda 2063, where businesses must align their operations with sustainable development goals, (i.e., promotion renewable energy, reduce gas emission, and drive environmentally friendly practices) to promote a sustainable and resilient business environment with these new member countries.

- Develop business matchmaking services in each region for South African companies to bring together their counterparts. This requires a strong partnership between government and the private sector.

The expanded BRICS has an opportunity to shape the future of global trade, investment, and sustainable development. This can be achieved through capitalizing on our respective strengths, fostering innovation, promoting inclusivity, and supporting initiatives such as *AfCFTA*. The expanded BRICS should collaborate with African nations to facilitate the successful implementation of the *AfCFTA* and recognize its potential to bolster Africa’s global economic participation whilst also offering a significant value proposition to other markets. The expanded BRICS countries can create a more prosperous, equitable, and interconnected world.

Forward looking

The SABBC is on record that the next decade (2023-2033), must personify pragmatism in trade and investment. This approach entails taking concrete actions, adopting effective strategies, leveraging the collective strengths and areas of complementarity of the “expanded BRICS” countries to address the evolving challenges and capitalize on emerging opportunities.

In assuming a pragmatic approach, the “expanded BRICS” can continue to deliver tangible results, bolster economic resilience, and create an environment conducive to sustainable growth. By promoting intra-expanded BRICS trade, enhancing market access, and facilitating the exchange of goods, services, and technologies, the expanded BRICS countries are creating a more balanced and diversified trade environment that benefits all participants. Such endeavors not only strengthen regional economic integration but also contribute to global trade stability. **BR**

“The SABBC is on record that the next decade (2023-2033), must personify pragmatism in trade and investment.”

Sustainable Development and Inclusive Multilateralism.

Speaking at the handover of the annual report, Mabuza cited, “*we have witnessed an upward trajectory in growth in trade volumes and investments among BRICS countries*”. However, we also recognize the challenges posed by tariff barriers, non-tariff measures, and regulatory complexities which hinder the full potential of our trade and investment capabilities.”

2023 marked ten years of the BRICS Business Council, Mabuza also gave a glimpse of next ten-year proposition, “we agree that looking ahead, the opportunity for intra-BRICS and BRIC-Africa investment remains promising. However, more effort is required to make investment a key driver of economic cooperation among the BRICS and BRIC-Africa, and

consumer market, expanding into these markets will lead to growth opportunities for South Africa. Some of the immediate benefits for South Africa include:

- Improve the trade patterns across new BRICS members through enhanced bilateral investment agreements, balancing of trade and exploring the value chain opportunities in line (*AfCFTA*)
- The construction of resilient infrastructure and sustainable industrialization as one of the key objectives of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, thus SA’s infrastructure deficit can be tackled by tapping into the BRICS new members, nurturing partnerships that yield programs with both a public appeal and commercial value. This also in



About SABYA

South African BRICS Youth Association (SABYA) is a non-profit organisation founded in 2018 and registered with the Department of Social Development in South Africa (205-671 NPO), with the vision to be the leading *voice of Youth* within BRICS+ and Advocate for their rights and interests in the decision making processes. Its mission is to provide youth with the opportunity to meaningfully participate in BRICS+ relations from a Global South perspective and strengthen linkages, institutional cooperation and people-to- people exchanges within the BRICS+ and multilateral platforms.

SABYA aims to enhance understanding and cooperation among young people

from South Africa, Global South and other BRICS+ countries through various initiatives, including conferences, seminars, workshops, skills programmes, and cultural exchanges. The organization strives to create a platform where young people can network, share ideas, and work together on projects that contribute to the development and prosperity of their respective nations. SABYA plays a significant role in advocating for youth empowerment, education, entrepreneurship, innovation, and sustainable development. It seeks to empower young people to actively participate in decision-making processes that shape policies and programmes within the BRICS+ framework. By fostering collaboration and dialogue, SABYA seeks to leverage the collective potential of BRICS+ youth to address global challenges and contribute to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

2023 Highlights

- **BRICS Youth Innovation Summit:** This electrifying event brought together young innovators from across the BRICS nations. We are thrilled that 12 participants received scholarships for mentorship

and incubation at the Tshwane University of Technology's Centre for Entrepreneurship Development, while 5 earned scholarships to attend the prestigious St. Petersburg International Economic Forum through our partners, Friends for Leadership. The summit was further graced by a keynote address from the Honourable Minister of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, her unwavering support a true inspiration.

- **2nd Africa-BRICS Youth Forum:** This groundbreaking forum saw over 20 African countries join forces with their BRICS counterparts, fostering dialogue and collaboration on critical issues. We were honored to receive keynote addresses from the Honourable Minister of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, the Deputy Minister in the Presidency responsible for Monitoring and Evaluation, and the Deputy Minister of International Relations and Cooperation. The forum pulsed with energy and produced tangible solutions and programs, solidifying the power of youth-led initiatives.
- **2nd BRICS Summer School South Africa:** This intensive program equipped young leaders with the

knowledge and skills to navigate the intricacies of the BRICS landscape. We were privileged to have the Deputy Minister of International Relations and Cooperation deliver a thought-provoking keynote address, setting the stage for an enriching learning experience.

- Civil BRICS Summit 2023:** SABYA played a crucial role in the planning and execution of Civil BRICS Summit 2023 as the co-secretariat alongside Economic Justice Network. The Civil BRICS Declaration, which was convened in Johannesburg from August 1 to August 3, 2023, underscores the pivotal role of Civil BRICS, Track 3, in complementing the formalized tracks of BRICS engagements. The document articulates policy recommendations generated by South African Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and BRICS partners across thematic areas, including Education, Just Energy Transition, Multilateralism, Peace, Security, Women, and Trade. Recommendations encompass the standardization of Track 3 governance structures, strengthening multilateralism, supporting the African Continental Free Trade Agreement, enhancing women's participation in peace processes, transforming education, and promoting an equitable just transition. It emphasizes the need for inclusive, sustainable development, gender equality, and the integration of civil society perspectives into BRICS policy formulation. The Declaration calls for collaborative efforts toward a world characterized by inclusivity, prosperity, and sustainability. This summit was supported by NIHSS/South African BRICS Think Tank, further enhancing its impact and relevance.
- Bilateral Forums:** Throughout the year, we fostered meaningful connections through bilateral forums with all BRICS member countries. These platforms were instrumental in generating concrete solutions and programs, tailored to the specific needs of each nation. 2023 we hosted three bilateral forums with Brazil, Russia and India, while China will be hosted in February 2024.



“ SABYA seeks to leverage the collective potential of BRICS+ youth to address global challenges and contribute to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. ”

As we look towards the horizon, we are brimming with excitement to announce the launch of some groundbreaking initiatives in 2024:

- BRICS+ Cultural Festival:** A celebration of diversity through the showcasing of the rich and vibrant cultures of BRICS+ nations, fostering unity and appreciation among the youth.
- BRICS+ Skills Programme:** A comprehensive initiative aimed offering a combination of online and residency programme designed to equip participants with a deep understanding of BRICS+ in all its three pillars - economic, political, and cultural cooperation.
- BRICS+ Fellowship:** This initiative, born from the South Africa-Russia Bilateral Youth Forum 2023, will provide exceptional young leaders with a platform to exchange knowledge, ideas, and best practices, fostering a network of future BRICS changemakers.

- Research and M&E Focus:** SABYA recognizes the importance of research as a catalyst for informed decision-making and impactful change. The revised strategy include a Research Agenda that aims to delve into critical topics that align with BRICS+ interests, focusing on both regional and global perspectives. Areas such as BRICS expansion, Alternative financial systems, the reform of global institutions and BRICS payment mechanisms and trades will be our focus. An M+E framework for BRICS declaration and reports for various all three pillars is part of our research agenda.

These three new programmes are an addition to the already existing programmes SABYA hosted in 2023. In 2024 SABYA will increase its programmes from 7 - 15, with addition to the BRICS+ seminars. Making it over 25 activities for 2024. **BR**



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PROFILE



A resilient and relevant academic and research agenda for BRICS and the developing world

THE OPENING ADDRESS OF THE 15TH BRICS ACADEMIC FORUM OPENING CEREMONY, SUNDAY, 14 MAY 2023 BY PROF BE NZIMANDE, MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND INNOVATION



At the 15th BRICS Academic Forum we converge, once more, to confirm who we are and the diverse cultures and civilizations that we embrace. The BRICS represents a group of countries brought together by a commitment to develop a more inclusive, equitable and just global system. This cannot be done unless we pay particular attention to developing countries and their needs.

The 15th BRICS academic forum provides us, as the BRICS, with another opportunity to strengthen our relations, and reaffirm our values, in an ever—unfortunately—polarising global order. For South Africa, the BRICS remains an important strategic platform to

advance our values, national interests, and to promote Africa's development agenda. The BRICS presents us with a vehicle to pursue our collective interest as an alternative voice on international affairs and to foreground multilateralism, peace and exclusive, equitable global development.

Drawing from the theme of South Africa's 2023 BRICS' Chairship, which is *BRICS and Africa: Partnership for mutually accelerated growth, sustainable development and inclusive multilateralism*, this academic forum is well placed to provide policy insights and informed analysis. This, particularly on how we could navigate some of the key challenges that continue to

confront us nationally, regionally and indeed on a global scale.

BRICS and key issues

There are some key issues confronting the world today in which the BRICS needs to play its role and make its presence felt. However, I wish to briefly highlight just four of these.

The first is the issue of climate change and its impact on Mother Earth and the danger it poses to the very survival of human civilization. We have one and only one planet, we have no alternative and we have a duty to protect it. The key issue is how to arrest further global warming and come up with mitigation strategies to protect the Earth, and all species, including the human species itself. This requires, amongst other things, a critical engagement and appraisal of the mode of production and reproduction of human life and how this is harmonised with the world we live in.

The second major issue that I would like to highlight is that of promoting and fostering multilateralism and opposing all forms of unilateralism. Multilateralism must act as a foundation for the peaceful development and coexistence of all humanity. In fact, multilateralism is a foundation needed to drive and realise the sustainable development goals of the United Nations. This is imperative, as unilateralism is likely to undermine all equitable development in the world.

The third issue is that of the necessity to bring about peace in the world as a precondition for equitable economic development. The African Union has adopted a very important resolution to silence the guns in the African continent so that we can have a peaceful continent capable of realising its objectives of human development. Why can this commitment not become a global commitment to silence the guns in the entire world so that we can focus on the achievement of human goals of egalitarianism and mutually beneficial development.

The fourth key global issue facing the world today is that of which I have hinted already, namely, equitable development in order to overcome uneven development in the world. These are four of the challenges in which the BRICS countries can make

a decisive contribution. Therefore, these matters must become some of the key focus areas for our academics and think tanks in the BRICS.

Developing policy capacity and research areas

In order to realise these goals of peace, inclusive development, multilateralism, and mitigation against climate change, we need to develop supportive policy capacity. Without development of policy capacity to support these goals we are not going to succeed, especially regarding policy capacity in the African continent. For instance, the BRICS' focus on Africa requires that we develop policy capacity in the African continent to support an African research and development agenda to strengthen economic and social development in our continent. It is not by mistake that South Africa decided that the theme for our chairship of the BRICS, in 2023, should be BRICS and Africa.

Informed by our previous engagements and resolutions as the BRICS, South Africa has presented the following five themes for discussion and consideration in 2023:

- First, an equitable and just energy transition. However, we cannot have a just energy transition if we also do not have just partnerships globally.
- Second, transformation of education and skills development and the future of education in the light of technological developments.
- Third, trade opportunities through the African continental free trade area.
- Fourth, post-COVID-19 social economic recovery
- Fifth, the strengthening of multilateralism.

The themes of sustainable and peaceful development, and inclusive growth, underpin all these topical areas that South Africa has placed as priorities for BRICS 2023.

Therefore, the key and immediate task of our academic forum is that of pursuing research in all of the above key areas. Such that, even beyond South African chairship, these issues remain areas of priority not just for the BRICS and Africa but for the developing world as a whole—with a decisive global impact as well. This will also require an extensive audit, for example, on

research that is being conducted amongst BRICS' countries under the themes that I have outlined above. The audit should also focus on identifying our current academic and research capacity, or that which we need to develop in order to be able to deal with these areas.

The BRICS' nations individually and collectively are an integral part of the global community and important role players in their respective regions with massive economic and political influence. As such the BRICS has a critical role to play in the realisation of the United Nations sustainable development goals and I must repeat and emphasise this. I was in New York two weeks ago to look at the role of science technology and innovation in the realisation of the sustainable development goals. It is very clear that the primary condition for the realisation of the United Nations sustainable development goals is peace. You cannot have sustainable development in the context of wars and destabilisation.

Global developmental trajectory

The BRICS is committed to multilateralism and to equitable development. As the voice of the developing nations, in particular of the global South, the role of the BRICS in the global sustainable development agenda, is to ensure a global development trajectory with a human face. As academic fora, and as think tanks, please give more content to this—a developmental trajectory with a human face.

BRICS' nations must ensure that as the world advances on the technological and innovation fronts that no country, however small, is left behind. This means, the active embracement of new technologies such as artificial intelligence and how this can be used to advance the agenda of peace, multilateralism, and equitable and inclusive global development. As a psychologist, I am watching this area of artificial intelligence very closely, because I would not like to see a future where artificial intelligence surpasses human intelligence. Then we would be in trouble. There are some scholars and researchers who argue that artificial intelligence may as well be the last human invention because thereafter it is likely to take over. My wish is that we do not reach that point. We must have technology that is serving the interest of humanity and

humanity must be at the centre and be in charge. Those are some of the issues that we need to be debating and discussing in platforms such as these.

Global inequalities

Human progress and development must be inclusive. It must not only favour the developed world over the underdeveloped world nor foster accumulation within countries, by the already wealthy, at the expense of the impoverished majorities. The technological and digital breakthroughs must benefit all nations of the world. As academics and think tankers you have to assist us in how we achieve this. The recent COVID-19 pandemic has shown that despite how inextricably intertwined our future and humanity are, global inequalities still persist. To the extent that the wealthy amongst us are able to cushion the impact of these global crises while the poor, and less well-off nations, remain more vulnerable

financial agenda, call for the emergence of a more diversified financial system, which benefits, and makes use of, more than one set of financial instruments.

Importantly, we need to reflect on the agreement between China and Brazil and for the BRICS' countries to say that we are now going to trade using our own currencies. Russia is already facing that situation. With the sanctions that are imposed on Russia, there is no choice, but to begin to seriously look at an alternative financial system globally. That is the contradiction of unilateralism because it then starts generating alternative and potentially better ideas.

How do we make those alternative ideas—the best ideas? That is what we expect from you as our academics and think tanks.

African Illicit flow of funds and exploitation

Related to this matter is the illicit flow of finances and funds from the African continent to developed countries. A flow that

not realise its full potential.

Producers and innovators

What I have highlighted above are some of the critical areas, amongst others, that require close attention from our academics and research institutions. All this should be part of the development of a resilient and relevant academic and research agenda for the BRICS and the developing world. The BRICS as a formation closely linked to the global South agenda must reject this unequal world and unashamedly call, and struggle, for a more just and inclusive world where equality remains the guiding principle of human development and interaction. This places a special responsibility on us as BRICS' nations. As we advance these noble ideas on a global front we must simultaneously develop national policies that are configured to address poverty, inequality, and high levels of unemployment within our own countries. This must be underpinned by a relevant and appropriate research agenda.

Whilst we should have a dialogue and interact with, and learn from, research agendas of the developed world we must not simply, and unproblematically, and uncritically, adopt and reproduce these paradigms. We should develop our own paradigms and we must not just be consumers and recyclers of knowledge but we ourselves, as the developing world, must be producers and innovators as well.

Sound and progressive education policies could play a central role in helping us to overcome some of these difficult challenges. When people receive quality education they are able to break from the cycle of poverty perpetuated by structural socio-economic inequalities. Through platforms, such as the academic forum, where honest and robust reflections on the merits and demerits of our policies are promoted, I am confident that we will be able to formulate policy proposals and recommendations that advance our development agenda. °°

The BRICS is an important voice of the developing nations and we cannot afford to falter. We have the commitment; we have the insights and we've showed our resolve and resilience over the years. We strongly believe as South Africa that the BRICS is equal to the task. **BR**

“BRICS' nations must ensure that as the world advances on the technological and innovation fronts that no country, however small, is left behind.”

and exposed. For example, at the height of COVID-19 there was uneven distribution of the vaccines with developed countries hoarding the vaccines.

We have entered the age of pandemics and there can be no one part of the world that can have pandemics and not affect the rest of the world. That is the reality that we are facing and we have to deal with. This is the unjust world with which the BRICS' academic forum and think tanks need to grapple.

Overhaul of the global financial system

Another very important, and emerging issue, is that of the necessity for a radical overhaul of the world's financial system, which is currently dominated by the US dollar. Current developments in the world, and the need for a more equitable developmental

is worth billions of US dollars each year (as we still measure everything in terms of the US dollar). These illicit flows out of the continent constitute a huge developmental deficit for Africa. This requires closer study and scrutiny with a view to developing counter mechanisms. The BRICS' and African think tanks, and research organisations, need to greatly assist us in this regard.

A slightly separate, but closely related matter, which is particularly negatively affecting the development of the African continent, is that significant research and development taking place in the continent often leads to products that are taken out of Africa and patented in the north. This includes research and development based on the continent's biodiversity. These practices reinforce a dependent African science technology and innovation system that does

PROFILE

BRICS' collaboration, co-creation and innovative research-opportunities

OPENING ADDRESS BY DEPUTY MINISTER ALVIN BOTES, INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND COOPERATION OF SOUTH AFRICA AT THE 15TH BRICS ACADEMIC FORUM OPENING CEREMONY, SUNDAY, 14 MAY 2023.



The 15th BRICS Academic Forum is hosted in South Africa, the land of Nelson Mandela. A country that we like to be known as always on the side of the most vulnerable, because that was what the anti-apartheid struggle was about.

SA foreign imperatives

It is important that I foreground our foreign policy imperatives in South Africa. These imperatives are encircled by four key aspects:

- Acknowledgement of the Pan-African nature of the South African society.
- Appreciation that we have an obligation towards the global South.
- A conscious realisation of a deepening cooperation with a more industrialised North and the developed world.
- An urge to ensure the transformation of global governance institutions with the United Nations being at the apex of that system.

Context—dangers and dividends

The theme of the 15th BRICS Academic Forum is aptly entitled BRICS in Africa, a partnership for mutually accelerated growth, sustainable development, and inclusive multilateralism. That theme is both apt and timely as it is a way for us to pivot current debates in the world on the importance of evidence-based research always foregrounding political sentiments and political expression. This puts an increased obligation on this august gathering to ensure that political leaders express sentiments, and make public pronouncement, on evidence-based research.

The current tectonic shifts that we are going through, not least being the war on Ukraine, poses some of the greatest dangers that we have faced as a world, in particular, post the 1945 World War II. But it also presents us with some of the

It is my hope that we will be exploring issues relating to research, innovation and development. This, and the identification of research opportunities, concomitant challenges and the necessary policy frameworks and best practices for collaboration amongst BRICS' countries.

BRICS' collective research development and innovation—positives

This conference must therefore continue to lay the foundation for examining the role of collaborative research and innovation in addressing our global challenges. One of the key areas of research should be the identification of innovative research opportunities that would help development in all of our countries. The BRICS' countries share many common challenges— social, environmental,

“The current tectonic shifts that we are going through, not least being the war on Ukraine, poses some of the greatest dangers that we have faced as a world, in particular, post the 1945 World War II.”

greatest opportunity dividends of which we, as BRICS member countries, should be aware. The COVID-19 pandemic, evidently, has adversely affected us as BRICS member countries. Particularly, in the realisation of the 17 anti-poverty sustainable development goals. It is therefore critical that by working together we create a unique partnership that is mutually beneficial and one that promotes accelerated growth, sustainable development and inclusive multilateralism.

economic and political, amongst others. Through increased collaboration, co-creation and integrated research, we can develop the innovative solutions required to address these challenges to the benefit of all our citizens.

As you may be aware, there are many advantages to research development and innovation amongst BRICS' countries. For example, we have diverse and vibrant research communities with experts in a range of fields. By working together, we



can therefore leverage the expertise to drive the innovation required and to create new opportunities for the development of the BRICS. In addition, collaborative research can help us to build stronger ties amongst our countries and foster greater understanding and cooperation. By the sharing of knowledge and expertise, we can build a more prosperous and sustainable future.

The creation of new partnerships and collaborations amongst research institutions is essential as this will enable the sharing of research information amongst experts that is critical for innovation and development. It will equally foster increased openness, trust and mutual respect amongst our people.

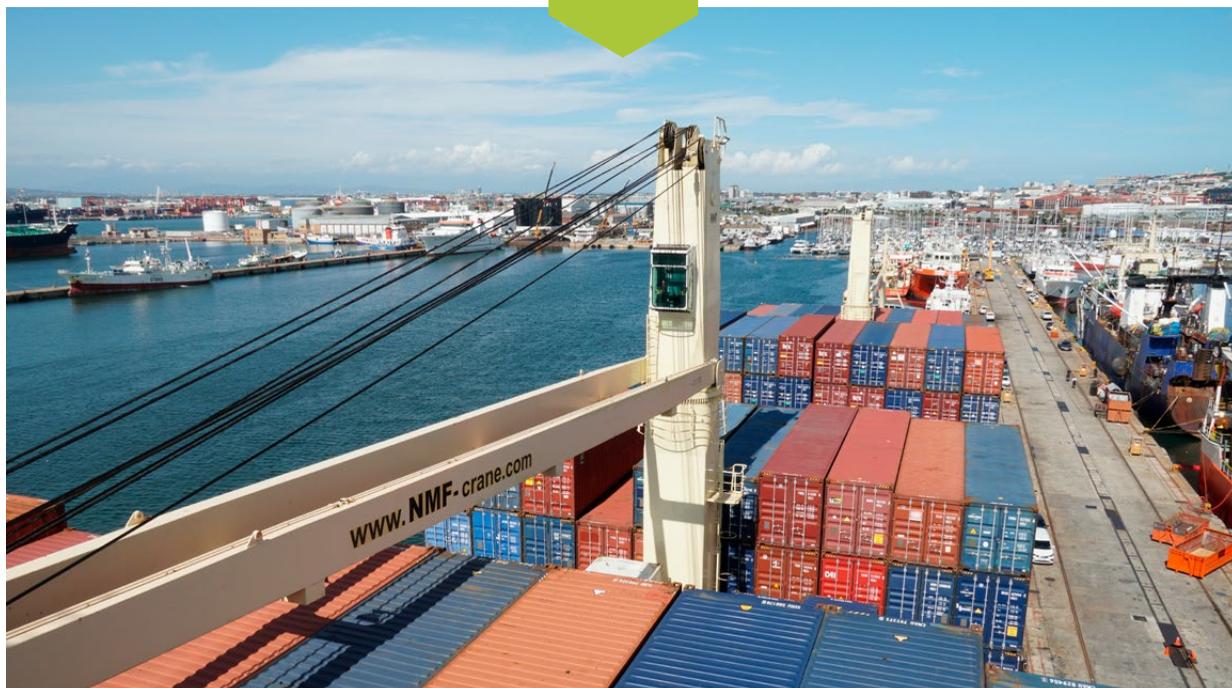
We are aware of the pitfalls and inherent

weaknesses when it comes to the question of research and innovation. We are aware of, and conscious of, that the budgetary and public provisions made as regards to research and innovation differs amongst member states of the BRICS. For example, we know that the People's Republic of China, accounts for approximately 75% of the overall BRICS countries' budgets for research and development. The question that the research should answer is how we maximise and leverage having such a strategic partner in the BRICS. Further, as the People's Republic of China increasingly makes strides in building a common prosperity for their society, how do we, as other members of the BRICS, ensure that we are not left behind in that very noble intent.

The positives are that as a collective the BRICS' member countries possess the capacity, through the Academic Forum and the Think Tank Council, to better analyse regional and geopolitical conflicts, wars, terrorism, violent extremism, and the rise of populist right-wing narrow nationalism.

Finally, and probably most importantly, this 15th BRICS Academic Forum must enable both the state, and non-state actors, of the BRICS to analyse and to fully understand the increasing geopolitical space that is accompanied by anxiety, trends and tensions in the world. These current tectonic shifts present a defining moment in realising an increased multipolar world and for a concomitant deepening of the multilateral system. **BR**

VIEWPOINT



The African Continental Free Trade Area: unlocking opportunities



SOUTH AFRICAN BRICS
THINK TANK ROUNDTABLE

KATLEGO VINCENT SCHEEPERS
Programme Coordinator, NIHSS



The African Continental Free Trade Area agreement, according to estimates by the World Bank, could increase Africa's income by US\$450 billion by 2035 and increase intra-African exports by more than 81 per cent, with further research by the UN Economic Commission for Africa noting that the agreement could enable the continent's economy to reach US\$29 trillion by 2050. Whereas the core objective of the AfCFTA is to promote industrialisation and development of African economies and businesses, research has posited that third parties have a critical role to play in the success of the agreement, by supplying intermediate goods and investments. Ostensibly the AfCFTA presents an opportunity for the BRICS bloc, with South Africa in its 2023 BRICS Chairship positioned as a bridge between its BRIC partners and trade partners across the continent, to enhance its trade partnerships. However, such partnerships must be mutually beneficial. This seminar not only interrogates current challenges faced by each BRICS member within intra-BRICS

trading, as well as possible weaknesses or blind spots within the implementation of the AfCFTA that could exacerbate and deepen poverty, inequality and unemployment, especially in consideration of deeper trading between BRICS members and the continent; the symposium also considers ways to further include and empower youth, women and marginalised communities and groups through livelihoods development and deeper trade ties.

The South African BRICS Think Tank, on 4 August 2023 hosted a roundtable dialogue as part of the presidency programme. The panel was made up of Ms Phuthi Mahanyele-Dabengwa of Naspers, Dr Fernando Ribeiro from Brazil, Dr Alexander Knoebel from Russia, Dr Priyadashi Dash from India, Dr Ya TAN from China, and Ms Arina Muresan from South Africa. The session was moderated by Ms Sanusha Naidu.

Ms. Sanusha Naidu of the Institute for Global Dialogue, South Africa opened the session by stating that this is a very important, timely and perhaps critical discussion on the African Continental

Free Trade Agreement and the potential engagement with the BRICS countries. Particularly because it raises several critical flash points and critical dynamics in terms of trade between the African continent and the BRICS countries. The broader set of external partners can be deepened based on having not just numbers but much more of a quality of relations on key issues relating to addressing poverty inequality and the Africa Agenda 2063.

In the other BRICS countries as well as, they deal with the question of how we get our future generation. The youth to be able to become much more empowered in terms of their entrepreneurial skill, but also look at the trade dynamic beyond just the macro picture. It is about micro-communities, economic, and commercial interests as well. It is about building up from the building blocks and the foundation of our societies. The question about how we empower the kind of entrepreneurial activity, whether we call it the Township economy or call it the informal economy that's on the periphery or the role of women and how important empowering women in trade and engaging and including women in trade is critical.

Emphasis on industrialisation around skills development, the inclusion of women in peace and security, but also, the inclusion of women in terms of trade and in the alliance in that context needs to see that the next generation of BRICS leaders and future entrepreneurs, must be skilled in a manner that enables them to find their entrepreneurial spirit.

Following Ms Naidu, Ms Phuthi Mahanyele-Dabengwa of Naspers, South Africa expressed that it is fair to say that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the situation. BRICS itself represents a significant opportunity, in which to view economic cooperation as a key pillar and, this cooperation needs to continue improving and finding new trading opportunities beyond the current tariffs. Infrastructure financing, development cooperation, industrial development, including industry levels and managing technological transit. China, India, Russia, and Brazil, all accounted for 26.9% of global GDP, which makes them an important trading bloc. The BRICS conversation and the African Continental Free Trade Agreement form a key part of that.

“Emphasis on industrialization around skills development, the inclusion of women in peace and security, but also, the inclusion of women in terms of trade and in the alliance in that context needs to see that the next generation of BRICS leaders and future entrepreneurs, must be skilled in a manner that enables them to find their entrepreneurial spirit.”

The African Continental Free Trade Agreement has emerged as a mechanism through which we can ensure that the continent can improve its economic resilience, and to put the opportunity in context, a single African market would create a market of 1.3 billion people with a combined GDP of \$3.4 trillion, making it the largest free trade area in the world since the establishment of the World Trade Organisation. Africa needs to aggregate its economies of scale to ensure balanced trade patterns with BRICS markets. Not only are governments realising the benefits of integration, but businesses across the world see Africa and its growing population of young people as a key growth market. But for us as Africans to fully benefit from the African Continental Free Trade Agreement, there is a need to concrete policy measures and investments, particularly those aimed at women and youth, who account for most of our population. Business owner's workforce can be better integrated into the value chains. Job opportunities and all these opportunities can stem from this arrangement. Over 70% of cross-border traders, especially those engaged in formal trade, are women.

Ms Mahanyele-Dabengwa continued stating that the youth are Africa's greatest assets. They represent the boundless stock of energy, creativity and resilience that will propel the continent forward, thus, we need to ensure that they have a credible path to economic engagement, which is

critically important for human development to maximise the opportunities of the agreement. We must appreciate that the agreement is about scale and upscaling beyond the local. She insisted that we must boost and strengthen Africa's capacities to scale women and youth-owned businesses across the continent, through inclusive digital technology and private sector partnerships, especially those that can boost value chain partnerships, education, and infrastructure, she stated.

The continent is experiencing an increase in the adoption of digital technologies across various industries with growing interest in e-commerce platforms, fintech solutions, mobile money and other digital tools that are transforming how business is done on the continent. This will unlock the potential for digital trade in Africa and enable businesses, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, to expand their reach and tap into new markets. Such investments will play a crucial role in supporting the African Continental Free Trade Agreement's objective of reducing trade barriers, harmonising regulations, and standards, and improving cross-border, she emphasised.

The South African BRICS Business Council is fully clear and coincident of this responsibility to promote and protect the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement as a catalyst to ensuring intra-African trade and South Africa leverages its cooperation with BRIC nations to ensure increased global Economic

Cooperation and participation for the broader African continent.

She conveyed that the Business Council is engaging with several regional business bodies on the continent and working with the African Continental Free Trade Agreements Secretary-General to explore opportunities in the prioritised value chains for BRIC and Africa and possible intra-African opportunities. Some of the areas that have been identified are agriculture and agro-processing, automotive and vehicle parts, pharmaceuticals, logistics, distribution, and infrastructure, including digital. The effective implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement will advance the dream of African integration.

In her conclusion, she notes that the African Continental Free Trade Agreement has the potential to improve the continent's trading position. The BRICS block represents a model of economic development and has exemplified its strong

content and hope, that can help a continent that has one point should be your people and the GDP of Trillion dollars. We see that this FTA makes much sense once interregional trade represents just 15% of the total trade of African countries, he continued.

There is a huge potential for increasing trade and promoting development throughout this. This FTA has the potential to increasingly diversify African trade flows, especially away from mineral commodities and towards manufacturing products and agriculture, and that is very important. FTA also has the potential to create regional value chains to promote more technical cooperation and to confront common problems and the agriculture issue is a very important one facing the notorious.

In summary, Dr Ribeiro urged us to remember that historical experience shows that more trade brings more growth, but it's not an automatic process. "We must also think about how the integration will evolve",

upward trend from 2014 to 2021. During this period, there have been noticeable fluctuations in trade activities. While the countries experienced significant trade growth there were declines in 2019-2020, potentially influenced by global economic conditions, geopolitical factors, and specific market demands. In 2021, the trade between the European Economic Union in Africa showed an increase in exports from the EAEU to Africa amounting to approximately 3.5 billion United States dollars, with the strong and notable growth rate of 15.3%, he shared.

"If we speak about Russia's potential in African countries, the key export product groups of Russia to African countries remain energy resources, cereal crops and team potential growth for cereal crops export is estimated to be around 1.6 billion USD representing a 44% increase compared to the absorb exports in 2021. Nigeria has the highest potential in absolute terms for the growth of petroleum and petroleum products".

Despite ranking 4th on the list of countries with the most significant potential in Africa, estimations indicate the potential for increasing timber export capacity to Yugi. By approximately 0.6 billion United States dollars, the highest potential for increasing Russian exports in absolute values lies in the markets of Egypt and Algeria. The markets of these two countries also represent the greatest potential for expanding the export of non-energy goods, including products such as paper and cardboard, grain, ferrous materials, and fertilizers.

In conclusion, Dr Knoebel stressed that it is also very critical to keep at the back of our minds for this discussion that trade flows also must complement or are accompanied by what trade facilitation means in this context and most importantly, trade facilitation also comes with the kind of technical cooperation that underpins it. And we see this a lot in the East African context around the capacity building around the issues as well as with trade facilitation. At this point there's a lot of expectation of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement and what it's going to achieve.

Dr Priyadashi Dash of the Research and Information System for Developing Countries, India started by noting the sequence and synchronisation of the process for building an institution. He stated that

“The BRICS block represents a model of economic development and has exemplified its strong growth, particularly its economic growth and an enormous capacity to compete in a globalised world.”

growth, particularly its economic growth and an enormous capacity to compete in a globalised world.

Representing Brazil, Dr Fernando Ribeiro of the Institute of Applied Economic Research, noted that this filtered area is no doubt an impressive achievement especially when considering the current complex situation of trade policies around the world and with a clear state of disillusion with the potential benefits of economic integration that we see in current days, leading to some development that is being branded that sometimes as the globalisation or fragmentation of trades and things like that, in the sense.

BRICS and the other big countries welcome disagreement with the mixture of

he said. Consider the political, social, and institutional fragilities of many countries. "We must think about how to effectively include smaller and poorer countries of the continents, or in other words, how to deal with the symmetries among the African countries and how to avoid huge disparities in the benefits with it by each of the countries and by different social actors within each country because of the free", he continued.

Dr Alexander Knoebel of the Institute for Economic Policy, Russia offered his view on trade and Economic Cooperation between the European Economic Union and African countries in Pan-African. The African free trade area first, reminds us that race statistics that trade between the European Economic Union and Africa has shown a general

it must be a well synchronised approach to building institutions, noting that at the beginning of the session it was mentioned that capacity building, trade financing support, investing in trade facilitation and other logistics necessities, and trade in infrastructure like digitalisation.

Adding on Ms Mahanyele-Dabengwa's point on Fintech and digitisation, Dr Dash emphasised that digitalisation could improve port operations from faster custom compliance, reducing the handling of passive transit events at the ports. So, the additional compliance and tail cost could be reduced significantly. By leveraging our digitalisation, of course, the level of digitalisation and the application of those from content to control deeper, focusing our attention on accelerated implementation of safety. Fintech Solutions could be leveraged for access, offering finance and risk mitigation instruments by the banks and the after-aging bank trade financing.

As far as trade financing is concerned, Dr Dash added many a time the MSME firms are not equally or favourably placed as far as access to financing is concerned. The National Development Banks, commercial banks should have some mechanism for offering them finance.

Working capital especially and these are the firms which very often get subject to exchange rate volatility. So, to prevent such kinds of external shocks there should be some mixed mitigation mechanisms like some guarantee or some sort of swap features like that. Those types of instruments widely used in the financial sector could also be suitably employed to help these firms, protecting their export proceeds from deteriorating in terms of value due to exchange rate fluctuations.

Briefly, the Trade Infrastructure Board customs modernisation of those processes, people less processing and allowing the traders to declare the minimum that they could do instead of everything for clearance of the goods.

Dr Ya TAN of the BRICS Research Centre, China stressed four opportunities to leverage, which are namely, digital infrastructure, e-commerce, digital skills, and fintech and noted that these align with China's Belt and Road Initiative, and infrastructure connectivity.

Firstly, in terms of digital infrastructure, China is a global leader in digital technology.

And infrastructure can cooperate with Africa in building digital infrastructure. This includes 5G broadband networks, data centres and some other necessary hardware for the digital economy. The digital infrastructure will enable more Africans to access the internet opening a vast array of opportunities in e-commerce, online education, digital health services, and more and more.

Secondly, China's success in e-commerce could serve as a model for Africa. Chinese companies like Alibaba. China has already started initiatives like the electronic World Trade Platform in Africa to help small and medium-sized enterprises benefit from global trade with the free trade area creating a larger unified market.

Thirdly, China and Africa can cooperate in training African entrepreneurs and youth in digital skills. This can be done through exchange programs, online courses, and partnerships between Chinese and African universities. These skills will be crucial for Africa and for them to fully leverage the opportunities of the digital economy. Besides, China is also a global leader in financial technology and Chinese companies could cooperate with African partners in mobile money, online banking, blockchain technology and more. This can help in increasing financial inclusion, the key requirement for a thriving digital economy.

She concluded by noting that the African Continental Free Trade area aligns with China's belt and Road initiative, which emphasise policy coordination, infrastructure connectivity, trade, financial integration, and people-to-people bonds. The synergy between these free trade areas creates a win-win situation. "As we stand on the brink of this exciting new era, it is crucial to seize these opportunities to deepen China-African cooperation and work together towards a prosperous future", she said.

In her opening, Ms Arina Muresan of the Institute for Global Dialogue, South Africa noted that what is always interesting for her is how BRICS are at a Nexus. They are competitors, but they also acknowledge the need and spirit for more and not less which resonates, with the desire to see global trade take new modalities. The BRICS as a bloc has the potential to set standards in terms of their engagement, particularly especially in trade. So, the South African perspective comes from

a context and a history of liberation and the need for a closeness of African cooperation. It is important to understand this kind of approach to how South Africa wants to give this kind of exchange a human face. From the other speakers, a sense a desire to see the BRICS use competitive advantage, better build capacity, specifically in digitisation, and invest in logistics and cross-border and the issue of cross-border movement comes up a lot, she said.

In her presentation, she noted a few additional challenges for the Continental Free Trade area in terms of the structural problems that need to be fixed. Third-party engagement with countries external to the partnership or the agreement and then the movement of capital money etc.

Driven in terms of creating this inclusive and sustainable development context, "it needs to be reciprocated at the same time between members and in the quest. To create this kind of liberal market, eventually eliminating tariffs, it wants to build up a customs union, it wants to enhance competitiveness, and resolve the challenges of overlapping membership to the regional economic community", she said.

With the added objective to also installing a body that creates and deals with a dispute settlement mechanism. The Continental Free Trade Agreement has a tall order that it wants to address, and the echoed statistic of 15 to 18% of this kind of trade is between African countries. This kind of export-oriented engagement will lead to industrialisation, she stressed.

Ms Muresan emphasised that by having fewer tariffs, "we are going to be able to improve non-tariff barrier environment and also hopefully invest more in the business that we're able to engage with, invest more in labour as well and the idea that businesses play a significant role".

Another challenge is that 83% of the markets in Africa or African markets are informal. And the Continental Free Trade area is designed to bolster your formalized businesses. That gives businesses that give people more opportunities, but it also creates significant anxiety.

Offering her recommendations, she stressed the mentorship of CSO, investing in non-tariff barriers, and orienting the sister city agreements with purpose (orienting investment in non-tariff barriers). **BR**

POLICY BRIEFS



Building Platforms for BRICS Vocational Education and Skills Training: Advancing High-quality BRICS Partnership on the New Industrial Revolution

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This policy reflection firstly introduces the development status and advantages of China's vocational education and analyses the development of China's vocational education in the future. Secondly, BRICS Partnership on the New Industrial Revolution Innovation Center (BPIC) based in Xiamen, China, is introduced. BPIC has made a positive contribution to the training of technical and skilled personnel, with an international scientific and technological vision, to meet the needs of new the industrial revolution in the BRICS countries. Xiamen City University (XMCU) is included as an example to illustrate how schools are actively involved in the BRICS skill training programme. Finally, we propose what BPIC will implement in the future in order to make a greater contribution to the close cooperation of BRICS countries in the vocational education field.

Vocational Education in China

China has the world's largest vocational education system with 11,200 vocational schools and 29.15 million students, offering more than 1,300 majors which cover almost all areas of the national economy (Workers' Daily, 19 August 2022). A system of Secondary Vocational High School + Vocational College + Vocational and Technical University was established. The Chinese government stresses the importance of craftsmanship and vocational education and has implemented a series of laws, mechanisms and policy measures with massive financial support. In recent years, a three-year action plan for expanding enrollment in vocational colleges and upgrading vocational skills has been successfully carried out. This drive saw vocational colleges enrolling an additional 4.13 million students and providing over 83 million training opportunities (Xinhua News

Agency, 12 March 2022).

Vocational education in China will develop in the following three directions:

- **The digital transformation of education**

The wide application of online education platforms has made learning easier for “anyone, anywhere, anytime” - it can also provide real-time data tools for analysing study and teaching quality. Virtual imitation of the real training platform can enable practical education to be easily deployed and implemented through online methods.

- **Deep integration of industry and education**

Commonly the vocational schools and colleges have training bases in the enterprises that makes scientific research cooperation and skill training more efficient. China will build several regional communities integrating industry and education, so that vocational education can serve the regional economic development better.

- **Internationalisation**

There will be more and more exchanges and cooperation between countries. China will introduce several high-quality foreign vocational education resources to its own system while recommend several vocational education programs with Chinese characteristics to other countries.

Above all, the vocational education has become more attractive, influential and competitive amid an industrial upgrade in China.

About BRICS Partnership on New Industrial Revolution Center

It is common knowledge that vocational education thrives in cities with high economic performance and an advanced level of modernisation and internationalisation. Xiamen is a beautiful coastal city in southeastern China. President Xi Jinping once described it as “a robust city famous for innovation and entrepreneurship, and a beautiful garden-like city with sound eco-protection.” In 2017, the 9th BRICS Summit was held in Xiamen. In 2020, to consolidate the BRICS Partnership on New Industrial Revolution initiated by BRICS Summit Johannesburg Declaration, Chinese President Xi Jinping announced at the 12th BRICS Summit that China would establish



Figure 1: Personnel training by BPIC

“ In the recent two years, the BPIC has held more than 30 BRICS events including the BRICS Forum on Development of Industrial Internet and Digital Manufacturing and the International Symposium for BRICS Think Tanks. ”

a BRICS Partnership on New Industrial Revolution Innovation Center (BPIC) in Xiamen, Fujian. This would be in order to advance cooperation in the fields of policy coordination, personnel training and project development and China welcomed the active participation of its fellow BRICS countries.

In the recent two years, the BPIC has held more than 30 BRICS events including the BRICS Forum on Development of Industrial Internet and Digital Manufacturing and the International Symposium for BRICS Think Tanks. The Xiamen BPIC Think Tank Cooperation Alliance was formed to strengthen cooperation among BRICS think tanks and conduct joint research. A platform for project cooperation and exchange was launched, to promote the two-way communication and transfer of technology and flow of products among BRICS countries.

BPIC intensively programmed personnel training (See Figure 1). A training alliance was formed for industrial capability improvement, bringing together training instructors and other resources from 16 universities, enterprises, and research institutions in Xiamen. Giving full play to its strengths in vocational education, especially in new industries, a training system was developed by BPIC including more than 600 courses and BPIC conducted 38 training activities attended by over 1.3million people from 52 countries. The BRICS’ industrial innovation cooperation and skills competitions were also organised by BPIC, attracting the participation of more than 5,000 domestic and foreign teams.

Xiamen City University (XMCCU) is included as an example of what efforts a member of the training alliance has made in organising BRICS skills training



Figure 2: 2022 BRICS Skills Competition (provincial IOT qualification)

“BPIC will assist the BRICS countries in building a bridge of wisdom connecting each other and a platform for more exchanges and cooperation, in order to deepen high-quality BRICS Partnership on the New Industrial Revolution and in order to move forward together for a better BRICS future.”

programs. In cooperation with national high-tech industrial park and some well-known leading companies such as Huawei, Schneider Electric and Digital China, XMCU has established a skills training base of national level. XMCU connected with more than 200 companies as working partners, and accepted, annually, over 20 000 people for short-term training. More than two hundred international students from 18 countries have been enrolled. One of the most popular majors is Internet of Things application technology (IOT). Comprehensive practical ability for the IOT system integration, and development by restoring the real IOT application scenarios, is cultivated here. Vocational skills standards which are widely recognised by enterprises in the industry is introduced,

and the students are sent to enterprises for better practice. Usually, the students achieve 1–2 vocational skill-certifications upon graduation. They qualify for jobs in IOT related areas such as smart home, smart transportation, smart city and industrial internet. An example is bike sharing where IOT technology is widely applied.

Additionally, as a supporter of the 2022 BRICS Skills Competition, XMCU had successfully organised a provincial-level IOT qualification trials with more than 70 participants competing for 6 finalist spots (See Figure 2). The competitions have promoted exchanges of expertise, best solutions among professionals, specialists and skilled workers to jointly advance the development of vocational education in BRICS countries.

BPIC in the future

BPIC is dedicated to establishing a policy coordination network, a personnel training base and an industrial project incubator for BRICS countries. It will support companies and institutes, who have exchanges and cooperation with other BRICS countries, and help them to introduce their practices and business models to other countries.

Focusing on this year, a series of training workshops is planned, including 10 short-term training projects such as a workshop for industrial internet leadership personnel, a workshop for high-calibre NIR technological and managerial personnel. Skills training courses will also be provided by the 16 enterprises, colleges and institutes of the training alliance. Meanwhile, the BRICS skills training events will be continually held in the future, (for example BRICS Skills Development and Technological Innovation Competition and BRICS Skills Competition), to promote the BRICS joint training and to help select technical talents who meet the needs of the new industrial revolution with international vision on science and technology.

BPIC will also provide support on joint research and studies between BRICS countries, and suggestions on how to deepen BRICS Partnership on New Industrial Revolution will be highly valued.

It is hoped that BPIC will assist the BRICS countries in building a bridge of wisdom connecting each other and a platform for more exchanges and cooperation, in order to deepen high-quality BRICS Partnership on the New Industrial Revolution and in order to move forward together for a better BRICS future.

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Leveraging technology to strengthen education and skills development for the future: cases from India

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BRICs countries collectively comprise 40 percent of the world's population (Statista, 2014). However, what truly defines this shared commonality among the nations is the diversity of population, culture and languages within the borders. India has 28 States and 8 Union Territories and according to the latest Census (2011), more than 19,500 mother tongues are spoken in India (Indian Express, 2018). Similarly, Africa is home to about one-third of the world's languages with about 1,000 to 2,000 languages (Harvard University, n.d.). These manifest the most in education policies and programmes that need to accommodate the regional heterogeneity while also adhering to the national standards. Hence, the issue of

relevance in education becomes one of the key considerations for policymakers while designing strategies and guidelines for the youth that represent these diversities.

The sixth BRICS Summit, held in Fortaleza, Brazil, in July 2014, affirmed the "strategic importance of education for sustainable development and inclusive economic growth" and pledged to strengthen cooperation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PR to China, n.d.). BRICS 2022 resolution also emphasised that countries must share the experiences and best practices of implementing the Education 2030 Agenda to promote education equity, quality, and lifelong learning.

India has dealt with these regional diversities through several innovative education and skills initiatives (Education Commission, 1964–66; Ministry of Education 1968; 1992). Akin to India's rich tradition and culture, South Africa

too has traditional knowledge systems that need to be advocated for while also keeping up with contemporary systems of futuristic education. India's National Education Policy (NEP) (Ministry of Education, 2020) is a remarkable example in this respect, which strikes a fine balance between India's traditional systems of knowledge while also advocating for digital education and skills that are needed to partake in the future of work.

Implementing policies into practice

As a nation, it is important for countries to create inclusive opportunities for the youth of the country where policymakers understand the lived realities and aspirations of the youth while designing not only overarching policies but also programmes. This stands especially true for skilling programmes, where employability and employment are the primary outcomes.

Referring back to aforementioned India's NEP, it is a forward-looking document that has considered the ever-changing nature of employment, and recommended including



new age skills at the school level, with multiple entry and exit options. “Beginning with vocational exposure at early ages in middle and secondary school, quality vocational education will be integrated smoothly into higher education. It will ensure that every child learns at least one vocation and is exposed to several more. This would lead to emphasising dignity of labour and importance of various vocations involving Indian arts and artisanship,” states the NEP (Ministry of Education, 2020). Various other BRICS nations face similar problems of varied levels of importance accorded to vocational and mainstream education.

In India, earlier, students who opted for vocational education in their high school, would not be able to transition seamlessly to higher education with the vocational field, until the National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) was introduced in 2013 (Ministry of Education, 2013). The NSQF devised ways to ensure vertical mobility of students who opt for vocational tracks – ensuring they can continue further into higher education, pursue

various chosen vocations as well as become employable. This will not only help them to progress in their careers but also contribute to personal growth, upskilling and lifelong learning – making vocational education aspirational for the youth of the nation (Pilz & Regel, 2021).

As per NEP, in order to make skills training available and accessible to the youth of the country, the government has proposed to develop skill labs in schools in a Hub and Spoke model, so that other schools can also utilise the facility. The idea is to be able to use shared resources and accord accountability to each partner stakeholder to maximise outcomes.

Parallel to the formal education system, in order to reap the benefits of India’s demographic dividend, the Government of India has also introduced several short-term skills training programmes, in order to “Transform rural poor youth into an economically independent and globally relevant workforce” (Press Information Bureau, 2023).

Experts point towards an expected global shortage of 56 million young people

(15–35 years) in the world (Chakravorty & Bedi, 2019). Given the share of the BRICS’s population in the world, in the coming decade, our countries will be the hub for skills talents for the world. Hence, it is important to think before the demand arises and train our youth in skills that will make them employable in the markets of the future.

Leveraging technology to strengthen skills development

Traditionally, manufacturing and agricultural skills have been imparted to students as part of vocational programmes, however, to be able to elevate the youth from their immediate socio-economic circumstances, it is important to skill them in new age competencies - not only professional skills but also transferable skills. This will help them become amenable to jobs that are dynamic in nature. For instance, soft skills, IT skills and AI-driven skills. While content is important, it has become pertinent to train students in a way that makes them adaptable to the ever-changing world of digital evolution.

As per the India Skills Report (Wheebox, 2023), most hiring will be in the area of automotive, engineering and internet businesses, and that there is an increased demand for 'niche skills' that are technology-driven. However, this demand for talent is mostly from the urban cities as they are driving digital acceleration.

Owing to advancing technology, the nature of employment is constantly evolving, and this requires continuous upgradation, value addition and induction in new-age skills for the youth, especially from the underserved areas – to ensure equity in opportunities.

Recently, the Central Board of Secondary Education in India introduced coding and artificial intelligence (AI) for students to

upskilling and reskilling from their regions. While physical labs are expensive and sometimes inaccessible, digital skill labs can provide convenient solution to tackle the problem of accessibility and availability.

Although the skill programmes need to be demand-driven, they also need to be student-centric so as to provide agency to the students to break the barriers of their immediate socio-economic cycles and explore diverse livelihood opportunities.

The pandemic intensified the need for transformational learning using digital technology. Several innovative EdTech solutions were experimented with and as we complete three years and post several impact evaluations, it is seen that only the most relevant, research-driven solutions stood the

primary, secondary and tertiary education – a) Developing world-class institutions that serve as models to transform and strengthen the country's education system, b) Nurturing India's youth and future global leaders to develop solutions to India's challenges and, in parallel, ensuring equitable access to education for all.

The above is approached by Reliance Foundation in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

For example, the Reliance Foundation offers various scholarships, including in Artificial Intelligence and Computer Science to marginalised students, female scholars as well as specially-abled youth. Jio Institute, under the Foundation, offers world class programmes in advanced AI skills so as to prepare students for the opportunities of tomorrow, including entrepreneurship skills to drive economic growth.

While there are prominent organisations that are experimenting with innovative ways, there are also smaller start-ups, in India, that are redefining the way education and skills are imparted to children in schools and higher education institutions. These include the following organisations' programmes.

Pi Jam Foundation

Their intention is to make technology accessible to lower income schools in India (Pi Jam Foundation, n.d.). Conceived by a young Teach for India Alumni in 2017, Pi Jam Foundation aims to provide students from under-resourced schools with computing and problem-solving skills. They focus on these skills so that school-going children are well equipped when transitioning to the job market.

Agastya International Foundation

This foundation uses experiential, and design-thinking based projects to teach science to the economically disadvantaged children and government schoolteachers in India (Agastya International Foundation, n.d.). In one of their innovative initiatives, they created mobile labs in buses to reach as many children as they could. However, due to difficult terrain and accessibility issues, when they couldn't reach the remotest of regions in India, they innovated and used

“BRICS nations need to collectively develop platforms and avenues where these best practices can be shared, and the youth can access opportunities across borders.”

promote skill education among students (India Today, 2023). This includes modules on data science, Augmented Reality (AR), financial literacy, coding, satellite applications, among others. The aim is to formalise skilling in schools.

We are in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and it is often defined by “connectivity, advanced analytics, automation, and advanced-manufacturing technology” (McKinsey & Company, 2022). The available and evolving technology can be most efficiently used for knowledge sharing and capability building. As there are more digital tools, there is a need to equip the young workforce with the knowledge and understanding of these – so as to create agile learners who can adapt to the future of work.

This is where BRICS countries can collaborate, create a digital network of institutions and share best practices on

test of time. It has helped us to understand that it is necessary to design tech solutions that make use of a bottoms-up approach in building trust within the community of users, to ensure efficient and effective usage of the solutions for desirable outcomes.

Innovative solutions from India

There are various models of delivery of education in India, some traditional but others more innovative who are trying to integrate the traditional ways of teaching with the needs of the 21st century workforce.

At Reliance Foundation (2023), for example, education and skilling is approached in the most holistic manner – starting from early childhood education until postgraduate levels:

Reliance Foundation uses a two-pronged approach to accelerate India's educational quotient, through initiatives spanning

the mobile van concept for a motorbike, which is driven by one of their instructors. These bikes are well equipped with laptops, portable internet connection, with access to language-neutral science videos, and quizzes. It contains simple hands-on experiments that teach scientific concepts in a simple and engaging manner. These concepts have been adapted to create a “Math Lab-on-a-Bike” and “Electronics Lab-on-a-Bike”, which helps children get over the fear of Math, and teaches the know-how of modern electronics in an increasingly digitised world.

Lend a Hand India

This is a non-profit organisation, that similarly, runs a programme called ‘Skills on Wheels’ that is a mobile lab, which is used to deliver career counselling for 10th and 12th Class students, and vocational skills training to students in remote areas with limited infrastructure (Singha, 2018). It is equipped with wi-fi, audio visual facility, and a generator – where vocational trainers deliver training in areas such as welding, plumbing, electrical wiring, food processing, basic healthcare and mobile repair.

The Way forward

In both education and skills development, technology has become an enabler and as countries, we need to equip youth with the 21st century skills so that they can adapt to the ever-changing nature of work.

Going forward, BRICS nations need to collectively develop platforms and avenues where these best practices can be shared, and the youth can access opportunities across borders. As mentioned above, using Artificial Intelligence, Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality, it is possible for BRICS nations to learn from each other and to share best practices on upskilling and reskilling. Leveraging the BRICS University network, countries can organise academic and cultural exchanges, where scholars and students can collaborate to develop knowledge products that can be used to train students on a variety of up and coming digital skills.

These can also help elevate the status of vocational education in the respective countries, making it aspirational for the youth to opt for vocational courses – helping them access meaningful jobs in the knowledge economy.

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Public-Private Partnership as a basis for strengthening BRICS post pandemic recovery

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The BRICS have chosen the route towards internationalisation, economic integration and modernisation and support economic entities, intended for strategic interests of the partner countries. In its essence public-private partnership (PPP) is a platform where public and private investors come together to find mutually beneficial resolution of financial and economic problems. It is important to note that PPP does not mean any transfer of assets from public to private institutions, but represents responsible involvement of participants, conducting business in social interest and valued outcome. The aim of the government, within a PPP,

is to solve social and economic problems and associated participants strive for profit maximisation. Risks and responsibilities of business are successfully distributed if the project is structured and monitored by an appropriate implementation schedule. As a result, PPP is beneficial for participants as an opportunity for economic development. In its turn, International Monetary Fund experts note that positive partners' activity relates to harmonisation of financial relations. This finding applies to BRICS. The partner-countries are strengthening post-pandemic economic recovery and effective solutions for challenges can be successfully based on a PPP vehicle, due to the following:

- Intergovernmental support of strategic environmental, infrastructural, social and educational projects is vital for stakeholders. It compensates market discrepancies and

shortfalls with the vast profit desire. More than that, intergovernmental initiatives positively influence supply and demand process through fiscal policy that regulates economic growth.

- Market players are concerned with microstructural demands. Effective intergovernmental relations provide a certain balance between public and private interests.
- Development of BRICS post-pandemic financial markets distort macroeconomic relations, which demand intergovernmental involvement in regulation and support of economic entities as well as the creation of favourable conditions for business with the aim of strengthening the role of the BRICS in a globalised economy.

Current BRICS fundamental goals are economic growth, production recovery and increase, modernisation of supply and demand structure, support of innovations and sustainable growth. In this regard, it seems appropriate for BRICS public

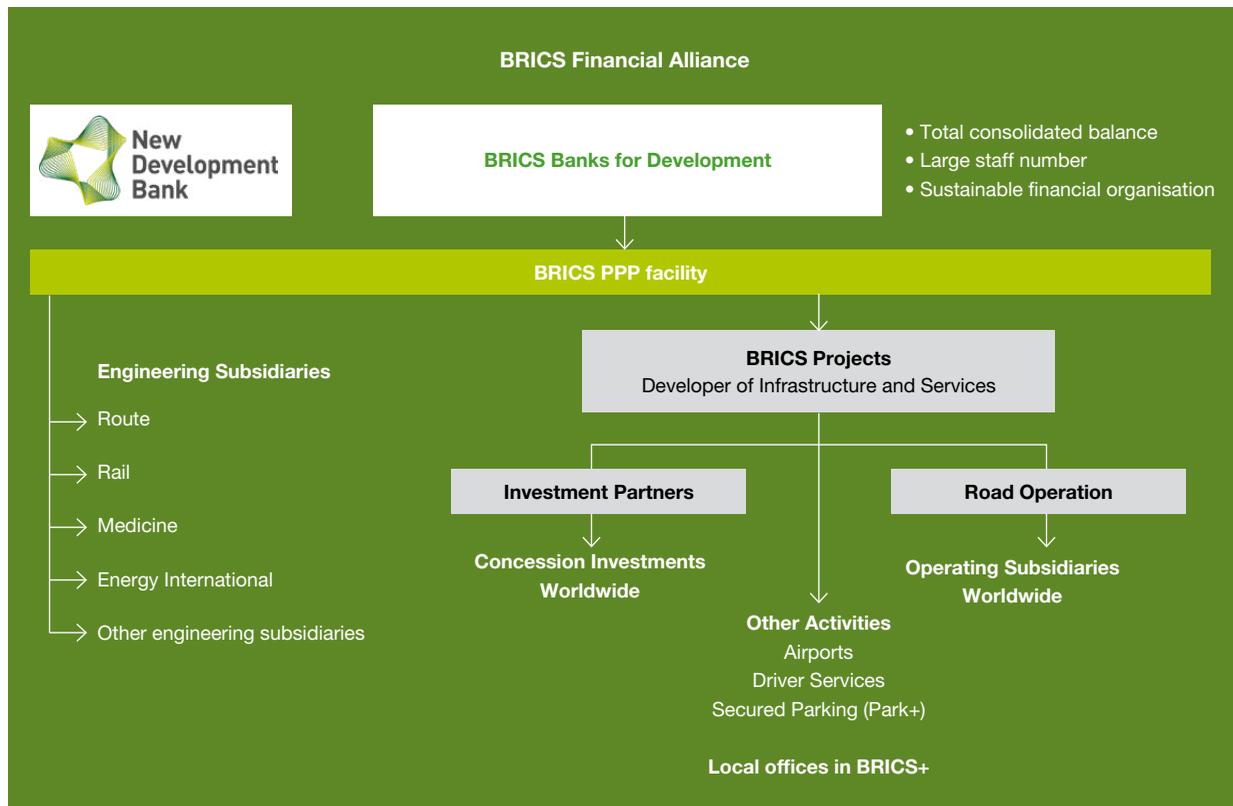


Figure 1. BRICS public-private partnership facility

institutions to support business by providing concessions, guaranties, export financing, distribution of goods and services as well as support of innovations. It is worthwhile using international experience of providing intergovernmental control of pricing, quality of goods and services and management of strategic projects. Public institutions possess great potential in areas such as budget management, tax and insurance regulation, monetary policy and legal systems. Thus, new types of BRICS economic relations in a post-pandemic era are linked to strengthening PPP relations. These should be taken into consideration, while selecting optimal solutions for BRICS issues.

The world is facing huge challenges provoked by issues such as a sluggish COVID-19 post-pandemic recovery and climate change. When coping with these challenges, BRICS partners have realised that it is important to promote sustainable and inclusive development, characterised by innovations, greenness, cooperation and resilience, aimed at achieving the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development

Goals (SDGs). In this respect, infrastructure, as an important pillar for sustained growth, plays a crucial role in the development of human society. With the demand, increase and expansion that infrastructure needs on the one hand and growing fiscal constraints of developing countries on the other, BRICS governments encourage participation of private investors in economic recovery, leveraging their capital, technology and management expertise.

The public-private partnership mechanism is widely recognised and applied around the world, promoting private sector investment and innovation vitality, supporting national development programs, improving the quality of public goods and services, relieving short-term fiscal burden and smoothing government payments, and enhancing international connectivity. PPP contributes to acceleration of funds, fair competition in the merit-based selection of private partners, risk sharing and equal cooperation between the parties.

International institutions, including the United Nations agencies, attach great

importance to PPP. In 2019, the 52nd session of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) amended the former Legislative Guide and Model Legislative Provisions on Privately Financed Infrastructure Projects into the Legislative Guide and the Model Legislative Provisions on public-private partnerships. Thus, the regional economic and social committees of the United Nations have been facilitating PPP capacity building and international cooperation among their member countries. Promoting PPP to speed up infrastructure development is highlighted as a priority by leading international fora such as the BRICS and G20.

The study proves that BRICS countries have significant reserves for multilateral cooperation and support of trade and economic relations, supported by BRICS banks for developments and intergovernmental financial institutions with BRICS countries participation. It is worthwhile mentioning, that in July 2019 the NDB's portfolio had reached 38 loans for infrastructure and sustainable development

projects for the member countries. In December 2019, the NDB Board of Directors approved the provision of technical assistance through the Bank's specialised Project Preparation Fund (PPF) - a multi-donor fund, opened to contributions. In this regard, harmonisation of financial, trade and economic relations of partner countries is strongly recommended in order to solve strategic problems successfully and to improve the living standards of the BRICS population. These measures simplify the access of BRICS entrepreneurs to credits and industrial goods, as well as to direct and

to speed up harmonisation of financial relations in this respect that contribute to risk management and accelerate interaction between the parties.

An important role in this regard is played by the BRICS New Development Bank (NDB), which, during the global pandemic threat of the COVID-19 did not stand aside and on April 2, 2020, successfully issued bonds in the amount of 5 billion yuan for a period of 3 years and attracted high-quality diversified investors. Then, on May 11, 2020, NDB allocated a \$1 billion Emergency Assistance loan to India. The

contribute to BRICS partnerships aimed at post-pandemic recovery.

Public-private partnership projects play a significant role for the BRICS and create a positive impact on the economy by generating investment, revenue, and profit opportunities, eventually leading to increased economic growth. NDB cooperation with BRICS development banks provides the setting up of BRICS Financial Alliance and special PPP facility (See Figure 1). These are designed to meet the needs of the BRICS population in reaching the goals of BRICS' sustainable and inclusive development.

Main models for secure PPP cooperation are suggested to be the following: concessions (BOT), co-financing, sale and lease, participation in the share capital, state orders implementation, special economic zones, technological parks preferential investment agreements and sale of shares. Prerequisites for success are clear legal framework, transparent tender business-process, flexible concession agreements, feasible payment structure and fair allocation of risks.

While strengthening BRICS post-pandemic recovery, the BRICS countries promote the spirit of openness, inclusiveness and mutually beneficial cooperation; practice a multilateral approach in a high-quality partnership that is consolidated and pragmatic. Thus, it is reasonable to accelerate efforts intended for maintaining open, sustainable global and regional production and supply chains, as well as using BRICS advantages to support common interests in G20 and UN.

It is important that the BRICS collaborate to maintain common values of peace, development, equality, justice, democracy and freedom, striving for a sustainable and secure existence, based on the principles of the UN Charter.

Creation of the BRICS Alliance for Industrial Cooperation will also provide the expansion of BRICS economic relations in the interests of our nations. **BR**

“Public-private partnership projects play a significant role for the BRICS and create a positive impact on the economy by generating investment, revenue, and profit opportunities, eventually leading to increased economic growth.”

indirect financing. Promotion of BRICS trade and finance cooperation, provision of equal access to the stock markets of member countries, and diversification of financial instruments, play an important role in the named processes of post-pandemic recovery.

Evaluation of indices of BRICS stock markets revealed that the absence of a coherent long-term strategy for BRICS economic partnership prevents them from resource accumulation and effective risk management. In order to expand resources for economic cooperation it is advisable to increase the interaction of the New Development Bank with BRICS Banks for development as well as banks with BRICS participation. This, taking into consideration, that such kind of financial institutions are financial intermediaries, that provide direct and indirect financing for their customers. Most BRICS member states are accelerating the usage of national currencies in servicing the needs of economic entities. It seems appropriate

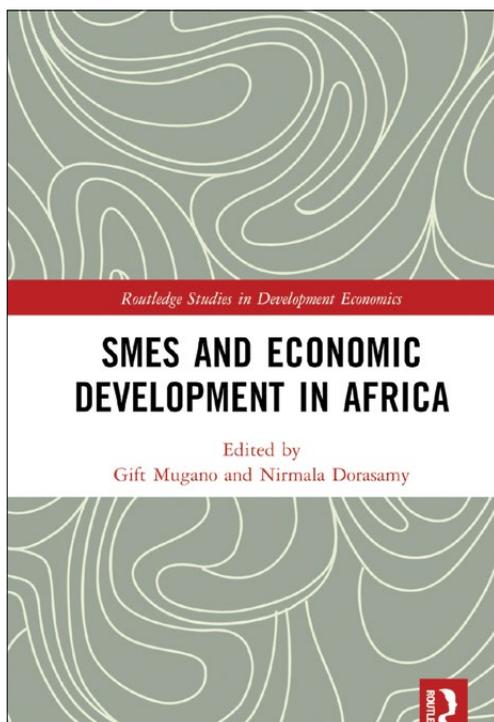
funds were a provision for supporting the Government of India in its efforts to contain the spread of COVID-19 and reduce the human, social and economic losses caused by the coronavirus outbreak. Selective facts testify to the successful activity of the Bank in the interests of the member countries.

It seems appropriate to not only focus on financing projects in clean energy, energy efficiency, transport infrastructure, water supply, sanitation, environmental protection, social and digital infrastructure, but to also consider the possibility of supporting enterprises intended for public-private partnership support and technology transfer, backed by a single BRICS digital currency, which can reduce BRICS transaction costs and functional risks. Key methods for ensuring financial security in this respect are mutual functioning rules, certified operators of BRICS payment system, general requirements for consumers and principles of supervision. Expansion of infrastructure and green bonds in national currencies also

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BOOK OF INTEREST



SMEs and Economic Development in Africa

Editors
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Nirmala Dorasamy

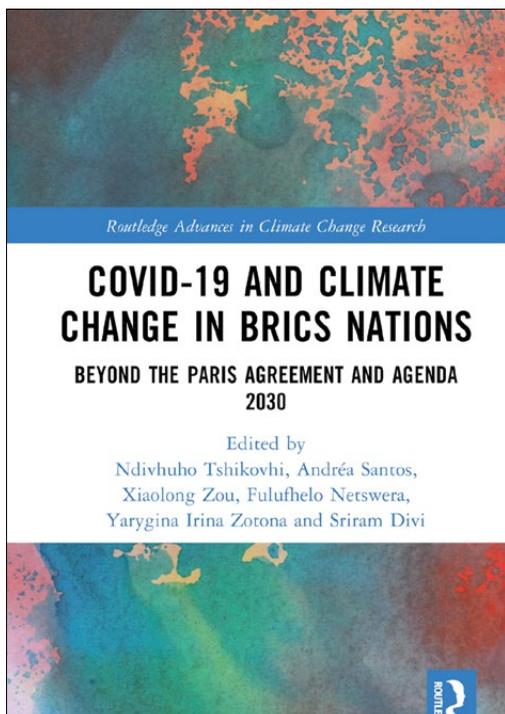
Publisher: Routledge Taylor & Francis group

S Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are a driving force of the global economy, contributing up to 50% of gross domestic product in some instances.

They also contribute to economic development through various channels such as employment creation, economic growth and poverty reduction, key elements of the Sustainable Development Goals. Furthermore, in many economies the majority of jobs are provided by SMEs. However, despite their support of the economy, SMEs are prone to several binding constraints, such as access to finance and market entry, as well as exogenous shocks and crises, most recently the COVID-19 pandemic.

Building on evidence from international experience, SMEs and Economic Development in Africa provides grounded solutions to challenges affecting SMEs, particularly in Africa, and offers guidance on how to build resilience to counteract future shocks. It also offers a number of policy measures which governments in developing countries may need to consider in order to encourage economic growth and development, such as increasing productive capacities, training, enhancing business ethics and professionalism and improving competitiveness.

What makes this book distinctive is that fact that it brings together the literature concerning SMEs in one place, and using case studies, it showcases how policymakers can overcome the challenges affecting SMEs. The book also provides tested and practical remedies for African economies with a view to making SMEs a springboard for economic prosperity.



COVID-19 and climate change in BRICS Nations: Beyond Paris Agreement and Agenda 2030

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A Addressing the great chasm of global climate change is a serious balancing act between population growth and its demands for economic development. A global response to climate emergency therefore requires strengthening every country's mitigation and adaptation efforts to reduce negative environmental effects, considering loss and damage and climate justice. As developing countries have experienced large population increases combined with rapid urbanisation in the past few decades, implications of these developments on the environment are unavoidable. However, the big question is, can sustainable development be attained at the same time. BRICS countries represent the emerging economies of the developing world accounting for nearly 40% of the total world population and are thus intrinsic to the global efforts and results for the 2030 Agenda, the Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement and beyond. In this manner, it is essential to get acquainted with the pledges and targets set by each BRICS country under international treaties. Additional factors such as new sustainable technological developments and investments in individual BRICS countries must be well-thought-out. Given the COVID-19 pandemic, it is of utmost importance to analyse how this single event has negatively or positively impacted climate data and the behaviour of BRICS countries with respect to their climate strategies and policies. The reader is invited to not only identify possible synergies within BRICS nations' efforts towards climate mitigation and adaptation strategies but to further explore the relationship between macro and micro levels of analysis. This provides the reader with a holistic yet detailed understanding of climate change in BRICS countries. The book also highlights with quasi-surgical precision how efforts to counter climate change can be optimised, in terms of where to devote attention while gaining maximum collective positive output. Above all, this research aims at providing a quantitative and qualitative overview of the overall impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on BRICS countries regarding climate change, as well as their capacity to re-shape global climate governance and explore areas for mutual cooperation. **BR**



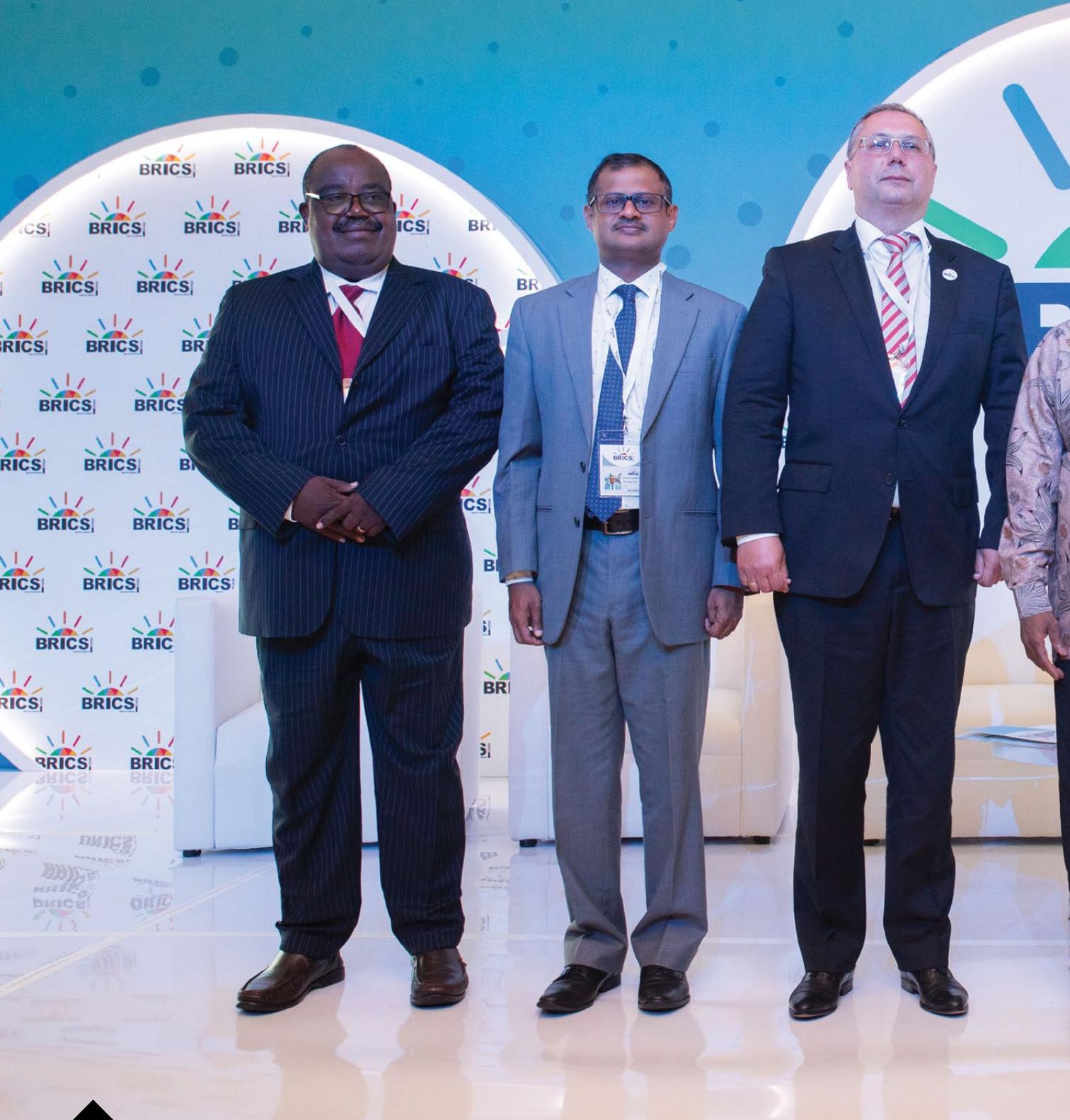
HE Minister Prof Blade Nzimande,
Department of Higher Education,
Science and Technology.



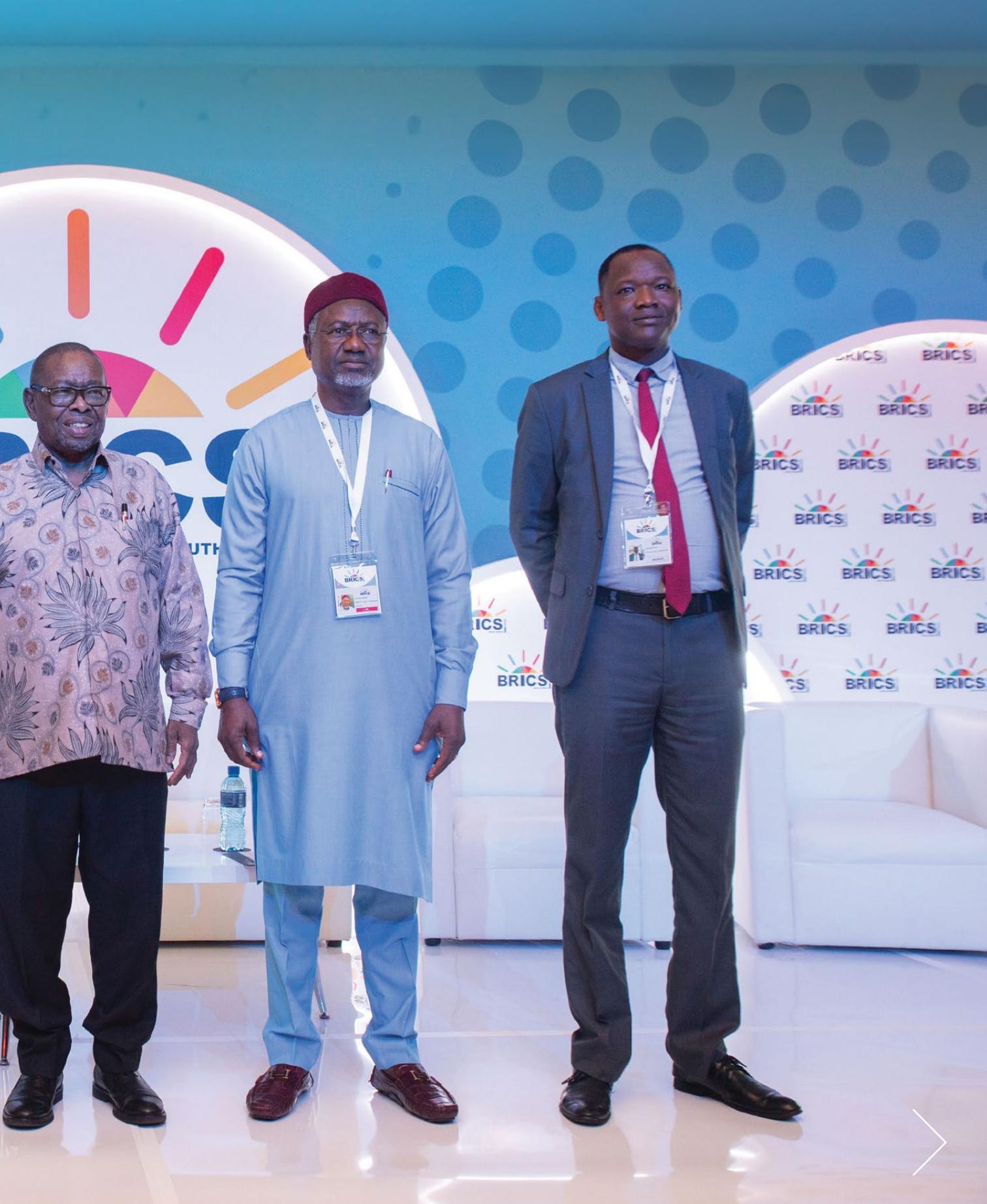
BRICS 2023 Academic Forum

C Capturing the essence of the 15th BRICS Academic Forum, held in Cape Town, 14 - 17 May 2023. Through a lens focused on 'BRICS and Africa: Partnership for Mutually Accelerated Growth, Sustainable Development and Inclusive Multilateralism,' witness the convergence of academia, diplomacy, and policy shaping the future of global cooperation. Exploring themes of collaboration, innovation, and inclusive development in this vibrant photo essay. **BR**





From left to right: Mr Videira Pedro, Commercial attache; Mr P.K Ashok Babu, Consulate General; Mr Aleksei Malenko, Consul General; HE Minister Prof Blade Nzimande; HE Mr Muhammad Haruna Manta, High Commissioner; Mr Samal Edeke Erupe, Second Secretary









From left to right: Dr JIN Xin, China Council for BRICS Think Tank Cooperation; HE Ambassador Prof Anil Sooklal, DIRCO; Dr Vyacheslav Nikonov, National Committee on BRICS Research; HE Deputy Minister Mr Alvin Botes, DIRCO; Prof Sarah Mosoetsa, SABTT; Dr Samir Saran, Observer Research Foundation; & Dr Fabio Veras Soares, Institute of Applied Economic Research.





Group photo of the BRICS Think Tank Council members after the 15th BRICS Academic Forum recommendations engagement.



PHOTO
ESSAY



From left to right: Mr ZHAO Longyue, Prof Irina Yarygina, Mr Krish Chetty, Mr Anirudh Bhagchandka, Prof Fulufhelo Netswera, Dr Andre de Mello e Souza



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Group photo at the closing ceremony of the 15th Academic Forum.





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