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BRICS ACADEMIC REVIEW

ISSUE 10 • 2025



# BRICS & Brazil:

STRENGTHENING GLOBAL SOUTH COOPERATION FOR MORE INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE GOVERNANCE

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## GUEST EDITOR

Auriel Niemack

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# CHAIR'S NOTE

## Shaping new trajectories that place equity, solidarity, and justice at the centre of global governance



This tenth edition of the BRICS Academic Review arrives at a moment of profound global transition. We are living through times marked by heightened geopolitical uncertainty, intensifying inequality, and the ongoing failure of multilateral institutions to address the needs of the majority world. Against this backdrop, Brazil's 2025 BRICS presidency offers a welcome and necessary call to action, under the theme "Strengthening Global South Cooperation for More Inclusive and Sustainable Governance."

This is more than a slogan. It is a clear recognition that the current order is failing, and that countries of the Global South must take up the mantle to reimagine and rebuild it. The BRICS formation, rooted in diverse histories, geographies, and political traditions, offers a unique platform for doing precisely that. Through intellectual exchange, shared research, and collective policy thinking, the BRICS can shape new trajectories that place equity, solidarity, and justice at the centre of global governance.

This edition of the BRICS Academic Review reflects that spirit. It gathers contributions that speak to some of the most pressing challenges our societies face today. The four policy briefs presented here offer grounded and forward-looking insights into the structural crisis in public

higher education systems, the realities of youth unemployment, industrial policy, small, medium, and micro-enterprise (SMME) support, and the critical question of food security and sovereignty. These are not theoretical exercises; they are situated in lived experience and offer practical pathways for reform and resilience. Together, they help articulate a clear agenda for inclusive development rooted in context, but with global relevance.

We are especially pleased to include in this issue a contribution from Brazil's Institute for Applied Economic Research (Ipea), whose leadership and policy research have been instrumental in shaping the intellectual foundations of this year's BRICS presidency. Ipea's ongoing work in reviewing the more than 180 BRICS dialogue and cooperation mechanisms is a vital resource, not only for coordination and institutional memory but also for helping us consider what kind of BRICS we want to build in this new, expanded era.

Indeed, expansion is one of the defining features of this moment. With the inclusion of new members, such as Ethiopia, Iran, and Egypt, among others, the BRICS grouping, and by extension the BRICS Think Tanks Council (BTTC), has become more diverse, complex, and representative. This issue features a profile of the Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS), the BTTC member from Iran. Their inclusion marks another significant step in deepening South-South cooperation and broadening the knowledge systems that inform our collective work.

Brazil's BRICS Agenda for 2025 rightly focused on issues that matter to people across the Global South, including cooperation in health, governance of artificial intelligence, climate change, reforming the multilateral peace and security architecture, and enhancing the functioning of our own BRICS institutions. These challenges are not

isolated; they intersect with the daily realities of inequality, exclusion, and uneven development. We must remain committed to advancing responses that are not only technically sound but also ethically grounded and historically informed.

I also want to acknowledge the timely and insightful address delivered by South Africa's Minister in the Presidency at the second Cape Town Conversations, which focused on the country's G20 presidency and its priorities for advancing the developmental agenda of the Global South. The emphasis on inclusive growth, multilateral reform, and the imperative of Africa's voice in global governance aligns closely with the themes raised throughout this issue and Brazil's BRICS presidency. At a moment when the BRICS and G20 paths intersect, this address reminds us of the importance of intellectual and political leadership from the South in shaping alternative futures. Such futures are grounded in justice, solidarity, and historical agency.

As Chair of the South African BRICS Think Tank, I am proud of the contributions our scholars, institutions, and partners continue to make. The BRICS Academic Review remains a vital platform for showcasing the depth and breadth of policy thinking emerging from our network. I wish to thank the contributors, reviewers, editorial team, and our partners across the BTTC who have made this issue possible. As we navigate Brazil's presidency and prepare for what lies ahead, we must remain steadfast in the tasks before us. Building inclusive and sustainable governance is a challenging yet necessary endeavour. It will require courage, care, and collective imagination. Let this issue of the BRICS Academic Review serve as both a record of our efforts and an invitation to do more together. **BR**

PROF SARAH MOSOETSA

Chairperson

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



This tenth edition of the BRICS Academic Review is released at a time of renewed global interest in the BRICS formation. Brazil holds the 2025 presidency under the theme “Strengthening Global South Cooperation for More Inclusive and Sustainable Governance,” focusing on sustainable development, institutional reform, and enhanced collaboration among emerging powers. These priorities are reflected throughout this issue.

The edition features a range of contributions that address the evolving priorities of the BRICS Think Tanks Council. Two globally oriented pieces provide context for the year’s agenda: an analytical contribution from Brazil’s Ipea (page [16]), which outlines Brazil’s strategic areas of focus and reflects on the operational landscape of the BRICS’ cooperation mechanisms, and a keynote address by South Africa’s Minister in the Presidency delivered at the second Cape Town Conversations (page [22]), which reflects on South Africa’s G20 presidency

and the broader call for more responsive, inclusive multilateralism. Together, these pieces offer valuable insight into how the BRICS and G20 trajectories might intersect and reinforce one another in the months ahead.

These are followed by four concise, policy-focused briefs by South African scholars and practitioners:

- Phokele Maponya (page [30]) explores how BRICS nations, despite vast agricultural resources and diverse food systems, face persistent food insecurity challenges, advocating for stronger policy cohesion to advance food sovereignty across the bloc.
- Krish Chetty (page [40]) advocates for a coordinated BRICS AI strategy that leverages open-source platforms to empower small, medium, and micro enterprises (SMMEs), positioning AI as a tool for inclusive economic transformation.
- Raymond Matlala *et al.* (page [49]) examine youth empowerment across the BRICS+ nations, highlighting both the progress made through platforms such as the BRICS Youth Summit and the newly established BRICS Youth Council, as well as the persistent challenges of limited policy uptake, funding gaps, and uneven access.
- Fuluhele Netswera and Bruno De Conti (page [56]) critically examine Brazil’s evolving stance toward international financial institutions, highlighting its advocacy for systemic reform, de-dollarisation, and greater representation for developing countries.

This issue also features a profile of the Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS), Iran’s recently inducted member of the BRICS Think Tanks Council (page [26]). As the BTTC expands

in step with the broader BRICS formation, new voices and institutions are helping shape an increasingly diverse and grounded agenda. IPIS brings decades of international policy expertise and research, adding further depth to the Council’s work.

Institutional development remains a key focus for the Brazilian presidency. With over 180 BRICS cooperation mechanisms now active, there is a growing recognition that coordination and strategic clarity are vital for sustaining long-term impact. Ipea’s mapping of these structures offers an important contribution to this conversation, particularly in light of the BRICS’s expanded membership and deepening policy agenda.

Also notable in this issue is the forthcoming publication *The BRICS Nexuses: Peace & Security (2018) and Security and Economy (2024)*, edited by Professor Nimala Devi Gopal and Gert Kruger. Supported by a NIHSS grant, the book brings together key insights from two BRICS conferences. It explores the intersections of peace, security, and economic transformation across the BRICS countries, addressing themes such as cybercrime, regional energy policy, environmental resilience, and governance. These are critical areas of concern for BRICS scholars and policy actors alike, and the book’s multidisciplinary framing will enrich our collective reflections going forward.

As always, the BRICS Academic Review serves as a platform for knowledge exchange and policy dialogue within the BTTC and across the wider academic and policy communities. My thanks go to all contributors, reviewers, and colleagues who supported the production of this tenth issue. As the BRICS agenda continues to evolve under Brazil’s leadership, we hope this publication will provide a valuable window into the research, reflection, and collaboration that will shape the year ahead. **BR**



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# BRICS

## Brasil 2025

SUL GLOBAL INCLUSIVO E SUSTENTÁVEL

### BRICS 2025 Brazilian Presidency

Guided by the motto “Strengthening Global South Cooperation for More Inclusive and Sustainable Governance”, Brasil’s 2025 BRICS Presidency will focus on two priorities: the Global South Cooperation and BRICS Partnerships for Social, Economic and Environmental Development.



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# OVERVIEW

INSIGHTS, NEWS AND COMMENTARY ABOUT BRICS

COMPILED BY BABALWA SISWANA & KATLEGO SCHEEPERS



## BRICS labour meeting in Brasilia tackles AI impact, green transition

**T**he 4th BRICS Employment Working Group (EWG) Meeting concludes in Brasília on April 23, following three days of discussions focused on artificial intelligence, digital transformation and just transition in the world of work.

Representatives from the expanded BRICS bloc of 11 nations, international organisations and key stakeholders gathered in the Brazilian capital under the coordination of Maíra Lacerda, head of the International Affairs Advisory Office at the Brazilian Ministry of Labour and Employment.

Brazilian Labour Minister Luiz Marinho opened the in-person stage of the meeting on April 22, beginning with a minute of silence to honour Argentine-born Pope Francis, who passed away a day prior at the age of 88. “The Pope always defended the excluded, with messages of fraternity, solidarity and

respect for the poor around the world,” Marinho said.

The meeting, part of a series of events in preparation for the bloc’s summit in July, continues discussions that began in February, exploring how BRICS countries are addressing challenges and opportunities presented by digital and environmental transitions in labour markets.

Delegates examined AI’s growing impact on employment, skills requirements and worker protections, with discussions focused on developing people-centred AI governance frameworks with social partner participation to ensure digital transformation promotes decent work and inclusion.

Marinho highlighted the progress made in concluding the Working Group’s chapter on artificial intelligence, reflecting “the collective commitment of our countries to face the challenges and opportunities of digital transformation.”

The group also focused on creating equitable pathways towards sustainable economies, with BRICS countries sharing experiences on green job investments and reskilling programmes, as well as strengthened social protection systems to

support workers and communities adapting to climate-related economic changes.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) delegation included Moustapha Kamal Gueye, coordinator of the ILO’s Green Jobs Programme; Vinicius Pinheiro Carvalho, ILO director in Brazil; and Anita Amorim, head of the ILO’s Emerging and Special Associations Unit.

Gueye stressed the importance of ensuring transformations in the world of work are based on principles of social justice, describing a just transition as “not just an aspiration, but a necessity.” He emphasised the key role of international cooperation, noting that “BRICS has the opportunity to lead this process.”

Marinho reinforced that the transition to a sustainable economy “cannot be seen only as an economic strategy, but as a social necessity,” and noted that topics discussed at the meeting will be taken to COP 30, scheduled for November in Belém, Brazil.

The Brazilian minister also addressed the current international scenario, highlighting the need for balance and sovereignty amidst global economic tensions, while reaffirming Brazil’s commitment to multilateralism and the promotion of peace.

The BRICS Employment Working Group functions as a space for dialogue and cooperation between the bloc’s member countries: Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia, Indonesia and Iran. In 2025, under Brazil’s presidency, the work will be guided by the motto “Strengthening Cooperation in the Global South for More Inclusive and Sustainable Governance”.

Outcomes from the Brasília meeting will inform ongoing BRICS cooperation on developing fair and sustainable work environments supported by South-South and triangular cooperation initiatives.

Source: bne IntelliNews | Photo by bne IntelliNews





## Russia and Indonesia work on direct bank settlement framework to bolster trade

**R**ussia and Indonesia are currently working to establish direct settlement mechanisms between their respective banking institutions, according to Russian First Deputy Prime Minister Denis Manturov, *Interfax* reported. The initiative is being overseen by financial regulators from both nations.

Speaking at the Russian-Indonesian intergovernmental commission, Manturov underscored the urgency of maintaining seamless financial transactions amid global challenges. "In today's environment, ensuring uninterrupted mutual settlements is vital. A key priority is expanding direct correspondent banking ties between our countries' financial systems," he said.

Trade between Russia and Indonesia

has surged by more than 80% over the past five years, reaching \$4.3bn in 2024. Manturov noted that Indonesia now ranks among Russia's top three trade partners within ASEAN.

In Southeast Asia, Indonesia is the most populous state and one of the biggest regional economies. In recent months the country has been moving much closer to Russia and the BRICs group as US policies in Asia have proven more and more unpopular.

He also commended Jakarta's foreign policy stance, saying, "We value Indonesia's independent and pragmatic approach in advancing comprehensive cooperation with Russia, even in the face of considerable external pressures."

## The volume of trade in agricultural products between Russia and Saudi Arabia exceeded \$1 billion

**M**inisters of Agriculture of Russia and Saudi Arabia Oksana Lut and Abdurrahman Al Fadli Negotiations were held in Riyadh, discussing further strengthening of the country's partnership in the agro-industrial sector. This is reported on Site Ministry of Agriculture of the Russian Federation.

It is noted that Saudi Arabia remains an important trading partner of Russia in the Middle East: the volume of mutual trade in agricultural products has already exceeded 1 billion US dollars (more than 82.3 billion rubles). At the same time, in 2024, Russian exports to the kingdom increased by 24 percent, primarily due to the growth of supplies of wheat, barley, poultry and beef.

One of the promising areas is also veterinary vaccines and genetic developments. The Saudi side showed interest in Russian selection achievements, in particular, in the meat cross of the "Change 9" chickens.

In addition, the parties discussed cooperation in the field of science and education, including the possibility of training Saudi students in agrarian universities in Russia.

Source: TV BRICS

## India, UAE agree to deepen defence ties

**I**ndia and the United Arab Emirates on Tuesday (April 8, 2025) agreed that "close cooperation between the defence industries" should be an "integral part" of the bilateral cooperation, the government said in a press note after Defence Minister Rajnath Singh met visiting Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum here.

The visiting Crown Prince of the UAE also met Prime Minister Narendra Modi

and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar.

"The two leaders expressed satisfaction on the active Coast Guard to Coast Guard cooperation and committed to further deepen it by formalising the same through an MoU. They were convinced that close collaboration between the defence industries should be an integral part of the bilateral cooperation," the press note announced after the meeting between Mr. Singh and the visiting Crown Prince.

Mr. Singh said the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with the UAE was of "immense priority" for India adding, "In the coming years, we are eager to work closely in areas such as defence cooperation, co-production and co-development

projects, innovation and technology. Both India and the UAE are committed to work towards peace and prosperity in the region."

The Crown Prince, who is also a patron of the arts in the UAE, said, "Our conversations reaffirmed the strength of UAE-India ties which is built on trust, shaped by history, and driven by a shared vision to create a future full of opportunity, innovation, and lasting prosperity."

Mr. Modi acknowledged the role that Dubai has played in the India-UAE Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. "This special visit reaffirms our deep-rooted friendship and paves the way for even stronger collaboration in the future," he said.



## “Reaffirmed Strength Of UAE-India Ties”: Dubai Crown Prince On Meet With PM Modi

THE CROWN PRINCE OF DUBAI OF ARRIVED IN INDIA ON A TWO-DAY VISIT EARLIER IN THE DAY AT INVITATION OF PRIME MINISTER MODI.

**T**his is Sheikh Hamdan Bin Mohammed Al Maktoum’s first official visit to India.

New Delhi: Sheikh Hamdan Bin Mohammed Al Maktoum, Crown Prince of Dubai, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on Tuesday hailed UAE-India ties following a meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi.

The Crown Prince of Dubai arrived in India on a two-day visit earlier in the day at invitation of Prime Minister Modi.

“It was a pleasure meeting the Prime Minister Narendra Modi today in New Delhi. Our conversations reaffirmed the strength of UAE-India ties which is built on trust, shaped by history, and driven by a shared vision to create a future full of opportunity, innovation, and lasting prosperity,” he posted on X after meeting PM Modi.

This is Sheikh Hamdan Bin Mohammed Al Maktoum’s first official visit to India as the Crown Prince of Dubai and he is accompanied by several ministers, senior government officials and a high-level business delegation.

Prime Minister Modi hosted a working lunch for the visiting dignitary

and the Crown Prince also held meetings with External Affairs Minister (EAM) S. Jaishankar and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh.

“Delighted to welcome Crown Prince of Dubai and DPM & Minister of Defence of UAE HH Hamdan Mohammed at the start of his first official visit to India. Value his positive sentiments for our wide-ranging cooperation and vibrant ties,” said EAM Jaishankar.

After Delhi, the Crown Prince will visit Mumbai and will also participate in a business roundtable with prominent business leaders from both sides. The interaction will strengthen India-UAE economic and commercial cooperation across traditional and futuristic areas.

“Traditionally, Dubai has played an important role in India’s commercial, cultural and people-to-people exchanges with the UAE. Majority of India’s around 4.3 million diaspora in UAE reside and work in Dubai. The visit of His Highness the Crown Prince will further solidify the India-UAE Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and strengthen our multifaceted ties with Dubai,” read a statement issued by the MEA.

Source: ndtv.com/world-news/reaffirmed-strength-of-india-uae-ties-dubai-crown-prince-sheikh-hamdan-on-meet-with-pm-modi-8116368

## BRICS partnership opens up “greater horizons” for Egypt, says minister

**E**gypt’s membership in BRICS has opened up “greater horizons,” expanding opportunities to benefit from China’s “inspiring” experience in high-quality development and modernization, Egyptian Finance Minister Ahmed Kouchouk has said.

“We are very happy with our accession to BRICS and with the cooperation in all areas of joint work, including the economic or political tracks,” Kouchouk told Xinhua in a recent interview.

Egypt officially joined BRICS in early 2024, a significant step in enhancing its global economic position.

He emphasized BRICS’ importance as a forum for emerging economies to discuss priorities and policies and coordinate efforts

to exchange expertise to enhance trade, economic and investment relations.

He underscored the role of the New Development Bank in financing infrastructure and development projects in BRICS nations.

Noting that Egypt is a founding member of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), which now has more than 100 members, Kouchouk said that the Beijing-based bank is currently financing about six projects in the country.

Kouchouk emphasized the significant development of Egypt-China relations in recent years, noting that “The level of bilateral relations has reached a strategic level, allowing cooperation across various fields. We have benefited from accessing the Chinese market and issuing bonds there.”

He noted that China is Egypt’s largest trading partner and one of its largest investment partners, thanks to the strong bilateral cooperation and the elevation of their relationship to a comprehensive strategic

partnership, which has significantly influenced trade figures and prospects for cooperation.

The number of Chinese companies in Egypt has considerably increased across all sectors, especially in the last 10 years, said the Egyptian official, who cited the vast industrial zone developed by China’s industrial developer TEDA near Egypt’s Suez Canal as an example.

He praised China’s high-quality development and modernization efforts, calling it a “pioneering experience.”

“I have visited many Chinese cities as an AIIB board member and witnessed the tremendous progress and modernization China has achieved,” he said, adding that Egypt can draw valuable lessons from China’s experience.

He also commended China for its achievements in reducing poverty, boosting income levels, enhancing competitiveness across different sectors, making significant technological advancements, and developing extensive infrastructure nationwide.

Source: Xinhua





Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov

## Chinese, Russian FM's agree to deepen practical cooperation, safeguard just international order

**C**hinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov agreed on Tuesday to jointly advance the development of bilateral relations and cooperation across various fields.

They made the remarks during Wang's official visit to Russia where he held talks with Lavrov.

Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, said Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin have twice engaged in strategic communication so far this year, guiding the steady progress of bilateral relations amid the major changes unseen in a century and making new important deployments to deepen comprehensive strategic coordination between the two countries.

China is willing to work with Russia to implement the consensus reached by the two heads of state, jointly advance the development of bilateral relations and cooperation across various fields, and continue to benefit the two peoples, Wang said.

Wang noted that this year marks the 80th anniversary of the victories of the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, the Soviet Union's Great Patriotic War and the World Anti-Fascist War, as well as the 80th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations (UN).

China is willing to work with Russia to shoulder the special responsibilities as permanent members of the UN Security Council to safeguard the outcomes of World War II, as well as international fairness and justice, he said.

China is also ready to work with Russia to promote a multi-polar world and greater democracy in international relations, so as to make new contributions to the cause of peace and development, he added.

Wang expressed his confidence that under the strategic guidance of the two heads of state, the China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for a new era will gain fresh momentum and reach a new stage.

For his part, Lavrov said that Putin and Xi have injected strong impetus into

bilateral strategic coordination, guiding bilateral relations to an unprecedented level.

Russia and China share a long tradition of good-neighborliness and friendship, a long border and broad common interests, Lavrov said, adding that Russia is willing to work with China in accordance with the guiding principles set by the two heads of state to achieve new results in bilateral relations.

Lavrov noted that facing the complex international landscape, Russia and China have maintained close coordination to inject stability to the world.

Russia highly appreciates the global initiatives that China proposed, fully supports China's position on the Taiwan question, and is willing to jointly uphold the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, and safeguard a just and equitable international order, he noted.

The two sides agreed to strengthen coordination between the two foreign ministries and prepare for exchanges at all levels within the year, deepen practical cooperation in various fields and consolidate the material foundation of bilateral relations.

They pledged to make the China-Russia Years of Culture a success, enrich cultural exchanges and enhance friendship between the two peoples.

They also agreed to enhance coordination within frameworks such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, BRICS, the G20 and the UN to jointly safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of Global South countries.

The two sides also exchanged views on the Ukraine crisis. Lavrov said that Russia eyes for eliminating the root causes of the crisis and is committed to building a lasting security architecture for Eurasia.

Wang reiterated China's consistent position and expressed support for all peace efforts, noting that China is willing to continue to build more international consensus through the Group of Friends for Peace and play a constructive role in promoting a political settlement of the crisis.

The two sides also coordinated their positions on the current international situation, particularly developments in the Asia-Pacific region.



## Ethiopia set to become 4th African member of BRICS New Development Bank

**E**thiopia has perfected plans to join the BRICS New Development Bank, making it the fourth African nation to become a member of the institution.

### Ethiopia set to become 4th African member of BRICS New Development Bank

- Ethiopia plans to join the BRICS New Development Bank, becoming the fourth African nation to be a member
- Ethiopia has submitted its application for NDB membership and received political support from all BRICS members
- The NDB has three African member countries: South Africa, Egypt, and Algeria, with Ethiopia set to join soon

This move highlights Ethiopia's growing role in international economic partnerships and highlights the BRICS Bank's commitment to expanding its influence across emerging markets, particularly in Africa.

The move for Ethiopia's accession to the BRICS New Development Bank (NDB) was confirmed by the Ethiopian Ambassador to Brazil, Leulseged Tadese Abebe, during an interview published on the website of

Brazil's BRICS Chairmanship, a partner of TV BRICS.

Ambassador Abebe revealed that Ethiopia had already submitted its application for NDB membership and highlighted that joining the bank is a key priority for the country this year.

He emphasized Ethiopia's full commitment to integrating with the BRICS mechanisms, stating, "One of the most important pillars in the BRICS family is the New Development Bank."

The ambassador further noted that Ethiopia has already garnered political support from all BRICS members and expressed optimism about completing the accession process soon.

### Ethiopia has already submitted its application for the NDB membership

Once a member, Ethiopia intends to focus on key priority sectors such as agriculture, energy, and industry, aiming to drive sustainable development in these critical areas.

The addition of Ethiopia to the bank is expected to further strengthen its development initiatives on the continent, supporting critical infrastructure and sustainable projects in one of Africa's fastest-growing economies.

### The NDB membership in Africa

The New Development Bank (NDB) has three African member countries - South Africa, Egypt, and Algeria - with Ethiopia set to join soon. These members reflect the bank's growing influence in supporting sustainable development in Africa.

Key points about each country include:

- South Africa (founding member - July 3, 2015): Participates in NDB operations, funds infrastructure projects, and promotes sustainable development.
- Egypt (member since Feb 20, 2023): Leverages NDB funding for regional cooperation, energy, infrastructure, and trade projects.
- Algeria (member since August 31, 2024): Brings expertise in sustainable energy development and is expected to benefit from NDB financing for infrastructure and industrial capacity expansion.
- Ethiopia (set to join): Plans to focus NDB resources on agriculture, energy, and industry, strengthening the NDB's presence in the Horn of Africa.

The NDB's expansion in Africa highlights the continent's growing role in global economic governance and its commitment to infrastructure, energy, and sustainable development projects.



## Brazil hosts first BRICS Sherpas meeting with expanded membership

**B**rasilia hosted the first BRICS Sherpas meeting under the Brazilian Presidency on February 24-25, bringing together representatives from all 11 member countries at the Itamaraty Palace, the Foreign Ministry headquarters.

The event, which laid the groundwork for the bloc's summit taking place in Rio de Janeiro on July 6-7, marked the beginning of an ambitious agenda focused on strengthening multilateralism, promoting cooperation among Global South countries, and reforming international governance structures to better reflect the needs and aspirations of developing nations.

Brazil's Foreign Affairs Minister Mauro Vieira delivered an opening speech underscoring the bloc's relevance during a period of profound global transformations.

"It is a great honour to welcome you to this inaugural meeting of the Brazilian BRICS Presidency. We are gathered in a crucial moment — of profound transformations, in which the principles of multilateralism and cooperation are being tested by crises that demand urgent and collective action," Vieira stated.

In his address, Vieira affirmed that the response to the crisis of multilateralism "is more multilateralism, stronger and more inclusive in all spheres" and noted that the international order is undergoing radical changes while existing institutions struggle to adapt, even as emerging economies demand greater participation in global decisions.

"In this evolving scenario, BRICS plays a fundamental role in promoting a more just, inclusive and sustainable world order. A multipolar world is not only an emerging reality, but a shared objective," he said.

This is the first meeting since last year's major BRICS expansion to include Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the UAE, Ethiopia, Iran, and Indonesia, alongside original members Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

The Brazilian presidency will prioritise cooperation with the Global South and an



The President of Brazil, Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, takes part in the opening ceremony of the First Meeting of Sherpas of the Brazilian BRICS Presidency in Brasilia, Brazil, on February 26, 2025.

agenda focusing on social, economic and environmental development, with emphasis on six key areas: health, trade, climate change, artificial intelligence, reform of the multilateral security system, and institutional strengthening of the bloc.

Ambassador Celso Amorim, serving as Head Adviser to President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, outlined his perspective on the bloc's significance during a recent interview with BRICS Brasil's press team. The veteran diplomat, drawing on his extensive experience as foreign minister across multiple administrations, presented BRICS as a platform for developing nations to coordinate their efforts "on energy, on the monetary field, and even on the field of peace and security."

Countering claims of anti-Western bias, Amorim was forthright: "How can anyone say that Brazil is against the West when we have just concluded an agreement with the European Union [Mercosur-EU deal]? There is no point. Being subordinated to a particular leading country, we don't want that."

The Sherpas meeting's second day included a special session with President Lula, who delivered an upbeat speech about the bloc's outlook.

"I am convinced that BRICS will continue to be a driver of positive change for our nations and the world. Acting in a coordinated manner for the success of the South African presidency of the G20 and the Brazilian presidency of COP30 is defending

the shared future of this planet," said Lula.

The Brazilian leader also called for collective efforts to promote peace and a multilateral security system, warning that "unilateralism undermines the international order" and that negotiating "on the basis of power" leads to instability and conflict.

"We will have an intense presidency, which will lead us to a beautiful Summit of Heads of State and Government, in Rio. We must live up to the chosen motto: strengthening Global South cooperation and reforming international governance structures."

Touching on an issue that resonates with many members, Lula has welcomed BRICS nations' efforts to expand local currency payment options to reduce economic vulnerabilities. In this regard, he argued that rising protectionism necessitates greater economic integration. The renewed push comes amid threats from US President Donald Trump of 100% tariffs on the bloc's nations "if they want to play with the mighty dollar."

While Lula previously floated plans for a full-fledged common BRICS currency, he now advocates for expanding existing bilateral payment mechanisms, shelving the idea of ditching the dollar entirely — as confirmed by various diplomats who said a shared currency is not currently on the agenda. This puts Brazil at odds with other members such as Iran and Russia, which feel a bigger pressure to dedollarise their economy due to wide-reaching sanctions imposed on them by Western countries.

## China, UAE to enhance investment cooperation

**C** Chinese Vice Premier Ding Xuexiang and Vice President of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan virtually co-chaired the first meeting of a high-level committee for China-UAE investment cooperation on Monday.

Ding, also a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, praised the role of the committee in helping yield more results in bilateral cooperation.

He said China will work with the UAE to deliver on the common understandings between the two heads of state, and boost the efficiency and scale of investment

cooperation to advance the two countries' comprehensive strategic partnership.

Ding proposed that the two sides should give full play to the steering role of the committee, plan major projects under the Belt and Road Initiative, and encourage enterprises to expand the fields of cooperation between the two countries and innovate their methods of cooperation.

Sheikh Mansour said that the UAE commends the bilateral relations and is confident of China's economy. He said the UAE will enhance its investment cooperation with China in order to leverage their complementary advantages and promote shared prosperity.

Source: en.people.cn

## Russia and South Africa pledge closer economic cooperation

**R** Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov met with South Africa's Minister of International Relations and Cooperation Ronald Lamola on Wednesday in Moscow. Following the meeting both sides reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening bilateral ties.

Lamola has arrived in the Russian capital to chair the South African delegation at the 18th session of the Mixed Intergovernmental Committee on Trade and Economic Cooperation.

According to a statement from Russia's Foreign Ministry, the talks covered "a range of issues related to further strengthening traditionally friendly Russian-South African relations."

"The ministers reaffirmed Moscow and Pretoria's unwavering commitment to effectively coordinate actions at BRICS, the G20, the UN and in other multilateral formats in view to finding best solutions to current global and regional problems, in accordance with the principles of international law and the provisions of the UN Charter," the press service of Russian Foreign Ministry said in the statement.

As part of his working visit, Minister

Lamola also participated in a session of the Russia-South Africa Business Council, held under the auspices of Business Russia. The event gathered representatives of South African government bodies, Russian companies, and business associations.

Pavel Titov, President of Business Russia, told participants that cooperation with South Africa ranks among the organization's top "priorities." He noted that Russian entrepreneurs regularly submit B2B inquiries regarding the African nation.

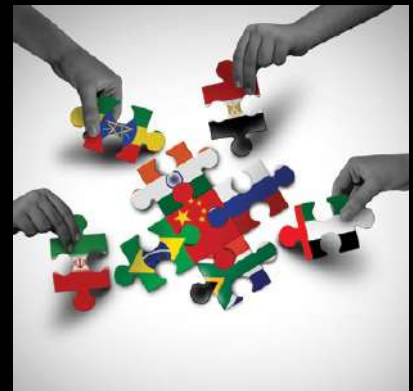
He also revealed that discussions are underway on the use of national currencies for mutual settlements and the potential establishment of direct air connections.

Lamola stressed to the council meeting the importance of expanding and diversifying bilateral trade. "We must look beyond traditional sectors and seek new opportunities for co-operation in advanced innovations, sustainable development and business transformation," he said.

Russia's achievements in aerospace, energy, metallurgy, and high technology as potential areas where South Africa could benefit—particularly in terms of "security, industrialisation and infrastructure modernisation," according to the minister.

Speaking to RT, Lamola said his delegation also came to Russia to honor the legacy of anti-Apartheid figures Moses Kotane and J.B. Marks, both of whom are buried in Moscow.

Source: rt.com



## BRICS countries to launch joint initiative to combat land degradation

**B** BRICS members will coordinate efforts to conserve soil and efficiently use water resources.

The second meeting of the BRICS Working Group on Agriculture is taking place in the capital of Brazil to discuss key initiatives in the field of food security, sustainable agricultural production, and rehabilitation of degraded areas. One of the main topics was the creation of the BRICS Partnership for Land Restoration. This is reported by the official website of the Brazilian Government.

It is specified that the new initiative will be officially launched at the ministerial meeting on 17 April and will be included in the final declaration to be adopted at the summit of the association's leaders in July. The partnership will coordinate efforts to rehabilitate degraded land, conserve soil, efficiently use water resources and introduce scientific solutions in the agricultural sector in the Global South.

Delegates also discussed the 2025-2028 Action Plan, which outlines goals in four key areas: facilitating international trade in agro-products, sustainable production, agricultural innovation and industry finance, and food security.

The first meeting of the BRICS Working Group on Agriculture was held in February. It addressed issues of electronic certification to improve control and security in the agricultural sector.

Source: tbrcs.com



The Union Minister of External Affairs, Shri S. Jaishankar meets with The Crown Prince of Dubai, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence H.H. Sheikh Hamdan Bin Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum

## Dubai Chambers Enhances India-UAE Business Relations at Mumbai Event Attended by Hamdan bin Mohammed

**I**n the presence of His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Crown Prince of Dubai, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defence, and Chairman of The Executive Council of Dubai, Dubai Chambers organised a high-level business meeting in Mumbai attended by senior officials and business leaders from both the UAE and India.

During the event, His Excellency Sultan bin Saeed Al Mansoori, Chairman of Dubai Chambers, announced the opening of Dubai Chambers' second representative office in India. Located in Bengaluru, the new office will expand Dubai Chambers' efforts to strengthen business ties with the Indian market and build on the success of its first office in the country, which was launched in Mumbai in 2018.

In their addresses at the event, His Excellency Abdullah bin Touq Al Marri, UAE Minister of Economy, and His Excellency Piyush Goyal, India's Minister of Commerce and Industry, highlighted the strength of economic ties between the two nations. They noted that the opening of Dubai Chambers' second office in India

marks a significant step toward expanding cooperation and supporting the ambitious goals of the UAE-India Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement. Both ministers highlighted their shared

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“Both ministers highlighted their shared commitment to strengthening a partnership that has already driven significant growth in bilateral trade.”

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commitment to strengthening a partnership that has already driven significant growth in bilateral trade.

*His Excellency Al Mansoori* noted that the Mumbai and Bengaluru offices will help accelerate the flow of investments between Dubai and India. He highlighted that Dubai's investments in India have focused on key sectors such as transportation and

warehousing, real estate, and information technology services, while Indian companies have invested significantly in Dubai's software and IT services, business services, and consumer goods sectors.

He added: “We remain committed to strengthening Dubai's global investment appeal and supporting the international expansion of the local business community. Dubai International Chamber's network of international offices plays a vital role in raising awareness among global businesses and investors on the high-potential opportunities Dubai offers across diverse sectors, while also encouraging multinational companies to benefit from the emirate's competitive and business-friendly environment.”

His Excellency Sultan Ahmed bin Sulayem, Chairman of Dubai International Chamber, said: “Dubai's leadership has long recognised that international trade and deeper connections with global markets are central to the emirate's future economic growth. The Dubai International Chamber plays a vital role in advancing this vision. By strengthening partnerships with key economies such as India, we are not only reinforcing Dubai's role as a hub for international collaboration but also creating pathways for Emirati businesses to explore new global opportunities.”

He added: “Through broader engagement between our business communities across sectors, we are unlocking potential that can shape a new future for cross-border trade, while strengthening Dubai's value proposition as a strategic base for global commerce. These efforts to grow connectivity are vital for building resilient trade corridors and enhancing shared prosperity.”

# GLOBAL AFFAIRS

## The role of Ipea in the 2025 Brazilian Presidency of the BRICS: Cooperation mechanisms, thematic priorities and planned activities

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LUCIANA MENDES SERVO

Institute for Applied Economic Research

### Introduction

Brazil currently holds the 2025 rotating presidency of the BRICS, with the motto: *Strengthening Global South cooperation for more inclusive and sustainable governance*. Within the institutional framework of the working groups of the international coalition, the Institute for Applied Economic Research (Ipea) serves as a platform dedicated to specialised dialogue. The Ipea is also the formal representative of the Brazilian federal government in the following two cooperation mechanisms:

- The BRICS Think Tank Council (BTTC): established in 2013, it comprises policy-oriented research institutions, each nominated by their respective national government. Its primary purpose is to facilitate the exchange of ideas among researchers, academia, and other scientific centres. The leadership rotates annually, held by

the think tank of the country chairing the bloc that year.

» The BRICS Academic Forum (FABRICS): convened annually since 2009, providing a platform for the exchange of ideas among experts within the group. Currently, the organisation of the forum is assigned to the BTTC. The event is coordinated by the think tank that presides over the council, with activities conducted in their respective country.

- The BRICS Think Tank Network for Finance (BTNF): launched in 2024, it serves as a platform for sharing experiences and knowledge regarding public finance, particularly its international aspects, as well as conducting research on topics related to the reform of global economic governance. Similar to the BTTC, it comprises think tanks appointed by each national government, with its rotating

presidency following that of the bloc.

The chairs of the two mechanisms are responsible for planning, coordinating, and executing activities. In the BTTC and the BTNF, Brazil is represented by the same institution, the Ipea.

### Mandates and functions of the BTTC, the BTNF and their chairships

Even before the inaugural BRICS Summit in Yekaterinburg (2009), a foundational conference took place in Moscow at the end of the previous year. This initial gathering brought together experts and practitioners from the four countries that would form the original coalition. The meeting focused on analysing ongoing global political and economic developments and discussing the prospective trajectory of the group. It later evolved into the BRICS Academic Forum, held regularly since 2010 by the country assuming the rotating presidency.

With South Africa's accession to the





group in 2011 and 2012, the BRICS leaders expressed support for the establishment of a network of research centres across the five member states. They identified at least two key areas for joint exploration:

- (i) assessing the cooperation undertaken by the group thus far, and
- (ii) developing strategies to advance the bloc and realise its collective goals.

The Declaration on the Establishment of the BRICS Think Tank Council (BTTC)

In 2013, the BTTC was signed in Durban, formally institutionalising this mechanism for experts' collaboration. The following year, the council held its first formal meeting in Rio de Janeiro, where procedural guidelines for its operation were negotiated. This effort resulted in a document presenting 21 general recommendations to the BRICS leaders, along with the decision to conduct a joint study by BTTC members, structured around five thematic pillars. The core provisions regarding the constitution and operation of the BTTC, as articulated in these two foundational documents, are summarised in Table 1.

In 2024, the Council marked a decade of activity. During the course of the year, following the announcement of the BRICS' enlargement at the previous summit, two new countries—Ethiopia and Iran—joined the BTTC and actively participated in its meetings and initiatives. To provide renewed structure to the Council's work and formally incorporate these new think tanks, a Memorandum of Understanding was negotiated among all parties during the Russian presidency. This agreement, which is set to be finalised in the current year, will also include the accession of another new member: Egypt. The current list of BTTC members is presented in Table 2.

Regarding the activities undertaken by the BTTC over the past decade, it is important to emphasise that its direction has primarily depended on the initiative of the country holding the rotating presidency. Although comprehensive joint studies have been produced, such efforts have not occurred regularly, primarily due to operational challenges.

Nevertheless, despite some variation in format, three core activities have been

**Table 1: The BTTC Mandate**

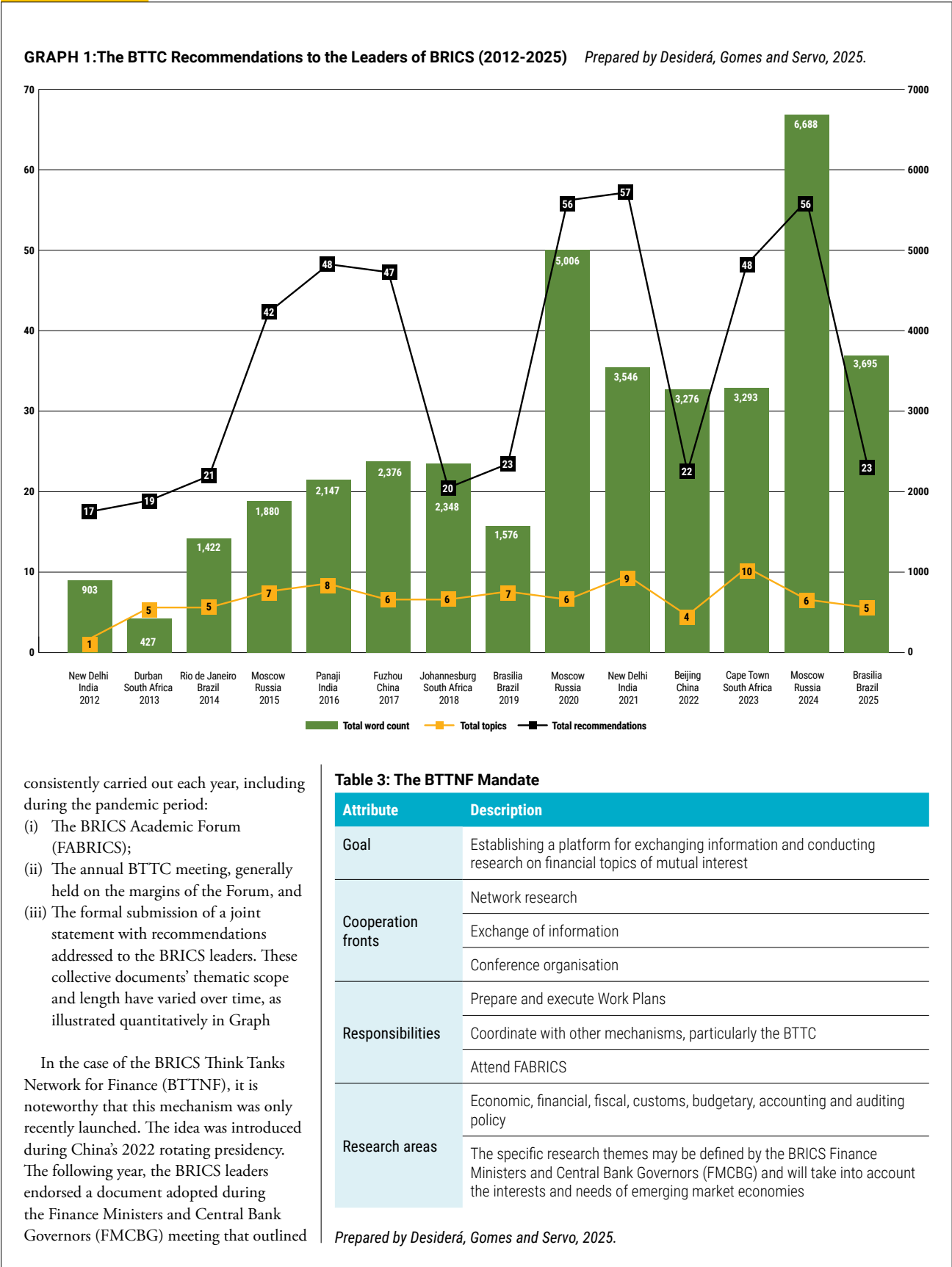
Attribute	Description
Goal	Strengthening, promoting and developing (i) research cooperation, (ii) knowledge sharing, (iii) capacity building and (iv) policy advice
Cooperation fronts	Encouraging participation in international events
	Exchange of administrative, teaching and research experiences
	Organisation of joint symposia, conferences and workshops
	Exchange of unclassified information
Responsibilities	Organise FABRICS
	Meet regularly, at least once a year
	Recommend policies to leaders
	Identify priorities for cooperation
	Produce joint studies
	Facilitate exchange programs
	Support members' research activities
Thematic pillars	Cooperation for economic growth and development
	Political and economic governance
	Social justice, climate change, sustainable development and quality of life
	Peace and security
	Progress through the sharing of innovations and knowledge

*Prepared by Desiderá, Gomes and Servo, 2025.*

**Table 2: The BTTC Members**

Country	Institution
Brazil	Institute for Applied Economic Research
Russia	The BRICS Expert Council - Russia
India	Observer Research Foundation
China	China Council for the BRICS Think Tank Cooperation
South Africa	The South African Think Tank
Egypt	Information and Decision Support Centre
Ethiopia	Institute of Foreign Affairs
Iran	Institute of Political and International Studies
Indonesia	<i>Pending the appointment of a representative by the member country</i>
Saudi Arabia	<i>Pending the appointment of a representative by the member country</i>
UAE	<i>Pending the appointment of a representative by the member country</i>

*Prepared by Desiderá, Gomes and Servo, 2025.*



the network's operational guidelines. In October 2024, the research institutions appointed by each country formally signed the Memorandum of Understanding among BTTNF Participants. The key provisions concerning the establishment and functioning of the network, as set out in these two foundational documents, are summarised in Table 3.

Although it shares a similar nature with the BTTC, the key distinction of the BTTNF lies in the role assigned to the BRICS finance track, which is empowered to request or commission studies on topics of interest while preserving the network's independence. Another difference is that each member country can appoint multiple think tanks to join the network, although one must be designated to take the lead. As operations are set to begin in 2025, the format of the work dynamics is still being developed. Finally, as shown in Table 4, the countries and the representative institutions currently making up the network and the council are generally distinct, with the exceptions of Brazil and Egypt.

**Thematic priorities**

Under the Brazilian presidency and in accordance with its guiding motto, the 2025 BRICS agenda comprises six focus areas. First,

**(i) Global Health Cooperation**

This theme strongly emphasises advancing tangible collaboration in the field. The bloc aims to move beyond declarations by implementing practical initiatives and projects, particularly in universal health systems, primary care, and digital health infrastructure. The concept underpinning this priority is that cooperation among BRICS countries can be crucial in building resilient health systems, reducing inequalities in access to care, and fostering coordinated responses to global health crises.

**(ii) Trade, Investment and Finance**

This theme underscores the need to deepen coordination in global economic governance. Recognising their growing share in the world economy, BRICS countries are encouraged to play a more assertive role in reforming international

**Table 4: The BTTNF Members**

Country	Institution
Brazil	Institute for Applied Economic Research
Russia	Financial Research Institute
India	Research and Information System for Developing Countries
China	Chinese Academy of Fiscal Sciences
Egypt	Information and Decision Support Centre
UAE	Emirates Centre for Strategic Studies and Research
Ethiopia	<i>Pending the appointment of a representative by the member country</i>
Indonesia	<i>Pending the appointment of a representative by the member country</i>
Iran	<i>Pending the appointment of a representative by the member country</i>
Saudi Arabia	<i>Pending the appointment of a representative by the member country</i>
South Africa	<i>Pending the appointment of a representative by the member country</i>

*Prepared by Desiderá, Gomes and Servo, 2025.*

financial institutions, promoting equitable decision-making, and enhancing access to development finance. This includes support for initiatives such as local currency financing and developing inclusive, sustainable investment frameworks. The priority reflects that the bloc can catalyse structural change in the international economic order, anchored in fairness and multipolarity.

**(iii) Climate Change**

This theme proposes articulating a BRICS Climate Leadership Agenda in preparation for COP30 in Belém, marking the tenth anniversary of the Paris Agreement. The bloc is expected to collectively advocate for

ambitious, fair, and implementable climate commitments, rooted in common but differentiated responsibilities. The concept emphasises the strategic opportunity for the BRICS to lead by example—coordinating efforts to reduce emissions, protect biodiversity, and mobilise financing for climate adaptation and mitigation across the Global South.

**(iv) Artificial Intelligence (AI) Governance**

AI governance addresses the urgent need for collective approaches to regulating emerging technologies. The BRICS platform envisions contributing to the construction of inclusive, multilateral governance

“The BRICS platform envisions contributing to the construction of inclusive, multilateral governance frameworks that ensure the responsible development and deployment of AI.”

**Table 5: Planned activities for the BTTC and the BTTNF (2025)**

Scope	Activity	Description	Output	Timeline
Ipea	Workshop cycle	Series of meetings structured around the thematic priorities to collect recommendations with Brazilian experts and institutions	Zero drafting of the recommendations to leaders	February 17 to February 24
BTTC	Recommendations	Formulation, discussion and consensus-building among BTTC members to provide policy recommendations to the leaders	Submission of the BTTC Recommendations to the leaders at the XVII BRICS Summit (2025)	April 2
BTTC	Joint research	Compilation and systematisation of data regarding BRICS cooperation mechanisms	Publication of reports of the Portfolio of BRICS Cooperation Mechanisms	June 26 and November 30
BTTC	Institutional progress	Conclusion of negotiations for the update of the operational framework	Signing of the BTTC Memorandum of Understanding	June 25
BTTC	Membership expansion	Prospective consultations with diplomatic representatives from BRICS member countries to appoint think tanks to join the BTTC	Completion of BRICS members representation within the BTTC	Continuous
BTTC and BTTNF	Academic forum	Conceptual and logistical planning for the FABRICS, facilitating the reception of delegations of speakers headed by the BTTC and the BTTNF members	Realisation of the XVII FABRICS	June 25 and 26
BTTNF	Finance track consultation	Meetings with the Brazilian deputies for alignment and guidance regarding the areas of interest in which the FMCBG suggests the development of studies	Zero drafting for the BTTNF Work Plans	April 23
BTTNF	Joint research	Collective construction and execution of the inaugural Work Plans of the network	Execution of BTTNF Work Plans and publication of research results	June 25 and December 15
BTTNF	Membership expansion	Prospective consultations with FMCBG representatives of BRICS member countries to appoint think tanks to join the BTTNF	Completion of BRICS members representation within the BTTNF	Continuous

*Elaborated by Desiderá, Gomes and Servo, 2025.*

frameworks that ensure the responsible development and deployment of AI. This involves protecting digital sovereignty, promoting data equity, and encouraging technology transfer and capacity-building among developing countries. The concept underscores the future-defining nature of AI and the responsibility of major emerging powers to shape its trajectory in alignment with human rights and global stability.

**(v) Reform of the Multilateral Peace and Security Architecture**

This theme calls for a transformation of existing global security institutions to make them more representative, transparent, and oriented toward development and peace. This includes a long-standing BRICS demand for the United Nations Security

Council reform and enhanced cooperation with regional organisations engaged in conflict prevention and resolution. The concept behind this priority is that current multilateral structures, shaped in the post-World War II context, no longer reflect contemporary geopolitical realities, and that the BRICS can play a vital role in making the international security order more inclusive and effective.

**(vi) Institutional Development**

This theme emphasises the need to enhance the BRICS group's internal structure and cohesion. While the coalition has expanded its scope and influence, many of its mechanisms remain underutilised or unevenly integrated. Strengthening platforms such as the BRICS Think Tanks

Council and the New Development Bank and enhancing coordination across initiatives are essential steps toward building greater coherence and strategic capacity. The Brazilian presidency encourages efforts to consolidate the group's institutional foundations to ensure its long-term effectiveness in global governance.

These six focus areas have established the foundation for the Brazilian presidency's action plan. As outlined in the following section, the Ipea has translated these priorities into a concrete agenda of activities and contributions.

**Agenda for the BTTC and the BTTNF in 2025**

Before detailing the specific activities planned by the Ipea for 2025, it is



important to highlight an initial step taken to optimise coordination within the mechanisms currently under its leadership. To enhance operational efficiency—both logistically and to avoid duplication of efforts—a joint meeting was convened in Rio de Janeiro on 13 November 2024, bringing together the think tanks participating in the BTTC and the BTTNE. This initiative sought to align institutional perspectives and promote early-stage synchronisation between the agendas of both research platforms. Moreover, the meeting provided an opportunity to gather expectations and inputs from the participating institutions. Four main concerns were identified during the discussions:

- (i) promoting a positive narrative about the coalition and its progress,
- (ii) fostering cooperation with the New Development Bank (NDB),
- (iii) studying local currency payment systems, and
- (iv) encouraging the incorporation of new members into the mechanisms

Building on the contributions gathered during the joint meeting and drawing inspiration from the six thematic priorities, Ipea has developed a set of initiatives designed to translate these strategic goals into concrete action. These activities reflect a commitment to fostering substantive, coordinated engagement within the BRICS framework. Table 5 summarises the planned initiatives and expected deliverables for 2025.

#### Final remarks

The double responsibility assumed by the Ipea in 2025 of coordinating both the BTTC and the BTTNF and convening the FABRICS has demanded exceptional institutional commitment. This task has been further complicated by the year's compressed calendar, as the Brazilian presidency will host the XVII BRICS Summit as early as July. This anticipation, while logistically challenging, reflects a deliberate strategic choice.

The anticipation of the BRICS agenda 2025 directly links to the organisation of COP-30, which will occur in Belém in November. This decision reflects a clear conviction of Brazilian foreign policy:



“Advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is, in this regard, the most important collective task of our time, as it represents the foundational condition for building a more just, inclusive, and equitable world.”

the success of the climate conference is fundamentally important for all of humanity, and prior alignment within the BRICS is an invaluable contribution to achieving this goal. Ensuring the bloc reaches a common understanding and puts forward coherent proposals in advance reinforces its capacity to influence the global agenda constructively and ambitiously.

The centrality of COP-30 arises primarily from the existential threat posed by the environmental crisis. Approving firm and fair commitments by all

countries to curb global warming is no longer a matter of choice but of urgency. Additionally, climate action is integral to one of the core pillars of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is, in this regard, the most important collective task of our time, as it represents the foundational condition for building a more just, inclusive, and equitable world. By anticipating its work and consolidating its positions, the BRICS contributes to this broader vision with clarity and purpose. **BR**

# GLOBAL AFFAIRS

## Speaking notes of Ms Khumbudzo Ntshavheni, Minister in The Presidency at the Thabo Mbeki Foundation 2nd Annual Cape Town Conversations

Wednesday, 27 November 2024

**H**

**His Excellency, President  
Thabo Mbeki (former),  
Distinguished Guests**

I wish to thank the Thabo MBEKI Foundation for the invitation to articulate “South Africa’s Vision and Commitment to Shaping a More Inclusive Global Governance System” and to unpack “the Pivotal Role of the Global South and South Africa’s Upcoming G20 Presidency in Advancing Solidarity, Equality and Sustainability”.

It is indeed an honour to be invited by an institution that is dedicated to “facilitating dialogue on the strategic priorities and actions for Africa’s Renaissance”, a few days before the first ever Presidency of the G20 by an African country begins.



The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the interconnectedness of the global South and North. The growing unity and assertiveness of the global South has amplified its role in global governance and provided a platform for reshaping global governance structures to better reflect the needs and aspirations of the world's majority. It can be said that the global South continues to demonstrate that it is not merely a passive participant but a transformative force in global governance, advocating for equity, inclusivity, and sustainable development in an evolving international order. This influence arises from their collective population size, economic growth trajectories, natural resources, and evolving geopolitical alliances.

Many countries in the global South are central to global trade networks and they are beginning to play a larger role in technology innovation, particularly in areas like fintech and renewable energy. Demonstrating the emergence of the global South in the global economy. Initiatives like the New Development Bank (NDB) and China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) reflect efforts to create alternative pathways for economic development and governance, bypassing traditional Western institutions.

Being home to the majority of the world's population, representing a youthful and growing labor force has gifted the global South with a demographic dynamism that positions these nations as drivers of global consumption and production in the coming decades. In addition, the global South holds vast reserves of natural resources, including minerals, energy resources, and arable land, making it central to global supply chains and energy security.

Countries in the Global South advocate for greater representation in international institutions such as the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), International Monetary Fund (IMF), and World Bank. Forums such as the Conference of the Parties (COP) have witnessed the Global South shaping discussions on adaptation, mitigation, and the Loss and Damage Fund.

It is in this context of it being part of the global South that has shaped South Africa's vision for an inclusive global governance system reflects South Africa commitment

to creating a world that prioritizes fairness, sustainability, and cooperation. By championing reforms in international institutions, fostering African unity, and engaging in South-South cooperation, South Africa seeks to ensure that the voices of marginalized and developing nations are not only heard but have a meaningful impact on the global stage. This is drawn from our foreign policy principles that are rooted in human rights, solidarity, and African unity and it is succinctly summarised in our objective of "A better Africa, and a better world".

So, we advocate for an inclusive global governance system that prioritizes equitable development, multilateral cooperation, and justice. South Africa has worked to reform international institutions and promote a

- A Fairer Global Economic Order: South Africa seeks to address systemic inequalities in trade, finance, and technology transfer that disadvantage African and other developing countries.

## 2. Leadership on the African Continent

As a prominent member of the African Union (AU), South Africa tries to play an important role in advancing the continent's agenda on global platforms, including:

- Agenda 2063: Aligning global governance reforms with the AU's vision for a prosperous and peaceful Africa.

## 3. Commitment to BRICS and the Global South

South Africa's active membership in BRICS demonstrates its commitment to

“By championing reforms in international institutions, fostering African unity, and engaging in South-South cooperation, South Africa seeks to ensure that the voices of marginalized and developing nations are not only heard but have a meaningful impact on the global stage.”

more balanced world order. Let me give a brief overview of South Africa's vision and commitments:

### 1. A Vision for Inclusive Multilateralism

South Africa envisions a global governance system that reflects the realities of the 21st century, especially the growing influence of the Global South and thus we advocate for:

- Reform of Global Institutions: South Africa has called for changes to the United Nations (particularly the Security Council), the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Trade Organisation (WTO) to better represent developing nations.

strengthening South-South cooperation and through institutions like the New Development Bank (NDB), South Africa supports projects that address infrastructure and development gaps in emerging economies. The BRICS also serves as a platform for South Africa to amplify the collective voice of the Global South in global governance discussions.

### 4. Climate Justice and Sustainability

South Africa is vocal about the need for an inclusive approach to addressing climate change that considers the vulnerabilities of developing nations:

- Just Energy Transition: Advocating for international support to transition from coal-dependent energy systems while addressing unemployment and inequality and without indebting future generations
- Global Climate Financing: Pushing for increased and accessible funding mechanisms to assist developing countries in adapting to climate impacts including the possibility for a global climate insurance fund.

### 5. Peace, Security, and Human Rights

We continue to champion for conflict resolution and protection & promotion of human rights. We drive this through our Mediation Efforts such as South Africa's contribution to peace-building processes in

Trade Area) seeks to leverage regional integration to enhance Africa's collective bargaining power in global trade. A strong bargaining power is demonstrating its bearing in our call for fair access to technology and investments that support sustainable industrialization.

Therefore South Africa's Presidency of the G20 will be informed by these principles.

As government we consider our imminent presidency of the G20 and the hosting of its Summit in 2025 not just as an honour to South Africa, but a historic opportunity for our continent to address longstanding inequities and to champion transformative policies that would benefit its people and those of the global South in general. It was indeed

“Without a doubt, the current architecture has prejudiced the countries of the South more than the countries of the North. The scope of issues covered or requiring global governance is very wide and affects almost every facet of humanity.”

Africa, like in the Sudan, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and our participation in the African Peace Initiative on the Russia-Ukraine conflict. We are strong advocates for fair and inclusive global systems that uphold international law and human dignity. South Africa's case in the International Court of Justice against Israel based on the plight of the people of Palestine is rooted on this principle.

### 6. Advocacy for Inclusive Trade and Development

South Africa promotes the need for equitable trade systems that enable meaningful participation by developing nations in the global economy. Our role in the AfCFTA (African Continental Free

Trade Area) seeks to leverage regional integration to enhance Africa's collective bargaining power in global trade. A strong bargaining power is demonstrating its bearing in our call for fair access to technology and investments that support sustainable industrialization.

### South Africa's G20 priorities

South Africa has chosen the theme “Solidarity, Equality and Sustainability” for its G20 Presidency. While the high-level deliverables and priorities of our G20 presidency resonate with the agenda of the Global South and Africa in particular; we have painstakingly ensured that our G20 presidency also mirrors and contributes to the realisation of our own national priorities and initiatives.

### Priority 1: Inclusive Economic Growth, Industrialisation, Employment and Inequality

South Africa has identified this priority with the view to elevating and accelerating the discussion around industrialisation, especially in Africa and other developing regions, focusing on special economic zones, green industries and technology, energy, food security, manufacturing, trade, logistics, and regional and global integration. This priority is strategically aligned with our own programme of action as articulated in the Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP) 2024-2029 on Inclusive Economic Growth and Job Creation. The realisation of this priority requires an alignment of all spheres of economic policy behind the goals of achieving high employment, decent work and inclusive economic growth through industrialisation and re-industrialisation, in a manner that focuses on youth employment, closes the gender-gap, reduces inequality and protects the environment.

During its Presidency, South Africa will propose the creation of a Task Force on Inclusive Economic Growth, Industrialisation, Employment and Inequality. The Task Force will provide a platform to share ideas on economic policy frameworks best suited for the individual needs of countries, while at the same time ensuring international policy coordination.

### Priority 2: Food Security

Reports from prominent institutions such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Food Programme, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the United Nations Children's Fund and the World Health Organization paint a disturbing picture of the state of global hunger. Reports released by these organisations in July 2024 place the number of people who faced hunger globally at 733 million.

Africa continues to register negative food security trends, with 2024 being the fifth consecutive year of rising food insecurity on the continent. The number of Africans classified as “food stressed” increased by 11 million to a record high of 225 million in 2024. Sub-Saharan Africa's



continued reliance on subsistence farming and food imports makes the continent susceptible to a combination of global and local factors, such as extreme weather, economic shocks and conflict.

We have equally linked the food security issue with our own programme of action. Food security falls squarely within the ambit of South Africa's own Priority 2 of the MTDP 2024-2029 on Reduction of Poverty and Tackling the High Cost of Living. Among other outcomes, the government has committed itself to ensuring an effective, integrated and comprehensive poverty alleviation strategy aimed at lifting the most vulnerable out of poverty.

During our G20 presidency we propose the establishment of a Task Force on Food Security. The task Force will look at food security and systems under regional and global pillars. Under the regional pillar, it is envisaged that the G20 could task the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) to monitor, provide technical advice and encourage regional approaches to resilience in food systems, such as water, energy, infrastructure, trade, and climate change. Under the global pillar, the Task Force would embark on initiatives to address the drivers of food insecurity due to speculative activities, market concentration, and barriers related to food trading systems. Government of South Africa is currently considering a strategy to prevent Food Waste or Loss.

### **Priority 3: Artificial Intelligence and Innovation for Sustainable Development**

Artificial Intelligence (AI) features strongly in the 19th G20 Summit Leaders' Declaration (Brazil 2024). The Declaration emphasised that AI progress brings great opportunities for development within the framework of the digital economy and highlights the importance of establishing safeguards to uphold human rights, governance, the need for human supervision and appropriate regulation. This would ensure the alignment of technological development with human values.

South Africa has noted that all these issues impact some of her priorities, especially those pertaining to Inclusive

Economic Growth and Job Creation as AI will impact the world of work and the emergence of the digital economy. Consequently, South Africa proposes that during its presidency of the G20, a Task Force on Artificial Intelligence be established to play a crucial role in aligning Africa's strategic priorities with the broader global agenda; ensuring that regional perspectives and needs are integrated into the international discourse on AI governance. We are strongly considering legacy projects of South Africa's G20 Presidency in the field of AI.

"The G20 after 20 Years": A Reflection on Key Achievements and the Way Forward

During its presidency of the G20, South Africa also proposes a comprehensive review of the work of G20. The review will identify proposals to strengthen consensus building. At the G20 Brazil Leaders Summit, our President introduced the concept of "sufficient consensus" which is was used during South Africa's CODESA negotiations.

Furthermore, South Africa plans to continue the practice started by Brazil to include civil society that are not yet involved in the work of the G20 engagement groups. In this regard, a partnership with non-governmental organisations such as Thabo Mbeki Foundation known for facilitating dialogues will come in handy to bring together representatives of the existing engagement groups and other segments of civil society that may offer meaningful contributions to the G20.

The world, or at least parts of it, has been subjected to elements of global governance for a few centuries now, with the various empires that have ruled at different times imposing elements of global governance, some of which doctrinally survive to this day. The Second World War and the outcomes thereof have given the world much of what obtains today as the prime institutions and systems of global governance. However, that period is vastly and materially different from the world of today. Many countries of the South were colonies at the time and this was notably the case in Africa. The countries that were defeated during

that war were largely marginalised or contained as a measure of preventing them from becoming a threat to global peace and security. They were arguably co-opted into the global institutions and systems of governance later but importantly, within the prism of the Cold War, that largely defined global affairs after the Second World War.

There are several other forces with a strategic motive that have since come to the fore: much of the colonial world has been liberated; climate change is a global challenge that poses an existential threat to humanity; demographic changes in the population of the world and the inherent migration patterns underpinning it have changed markedly; the dizzying speed of evolution of technologies, notably Artificial Intelligence and machine learning, bring about in almost equal measure opportunities and risks; the deep sea and deep space are areas of inquiry and exploitation that require progressive and equitable global governance; non-state actors often play a role equal to or even bigger than state actors, including terrorist networks and transnational criminal syndicates; and the capacity of a few countries to take and effect decisions across the world, including outside the context of the established institutions of global governance.

Without a doubt, the current architecture has prejudiced the countries of the South more than the countries of the North. The scope of issues covered or requiring global governance is very wide and affects almost every facet of humanity. The challenge facing the world in this respect is whether or not these institutions of global governance need "pragmatic reform" or "pragmatic transformation", or elements of both. Thus South Africa's Presidency of the G20 must not only provide an answer to this question, but advance reforms of the institutions of global governance to become systems and institutions that will be relevant and effective for the next 50 to 100 years.

Thank you **BR**

**Link to the source:** <https://www.thepresidency.gov.za/speaking-notes-ms-khumbudzo-ntshavheni-minister-presidency-thabo-mbeki-foundation-2nd-annual-cape>

# PROFILE



## The Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS)

**ALIREZA KHODA GHOLIPOUR**

Deputy Director General and Director for Asian Studies, Institute for Political and International Studies



### Overview

The Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS) was established in 1983 in Tehran as a think tank and policy-planning body of the Iranian Foreign Ministry. This centre has defined its missions and goals within three programmes: research, public diplomacy for elites, and training and educational initiatives. It comprises several departments, including the Research and Studies Department, the School of International Relations, the Department of Education, Archive and Historical Studies, and a rich specialised Library for International Studies.

The central mission of IPIS in the field of study and research is to help collect, organise, and develop research and investigate in regional and international fields. This will help to better understand regional and international developments and Iran's foreign policy needs and priorities.

In education, IPIS aims to provide updated knowledge directly and indirectly through meetings and workshops for students and foreign relations practitioners,

facilitated by the deputy of Education and the School of International Relations. This initiative also seeks to enhance knowledge and strengthen international cooperation with similar academic and educational institutions worldwide and acts as Iran's diplomatic academy.

In the documents field, IPIS preserves approximately 50 million copies of primary documents related to Iran's foreign relations history. Therefore, it is a unique and valuable resource for historians and archivists studying Iran's foreign relations.

IPIS has forged strong collaborations with significant think tanks worldwide and has over 100 signed MoUs with its international counterparts, facilitating consistent and regular interactions.

Additionally, IPIS hosts an annual flagship event known as the Tehran Dialogue Forum (TDF), which brings together numerous high-ranking officials and influential think tankers from across the globe to deliberate on significant international and regional developments each year. This year, part of the Forum will focus on the BRICS and its potential to promote further development for its member states towards a more just and equitable world.

### Research Focus and Expertise

The Institute of Political and International Studies, while researching foreign policy and international relations, has extensive collaborations with domestic and foreign research centres and think tanks in the form of various meetings, round tables and conferences. It consists of different study units, some of which are geographical (such as West Asia, South Asia, East Asia, Africa, Europe and America Study Units) and some thematic (including Strategic Studies, Environmental Studies, Legal-International Studies). Additionally, IPIS created a unit for BRICS studies in 2024 when Iran joined the bloc.

Over the past four decades, IPIS has been vital in expanding literature in Iran's international, regional, and foreign

policy studies. This institute has sought to understand regional and international developments by organising bilateral roundtables, bilateral and multilateral meetings, and conferences with the participation of political science and international relations experts and researchers from within and outside the country. The Institute publishes the results of its research and studies through various books and journals, including the Events and Analysis quarterly magazine, the Foreign Policy Quarterly, Central Asia and Caucasus Quarterly, and History of Foreign Relations Quarterly. The centre's website is a Virtual Think Tank, accessible to the public. Additionally, IPIS acts as a prolific part of decision-shaping process in the field of foreign policy with providing so many analyses in the form of policy papers for decision-making institutions.

All these activities align with our primary goals and objectives inside the BRICS: to promote the BRICS among the public and officials of the member countries (Iran) and help create new ideas and suggestions through brainstorming sessions, analytical exchanges and articles.

### Joining the BRICS Think Tanks Council

The world has been transitioning for several years, and a new world order is evolving. The emerging world order appears to be a non-polar or post-polar one, rather than unipolar, bipolar, multipolar, or any combination of these. The rapid rise of Asia and the Global East, along with their new initiatives to assume a greater role in world geopolitics and a larger share of the global economy, is a significant trend. In such an interdependent and inter-woven world, zero-sum games do not work anymore; it means more inclusivity can result in greater prosperity. In the current situation, traditional international structures are increasingly becoming fluid and cannot determine and impose the results of global processes. Instead, temporary, ad-hoc, issue-based coalitions are gaining more importance,

strengthening mini-lateralism and mini-lateral formats among different actors. At the same time, black or white/ zero or one dichotomies are no longer valid and rational actors pursue their interests in diverse formats.

These characteristics present both opportunities and challenges. But in this era of power politics, within such a fractured and competitive world characterized by increasingly shifting geopolitics, opportunities outweigh challenges, at least for now. These opportunities may grow even further, particularly with interesting groupings like the BRICS.

The BRICS symbolizes rising powers striving to make the world a better place to live, a planet where justice, fairness and equality are the main principles and unilateral decisions and actions do not specify the future world. This can propel the world towards greater pluralism and reconstruct the chessboard to reflect the new realities of the evolving world order more accurately. The expansion of the BRICS in January 2024, along with more countries eager to join, signifies that the number of state actors seeking change is rapidly increasing. This can move the world towards greater pluralism and fully rebuild the chessboard to reflect the new realities of the evolving world order.

These ideals align with the Islamic Republic of Iran's macro-policy; therefore, the IPIS is also very committed to actively promoting those ideas. While the IPIS was a newcomer to the BTTC, it has tried a lot to be active in BTTC meetings during 2024, virtually or in person. It has contributed to producing scholarly articles and suggestions, and preparing related BTTC documents during 2024. Likewise, the IPIS is determined to bolster its presence and contributions to the BRICS and the BTTC.

### Impact and Goals for the Future

We, at the IPIS, believe the BRICS and its members, in pursuit of its main objectives, should focus on four parallel long-term goals:

1. We should deepen business and financial cooperation to boost economic growth. IPIS and the BRICS countries ought to be fellow companions on the journey of development and revitalisation, opposing decoupling, disruption of supply chains,

and economic coercion.

2. We need to expand political and security cooperation to uphold peace and tranquillity. The BRICS countries should pursue peaceful development, support each other on issues concerning their respective core interests, and enhance coordination on major international and regional issues. We must tender good offices on hotspot issues, advocating for a political settlement. It is crucial to address internal rifts among the BRICS member states, particularly regarding matters of vital interest to the members.
3. We must enhance people-to-people exchanges, foster mutual learning between civilisations, and champion peaceful coexistence and harmony among nations. We should encourage the respect of all countries in independently selecting their modernisation paths.
4. To improve global governance, we should uphold fairness and justice. The BRICS countries should practice genuine multilateralism, uphold the uncentered international multilateral system, and reject attempts to create exclusive blocs in international institutions. We must advance the reform of the international financial and monetary systems and enhance the representation and voice of developing countries.

### Challenges and Opportunities

#### Challenges

A kind of poly-crisis has been unfolding in recent years. Beyond the wars in several regions, other non-traditional security challenges are looming on an unprecedented scale, including pandemics, climate change, energy and food security, migration, and the growing disinformation campaigns and all of these require inclusive de-risking and risk sharing. Some of these challenges pose significant concerns for the BRICS and its member states, among which the most important can be identified as follows:

- A variety of actors and their different levels of development, different expectations, and some other disparities, which have the potential to cause some divergences and inconsistencies among member-states;
- The weaponisation of economic tools and coercive unilateral actions against

particular member states that obstruct smooth trade and economic interactions between them;

- Mis/dis-information campaigns against independent states, including some of the BRICS member states that distort the image of these nations;
- The emergence of hostile and exclusive security alliances among some rival countries and actors;
- Transforming geo-economic divergence of members into win-win convergence is a challenging and time-consuming task;
- The necessity to increase the soft power of the BRICS which requires ongoing and coordinated efforts from all member-states, especially their leaders and think tanks;
- Promoting cultural and people-to-people exchanges among member states and nations.

### The BRICS potentials and opportunities

The BRICS harbours immense potential and a myriad of opportunities that can shape the future of global diplomacy and cooperation including the following:

- The BRICS nations are dynamic emerging economies experiencing rapid and robust economic growth. These countries play a pivotal role in the global economy, showcasing significant potential for further expansion. The strength of their economic growth provides the BRICS with a unique opportunity to bolster their influence in global politics and diplomacy. The collective economic power of the BRICS can be harnessed to foster cooperation, promote economic stability, and drive sustainable development on a global scale.
- The BRICS countries have sizeable and rapidly growing populations. This demographic advantage provides abundant human resources and a vast consumer market for the BRICS nations to exploit. With their combined demographic strength, the BRICS nations have the potential to be significant drivers of economic growth and innovation. Moreover, the substantial population of BRICS nations grants them a stronger voice in global affairs, presenting an opportunity to influence policy decisions and advocate for shared interests on various international platforms.

- The BRICS has actively fostered closer interactions and cooperation through a range of mechanisms, such as the New Development Bank (NDB), Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA), the BRICS Business Forum and the BRICS Think-tank Council (BTTC). These platforms facilitate dialogue, investment, trade, and financial collaboration among member nations. As the BRICS continues to deepen economic cooperation, it opens up opportunities for increased trade volumes, investment inflows, and technological transfers. By strengthening regional economic integration, the BRICS can amplify its collective voice and become a significant force in shaping the global economic landscape.

and technology transfer, the BRICS can harness the potential of emerging technologies to address societal challenges, enhance productivity, and drive economic transformation. Moreover, by nurturing an innovation ecosystem, the BRICS can position itself as a hub for technological innovation, attracting investment and talent worldwide.

- Several of the BRICS countries possess substantial military capabilities, representing a significant force in global security dynamics. This military power allows the BRICS to contribute to global peace and stability. The BRICS can play a constructive role in maintaining regional and global security through enhanced defence cooperation, joint military

strengthen cooperation and collaboration among member countries. This involves enhancing institutional frameworks, deepening economic integration, and nurturing a culture of trust and mutual understanding. By harnessing their collective strengths, the BRICS nations can bolster their influence, address global challenges more effectively, and forge a path toward a more prosperous, inclusive, and sustainable future for their citizens and the wider international community.

### The way forward

The BRICS region has the necessary potential to continuously promote closer economic cooperation, leverage the power of innovation and technology, and actively engage in global issues such as climate change, international security, and poverty alleviation. Through these collective efforts, the BRICS can build stronger and sustainable bridges for global cooperation. Through solid partnerships and effective collaboration, the BRICS can enhance its influence in global diplomacy and significantly shape a more balanced and equitable world order. By taking necessary steps, the BRICS can become a force capable of addressing global challenges, driving sustainable economic growth, and creating a better future for its member countries and the world at large.

The BRICS must continue strengthening communication, coordination, and consultation among member countries to realise these potentials and opportunities. Building a deep understanding of each party's interests and priorities and finding common grounds and compromises are essential steps in overcoming differences and reaching consensus. At the same time, more attempts to involve the people and BRICS nations in the fast pace of BRICS improvement is very essential.

All these very important tasks can be pursued within the framework of the BTTC, where prestigious think tanks and prominent leaders of BRICS member states convene and talk directly together. The Institute for Political and International Studies is ready to work hard to pursue these goals and objectives alongside colleagues from other member states. **BR**

“Building a deep understanding of each party's interests and priorities and finding common grounds and compromises are essential steps in overcoming differences and reaching consensus.”

- The BRICS can play a pivotal role in addressing pressing global challenges. With its diverse membership, the BRICS can contribute valuable perspectives and solutions to complex issues such as climate change, economic inequality, international security, and poverty alleviation. Through concerted efforts and collaboration, the BRICS can leverage its collective influence to promote sustainable development, advocate for equitable global governance, and enhance the wellbeing of its member nations and the wider international community.
- The BRICS nations possess significant capabilities in innovation and technology. The collective strength of their scientific research, technological advancements, and entrepreneurial spirit provides a solid foundation for fostering innovation-driven growth. By promoting collaboration in research and development, knowledge exchange,

exercises, and shared security dialogues. By leveraging their military strengths, the BRICS nations can support peacekeeping efforts, counterterrorism initiatives, and humanitarian assistance, showcasing their commitment to maintaining international peace and stability.

- Through its strategy of fostering global cooperation, BRICS diplomacy possesses substantial potential to attain shared objectives and play a vital role in international diplomacy. Despite facing challenges and obstacles such as differing national interests, political differences, and the complexity of global issues, the BRICS has significant opportunities to strengthen economic cooperation, enhance its role in global issues, influence the existing world order, and build a more equitable and balanced foundation.

To fully capitalise on these potentials and opportunities, the BRICS must continue to





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# POLICY BRIEFS



## BRICS and Food Sovereignty

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### Introduction

In 2009, Brazil, Russia, India, and China established the *BRIC* group, with South Africa becoming a member in 2010 (see Figure 1). Additionally, in 2024, four more nations—Egypt, Iran, Ethiopia, and the United Arab Emirates—joined, followed by Indonesia in 2025. The BRICS nations comprise 54.5% of the global population, control

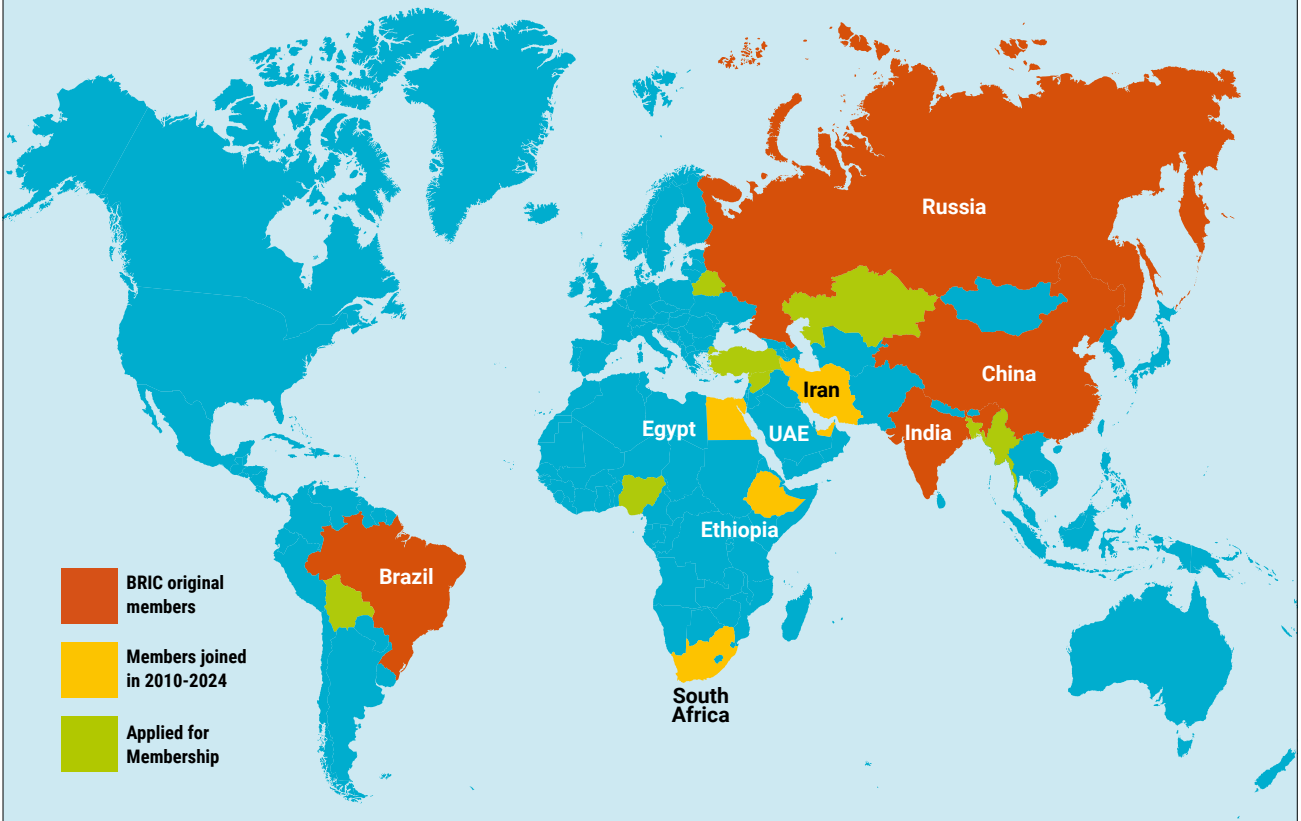
one-third of the world's agricultural land, and contain more than one-third of the planet's freshwater resources, as reported by Brazil's Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (Ministério da Agricultura e Pecuária/MAPA). Collectively, these countries contribute to 75 per cent of worldwide agricultural output and host approximately half of the 550 million family farms globally, a significant portion of which are managed by small-scale farmers.

Moreover, the BRICS countries have consistently supported the global initiative to combat hunger and poverty during their summits, which have rotationally taken place among the five members since 2009 in Yekaterinburg, Russia,

to Kazan, Russia (2024). The BRICS Strategy on food security cooperation was developed in 2022 during Russia's BRICS chairmanship and comprise the main areas of cooperation that are: food security and nutrition, the adaptation of agriculture to climate change, cooperation and innovation in agricultural technology, agricultural trade and investment, and the application of information and communication technology (ICT) in agriculture. These efforts aim to foster stable global agricultural growth and facilitate the attainment of the United Nations' sustainable development goals (SDGs).

Hence, BRICS countries are actively involved in reshaping the global food order. These nations continue to demonstrate

## BRICS EXPANSION



**Figure 1: The BRICS + Nations (World Bank, 2024).**

rapid growth in agriculture, emphasising their drive towards self-sufficiency in line with the UN SDG1 (No Poverty) and SDG2 (Zero Hunger); in short, the eradication of extreme poverty and the elimination of hunger on a global scale.

Food sovereignty, that is, where individuals involved in the production, distribution, and consumption of food have control over the processes and policies governing food production and distribution, was first articulated by small-scale producers who came together as part of the transnational social movement known as La Vía Campesina (LVC), which was introduced on a global scale during the 1996 United Nations World Food Summit (Samson *et al.*, 2021 and Noll *et al.*, 2022). This concept prioritises local food economies, ensures sustainable food availability, and highlights the importance of culturally appropriate foods and practices.

## 1. Food sovereignty in BRICS nations

For many rural and Indigenous populations, the capacity to oversee their land, seeds, and agricultural practices enables them to uphold their traditional ways of life, protect biodiversity, and effectively address climate change challenges. The fundamental principles of food sovereignty encompass:

### 1.1 Local Control of Resources

Communities should have primary authority over managing essential resources such as land, water, seeds, and knowledge, which are vital for food production.

## 1.2 Sustainable Farming Practices

The core of food sovereignty lies in agroecology, organic farming, and regenerative techniques that enhance soil health and mitigate environmental harm.

### 1.3 Fair Trade and Access

Ensuring equitable access to markets and food is essential for allowing all community

members to benefit from the food system, extending beyond mere production.

### 1.4 Cultural Respect

Food sovereignty also emphasises preserving traditional agricultural methods and crop varieties, ensuring that culturally significant foods are maintained and transmitted through generations. However, the acquisition of indigenous seeds by corporations such as Monsanto endangers food sovereignty, biodiversity, and the welfare of farmers. This phenomenon adversely affects fundamental principles of food systems, such as diversity, resilience, local knowledge, and equity. Multinational companies can restrict crop varieties, diminish farmer independence, and disturb traditional agricultural practices by monopolising seed markets. Furthermore, the reliance on seeds controlled by corporations can result in heightened debt, loss of land, and further marginalisation

of some farmers. Therefore, it is essential to advocate for and safeguard traditional seed systems and seed banks, encourage seed diversity, and enable farmers to make knowledgeable choices regarding their agricultural practices.

According to the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World data, the BRICS countries account for about 40 per cent of global grain production. It also accounts for more than 40 per cent of global cereal and meat production, nearly 40 per cent of dairy products and more than 50 per cent of total fish and seafood production. The production and consumption dynamics within the BRICS are substantial yet intricate, shaped by the forces of global trade. Certain BRICS nations, such as China, may experience

production and supply potential. The main BRICS declarations on food security and sovereignty are:

#### **XVI BRICS Summit Kazan Declaration**

This statement reaffirms the significance of solidarity and collaboration among BRICS nations, highlighting the necessity of bolstering strategic alliances and improving cooperation in economic and financial development sectors.

#### **XV BRICS Summit Johannesburg II Declaration**

This statement reiterates the dedication to enhancing agricultural collaboration, fostering sustainable farming practices, and bolstering food security both within the BRICS and globally. It further highlights

Ministers and representatives from the 11 member countries, who collectively endorsed and signed a Joint Declaration reaffirming their dedication to sustainable agricultural development, food security, and reducing inequalities in rural communities.

#### **14th Meeting of BRICS Ministers of Agriculture Joint Declaration**

This statement aims to attain Sustainable Development Goals concerning the eradication of hunger, the enhancement of food security, and the advancement of nutrition. It highlights the significance of innovation, technology, and the encouragement of native, nutrient-dense crops.

#### **13th Meeting of BRICS Ministers of Agriculture Joint Declaration**

This statement acknowledges the necessity of mitigating climate change's effects on agriculture and food production while also emphasising the importance of enhancing capacity and strengthening the resilience of food and agricultural systems.

#### **1.1 Russia**

In Russia, the concept of food sovereignty is defined by as:

A condition of the national economy that ensures the food independence of the Russian Federation, providing both physical and economic access to food products for every citizen, by the requirements set forth by Russian legislation on technical regulation, and in quantities that meet the rational norms necessary for an active and healthy lifestyle. (Ukaz, 2010)

A distinctive aspect of the Russian perspective is its strong focus on food sovereignty. This viewpoint is particularly reinforced in the context of Russia's confidence in its capacity to ensure domestic production and obtain supplies from alternative nations. Russia's primary food staples, which are predominantly cultivated within the country, consist of wheat, barley, corn, rye, oats, potatoes, millet, buckwheat, rice, and legumes (OEC, 2022). Furthermore, while Russia is a significant exporter of wheat, it also imports various food items, especially livestock products such as meat and dairy, as well as fruits, nuts, and processed foods and

“According to the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World data, the BRICS countries account for about 40 per cent of global grain production. It also accounts for more than 40 per cent of global cereal and meat production, nearly 40 per cent of dairy products and more than 50 per cent of total fish and seafood production.”

a surplus in specific commodities owing to elevated production rates and export-driven strategies. In contrast, others, like India, might face a deficit due to elevated consumption levels and dependence on imports. Furthermore, the balance of payments between BRICS nations and other countries can reveal a scenario where BRICS countries maintain a surplus while the other countries encounter a deficit.

According to The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2024, the BRICS countries have significant food

the significance of the Action Plan 2021-2024 for Agricultural Cooperation and the Strategy on Food Security Cooperation among BRICS nations.

#### **The 15th Meeting of BRICS Ministers of Agriculture Joint Declaration**

The theme of the Ministerial Meeting convened on 17 April 2025, in Brazil, was the promotion of inclusive and sustainable agriculture through collaboration, innovation, and fair trade among BRICS nations. This gathering united Agriculture



beverages (OEC, 2022). Russia also have a food security plan and strategy signed on January 21, 2010, by then Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, which outlines the agriculture production goals to achieve domestic food self-sufficiency.

The significance of Russia as a key player in the global food security framework is on the rise (Maslova, 2023). The country is recognised for its advanced agricultural sector and is a leading grain, cereals, and wheat exporter. In 2010, Russia implemented a food security doctrine that positioned food security as a fundamental aspect of national security. This move was primarily shaped by the international discourse surrounding the hunger crisis that occurred in the Global South from 2006 to 2008. In January 2020, a revised food security doctrine was adopted to supersede the 2010 version, which included an expanded list of food products essential for ensuring food sovereignty.

In addition, Osmakov (2024), the First Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade of the Russian Federation, stated at the session, *The Role of BRICS States in Ensuring Global Food Security*, that Russia is ready to be the guarantor of the technological foundation of food security:

Russia has everything necessary to ensure food sovereignty: fertilisers, plant protection products, and agricultural machinery. We are ready to offer the world our solutions in this area, and such solutions can also ensure the food security of the BRICS and the Global South countries (Osmakov, 2024).

Some of Russia's exports within BRICS countries include: Mineral products, machinery and equipment, chemical and livestock products, fish and seafood, legumes, barley, poultry meat, food products, agricultural raw materials, sunflower and soybean oil, dried chickpeas and fertilisers etc. (Apananovich and Maslova, 2024; OEC, 2022). Russia's food sovereignty strength lies in its wheat production, as it can satisfy its domestic market and continues to export wheat to other countries.

Hence, Russia typically enjoys a surplus in food production, particularly with staple crops such as grain. Historically, the nation has been a significant exporter of food, consistently ranking among

the leading wheat exporters worldwide. Although the 2024 harvest experienced a downturn due to adverse weather and supply chain disruptions, Russia maintains self-sufficiency in numerous essential food products. The agricultural yield in 2024 fell short of expectations, primarily due to unfavourable weather and logistical challenges (BOFIT, 2024). Additionally, the output of major field crops decreased to around 125 million tons, representing a 14 per cent decline from the record harvest of 153-155 million tons achieved in 2023. Wheat production dropped to 82 million tons, marking a 16 per cent reduction, while other crops such as maize, barley, and sugar beets saw a 20 per cent decline. Furthermore, potato production decreased by 10 per cent (BOFIT, 2024).

## 1.2 China

China possesses merely 10 per cent of the world's arable land (FAO, 2024). Yet, it can feed a population of approximately 20 per cent of the global total, while producing around 25 per cent of the world's grain. Given its substantial population and limited agricultural resources, this situation has raised concerns regarding China's food sovereignty. Nevertheless, China has demonstrated effective strategies to enhance food sovereignty and combat poverty through a comprehensive approach that includes:

- (i) state-funded agricultural cooperatives,
- (ii) the stockpiling of non-perishable staples, initiatives to reduce waste, and
- (iii) government investments in innovative technologies.

Reports suggest that China has accumulated sufficient reserves of rice and wheat to support the nation during any potential crisis. China locally produces 97 per cent of its essential cereals and some of China's exports include wheat, potatoes, tomatoes, sorghum, peanuts, tea, millet, barley, cotton, oilseed, corn, and soybeans (OEC, 2022). Furthermore, rice remains the largest crop in China and accounts for more than 40 per cent of the world's rice production. Therefore, "Chinese people should hold their rice bowls firmly in their own hands, with grains mainly produced by themselves." (Xi Jinping, 2022).

## 1.3 India

Approximately 70 per cent of India's 1.3 billion people depend on agriculture for their livelihoods, and 800 million have relied on public food distribution during the COVID-19 pandemic (FAO, 2024). Rice is one of the major food grains exported by India worldwide, with 22 million metric tons of 2024/2025 (EOC, 2024). However, it must be noted that India's agrarian economy has already been in crisis for over a decade due to farmers' indebtedness to agribusiness and money lenders, severe under-investment in farming, and low farm prices, as well as successive governments pushing a market-led, neoliberal approach to agriculture.

India is the largest milk, pulses, and jute producer globally (FAO, 2024). It also ranks second-largest in rice, wheat, sugarcane, groundnut, vegetables, fruits, and cotton. Furthermore, India is recognised as one of the foremost producers of spices, fish, poultry, livestock, and plantation crops.

India typically experiences a surplus in food production, with the total output of food grains, including rice, wheat, maize, Shree Anna, tur, and gram projected at 3288.52 LMT (PIB, 2024). This figure represents an increase of 211.00 LMT compared to the average food grain production over the past five years. The primary staple foods, rice and wheat, are mainly produced within the country, and India plays a role in both export and import activities, with rice exports being particularly noteworthy.

India has established an extensive food security framework, primarily represented by the National Food Security Act (NFSA) enacted in 2013. The NFSA guarantees food and nutritional security for the most at-risk groups by providing subsidised food grains and various welfare initiatives. This effort is further supported by the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS), which supplies subsidised rations to a significant segment of the Indian populace.

Another mechanism used in India is the alternative public distribution system (APDS), which is grounded in local production, storage, and distribution, reclamation of fallow land rather than increased productivity of existing cultivated lands, biodiverse agriculture instead of

market-focused and government-driven planting, and emphasis on local roles rather than centralised administration of distribution (Kohli, 2005). Furthermore, the diversification of agricultural livelihoods through related sectors such as animal husbandry, forestry, and fisheries has improved livelihood opportunities, bolstered resilience, and significantly increased labour force participation within the sector.

In addition, Dr. M. S. Swaminathan, often referred to as the father of the Green Revolution in India, significantly altered the agricultural framework of the nation by advocating for high-yield crop varieties, which enabled India to attain self-sufficiency in essential food items. Subsequently, he championed the “Evergreen Revolution” concept to enhance productivity while safeguarding natural ecosystems. Swaminathan’s efforts were in harmony with the principles of food sovereignty, emphasising the empowerment of farmers, the preservation of biodiversity, and the necessity for agricultural systems tailored to local conditions. His promotion of Community Seed Banks and agro-ecological farming reflects the objectives of farmer-led innovation and self-sufficiency, which are fundamental aspects of the food sovereignty movement.

#### 1.4 Brazil

Brazil is the third-largest food producer globally, supplying sustenance to approximately 800 million individuals (FAO, 2024; EMBRAPA, 2023). Nevertheless, over half of the nation’s population, totalling 125.2 million, experiences varying degrees of food insecurity. The Brazilian Research Network on Food Sovereignty and Security (Rede Penssan) indicates that around 33.1 million individuals face severe food insecurity, meaning they lack sufficient daily nourishment. Additionally, Brazil exhibits one of the highest levels of land concentration worldwide (FAO, 2024), which disproportionately affects marginalised communities, including Indigenous populations and smallholder farmers, who bear the brunt of these challenges in favour of large landowners. This context prompted discussions among researchers, social movements, and policymakers in the 1970s

regarding the concept of food sovereignty, where they critiqued the government’s manipulation of food availability and access as a means of social control and the promotion of capitalist interests.

Food sovereignty takes a prominent role in Brazil through several key mechanisms:

- (i) The Fome Zero (Zero Hunger) strategy, introduced by President Luiz Inácio “Lula” da Silva, aims to eliminate poverty and hunger across the nation. This comprehensive approach encompasses programmes designed to enhance food accessibility, bolster agricultural practices, and generate income opportunities. The “Zero Hunger” initiative is structured around four fundamental pillars: ensuring access to sufficient food, providing agricultural support, facilitating income-generating activities, and promoting social engagement. This initiative has successfully enabled 20 million Brazilians to rise above the poverty line.
- (ii) The National Food and Nutrition Security System (SISAN) unifies local, state, and federal public policies, enhancing food and nutrition security.
- (iii) The Alimenta Brasil Program (ABP) has been instrumental in combating malnutrition and hunger in Brazil and other nations.
- (iv) The School Meals Program (PNAE) contributes significantly to the fight against malnutrition and hunger within Brazil and beyond.
- (v) Granting loans with preferential terms, price stabilisation, and support mechanisms.

Brazil is renowned for its significant agricultural output, which encompasses a variety of key crops. The country stands as a global leader in coffee production and is a major supplier of sugar. Additionally, Brazil is a prominent exporter of soybeans, soybean products, corn and cotton. It also plays a vital role in the global orange juice market. Regarding livestock, Brazil is a leading meat supplier and boasts the largest cattle population worldwide. Furthermore, the nation is a major producer of ethanol and milk, and it holds the distinction of being the largest rice producer in the Western Hemisphere.

#### 1.5 South Africa

South Africa is currently confronting a significant issue of food insecurity (HSRC, 2024). The Household Food Insecurity Access Score (HFIAS) revealed that over half of the country’s households (63.5 per cent) are experiencing food insecurity, leaving only 36.5 per cent classified as food secure. Furthermore, the HFIAS indicated that 17.5 per cent of households are severely food insecure, 26.7 per cent are moderately food insecure, and 19.3 per cent are mildly food insecure. In addition, the Household Hunger Scale (HHS) demonstrated that a majority of the surveyed households (79.2 per cent) reported experiencing little to no hunger. Conversely, 15.3 per cent of households faced moderate hunger, and 5.6 per cent experienced severe hunger. The HSRC study further emphasised that land redistribution and restitution are pressing concerns that must be addressed to facilitate the empowerment of small-scale farming communities in rural areas, thereby enhancing their contribution to the food system in South Africa. Consequently, it has been observed that access to agricultural land remains relatively limited throughout the country, as about 10 per cent of the land has arable potential.

The initiation of campaigns such as the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign (SAFSC) during an assembly that brought together agrarian NGOs, small-scale food producers, food justice advocates, environmental justice organisations, and community movements is not unexpected. These campaigns highlighted the inadequacy of existing solutions to the hunger crisis in South Africa, particularly those proposed by market forces or government entities. Consequently, they argued that food sovereignty must be prioritised on the national agenda as a viable alternative for improving the food system. South Africa must also learn from other BRICS countries’ mechanisms and strategies on food sovereignty.

However, despite various challenges, South Africa’s agricultural sector has demonstrated remarkable achievements. South Africa predominantly functions as a net exporter of food, especially in agricultural goods, while simultaneously being a notable importer of specific food

items (DALRRD, 2023). The nation boasts a strong agricultural export performance, with significant exports comprising citrus fruits, wine, grains, and other fruits and vegetables. This sector employs over 800,000 individuals, playing a crucial role in the country's labour market. Additionally, South Africa excels in wine production. Notably, vegetable cultivation has emerged as the predominant agricultural activity across all provinces (HSRC, 2024). Conversely, South Africa relies on imports for certain food products, including rice, palm oil, wheat, poultry, and whiskies (DALRRD, 2023).

South Africa has established a food security plan and strategy (RSA, 2017). The National Food and Nutrition Security Plan (NFNSP) for 2018-2023 is designed to enhance food security and mitigate malnutrition. This initiative is an extension of the Integrated Food Security Strategy, which had a broader scope and was implemented from 2002 to 2015.

South Africa ought to allocate resources towards emerging technologies that foster sustainable development, emphasising renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, and hydroelectric power. Additionally, implementing nature-based solutions, including agroforestry practices, can significantly mitigate carbon emissions and decrease reliance on traditional energy sources. Moreover, it is essential for South Africa to promote partnerships between the public and private sectors to enhance innovation and facilitate technology transfer. This initiative could include collaborations with international organisations, academic institutions, and research entities to exchange knowledge and expertise.

South African Ambassador to Brazil, Vusi Mavimbela, stated that the BRICS offers a strategic platform for sharing experiences and enhancing collaboration among its member nations, particularly in critical sectors like agriculture:

We all wish to reach the same level as Brazil regarding food production. Agriculture is key, and discussing this theme at the BRICS is extremely valuable. Coming from a much marginalised and poor continent, such as Africa, where agriculture is not as developed, it is of great importance for us to participate in this process. (Mavimbela, 2025)

### 1.6 Iran

Agriculture in Iran is characterised as underdeveloped (Ehlers, 2014). Although approximately one-third of the nation's total land area is deemed suitable for agricultural activities, the majority remains uncultivated due to subpar soil conditions and insufficient water distribution. Less than one-third of the land utilised for crops, orchards, and vineyards benefits from irrigation, with the remainder dedicated to dryland farming practices. The regions in the western and north-western parts of the country possess the most fertile soils. Iran is classified as a net food importer, indicating that its food imports exceed exports (FAO, 2022). In

investing in human capital and training, and improving water resource accessibility. In contrast, food security initiatives have concentrated on environmental and climate considerations. To promote food sovereignty, Iran implemented several policy measures, including:

- (i) Producer-oriented policies aimed at achieving self-sufficiency in key crops and animal products,
- (ii) Consumer-oriented policies that involve the provision of subsidies, and
- (iii) Trade-oriented policies that focus on establishing bilateral agreements. Wheat, rice and barley are the country's major crops.

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“We all wish to reach the same level as Brazil regarding food production. Agriculture is key, and discussing this theme at the BRICS is extremely valuable ... it is of great importance for us to participate in this process.”

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2020, for instance, the country imported food valued at \$8.3 billion, with significant imports including corn and soybeans (FAO, 2022). Despite being a net food importer, Iran also exports various agricultural goods, such as pistachios, dates, saffron, and dairy items. Additionally, the Iranian government has emphasised the importance of achieving self-sufficiency in food production, reaching a notable 96 per cent self-sufficiency in essential agricultural products.

Furthermore, Iran is currently viewed as having inadequate food security, with a significant portion of the population, especially in rural areas, experiencing difficulties related to food insecurity. However, efforts have been made to improve the nation's food production capacity. Hence, the concept of food sovereignty in Iran has aimed to localise the food system by enhancing access to financial resources and local markets,

The Iranian government has also implemented an extensive food security strategy, encompassing the 20-year Vision document and the fifth Five-Year Development Plan. This strategy includes market-oriented reforms and seeks to tackle food security issues such as low self-sufficiency in essential crops and limited access to food resources.

### 1.7 Egypt

The World Food Programme (WFP, 2024) reported that 14.4% of Egypt's population, which totals 106.7 million, experiences food insecurity. Egypt boasts one of the largest agricultural sectors in Africa (Silva *et al.*, 2021), and agriculture plays a crucial role in the government's budgetary revenues and expenditures.

Furthermore, although agriculture plays a vital role in Egypt's economy, its overall contribution has diminished over the years as

other sectors, such as services, construction, and oil, have expanded. This decline is further exacerbated by restricted arable land, scarce water resources, and a rising population. Additionally, Egypt's fertile land is primarily located along the Nile River. Consequently, the interplay of limited resources, an increasing population, and reliance on imports presents a multifaceted challenge to food security in Egypt.

Egypt lacks a surplus in food production and is primarily a net importer of food, especially grains such as wheat and maize. The country heavily relies on international markets to meet its population's dietary needs. Although Egypt does cultivate some rice, the surplus is minimal, with domestic consumption closely aligning with production levels. Generally, Egypt's food system is marked by a significant trade deficit and a strong reliance on imports, accounting for 50 per cent of wheat consumption. It is also burdened by foreign loans, constituting 90 per cent of the nation's GDP in debt (O'Neil, 2023). Rice stands out as the only major food crop with the potential for exportable surplus; however, this surplus is limited and subject to fluctuations. Additionally, the self-sufficiency ratios for essential crops, including cereals, vegetable oils, and oilseeds, remain relatively low.

However, agriculture still plays a crucial role in job creation and foreign exchange, with about 29 per cent of the workforce employed in the sector. It also contributes to food security and supports the non-agricultural sectors. In addition, Egypt has a food security plan and strategy that aligns with Egypt's Vision 2030 and the Sustainable Development

Goals. Additionally, the government has initiatives like the "Sustainable Agricultural Development Strategy Towards 2030" to promote sustainable resource utilisation, enhance productivity, and boost agricultural competitiveness.

Egypt is actively pursuing the enhancement of its food sovereignty through a series of proactive initiatives to ensure a stable and varied supply of wheat, a vital resource for its citizens. This approach to securing food resources reflects the nation's capacity to foresee and address economic and logistical challenges, ensuring its long-term stability and growth. Egypt has also established a sovereign fund to focus on the food and agricultural sector. The objectives of this fund include:

- (i) ensuring food security by Egypt's Vision 2030 and the structural reform programme,
- (ii) attracting private investments to boost agricultural productivity by implementing cutting-edge technology, and
- (iii) leveraging Egypt's fertile land and diverse high-quality crops to enhance the sector's value addition and export potential.

The Egyptian Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation (MALR) has formulated the "Sustainable Agricultural Development Strategy 2030" (SADS). This strategy emphasises the cultivation of key crops that significantly impact the nation's food imports, specifically wheat, corn, and sugar. The primary objective of SADS is to enhance self-sufficiency levels and bolster food security by improving agricultural output per unit of land and water resources.

To achieve these goals, SADS intends to boost agricultural productivity by developing varieties resistant to drought, salinity, and pests, cultivating early-maturing crop types, and implementing effective agricultural and management practices.

### 1.8 Ethiopia

A significant portion of the population experiences hunger due to persistent food shortages (Debela, 2024). These shortages can arise from natural factors, including drought, as well as from policy-related issues. The existing policies in Ethiopia are disjointed and fail to guarantee food sovereignty or establish a sustainable food system. Furthermore, the agricultural sector is facing severe challenges, with soil health deteriorating due to overuse and inadequate farming practices, including the application of chemicals in agriculture.

Ethiopia is known for several key agricultural products, including coffee, and pulses such as beans, oilseeds, fruits, cereals, potatoes, sugarcane, maize, teff, sorghum and wheat. Coffee stands out as the country's primary source of foreign exchange. Additionally, Ethiopia ranks as Africa's second-largest producer of maize and boasts the continent's largest livestock population. Ethiopia is currently facing a deficit in food production, and the disparity between local production and demand is growing. The country's reliance on food imports is anticipated to rise considerably by 2043 (Chipanda, 2025). Land insecurity is also a significant challenge in Ethiopia, resulting in decreased investment in land and adversely affecting agricultural productivity. The rise in urbanisation and swift population growth has contributed to reducing landholdings (Deininger and Jin, 2005).

However, Ethiopia has recently made considerable progress in transforming its agricultural sector. The nation is implementing a range of comprehensive initiatives to transition from food dependency to food sovereignty. Through adopting innovative and climate-resilient practices, Ethiopia is improving agricultural productivity while establishing a reliable food supply, tackling urgent issues, and promoting long-term sustainability (Amente, 2024). Ethiopia has significantly increased its agricultural budget,

“Egypt is actively pursuing the enhancement of its food sovereignty through a series of proactive initiatives to ensure a stable and varied supply of wheat, a vital resource for its citizens.”



consistently improving crop yields, food security, and livestock production.

Additionally, three primary initiatives have been pivotal in advancing Ethiopia's agricultural sector (Amente, 2024). One significant achievement is the enhancement of wheat production, which has raised annual output to 231 million quintals, thereby attaining self-sufficiency and eliminating the need for wheat imports. Another critical initiative is the implementation of the National Agricultural Investment Plan (NAIP), which emphasises public investment in agriculture and focuses on resilience objectives. Ethiopia can increase productivity, diversify its crop offerings, and enhance access to nutritious food by investing in sustainable agricultural practices, modern technologies, and capacity-building efforts.

Ethiopia's Food Security Strategy (FSS) was also released in November 1996, outlining the government's approach to tackling the causes and consequences of food insecurity in the country. Following this strategy, regional food security initiatives and projects were developed.

### 1.9 Indonesia

Indonesia has a rice surplus, with production primarily in irrigated or lowland systems (WFP, 2023). However, food insecurity still affects some, with 68 districts/municipalities identified as vulnerable in 2023. This results from high food loss and waste, making it difficult for the surplus to reach those in need (WFP, 2023). Indonesia's main staple foods include rice, corn, sorghum, cassava, sago, and soybeans. While rice is the primary staple, with production heavily concentrated in Java, the country also relies on imports for certain staple crops, such as soybeans, maize, oranges, and apples. Some staple foods like corn, sorghum, cassava, and sago are produced domestically, but may also be imported in certain quantities.

Indonesia is the largest global producer of palm oil, cloves, and cinnamon (Statista Research Department, 2023). It also ranks as the second-largest producer of nutmeg, natural rubber, cassava, vanilla, and coconut oil. Furthermore, Indonesia is the third-largest producer of rice and cocoa, the

fourth-largest producer of coffee, the fifth-largest producer of tobacco, and the sixth-largest producer of tea.

In 2023, food exports represented 19.59 per cent of Indonesia's total merchandise exports. While Indonesia is a significant exporter of food products, it's also a major importer of goods, with imports accounting for 20.90 per cent of its GDP (WFP, 2023). Hence, Indonesia's food production is not consistently in surplus. Furthermore, FAO (2024) reported various challenges faced by Indonesia, including the importation of 3.1 million tons of rice, the degradation of land quality with 89.5 per cent of land deemed unsustainable, an ageing farming population, a yearly population growth rate of 1.1 per cent, and stagnant food production levels. Furthermore, over the past decade, there has been a notable shift in the political discourse surrounding food policy in Indonesia, moving from focusing on food security to emphasising food sovereignty.

The Food Sovereignty document for 2014-2024 aims to enhance relationships among farmers, corporations, and the government. Additionally, a food law was enacted in 2012 to support Indonesia's national objective of achieving food self-sufficiency. This legislation underscores the importance of Indonesia's pursuit of national food sovereignty by cultivating and consuming diverse local foods. Furthermore, the government established the Coordinating Ministry for Food, which oversees the collaboration of four ministries: the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Forestry, the Ministry of Environment, and the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, along with two agencies, the National Food Agency and the National Nutrition Agency, and other relevant institutions.

A strategy was also established to enhance the priorities of agrifood systems, which will inform the Indonesian National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) for 2024-2029 regarding food systems development initiatives. The plan focuses on three primary objectives: identifying transformation priorities within agrifood systems that improve food security for at-risk populations. Furthermore, the Food Law (No. 18/2012) serves as the foundational legal framework for food development and systems, while additional Presidential

Decrees strengthen the commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and national priorities.

### 1.10 United Arab Emirates (UAE)

Food sovereignty represents a significant challenge for the UAE, primarily due to the country's scarcity of vital resources necessary for agricultural endeavours (Farmlandgrab, 2024). Hence, the UAE's agricultural sector is small compared to other nations, and the food processing industry mainly depends on imported raw materials. As a result, the UAE lacks a food surplus, sourcing approximately 85 per cent of its food requirements, such as fruits, vegetables, and grains, from countries including Russia, Canada, India, and Argentina (Farmlandgrab, 2024). The country's severe climate, skilled labour and scarce natural resources, particularly water and cultivable land, estimated at 50,300 hectares by the World Bank, pose significant challenges to local food production.

Despite these challenges, the UAE is deemed food secure owing to its economic and political stability, as approximately 85 per cent of the nation's food products and processed foods are imported (Farmlandgrab, 2024). The primary crops cultivated in the UAE include dates, tomatoes, cabbage, eggplant, squash, cauliflower, citrus fruits, and mangoes. The country is nearly self-sufficient in producing fruits and vegetables and boasts one of the largest fishing industries in the Arab region (Farmlandgrab, 2024).

A competitive landscape has emerged in response to this situation, prompting the government to explore alternatives to enhance domestic food production. This includes initiatives such as providing free land grants to entrepreneurs interested in cultivating food crops, subsidising up to 50 per cent of fertiliser and technical equipment costs, distributing artificially cooled greenhouses, and developing urban high-rise greenhouses for local food production, alongside the adoption of innovative agricultural techniques and organic farming practices to bolster the sector's growth within the UAE.

In 2018, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) initiated a food security strategy that emphasised a combination of domestic and

international investments. The objective was to position the UAE among the top ten countries in the global food security index. Furthermore, the UAE strives for food self-sufficiency by implementing various strategies, including agricultural investments, diversifying food imports, and acquiring agricultural land overseas. Furthermore, the UAE has launched initiatives such as the UAE Food Bank, which channels excess food to charitable organisations to provide nourishment to those in need, both within the country and abroad.

## 2. Suggestions for enhancing BRICS policy cohesion

Despite their considerable influence in agricultural trade, BRICS nations do not achieve complete food security, with certain members being net importers of particular food items, even among themselves.

Although they play a prominent role in global agri-food markets and some members are net exporters, the BRICS coalition encounters various food security and nutrition challenges. The above statement is also emphasised by the BRICS+ nations' joint declarations on food security.

Therefore, improving policy cohesion among BRICS + nations is crucial for the group to address global challenges and effectively enhance its influence. Several strategies can be implemented to bolster internal cohesion:

**2.1** Establishing formal mechanisms for cooperation, such as a dedicated secretariat or coordinating body, can facilitate decision-making processes and promote the consistent execution of agreements. This strategy would reduce the likelihood of unmet commitments and strengthen the bloc's credibility.

**2.2** Establishing robust frameworks for possible conflict resolution regarding food trade wars and tariffs is essential, particularly with the expansion of the BRICS. The introduction of well-defined procedures for managing disputes can help avert internal discord and preserve cohesion among member nations

**2.3** Concentrating on community-driven concrete projects in sectors such as economic partnerships, sustainable development

initiatives, and cultural exchanges can foster trust and illustrate the advantages of working together. These initiatives may establish a basis for more extensive policy alignment

**2.4** Promoting international agricultural trade by minimising unnecessary obstacles, enhancing transparency, and facilitating the exchange of agricultural and livestock products among member nations.

**2.5** Enhancing subsistence and smallholder agriculture policies and reaffirming the bloc's commitment to fostering a more sustainable and equitable future for them.

**2.6** Engaging with BRICS+ nations can amplify the bloc's global impact and offer a variety of viewpoints, thereby enriching policy dialogues and promoting a more holistic approach to international matters.

**2.7** Developing alternative financial platforms and payment systems can reduce reliance on Western-dominated financial structures, enhancing economic sovereignty and resilience. Initiatives like the BRICS Pay System exemplify this approach

**2.8** Establishing food reserves by acquiring products from smallholder farms can play a significant role in revitalising and advancing rural regions. This strategy generates income for economically disadvantaged communities and enhances the appreciation and sustainability of local and indigenous food production and consumption.

By adopting these strategies, the BRICS can strengthen its policy unity, tackle global challenges more effectively, and assert its presence on the international stage. Hence, the Agricultural Cooperation Plan for 2025-2028 among BRICS nations was established during the 15th Meeting of BRICS Ministers of Agriculture. This joint declaration embodies a more ambitious strategy that aligns with principles of harmonising food and agricultural requirements with environmental sustainability.

## 3. Implications and Recommendations for South African policymakers

Food sovereignty extends beyond the mere production of food; it entails the

reclamation of the right to a food system that is fair, sustainable, and intricately linked to local communities. Given the challenges of climate change and the rapid growth of the global population, it is imperative to promote food systems that prioritise local governance and sustainability over profit-driven industrial agriculture. Therefore, South African policymakers should focus on the following critical areas:

### 3.1 Self-sufficiency

South Africa must establish achievable goals to enhance its self-sufficiency in essential agricultural products. Although achieving total self-sufficiency may not be practical, a targeted emphasis on agricultural production can enhance food sovereignty. For example, offering extensive support to subsistence, small, and medium-sized farmers, such as access to financing, technology, and advisory services, as well as investing in irrigation systems, access to water rights, storage facilities and market linkages can facilitate increased agricultural output.

### 3.2 Domestic production

A concerted effort should be made to boost domestic food production, as recent studies have revealed significant levels of food insecurity at the household level. A multifaceted approach is needed, involving the government, farmers, and the private sector, to create an enabling environment for increased agricultural productivity. The launch of the 2025-2028 plan for Agricultural Cooperation among BRICS countries, 2025-2028, which was agreed upon during the 15th Meeting of BRICS Ministers of Agriculture Joint Declaration, is a workable approach for implementation.

### 3.3 Technological and infrastructure development

South Africa should invest in advancing new technologies that support sustainable development, environmental conservation, and adaptation to climate change.

In summary, South Africa needs to establish a robust food system that encourages a variety of practices, safeguards traditional knowledge, and enhances local subsistence agriculture through expedited

policy execution. South Africa should focus on enhancing trade relations with other BRICS countries, particularly those with an excess agricultural output, to ensure a stable food supply and explore new markets for its exports. It is essential to establish systems for exchanging best practices in areas such as crop diversification, contract farming, and urban agriculture, as several BRICS nations have successfully implemented effective policies in these

domains. Additionally, developing and sustaining strong transportation and storage infrastructure is crucial for facilitating food distribution within the region and to BRICS markets.

Given its unfavourable food trade balance with these economies, South Africa should collaborate with other BRICS nations to create free trade agreements or lower tariffs on agricultural products. Joint efforts in research and development are

also necessary to tackle shared agricultural challenges, including climate change and water management. Furthermore, South Africa should encourage BRICS countries to invest in African agriculture to enhance productivity and strengthen food security. By adopting individual and collaborative approaches, South Africa can utilise the BRICS+ framework to improve its food sovereignty and contribute to global efforts to address food security issues. **BR**

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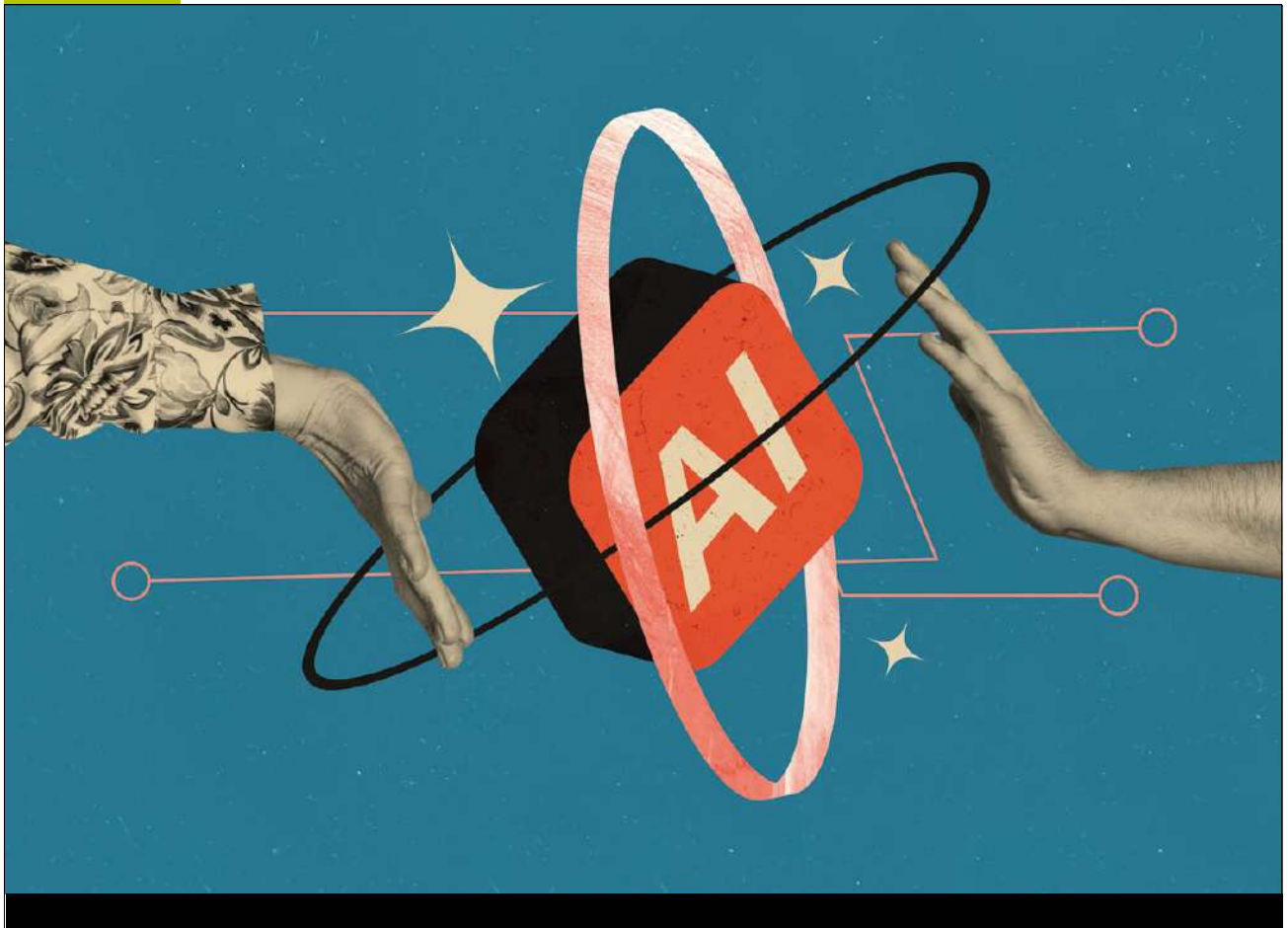
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## An Inclusive BRICS AI Strategy Empowering Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises

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### Background

Chinese Open Source AI  
Leapfrogs the United States  
of America's Proprietary AI

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly reshaping global economies and geopolitics, influencing global power dynamics with significant implications for the BRICS and BRICS Partner countries in how they approach this economic tipping point (Kubasova and Chepinoga, 2023; Pitukhina et al., 2024; Trabelsi, 2024). These implications drive what many call an AI arms race between the United States

of America (USA) and China, which are competing for technological and military dominance (Rokvic, 2024). However, these new systems have the potential to drive innovation and economic growth but are impeded by uneven access. For instance, in December 2024, the USA's OpenAI released a new usage tier costing US\$200 per month per user, which was coupled with their advanced AI features (OpenAI, n.d.). This exorbitant pricing model excludes much of the developing and emerging world. Furthermore, Open AI CEO Sam Altman described 2025 as the year when AI agents join and transform the workforce (Altman, 2024), significantly disrupting the relationship between labour and capital.

However, a counter-narrative to inaccessible AI emerged from China in September 2024, when a startup named DeepSeek launched a freely accessible AI model with a built-in reasoning model rivalling OpenAI's O1 (Franzen, 2024).

The model's disruptive impact was felt in January 2025, when investors understood the implications of the infrastructure cost savings associated with the DeepSeek architecture. This recognition led to the dramatic fall of USA technology stock prices, coinciding with DeepSeek's rise to the most downloaded application in the Apple App Store, dethroning ChatGPT (Field, 2025). The DeepSeek model highlighted China's growing AI development capacity and signalled the embrace of open-source AI, proving that advanced AI can be built cost-effectively despite the USA's ban on advanced computer chip exports to China (Yang, 2025). The Deepseek breakthrough, which is shared freely in an open-source format and can be adapted by BRICS partners, offers substantial development opportunities for BRICS companies to make AI accessible to previously underserved markets.

However, for the best impact, the



**Table 1: Scale of the Informal and SME Sectors in the BRICS (latest available data)**

Metric	Brazil	Russia	India	China	South Africa	Saudi Arabia	Iran	UAE	Indonesia	Egypt	Ethiopia
Informal Economy / Sector as % of GDP	33.5%	38.2%	37.6%	12.5%	29%	22.9%	No data	20.5%	22.6%	35%	33.7%
SMEs as a percentage of total enterprises	~99%	~95%	~95%	~99%	~98%	~90%	~90%	~94%	~99%	~90%	~90%
SMEs' contribution to GDP	~27%	~20%	~30%	~60%	~39%	~20%	~25%	~33%	~60%	~25%	~33%
SMEs' contribution to employment	~52%	~25%	~40%	~80%	~60%	~60%	~40%	~86%	~97%	~75%	~90%

Source: *World Economics (n.d.) and Ayyagari et al. (2010)*

BRICS requires an inclusive AI strategy that leverages its strengths and channels its expertise and capabilities to develop AI services targeted to the needs of its Small, Medium and Micro Enterprise (SMME) market (inclusive of Small and Medium Enterprises and informal enterprises). Through a coordinated AI strategy, the BRICS has the potential to introduce a paradigm-shifting model that promotes inclusiveness and bridges the digital divide by empowering traditionally excluded sectors that could not afford high-end technologies.

#### Understanding the BRICS SME and Informal Sectors

Much of the BRICS economy depends on the SMME sector (including informal and Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) sectors). Drawing from various locally published statistics across the expanded BRICS countries, one notes the substantial scale of the SME and informal sectors. Using the most recently available data from *World Economics (n.d.)*, the informal sector, for instance, contributes between 12.5% (in China) and 38.2 % (in Russia) to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Notably, these statistics vary substantially, with other reports of Indonesia's informal sector contributing 59.3% of GDP (Larasati, 2023; *World Economics, n.d.*).

The SME and informal sectors, while varying in definition and composition across countries, are a significant economic

force across all the BRICS countries and other included nations, accounting for between 20% and 60% of GDP using World Bank estimated data from 2010 and employing between 25% and 90% of the workforce (Ayyagari *et al.*, 2010). Some countries, such as Egypt and Indonesia, are at the higher end of the scale. Brazil and South Africa are at the lower end. This sector often comprises diverse businesses, from micro-enterprises and family businesses to more established small and medium-sized companies.

It is crucial to distinguish clearly between the Informal sector and SMMEs, as definitions and statistical classifications vary across the BRICS nations. Informal enterprises typically refer to businesses that operate outside formal regulatory frameworks without official registration. In contrast, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) usually operate formally within registered and regulated frameworks. The inclusion of 'Micro-enterprises' varies significantly, South Africa explicitly includes 'Micro' enterprises, while most other BRICS countries typically refer to SMEs. As a comparison, Table 1 excludes micro-enterprises while presenting data on the informal economy and SMEs as gathered by *World Economics (n.d.)* and Ayyagari *et al.* (2010). For the purposes of this study, the SMME acronym is applied as a collective term where informal businesses are recognised as micro-enterprises.

Generally, a large portion of the workforce is employed or works in the

SMME sector in the BRICS countries. Their businesses range from street vendors and domestic workers to small-scale manufacturers. Drawing from a range of studies, as indicated in Table 2, the countries represented (Ageba and Amha, 2006; Chen, 2023; Elhassan, 2019; Gómez and Handeland, 2021; Iranian Ministry of Commerce, 2009; Kalyani, 2016; Kiselev *et al.*, 2024; Muriithi, 2018; National Bank of Fujairah, 2019; SME South Africa, 2022; Soliman, 2020; Tambunna, 2007; World Bank Open Knowledge Repository, n.d.). Importantly, Table 2 represents typical business types where SMMEs are prevalent across BRICS countries but not necessarily the overall economic significance of each sector within each country. In interpreting Table 2, there are also regional concentrations in specific sectors. Agriculture is a key component of the informal and SME economies in Ethiopia, Indonesia, India, and Russia, indicating the significance of farming and related activities in these regions. Construction is also an important sector in China, India, Iran, Russia, and Saudi Arabia, reflecting the ongoing infrastructure and development projects within these nations. The tourism and hospitality sector shows a clear presence in Egypt, the UAE, South Africa, and Indonesia, reflecting the role of these countries as tourist destinations. Several sectors show a strong presence in specific regions, indicative of economic shifts and local specialisation. High-tech/IT services and e-commerce are emerging in China,

**Table 2: Typical Concentrations of SME and Informal Sector Businesses in the BRICS**

SMME Business Type	Brazil	Russia	India	China	South Africa	Saudi Arabia	Iran	UAE	Indonesia	Egypt	Ethiopia
Manufacturing	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Trade (Wholesale/ Retail)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Construction		X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X
Services	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Food and Beverage	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Tourism and Hospitality			X		X		X	X	X	X	X
Agriculture		X	X						X	X	X
Handicrafts									X	X	
Transportation and Storage			X	X						X	
High-Tech/IT Services			X	X				X		X	
E-commerce			X	X				X	X		
Textiles/Garments	X		X	X					X		X
Beauty/Hair Care	X		X		X						X
Repair Services	X		X		X					X	

Source: Author's Compilation

India, and the UAE, highlighting the rise of digital economies in these countries. Certain business types are more specific to certain regions, such as the beauty and hair care industry in Brazil and South Africa. At the same time, handicrafts are a feature of Indonesia's SMME sector. Furthermore, transportation and storage are more prominent in India, China and Egypt, suggesting the importance of logistics and movement of goods within these economies.

These sectors drive these nations' economic activity, supporting production and the provision of essential goods and services. They are responsible for providing livelihoods, albeit precarious ones, especially for those who cannot access the formal labour market (Rogan *et al.*, 2017). As this precarity becomes the norm, a disruptive force is required to break the economic model.

If functioning well, it is widely acknowledged that the SMME sector can

be a critical economic growth driver and source of job creation in South Africa and across the Global South (Mutenyoka and Madzivhandila, 2014; Saah *et al.*, 2023; Vuba, 2019). However, the sector faces challenges such as access to support services, finance, regulatory hurdles, and a need for skills development.

The diversity of the SMME sector across the BRICS underscores the need for tailored policy approaches to support their development and address the unique challenges faced by these businesses within each nation.

#### **A BRICS AI Strategy Targeted to the Needs of the SMME Sector**

Given the preceding discussion, the BRICS require a cohesive AI Strategy tailored to the needs of the SMME sector, given the contribution this sector makes to their economies. Its underlying precarity requires disruption, which is potentially offered through an inclusive AI strategy.

SMMEs, the backbone of most BRICS economies, often lack the resources and expertise to adopt advanced technologies like AI. Existing AI solutions are frequently too expensive, complex, and suited to large corporations, requiring technical expertise to adapt them to the needs of the SMME sector. An inclusive BRICS AI strategy can bridge this gap by providing affordable and accessible AI tools and services designed specifically for the SMME sector, fostering greater economic inclusion, reducing inequality, and enabling SMMEs to compete more effectively in the global marketplace.

The 2024 Kazan BRICS Heads of State Declaration spotlights several disparate AI-related interventions (BRICS, 2024). The declaration acknowledges the need for policy exchanges and dialogues on AI and supports establishing a global governance framework for AI based on broad consensus. It also emphasises building AI capacity in developing countries,

supporting the United Nations General Assembly resolution A/RES/78/311—entitled “Enhancing International Cooperation on Capacity-Building of Artificial Intelligence” (BRICS, 2024). However, the responsibility for enacting this support is unclear. Furthermore, the BRICS Institute of Future Networks (BIFN) Study Group on AI is encouraged to conduct consultations on AI, with the BIFN itself being supported as a vehicle for cooperation among BRICS members (BIFN, 2024; BRICS, 2024). The declaration also recognises SMMEs as drivers of economic growth and calls for the exchange of best practices using digital services and platforms (BRICS, 2024). The Partnership for the New Industrial Revolution (PartNIR) is recognised as a platform for the BRICS innovation cooperation and capacity building and contributes to the BRICS’s digital skills exchange (BPIC, n.d.; BRICS, 2024). Finally, the BRICS STI Framework Programme is acknowledged for promoting joint collaborative research and innovation projects, especially in biomedical fields, renewable energy, and hi-tech sciences (BRICS, 2024). The programme aims to advance scientific collaboration to address economic and societal challenges but lacks a direct focus on developing the SMME sector (BRICS STI Framework Programme, 2024).

Across these interventions, there is a lack of integration and focus on the needs of the SMME sector. Thus, this policy brief advocates for prioritising SMME requirements in an inclusive and coordinated AI strategy, understanding its contribution to livelihoods and economic growth.

### **A Coordinated BRICS AI Strategy for the SMME Sector**

#### **Roles and Responsibilities**

The SMME sector’s contribution to the BRICS economic activity underscores the need for a coordinated BRICS AI strategy that empowers these sectors. This strategy must be inclusive and bridge the digital divide by empowering traditionally excluded sectors. Following the spirit of the DeepSeek breakthrough, a coordinated BRICS AI strategy is needed that leverages the BRICS’ open-source community

to maximise the benefits of AI for these underserved sectors. The strategy must be a carefully orchestrated effort leveraging key programmes and institutions, each playing a vital, interconnected role.

Given the mandate of the BRICS Institute of Future Networks (BIFN) Study Group on AI (BIFN, 2024; BRICS, 2024), it should take the lead in convening a dedicated task force that actively engages the open-source community and the BRICS programmes tasked to fund and lead innovation projects. This task force, comprising experts and developers from across the BRICS nations, should identify and address the specific needs of the SMMEs within the bloc while ensuring that the AI solutions developed are open, accessible, and adaptable. They should

(Spaeth *et al.*, 2008), such as research and development, managing an open-source development community, supplying the physical infrastructure and establishing incubation centres for physical and online collaboration. These projects must be launched with a clear intention to ensure that new intellectual property is generated following open-source principles (Brandon, 2024).

The Partnership for the New Industrial Revolution (PartNIR), which was launched to support innovation cooperation in the BRICS (BPIC, n.d.; BRICS, 2024), should focus on promoting AI services development that aligns with open-source principles. The BPIC should provide the facilities needed for collaboration to develop AI tools and technology transfer,

“DeepSeek ... demonstrates that SMEs within BRICS countries have the capacity to disrupt industries traditionally dominated by large multinational corporations like OpenAI and Google.”

also actively solicit input from the open-source community and encourage their participation in developing an AI service stack. In coordinating an open-source community, the group should apply best practices adopted in developing the India Stack of digital financial services (Raghavan *et al.*, 2019; Sharwood, 2022).

The BRICS STI Framework Programme, which previously funded research into information technologies and high-performance computing for developing next-generation AI systems (BRICS STI Framework Programme, 2024), should shift its focus, supporting the development of open-source AI projects that are SMME-focused. Thus, this programme can channel resources towards projects that are not only innovative but also sustainable and widely accessible. By broadening its funding, the programme can fund the communal resources needed for development

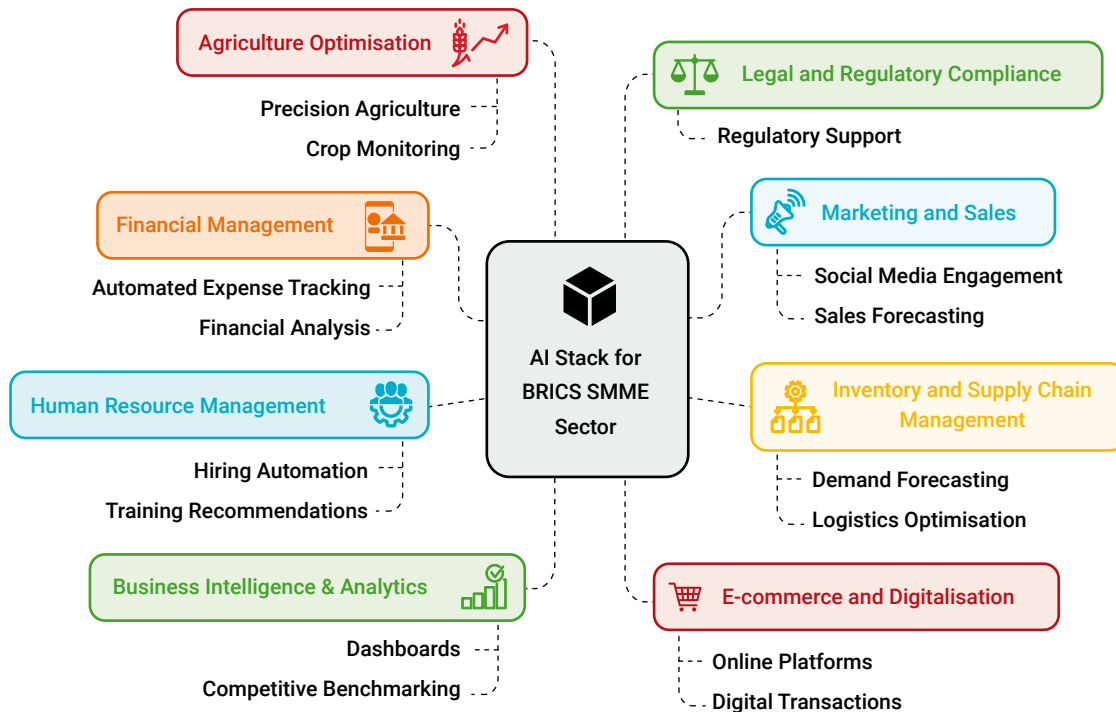
as well as platforms and applications that the SMME sector will access. To promote efficient collaboration across BRICS countries, online workspaces should be employed when organising workshops and events that bring together researchers, developers, and SMMEs to collaborate on open-source AI projects (Bothma *et al.*, 2008).

### **The BRICS AI Stack for SMME Business Development Services**

While DeepSeek is open-source, the technical expertise required to adapt it to small business owners’ needs remains significant. Notably, DeepSeek itself, a new Chinese startup launched in 2023 (DeepSeek AI, n.d.), demonstrates that SMEs within BRICS countries have the capacity to disrupt industries traditionally dominated by large multinational corporations like OpenAI and Google.

Figure 1: AI Stack for the BRICS SMME Sector

## AI INTEGRATION IN BRICS SMME SECTOR



Source: Author

This success story actually strengthens the case for a coordinated BRICS AI strategy that can create an ecosystem where more SMMEs can achieve similar breakthroughs.

However, despite DeepSeek's success, most SMMEs still lack the resources to develop or adapt such AI solutions. The challenge remains not simply creating powerful open-source AI but ensuring its widespread adoption across the diverse SMME landscape, particularly among micro-enterprises lacking access to technical expertise and financial resources. Given the spread of businesses across the BRICS SMME sector presented in Table 2, the following AI services suited to these business types should be prioritised and customised based on regional preferences.

- **Financial Management:** The SMME sector lacks internal financial management expertise, with 60% of South African SMMEs relying on external support (Brijlal *et al.*, 2014), which increases the risk of failure. AI

services that promote automated expense tracking can provide real-time visibility into cash flows. Additionally, AI tools can improve business efficiency and decision-making (Okeke *et al.*, 2024; Opeyemi *et al.*, 2024).

- **Marketing and Sales:** AI services focused on marketing and sales automation have been shown to optimise customer targeting, improve engagement strategies and offer the business's customers a personalised experience, resulting in higher sales conversion rates (Kedi *et al.*, 2024; Sharma *et al.*, 2023). These tools can lower the barriers to creating professional sales campaigns. They also provide the SMMEs with advanced capabilities to analyse and understand their customers or clients.
- **Inventory and Supply Chain Management:** AI-powered tools allow SMMEs to optimise their inventory, warehouse management, and distribution strategies. By leveraging real-time

data analytics, AI can support SMME business owners in managing their logistics and supply chain operations (Adesoga *et al.*, 2024; Vandana, 2024). Thus, SMMEs minimise waste and introduce efficient trade practices.

- **Human Resource Management:** SMMEs often overlook human resource management, focusing on operational matters. However, AI tools have been found to relieve the burden of hiring, training and employee engagement. Such systems can also contribute to workforce planning, allowing the business to optimise how staff implement the business plan (Gupta, 2024).
- **Business Intelligence and Analytics:** SMME business owners could also benefit from AI tools that provide expert business intelligence by analysing operational data in the context of their market. Given the pace at which AI can offer insights, a well-integrated system could provide near real-time insights



and predictive analytics. These tools allow SMMEs to make better decisions and maximise their scarce resources (Chowdhury, 2024; Sachan and Noida, 2024).

- **Legal and Regulatory Compliance:** AI agents can help SMMEs navigate complex legal and regulatory environments. However, such tools need to be informed by local legislation and regulations to ensure that Western regulatory frameworks are not applied in the BRICS contexts. Current studies have shown that such tools can alleviate the regulatory compliance burden experienced by SMME business owners who lack legal expertise (Opeyemi *et al.*, 2024). In many cases, they also reduce the costs of securing legal advice (Fang *et al.*, 2023; Schmitz and Zeleznikow, 2021).
- **E-commerce and Digitalisation:** AI agents can also assist SMMEs onboard their business functions to e-commerce platforms, facilitating digital transactions and allowing the business to reach a wider market audience (Raji *et al.*, 2024). The OpenAI off-the-shelf system already offers such functionality through its Operator Agent but is only available to the US market (OpenAI, 2025). Similar but open-source developments are needed in the BRICS.
- **Agriculture Optimisation:** Given the prevalence of agriculture in some BRICS nations, AI tools that optimise farming practices will introduce new efficiencies in managing available resources. Farmers and other SMMEs involved in agricultural practices have opportunities to introduce sustainable farming practices, make decisions based on climate predictions and become more resilient against market shocks. Such practices boost productivity and precision (Debnath and Basu, 2023; Sakapaji and Puthenkalam, 2023).

By adopting the India Stack architecture design principles, these AI services should be developed as part of a modular, scalable, and adaptable AI service stack, leveraging open-source tools and platforms (Alonso *et al.*, 2023; Raghavan *et al.*, 2019). Throughout 2025, proprietary AI from



“Furthermore, as the open-source development community is organised and creates various AI services and platforms, its efforts must be complemented by awareness and AI literacy campaigns.”

the USA will be expected to offer such services at an unaffordable cost for many across the BRICS. Furthermore, the BRICS businesses must reduce their dependency on Western proprietary AI systems, as the continued use of such systems provides these companies with a stream of data, powering their future progress.

Furthermore, as the open-source development community is organised and creates various AI services and platforms, its efforts must be complemented by awareness and AI literacy campaigns. Such campaigns

are necessary to maximise the use of these facilities, allowing the SMME to benefit from these developments (Firth-Butterfield *et al.*, 2022; Laupichler *et al.*, 2022). While DeepSeek is freely available and offers advanced AI capabilities, awareness among SMMEs is low, and such services are underutilised (Abaddi, 2025). The bloc's sustained economic growth depends on these awareness and literacy campaigns.

Open-source models like DeepSeek provide developers with a foundation to develop their advanced reasoning

capabilities. Given the DeepSeek cost-efficiency breakthrough, new open-source reasoning models are expected (Friesen, 2025). However, the missing link in these developments is producing new services that underserved SMMEs can adopt (Proietti *et al.*, 2025). These services can allow SMMEs to offer competitive products and services with their corporate counterparts.

The BRICS must coordinate its efforts to leverage this breakthrough and facilitate the development of these agents. The BIFN's Study Group on AI can lead this coordination, with funding provided by the BRICS STI Framework Programme and the BPIC coordinating technology transfer across the BRICS.

(PartNIR) which significantly hampers effective coordination and strategic alignment. A comprehensive BRICS AI strategy, therefore, requires an overarching coordination mechanism across these ministerial portfolios before specific SMME-focused initiatives can be effectively implemented.

To enact this strategy, the following actions are required:

1. **Establish a BRICS AI Coordinating Council:**

- 1.1 Create a ministerial-level body with direct representation from Communications, Science & Technology, Small Business Development and Trade & Economy portfolios from each BRICS nation.

2. **BRICS Institute of Future Networks (BIFN) Study Group on AI:**

- 2.1 Establish a dedicated SMME AI task force comprising experts from all the BRICS nations.
- 2.2 Implement a standardised licensing framework that ensures innovations remain accessible while protecting BRICS interests.
- 2.3 Develop implementation guidelines for AI adoption in key SMME sectors.
- 2.4 Coordinate regular consultations between technical experts and SMME representatives.
- 2.5 Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of AI solutions across different business sectors.

3. **BRICS STI Framework Programme:**

- 3.1 Launch targeted funding streams for SMME-focused open-source AI projects.
- 3.2 Establish research grants specifically for AI solutions targeted to SMME requirements.
- 3.3 Fund collaborative research and development projects between the BRICS nations' technical institutions.
- 3.4 Support the development of AI training programs for SMME owners and employees.

4. **BRICS PartNIR Innovation Centre:**

- 4.1 Develop industry-specific AI adoption frameworks for SMMEs.
- 4.2 Create technology transfer protocols for sharing AI innovations across the BRICS nations.
- 4.3 Establish demonstration centres for AI applications in key industrial sectors.
- 4.4 Coordinate capacity-building workshops for SMME digital transformation.
- 4.5 Foster partnerships between technology providers and SMME associations.

The success of this strategy depends on strong coordination between these stakeholders and a sustained commitment to open-source development. Regular monitoring and adjustment of these actions will be crucial to ensure they effectively serve the diverse SMME sectors across the BRICS nations. **BR**

“Through open-source AI models built upon DeepSeek or similar platforms, the BRICS can deliver affordable AI to an underserved SMME sector, unlocking their entrepreneurial capabilities.”

**Recommendations**

This BRICS AI Strategy allows the BRICS and BRICS partner countries to leapfrog towards technological sovereignty by leveraging their collective expertise and commitment to collaboration and technology transfer. This collaborative mindset is a strategic advantage over the USA's proprietary AI model. Through open-source AI models built upon DeepSeek or similar platforms, the BRICS can deliver affordable AI to an underserved SMME sector, unlocking their entrepreneurial capabilities.

Currently, BRICS AI-related initiatives operate in isolation under separate ministerial committees such as Communications and Digital Technologies (BIFN), Science, Technology and Innovation (STI Framework Programme), and Trade, Industry, and Competition

- 1.2 Entrust this Council with decision-making authority to overcome existing fragmentation and oversight over the BIFN Study Group on AI, BRICS STI Framework Programme and BRICS PartNIR Innovation Centre.
- 1.3 Establish a permanent secretariat to ensure continuity and accountability across initiatives.
- 1.4 Establish a dedicated SMME AI advisory group comprising AI experts and social science council representatives to identify priority concerns for SMME development.
- 1.5 Create a collaborative development platform for the BRICS SMME AI Stack, modelled on the successful India Stack approach, with dedicated infrastructure for community developers to test and deploy solutions.

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Member states at the 16<sup>th</sup> BRICS SUMMIT, KAZAN, Russia, 2024

## Youth across the BRICS—Empowering the Next Generation and Creating Opportunities in the Global South

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### Introduction

The BRICS alliance comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, as well as newly inducted members Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Indonesia, and the United Arab Emirates has emerged as a key global player, shaping economic and political dynamics in the Global South. Youth engagement is integral to the BRICS' long-term sustainability, with

various mechanisms and platforms designed to empower young people. However, the effectiveness of these initiatives requires critical evaluation to enhance their impact.

The BRICS nations collectively represent a significant portion of the global youth population, making their role in shaping the future workforce, innovation landscape, and diplomatic relations crucial. Despite efforts in youth engagement, several challenges remain in execution; policy integration, and programme sustainability.

The BRICS countries have established various mechanisms to empower youth by fostering collaboration, education, and innovation. The BRICS Youth Summit serves as a flagship platform that unites young leaders to discuss pressing global issues, exchange ideas, and promote sustainable development initiatives (Beijing Declaration, 2022). Educational exchange programmes, including scholarship opportunities and student mobility agreements, enhance academic collaboration and cultural understanding among BRICS

nations. Furthermore, initiatives such as the BRICS Network University and vocational training programmes focus on equipping youth with skills relevant to emerging industries, entrepreneurship, and technological advancements (Mukul *et al.*, 2024). Collectively, these mechanisms aim to nurture a globally aware, skilled, and empowered generation capable of driving socio-economic progress within the BRICS framework.

### Context

Youth empowerment has been a recurring theme in BRICS Summit Declarations, reflecting the bloc's commitment to fostering the potential of the younger generation as drivers of sustainable development. The Johannesburg II Declaration (2022) emphasised capacity-building initiatives for youth, particularly in digital transformation and entrepreneurship, in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Declaration, 2022). The Beijing Declaration (2022) highlighted youth innovation and



The First BRICS Youth Summit, Kazan, Russia, 2015

cross-cultural exchange as vital to addressing global challenges such as climate change (Fan *et al.*, 2022). The New Delhi Declaration (2021) focused on bridging the digital divide and equipping youth with skills in emerging technologies including artificial intelligence and green technology (Ayodele and Petla, 2024). During the Moscow Summit (2020), which occurred amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the emphasis shifted to resilient education systems and digital tools for ensuring access to learning (Daldegan and Carvalho, 2022). The Brasilia Declaration (2019) stressed fostering entrepreneurial ecosystems and supporting youth-led start-ups, while the Johannesburg Declaration (2018) prioritised partnerships in science, technology, and innovation, as well as academic and cultural exchange programmes (Ignatov, 2019; Dzis and Sidorova, 2021). Collectively, these commitments underscore the bloc's recognition of youth as pivotal to advancing shared goals and addressing challenges of the 21st-century.

#### Existing Mechanisms and Platforms

BRICS countries have made notable strides in empowering youth through various platforms and programmes, each contributing to social, educational, and economic development. Below are some of the current platforms and their mandates.

#### Key official forums and conferences on the BRICS Youth

##### BRICS Youth Summit

The BRICS Youth Summit is an annual platform that provides opportunities for dialogue, networking, and collaboration among the youth of BRICS nations. The Summit was first organised and hosted by the Russian Federation in 2015 in Kazan, held on the sidelines of the BRICS Leaders' Summit. It facilitates youth-led policy discussions and enables young leaders to engage with policymakers and business leaders. Typically, it concludes with the adoption of a declaration that includes policy recommendations on critical issues affecting young people in BRICS countries. One of the notable outcomes of the BRICS Youth Summit was the commitment to establish a BRICS Youth Energy Agency to implement youth projects in the field of energy of the BRICS association.

##### BRICS Young Scientists Forum

The BRICS Young Scientists Forum is a youth-led platform created to harness knowledge for solving common societal challenges through research and innovation. The forum primarily aims to promote collaboration among the youth, develop, and share scientific knowledge in search of solutions to common socio-economic

issues, and strengthen the position of BRICS members in global science and technology. Most importantly, the forum features a Young Innovator Prize competition worth £25,000 that recognises outstanding research and innovation projects with the potential to advance global scientific and economic development and engage a substantial number of young scientists in international scientific and technical cooperation (DSTI, 2024).

##### BRICS+ Youth Energy Summit

The BRICS Youth Energy Summit is an annual forum organised by the BRICS Youth Energy Agency in collaboration with a presiding country and its stakeholders within the energy sector. The Summit has emerged as one of the principal platforms for young people to share ideas and take action on BRICS energy cooperation. Additionally, the platform fosters innovative thinking, promoting a youthful spirit and building a shared green future among the youth of BRICS nations. The BRICS Youth Energy Summit has taken place since 2018 and has been publishing the BRICS Youth Energy Forecast since 2019.

##### BRICS+ Forum of Young Diplomats

The BRICS Young Diplomats Forum (YDF) provides a platform for the young



diplomats from BRICS countries to engage, interact and share their experiences and perspectives. The inaugural BRICS YDF took place in Moscow, Russia, in 2015. The forum aims to enhance youth involvement in international diplomacy by providing a space for young diplomats to exchange perspectives on global governance, multilateralism, and regional cooperation.

### The Newly Established BRICS Youth Council (BYC)

In 2023, during South Africa's chairing of the BRICS, the BRICS heads of state endorsed a decision to establish the BRICS Youth Council (BYC). The foundation of the Council can be traced back to the BRICS Youth Summit, which was first organised and hosted by the Russian Federation in 2015 at Kazan on the sidelines of the BRICS Leaders' Summit. Prior to the endorsement of a BRICS Youth Council in 2023, the BRICS Youth Summit was the principal platform intended to encourage dialogue among the youth of BRICS nations, on various critical issues that affect the youth of BRICS nations. However, the BRICS Youth Summit was akin to the Civil BRICS Forum in its relationship with BRICS leaders—that is, while acknowledged, it was not formally endorsed by the BRICS leaders until 2023, as mentioned above. Therefore, the lack of formal endorsement posed challenges for accountability regarding adopted commitments, as well as adequate financial support from state agencies of BRICS nations to fulfil adopted commitments. According to the NYDA, the Council is “determined to take all necessary steps to ensure the youth voice is important to the agenda of the BRICS Summit of the Heads of States” (National Youth Development Agency, 2023:1). The BRICS Youth Council provides an opportunity to speak with one collective voice as the BRICS youth. However, although the Council is in its infant stage, there are challenges particularly concerning its operations and organisational structure. These challenges are discussed in the Shortcomings section below.

### Civil Society Key Platforms and Programmes

This section unpacks some of the key programmes initiated by civil society. This is



The 7th BRICS Young Scientists Forum, 2022, Xiamen, China



VI BRICS+ Young Diplomats Forum, Ufa, Russia, 2024

not an inclusive list as the brief focused on three countries, Russia, China and South Africa. The selection was based on the continuity of the annual convergence of the activity. It includes, but is not limited to:

### BRICS Summer School South Africa (Organised by the South African BRICS Youth Association (SABYA))

The BRICS Summer School programme brings together students and scholars from the BRICS and the Global South. Its purpose is to provide participants with an intensive and multidimensional knowledge of the BRICS, encompassing its historical context, foundational principles, current initiatives, and future aspirations.

The summer school seeks to enhance participants' understanding of the history, principles, and significance of BRICS cooperation, emphasising its economic, political, and cultural dimensions (SABYA, 2024a).

### BRICS International School (Usually organised by the BRICS–Russia Expert Council and the National BRICS Research Committee)

The BRICS International School (2024), is an educational programme that brings together and trains students, young scientists, diplomats, social activists, entrepreneurs, and journalists aged 18 to 35 across BRICS nations. The programme

provides delegates with an opportunity to attend a specially prepared series of lectures by leading Russian and foreign experts on BRICS, engage in master classes, business games, debates, and discussions, develop communication skills, expand their professional horizons, and examine specific aspects of interactions between BRICS countries in detail.

### **Shanghai Summer School (BRICS Programme)**

*(Organised by Fudan University)*

The Shanghai Summer School (BRICS Programme) at Fudan University aims to provide students and young researchers from BRICS countries an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the BRICS, China, Shanghai and Fudan University. The programme provides the participants with approximately one-month of lectures, consisting of three modules: “Global Governance and Cooperation among BRICS,” “China’s Politics and Diplomacy” and “Happy in Shanghai”. The modules, ‘Global Governance and Cooperation among BRICS’ and ‘China’s Politics and Diplomacy,’ earn four credits each and provide students with in-depth knowledge of international relations and diplomacy.” (Zhao, 2024:1).

### **BRICS Youth Innovation Summit**

*(Organised by South African BRICS Youth Association)*

The BRICS Youth Innovation Summit is a programme designed to bring together young innovators and entrepreneurs from the BRICS+ countries to explore opportunities for collaboration, share knowledge and experience, and develop innovative solutions to common challenges. The rationale behind this programme is to create a platform for young innovators and entrepreneurs from the BRICS countries to connect, learn from each other, and work together to address common challenges. The programme covers various topics, including innovation, entrepreneurship, sustainability, and social impact. Delegates also participate in networking events to collaborate with their peers and develop innovative solutions to common challenges (South African BRICS Youth Association, 2024b).

### **AFRICA-BRICS Youth Forum**

*(Organised by South African BRICS Youth Association)*

The forum’s purpose is to establish and strengthen multilateral relations between the African continent and the BRICS Nations. In line with SABYA’s mission of strengthening linkages, institutional cooperation, and people-to-people exchanges within the BRICS nations, the forum seeks to provide youth with the opportunity to meaningfully participate in BRICS relations from an African perspective and promote collaboration and Intercultural conversation between African and BRICS youth (South African BRICS Youth Association, 2023).

### **International Youth Forum on Public Diplomacy (InterYES)**

*(Organised by Russia – BRICS Project office for international diplomacy)*

The Forum is a platform for teaching and discussions of topical issues related to the development of public diplomacy in the world. It is dedicated to finding solutions to existing challenges through the involvement of young people (aged 18 to 35 years) in international cooperation. The aim of the Forum is to unite the leaders of youth non-profit organisations from BRICS countries and other foreign countries, engaged in public diplomacy in their territories, into an initiative community aimed at expanding dialogue with each other. The Forum is essentially a common space for discussing public diplomacy development issues in the world, finding solutions and establishing cooperation among youth leaders.

### **BRICS To You’ International Youth Volunteer Conference**

*(Organised by Russia – BRICS Project office for international diplomacy)*

The annual conference seeks to introduce to the youth of BRICS member countries the opportunities for volunteering to improve the quality of international events and raise awareness about the future projects planned for BRICS countries. Training of competent volunteers shall raise the overall level and effectiveness of such activities in BRICS, facilitate joint projects, and promote volunteering in general (BRICS Russia 2024, 2024).

### **Shortcomings**

#### **Limited Policy Implementation**

While the BRICS declarations frequently emphasise youth development, concrete policy implementation remains slow. Many youth summits and forums recommendations fail to be integrated into national policies or long-term BRICS strategies. Since inception in 2015, over 100 policy recommendations have been submitted to heads of states. However, a vast majority of those have not been included in the final declarations. For example, in a report prepared by South African delegates who attended the BRICS Youth Summit in 2025, it was noted that efforts to ensure the summit resolutions were reflected in the Declaration of the Heads of States were futile. Only in 2023, when the BRICS Youth Council was endorsed, youth were invited to make remarks during the Heads of State Summit.

#### **Lack of Institutional Continuity**

Many youth-focused initiatives are event-based rather than sustained programmes. A lack of dedicated frameworks for youth engagement hinders long-term participation and consistent policy influence. Gaps in coordination between the different BRICS countries result in fragmented efforts and a lack of alignment with youth priorities. This makes it challenging to create unified, long-term strategies. Even with the recently established BRICS Youth Council, the sustainability of BRICS youth has not been evident. While the BRICS Youth Council has been established, it still faces numerous challenges, including leadership, funding and inclusivity. For instance, the configuration of the BRICS Youth Council has not followed the widely used model adopted by other BRICS chapters such as the BRICS Business Council, BRICS Think Tanks Council, BRICS Business Women Alliance, and the recently established Civil BRICS Council. The BYC is largely led by the government, playing a chair and secretariat roles, while civil society plays minimal roles through working groups. Concerning the working groups, the council has adopted five working groups where each country is solely responsible for one of them. This means each country works on a working group independently





and then report back to the council meeting, or the summit. This contrasts with the other BRICS Chapters, where each working group comprises representatives from all BRICS countries, ultimately ensuring that each nation contributes fairly to the working groups, led by a rotating chair based on the BRICS presidency.

#### **Lack of sufficient funding and resources**

While platforms and programmes designed to empower youth within the BRICS, such as the BRICS Youth Summit, educational exchange programmes, and skills development initiatives, have demonstrated potential, they encounter various shortcomings. One limitation is unequal access due to regional disparities, where youth from more remote or economically disadvantaged areas often struggle to participate in such initiatives due to logistical, financial, or digital barriers (Rwigema, 2023). Insufficient funding and resources also hinder the scalability and sustainability of these programmes, limiting their reach and impact (Rwigema, 2023).

#### **Restricted Accessibility**

Participation in BRICS youth programmes is often limited to elite groups, excluding grassroots youth and marginalised communities. For instance, a 2015 South African report of the 2015 BRICS Youth Summit noted that most of the South African delegates who the government supported to attend were not necessarily young people.

“Participation in BRICS youth programmes is often limited to elite groups, excluding grassroots youth and marginalised communities.”

#### **Lack of relevant expert absorption strategies in the home country**

Students qualified and upskilled in Artificial intelligence, Machine Learning and Big Data, as well as Data Analysis gained internationally, come back into their home country where there are very few companies specialising in these fields nor jobs that require those skills. Meaning that they became upskilled in a domain that had almost no value to the geographical area around them, they therefore find themselves having to relocate internationally, effectively draining the country of resources because it takes quite a lot of resources to train up a specialist like that, only to benefit another country.

#### **Missed opportunities for strategic impact and sharing of good practices**

BRICS countries have made significant strides in recognizing youth as key drivers of development, yet there remains a missed opportunity in systematically identifying and

sharing best practices across member states. Youth-led initiatives and community-based interventions, particularly in areas such as, digital innovation, and green economy-often lack visibility at the policy level. As youth engagements continue through various BRICS youth formations, it becomes increasingly important to take stock of the tangible gains and long-term impact of these engagements. Too often, opportunities for strategic impact have been missed by failing to systematically track, report, and reflect on outcomes through project reporting, follow-ups, and integration into national and BRICS-wide youth development agendas.

#### **Recommendations**

To enhance youth participation and create meaningful and sustainable opportunities within the BRICS, consideration of the following recommendations is critical:

##### **1. Strengthening Policy Integration**

It is essential to ensure that youth-related

recommendations from BRICS forums are integrated into national and regional policies, with a clear implementation of roadmaps, as elaborated further in the section below.

### 1.1. Establishing Shared Policy Frameworks

Creating shared frameworks is critical to policy cohesion. BRICS nations can prioritise the establishment of working groups and think tanks that focus on common challenges such as climate change, digital transformation, and equitable trade practices. These frameworks should outline clear objectives, timelines, and metrics for success while respecting the unique priorities of each nation. Harmonising efforts in areas like green energy transition, cross-border e-commerce, and infrastructure investment can set the foundation for deeper collaboration.

### 1.2. Enhancing Communication Channels

Regular and structured dialogue is indispensable for policy alignment. Annual summits, ministerial meetings, and thematic forums offer opportunities to align priorities. Establishing virtual collaboration platforms and promoting multilingual engagement tools can ensure continuous interaction, minimising gaps between countries' policy directions. Sharing the best practices and lessons learned through such channels also helps member nations learn from each other's successes and challenges.

### 1.3. Promoting Youth Engagement in Policy Making

The role of youth is pivotal in achieving shared goals. BRICS nations can empower young leaders through exchange programmes, scholarships, and entrepreneurship grants aimed at fostering innovation and cross-cultural collaboration. Platforms such as the BRICS Youth Summits can enable young voices to contribute to policy making processes, addressing climate action, technological advancements, and social equity. For instance, encouraging youth participation in digital economy initiatives can drive innovation while creating

employment opportunities aligned with the group's objectives.

### 1.4. Leveraging Technology and Digital Diplomacy

Digital tools can transform policy alignment. Establishing a unified digital platform for BRICS nations to share data, track progress on joint initiatives, and coordinate research efforts can ensure more seamless policy implementation. Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Big Data analytics can also be used to predict trends, assess the impact of policies, and make data-driven decisions that benefit all members.

### 1.5. Encouraging People-to-People Connectivity

Fostering cultural and educational exchanges among citizens, particularly youth, can build mutual understanding and strengthen ties. Collaborative programmes in sports, arts, and science can bridge gaps and encourage unity in diversity. Enhanced people-to-people connectivity promotes a sense of shared identity and responsibility, vital for the cohesion of long-term policies.

### 2. Harmonising of the BRICS Youth Council

The BRICS Youth Council can adapt the universal model used by the other four chapters of BRICS. This can be led by civil society, with the governments providing institutional support in secretariat roles and overseeing governance. For example, we have the BRICS Think Tank Council in South Africa which is under the National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS) and reports to the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), BRICS Business Council which reports to the Department of Trade, Industry and Commission (DTIC) and the BRICS Women Business Alliance which reports to the Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities (DWYPD). Similarly, the BRICS Youth Council may consider the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) as a secretariat reporting to the DWYPD.

It is further recommended that the BRICS Youth Council be strengthened and afforded an annual opportunity to attend

at least one of the BRICS Sherpas meetings to provide high level deliverables for that specific chairship. Furthermore, some of the key recommendations of the BRICS youth summit should be able to find expression in the BRICS leaders declaration in line with the priorities and deliverables of the chairship, with this, there is at least commitment to implement some of those recommendations.

### 3. Increase Funding and Support for Youth Programmes

There is a need to strengthen financial support mechanisms through BRICS governments, business, international agencies, and New Development Bank (NDB). This is crucial for the implementation of resolutions and commitments that arise out of these platforms and programmes.

### 4. Promote inclusive development across the Global South

There is a need to invest in the BRICS-wide digital platforms that allow youth to collaborate on projects, access training, and participate in policy discussions. Considering the geographic disparity of BRICS nations, in cases of limited financial resources for in-person programmes, this is crucial. Moreover, establishing formal mechanisms for showcasing successful programs, such as a BRICS+ Youth Best Practices Forum, Think tank or annual policy exchange platform, could empower young people to contribute meaningfully to policy formation. Such structures would ensure that scalable, context-relevant interventions inform national and regional strategies, fostering inclusive development across the Global South.

### 5. Foster More Inclusive Participation

There is a need to create outreach programmes targeting marginalised youth and rural communities to enhance accessibility and representation within BRICS initiatives. This will ensure broader geographical and socio-economic representation from all BRICS countries, particularly from rural or marginalised regions, to ensure inclusive and equal access to these platforms irrespective of social class.

## 6. Develop strategies to take stock of youth gains from across all BRICS youth formations

Developing a BRICS Youth Progress Tracker-that allows each BRICS country to collect and report youth-related data through designated national bodies, while feeding into a shared digital platform that tracks common indicators and showcases progress across the bloc is recommended to ensure that opportunities for strategic impact and sharing of good practices are not missed.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, while existing mechanisms such as the BRICS Youth Summit and various civil society programmes provide valuable platforms for youth engagement, limited policy implementation continues to pose a significant challenge. Although these initiatives promote collaboration and skill development, their impact is often hindered by a lack of structured governance, insufficient funding, and gaps in policy execution. To fully empower young people across BRICS nations, there is a need to bridge these shortcomings by strengthening institutional frameworks and ensuring that youth-driven recommendations translate into tangible actions.

Addressing these challenges requires harmonising the BRICS Youth Council, increasing funding for youth programmes, and expanding exchange opportunities to foster cross-border collaboration. Strengthening policy integration, enhancing digital inclusion, and ensuring broader participation, especially among marginalised youth, will create a more inclusive and impactful BRICS youth agenda. Lastly, to ensure continuity, relevance, and growth, it is crucial to establish a structured mechanism for monitoring and evaluating the progress of youth across various BRICS formations, capturing success stories, lessons learned, and policy influence. By prioritising these recommendations, the BRICS bloc can unlock the full potential of its young population, equipping them with the resources, skills, and opportunities needed to drive sustainable development and economic growth across the Global South. **BR**

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## Brazil and the international financial institutions; A critical analysis

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### Introduction

The purpose of this policy brief is to reflect on the historic and current position of Brazil against the international monetary system as well as its utilisation of the related monetary financial instruments. By GDP (Gross Domestic Product) rankings, Brazil has in the past fifteen years vacillated between seventh and tenth biggest economy globally. In 2010, Brazil's GDP estimates placed it at 7<sup>th</sup> position globally at US\$2,08 trillion, 9<sup>th</sup> in 2015 at US\$1,8 trillion, 11<sup>th</sup> in 2020 at

US\$1,9 trillion and 10<sup>th</sup> by 2025 estimates at US\$2,3 trillion. In essence, the Brazilian economy, though considerably huge, suffered a deep crisis in 2015-16, and has been generally stagnant since 2020 as recorded annual growth was minimal. Other important indicators of economic performance, such as trade surplus, suggest a healthy economy measured at US\$5,19 billion surplus in 2010, a slight growth to US\$19,6 billion in 2015, a massive jump to US\$51 billion surplus in 2020 and an estimated leap towards US\$80 billion in 2025.



However, throughout this period, Brazil has been running a budget deficit. As a percentage of the GDP, Brazil's deficit in 2010 was 2,39%, grew to 10,2% in 2015, to 15,4% in 2020 and 8,4% in 2024 according to Török (2019) and by the records of the Banco Central do Brazil (2025). A significant part of this deficit, however (around 6-7%) accrues to the repayment of interest rates of the public debt, creating a vicious circle of indebtedness. After all, to finance its deficit, the Brazilian government must engage in additional national and international borrowing as its annual budget versus total revenue collection was disappointing. Public debt in 2010 was recorded at US\$425 billion; however, this grew to US\$754 billion in 2015 and US\$1,2 trillion in 2020. The 2025 projection is an escalation to US\$1,9 trillion. Brazil's debt burden score as of 2024 stood at -0,3, a -0.1 change from its 2022 burden (Neufeld, 2024).

Throughout Brazil's history, it had several crises related to the balance of payments. In the last decades (especially from 2005 to 2010) it accumulated large international reserves, and currently the external debt is no longer a relevant burden. Even though both the dimension and the profile of its external liabilities (in particular the portfolio investments) create a high vulnerability of the Brazilian economy to the different phases of the international liquidity cycles. More concretely, capital flows to Brazil are very volatile, and the country always faces the risk of massive capital flights. As a member of the BRICS and the G20, Brazil has therefore vested interests in a highly functional International Financial Institutions' (IFIs) framework. The position of Brazil on the workings of such institutions as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Trade Organisation (2023) which is a member state has been clearly and continuously ventilated by successive Brazilian leadership. The country's position reflects its strategic aims in global financial governance and its interest and commitment to see the modernisation of IFIs take off in the interests of developing nations. Brazil's ideas are equally reflected in the declarations of the BRICS, IBSA and the G20. This brief examines Brazil's position on IFIs analysing official

declarations, speeches by Brazilian officials, and major policy comments.

### **Brazil and the IMF**

As its justification for existence, the IMF purports to work towards achieving sustainable growth and prosperity for its 191-member countries. It achieves this through three missions: (a) advancing international monetary cooperation, (b) encouraging trade expansion, and (c) discouraging policies that would harm economic prosperity.

Brazil joined the IMF on 14 January 1946 and currently contributes 11,042,000 SDR (1 SDR = US\$1,42 by 2022 norms) at 2,3% shareholding. Since its membership, Brazil has benefitted from IMF financial

Finance of Presidents Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff (2006-2014), Mr Guido Mantega, suggested that "the IMF should create a prevention instrument to provide emerging markets a quick provision as necessary as possible". As a response, directly or otherwise, the IMF governors developed a concept to aid emerging economies' deficit (Roza, 2008).

President Lula frequently underlined Brazil's financial independence from the IMF in his speeches, presenting a triumph for national sovereignty (Lula, 2006). Nevertheless, Brazil still actively participates in the IMF by supporting governance changes that empower rising economies' votes and influence (G20, 2023). In their sitting in 2024, the IMF's Executive Board

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“The country's position reflects its strategic aims in global financial governance and its interest and commitment to see the modernisation of IFIs take off in the interests of developing nations.”

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support when necessary. However, since President Lula da Silva took office in 2003, his administration has reviewed the standby arrangements with the IMF.

Before President Lula's time, specifically during the financial crises of the 1980s and late 1990s, Brazil sought a bailout from the IMF. However, the year 1994 would become critically important for Brazil's economy for three main reasons: (i) Brazil experienced a significant economic crisis, partly influenced by the Russian crisis of 1990, (ii) Brazil transitioned from fixed to flexible exchange rates, resulting in substantial implications for its economy, and (iii) Brazil's relationship with the IMF had historically been cordial.

The last bailout for Brazil from the IMF was in 2002, under Fernando Henrique Cardoso's presidency. The Minister of

commended Brazil for, among other things, maintaining fiscal prudence, bringing down inflation, and halting the ecological disaster in the Amazon basin (IMF, 2024).

In alliance with other countries (especially the BRICS), Brazil has been vocal in its claims for reforming the quota system at the IMF, thereby providing more power to the Global South. The USA and Western Europe have been very reluctant in accepting these proposals, because they do not want to lose the veto power they have for the more crucial decisions at the Fund, which require 75% of the votes the USA has veto power alone, and the Western European countries through the European Union.

### **Brazil and the World Bank**

The World Bank projects its primary objective as eradicating extreme poverty and



“During the BRICS+ Dialogue in 2023, President Lula emphasised the necessity of de-dollarisation, remarking that a more diversified financial system would enhance economic resilience in developing nations (Lula, 2023).”

promoting prosperity worldwide. This is done by financial support to governments to improve economic performance and living standards. Brazil became a member of the World Bank on 14 January 1946, i.e., the date it joined the IMF, and currently holds 5,350.9 shares, which translates into 1.98% of the total shares (World Bank Group, n.d.). Over the years, Brazil has borrowed from the World Bank for various mega projects. Brazil's first World Bank financed project was for power production and distribution in 1949, worth US\$75 million loaned to the Brazilian Traction, Light and Power Company Limited. After its implementation, the company produced 60% of the Brazilian total power (World Bank, n.d.).

Although Brazil acknowledges the World Bank as a major player in global development, it has consistently called for reforms to make the institution more democratic and better suited to the needs of developing countries, particularly by increasing the representation of emerging economies. The sixth BRICS Summit held in Fortaleza in 2014's declaration criticises the slow pace of reforms in International Financial Institutions (IFIs). To complement the efforts of the World Bank and IMF, Brazil has subsequently supported alternative financial instruments, including the BRICS-led New Development Bank (NDB), which offers more flexible funding for projects related to sustainable development and infrastructure (BRICS, 2019).

At the pre-launch of the Global Alliance against hunger and poverty, on 24 July 2024—which is one of the main legacies of the Brazilian chairmanship of the G20, President Lula da Silva expressed gratitude that food security will become a central topic at the World Bank strategic agenda over the following years. At the same time, he lambasted both the World Bank and IMF for being the main obstacle in tackling today's complex problems (Lula, 2024).

#### **Brazil and the WTO**

As an influential member of the WTO, Brazil has emphasised lowering agricultural subsidies in wealthy countries and regularly argued for a more equitable world trading system. Seeking to defend developing nations against trade distortions brought on by protectionist measures, Brazil has positioned itself as a champion of the Global South in WTO negotiations (WTO, 2023). In addition, Brazil has argued for a more fair trading system that promotes economic development in developing countries and has been instrumental in the Doha Development Agenda.

#### **The BRICS and the push for a multipolar financial order**

Brazil's assertive participation in the BRICS demonstrates its commitment to transforming global financial governance.

The Declaration from the 11th BRICS Summit (2019) underscores Brazil's support for increasing the use of local currencies in trade to reduce reliance on the US dollar (BRICS, 2019). During the BRICS+ Dialogue in 2023, President Lula emphasised the necessity of de-dollarisation, remarking that a more diversified financial system would enhance economic resilience in developing nations (Lula, 2023).

US President Donald Trump has threatened the BRICS nations for their engagement in the effort to de-dollarise. Yet, Russia and China are seriously working to create a new institutional framework that alleviates the “dollar trap.” Brazil will, therefore, be amidst these disputes. Hopefully, it will continue to push for the cross-border usage of national currencies and more profound transformations in the international monetary and financial system.

### **Brazil's contribution to the G20 and financial governance reform**

As Brazil assumed the G20 Presidency in 2024, reform of financial governance remained a priority. The Brazilian government identified three key priorities for its chairmanship of the BRICS, one of which was reforming global governance. Brazil specifically emphasised the importance of enhancing the influence of emerging economies in global financial governance. The nation supports policies that reduce reliance on primary reserve currencies, promote trade in local currencies, and strengthen the lending capabilities of development banks (G20, 2024). These priorities align with Brazil's overarching vision of a multipolar financial landscape where decision-making authority is distributed more evenly.

### **Implications for South Africa and recommendations for policymakers**

As a prominent member of the BRICS, South Africa aligns with Brazil in expressing concerns regarding the need for improvements in financial governance. Given Brazil's focus on reducing reliance on dominant reserve currencies and increasing the influence of developing economies in global financial governance, South Africa can take strategic steps to align with these goals.

## **1. Currency**

- 1.1** Although creating a BRICS currency is a complex task unlikely to be finalised in the short term, South Africa and Brazil should establish and maintain working groups to explore this possibility, alongside the other BRICS nations.
- 1.2.** South Africa should enhance the effectiveness of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and pursue a regional payment system aimed at reducing dependence on foreign currencies.
- 1.3** Drawing inspiration from Brazil's support for local currency trade, South Africa can advocate for similar policies within the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

## **2. IMF and World Bank**

- 2.1** South African officials should intensify their lobbying efforts within Brazil's campaign for a more democratic and inclusive IMF and World Bank to ensure increased voting power for African countries. By collaborating with BRICS partners, cooperative lobbying campaigns can bolster the success of reform initiatives.
- 2.2** South Africa must leverage its chairmanship of the G20 in 2025 to advance these initiatives on reforms of the International Monetary and Financial System and its institutions. Through bilateral meetings with the Brazilian delegation, which led such discussions during Brazil's G20 chairmanship in 2024, the South African government can gain insight into concrete obstacles and potential areas for improvement.

## **3. Expanding the role of the new Development Bank**

Brazil's endorsement of the NDB as an alternative financial institution suggests South Africa should take a more active role in the bank's management.

- 3.1** South Africa needs to explore additional funding sources within the NDB to support crucial infrastructure and energy projects.
- 3.2** The effectiveness of Brazil's initiative for local currency trade and de-

dollarisation can be improved through coordinated efforts among other BRICS nations. South Africa can aid in developing a comprehensive BRICS financial strategy that standardises trade settlement processes in national currencies.

- 3.3** The CRA acts as a fiscal safeguard for BRICS countries. South Africa should advocate for the enhancement of the CRA's lending capacity and the optimisation of its operational processes to ensure timely financial support during economic crises. Brazilian chairmanship of the BRICS in 2025 is deeply committed to advancing these transformations of the CRA.

In conjunction with Brazil and other BRICS nations, South Africa should present a unified position in negotiations with the IMF, World Bank, and WTO. Aligning views on trade and financial governance reforms will enhance the BRICS' collective bargaining power. If BRICS countries combine their efforts, Brazil's pursuit of local currency commerce and de-dollarisation may achieve greater success. South Africa can aid in developing a BRICS-wide financial strategy that standardises the trade settlement system using national currencies. For the BRICS, the CRA serves as a financial safety net. To ensure swift financial assistance during economic crises, South Africa should support enhancing the lending capability of the CRA and streamlining its operational processes. With Brazil and other BRICS nations, South Africa should maintain a consistent stance in negotiations with the WTO, World Bank, and IMF. By coordinating their positions on trade and financial governance changes, the BRICS can enhance their collective negotiating strength.

## **4. Developing new cross-border payment systems**

As noted by De Conti, Netswera, Rossi, Saliba and Welle (2024), when addressing the International Monetary and Financial System it is crucial to recognise that digitalisation is driving profound changes in the form of money and payments. Over 105 countries are exploring the potential implementation of Central Bank Digital Currencies (CBDCs).

Discussions regarding the international use of CBDCs are intensifying, as there is a widespread recognition of the inefficiencies within the current global payment system. These inefficiencies stem from several factors, including the exorbitant fees that international migrants pay for remittances and the ability of the SWIFT platform to be weaponised for economic warfare. The emergence of CBDCs and the corresponding shifts in the global infrastructure for cross-border payments are expected to have significant implications for the world economy. Given that discussions on these changes are still in their early stages, now is an ideal moment to coordinate efforts in building a financial architecture that serves as a “global public good.”

This policy brief advocates for joint policies focused on creating a CBDC-based cross-border payment system that functions as a global public good. All analysts insist that such a system should enhance efficiency and transparency and reduce the costs of international transactions (BIS, IMF and WB Group, 2021:1). While these objectives are significant, we argue that one additional key goal should be prioritised in developing the system: reducing the asymmetries within the International Monetary and Financial System (IMFS).

In light of this, Brazil and South Africa (along with other countries of the Global South) should unite to establish a collaborative development of a new cross-border payment system aimed at addressing existing imbalances and avoiding platforms reliant on a single or limited number of currencies:

- 4.1 The system must be designed to include all countries.
- 4.2 It should support all currencies, facilitating bilateral exchange between currency pairs.
- 4.3 It should ensure consistent transaction speed and cost across all currency pairs.
- 4.4 The technological infrastructure underpinning this new system must not be controlled by any single nation but should be based on technology regarded as a global public good.
- 4.5 The regulatory framework governing these cross-border transactions must be established through multilateral cooperation.
- 4.6 In conclusion, while CBDCs may be developed through national initiatives, the system that enables their global circulation must be designed and operated under multilateral governance.

## Conclusion

Brazil's position on international financial institutions is grounded in its ambition for a more inclusive, just, representative, fairer and democratic global financial system. South Africa can gain from aligning with Brazil's plans including leveraging synergies between the two nations, especially in financial governance reforms, de-dollarisation initiatives, and the enhancement of alternative financial institutions such as the NDB. By enhancing policy consistency within BRICS, both nations may aid in reforming the global economic and financial architecture to benefit emerging markets. The inertias of the international monetary and financial system are very strong, but the collective actions of the Global South countries have to continue to work toward a gradual transformation of this picture. After all, the current IMF was designed to favour the interests of the dominant countries, and the Global South countries should counter this by providing collective leadership towards the reform of this multilateral financial institution in the main. Having a leading position respectively in Latin America and Africa, Brazil and South Africa should keep and strengthen these efforts to create a more just IMF. **BR**

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# BOOK OF INTEREST



## The BRICS NEXUSES: Peace and Security (2018) and Security and Economy (2024)

Editors: **Nimala Devi Gopal and Gert Kruger**

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**S** Supported by the National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS), the University of KwaZulu-Natal and the South African BRICS Think Tank, organised the multidisciplinary *2018 Peace and Security Symposium*, and the *2024 International Conference on the Nexus between Security and Economy*.

The BRICS nations – Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa represent a significant geopolitical and economic force on the global stage. As a collective, the BRICS represent the interests of these nations, as well as those of the developing world more broadly. The BRICS also aims to promote and mobilise for peace and security, as well as viable and constructive economic engagement and development.

Beyond their geopolitical initiatives for peace and justice internationally, a primary focus is on their economic prominence, particularly their emerging leading roles in global economic development. Within this framework, the BRICS nations also face complex security challenges and risks that intersect with their economic objectives, concerning investment and trade. The evolving dynamics within the BRICS framework demand a nuanced understanding of the interplay between security studies and economic imperatives, providing a framework for secure economic development and fostering economic resilience.

In response to these realities, the *2018 Peace and Security Symposium* deliberated on seminal research focusing on the role of the BRICS at the global and UN levels, addressing matters related to African and

Indian ocean maritime security, BRICS leadership in the post-Western era, the promotion of peace operations, and especially in the de-escalation of armed conflict and cybercrime.

Subsequently, the *2024 International Conference on the Nexus between Security and Economy* addressed the intersection of security studies and economic objectives within the BRICS Framework. The conference explored the complex interplay between security challenges and economic imperatives within the framework of the BRICS nations. It provided a platform for scholars, policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders to engage in critical discussions, share insights, and explore innovative approaches toward understanding and addressing the complex dynamics at the intersection of security and economic priorities within the BRICS context.

Some seminal papers addressed the security problematics and interventions related to regional and domestic cybersecurity, including social media, governance, democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and social dialogue as essential foundations for peace and security in an expanded BRICS. This encompasses countering transnational cybercrime, as well as financial matters related to economic integration within the BRICS nations, the BRICS investments, and economic aspects of onshore and offshore energy generation and environmental security. Additionally, addressing challenges regarding reliable intelligence gathering, psycho-social security at local and communal levels, and plans for global improvement and preparation for future health pandemics. **BR**

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An athlete from Team South Africa receives a special recognition award during the official closing ceremony of the 1st BRICS+ Blind Football International Friendly Tournament.





An athlete from Team South Africa receives a special recognition award during the official closing ceremony of the 1st BRICS+ Blind Football International Friendly Tournament.





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