



EDITORIAL ARTICLE

Welcome Message for the Inaugural Edition of the “BRICS+: Current Agenda”

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Thank you very much for inviting me to contribute to the inaugural edition of the BRICS+: Current Agenda. Firstly, congratulations on the publication of the BRICS+: Current Agenda. I think this is a welcome initiative and long overdue.

So to all involved in the launching of this journal, we are extremely pleased to have this addition to the BRICS family. On the first issue, on the global significance of BRICS, of course BRICS today is a brand name. And when you speak of BRICS, it is not just the five countries anymore.

As you are aware, in 2025 BRICS underwent its expansion with the addition of five new members. So hence we now refer to BRICS as BRICS+. However, when you speak of BRICS, BRICS signifies not only the rise of the Global South and the institutionalization of a formation that champions the key issues as it affects not only the countries of the Global South, but the global community as a whole. We live in a very difficult global environment, perhaps the most challenging in the modern era.

It is a world that is fragmenting, and we are seeing the divide between the Global North and South becoming greater. And in this world, we are seeing that the liberal order that was established by the key players following the Second World War is collapsing.

And it is collapsing precisely because the very champions that were the architects of a new global order following the Second World War are the chief transgressors of the multilateral global architecture.

This year we mark the 80th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations. But what we have seen is that multilateralism is under siege. We have seen the rise of unilateralism, and we have seen a world where those hegemonic powers that have determined what is best for the global community continue to occupy the space and are not making way for new players on the global stage.

The world of 1945 and the world of 2025 are vastly different. You have had major powers from the Global South rising whose economies are far bigger those that of many of the G7. This includes countries like China, India, Brazil and Russia, the key BRICS countries that came together to form BRICS, and South Africa from the African continent.

So, BRICS can be a very positive force based on the fact that it represents in many senses the voice of the Global South and champions the issues of the majority of the global population, understanding that over 85% of the global population lives in the Global South.

Almost 50% of the global population today is made up of member states of BRICS countries, the BRICS+ countries as well as the partner countries of BRICS; it is well above the 50% mark.

So in that sense, BRICS represents the majority of the global community. Secondly, BRICS, apart from its demographic might, also today in terms of its GDP in PPP is larger than that of the G7. BRICS accounts for almost 36% of global GDP as against 29% of the G7. So it is, even in economic terms, a major force to be reckoned with today.

Now, of course, all of this places BRICS in a very strong position in terms of championing global change, in creating a more cohesive global environment that is inclusive, that is just, that is fair. Hence, the three major pillars of BRICS are focused on politics and security, on finance and economics, and on cultural, social and people to people interaction. And on all three fronts, BRICS is a positive force for creating a more equitable world, a world that is characterized by multipolarity as against unipolarity, and an inclusive world.

South Africa was very pleased to be invited to join BRICS because it was not just about South Africa, it was also about the African continent when we attended the first summit in 2011 in Sanya as a full member.

Now, South Africa had the privilege of chairing BRICS for the first time in 2013, and it was South Africa that put forward the idea that BRICS has to be not only about advancing the interests of the five member states, but of the collective Global South. And as the first African country to chair BRICS in 2013, we felt it important that it must be a BRICS about South Africa and the African continent. And therefore, we put out the idea of the outreach, and the first outreach was held during South Africa's presidency in 2013 when we held the Johannesburg summit and invited representatives of the entire African continent. So, for South Africa, championing African issues within BRICS is an integral part of our membership, as we do in terms of championing the issues of the Global South.

But for South Africa, we believe that BRICS is an important platform to champion the global multilateral system, which, as I have mentioned, is under siege, to ensure that there is reform of the United Nations, there is reform of the Security Council of the United Nations to be reflective and representative of the global order as it is today. To ensure that we have the Charter of the United Nations, underpinned by international law, at the center of the evolving multipolar global world order that we within BRICS have already indicated within the BRICS Summit Declaration that we would like to see the world move away from a compartmentalized world dominated by one or two powers, but rather representing the current reality where you have major powers from the Global South today playing important roles in being architects of the new global order, not just the political and security, the financial and economic, as well as equally important the social, cultural dimensions and issues pertaining to sustainable development.

So, for South Africa, all of these are key issues that must be an integral part of the BRICS agenda on an ongoing basis. Equally important, like we championed during our 2018 chairship when we focused on the Fourth Industrial Revolution, is to see how digitization and digital transformation can be a major tool in terms of addressing the development issues, especially as it affects Africa, but more broadly the Global South.

I believe that BRICS members are key to global digital transformation, and this is an integral part of the BRICS agenda on how we can use digital transformation in leapfrogging into the future and addressing our key developmental issues of poverty, underdevelopment, and inequality. Furthermore, we need to ensure that this is a major part of the focus of the journal in terms of addressing the challenges facing Africa in particular and the Global South in general and the global community as a whole in ensuring that the development agenda continues to enjoy center stage within the BRICS agenda, because it has been relegated to the margins in terms of the global agenda, including within the UN system.

Academic knowledge, of course, has been and continues to be an integral part of BRICS since its outset. On the role of academic knowledge and BRICS+ and the current agenda of the journal, it is important to understand that BRICS, as indicated, has three key pillars: political and security; economic and financial; and, thirdly, people-to-people, social and cultural.

Under the third pillar, the academic and think tank dimension of BRICS is critically important, which is why the BRICS Think Tank Council was launched in 2013 under South Africa's chairship, becoming the umbrella for the BRICS think tank community and, equally important, the BRICS Academic Forum. This is a very critical and crucial part of BRICS cooperation.

It is important to understand that BRICS cooperation is not compartmentalized under these three pillars, as there is constant cross pollination between them, and academia has a very important role in addressing the key challenges and opportunities facing not only the BRICS community but the entire global community, covering all the key issues contained in the BRICS Summit declarations. These issues range from global political and security questions, the global multilateral architecture and the Bretton Woods institutions, to key UN institutions, as well as climate change and climate action, pandemics and health infrastructure, and, of course, economic, financial and investment issues.

Academia has an important role in providing policy guidance to BRICS leaders, and this is what is expected of a journal like the BRICS+ Journal, which has a critical role in coordinating among academia from the vast BRICS community, not only in member states and partner countries but globally across the Global South and including academics from the Global North. A number of Global North countries have a key interest in and produce journals and articles focusing on BRICS because today BRICS is not just about the Global South; it is a pan global North–South structure that addresses all key challenges.

This is where the academic community, think tanks and students must engage in addressing key issues pertaining to BRICS, and a journal like the BRICS+ Journal must also reflect on the outcomes of BRICS presidencies and summit declarations to ensure that all key decisions taken are being delivered on. The BRICS+ Journal can become an important barometer of self-reflection within the BRICS community, asking how the very lofty ideals and important decisions taken, not only at ministerial and working group level but also at summit level, are becoming reality and impacting the lives of all, which makes this a very important dimension of BRICS cooperation.

On the issue of the expansion of BRICS and the BRICS+ concept. The presidency of South Africa in 2023 will be remembered for one major outcome in particular

and that is the expansion of BRICS from five members to the current 10. Now, of course, this did not occur in a vacuum.

Over the years, a number of countries have championed to join the BRICS family for various reasons. Because BRICS was seen as a positive force, a unifying force of the global South and the global community. South Africa was the first beneficiary of expansion of BRICS when the original four members invited South Africa to join BRICS in 2010. And between the period 2011 to 2023, a number of countries made overtures to the five BRICS members wanting to become full members. And it was during China's chairship of BRICS in 2022 that the leaders of BRICS at the Beijing Summit decided to task the BRICS Sherpas to look into the question of the expansion of BRICS and to author the guiding principles, standards, criteria and procedures of the BRICS expansion process. Based on the directive received from the leaders at the Beijing Summit in 2022, the BRICS Sherpas held various meetings starting under China's chairship. In 2022 and this continued into South Africa's chairship in 2023. I was very privileged as South Africa's Sherpa to oversee several meetings of the BRICS Sherpas specifically focused on the mandate given to Sherpas to develop the guiding principles, standards, criteria and procedure of BRICS expansion and this was presented to the foreign ministers for their consideration and subsequently the foreign ministers presented this to the leaders at the Johannesburg 2 Summit in South Africa in 2023. And it was at this summit that the leaders of course endorsed the guiding principles, standards, criteria and procedure for the expansion process and invited six countries uh seven countries originally to become full members. Two of those countries unfortunately uh did not respond positively. Argentina uh did not take up the offer and Saudi Arabia has still to decide uh on the invitation. Uh so we have currently 10 full members, five having joined post the 2023 process. Of course, an expanded BRICS sends out several key messages. Firstly, that you have now a more powerful BRICS, a set of very important countries of the global South, countries that are very influential in their own right within their own regions and globally. And of course, it also covers all of the key and major regions of the global uh geography. Some of the key challenges of course facing an expanded BRICS to how are integrate the new members into the culture uh of of the five members that had been developed over the past several years. And I think this is being addressed effectively and we are seeing the new members being integrated and uh you have a more coherent and effective BRICS with the 10 members as well as was demonstrated uh during the outcome of the summit in 2024 under Russia's chairship and under Brazil's chairship in 2025.

As I indicated, all three pillars of BRICS cooperation are equally important and the so-called third pillar, the social pillar and people-to-people pillar, is a critical part of BRICS cooperation. BRICS is not just about intergovernmental cooperation. It is about enhancing ties between the communities of the BRICS member countries. And therefore we have stressed from the very beginning that we would like to see a people-centered BRICS where the cooperation that derives from the BRICS countries percolates and benefits all of our people, especially addressing issues of underdevelopment and ensuring that we make our people the brand ambassadors of BRICS. And that is why from the very outset we have cooperated in the fields of culture, art, sport, education and therefore we instituted the BRICS Games as an annual event to bring sports into the forefront as a gelling agent between our peoples and to also ensure this cultural appreciation and exchange because BRICS countries are civilizational countries that have contributed in major ways to the global civilizational landscape that we see today. We must ensure that we just do not have a Western-centric culture that dominates the world, that we have

a cultural landscape that embraces the entire global community including the major contribution made by BRICS countries to the global cultural civilizational landscape. Education, of course, as I have emphasized, is an important dimension. How do we deepen exchanges between our universities, between our academics, between our students? During Russia's chairship, we had a novel and creative idea where we had the BRICS+ Bread Competition where we brought the bakers from all of our countries together. These are novel ideas that we must share. How can we share our different cuisines that also enrich the world's cuisine between BRICS countries, and our films, through the annual BRICS Film Festival. All of us produce major films in our respective countries and regions. We do not only have to be fed by the Hollywood dose of movies. We need to ensure that the global community, including our people, have access to the rich dimensions of our film producers and our stories. This is also true in terms of creating stronger partnerships between our people through these so-called soft ties between BRICS countries in the field of art, sport, culture, food, cuisine, and drinks that we produce amongst ourselves that have a global reach. This is what BRICS is about: changing the mindset of the global community that the Global South is also equally rich, if not more, in terms of what it can provide in shaping a new global order that is inclusive and that looks at all cultures, all civilizations as equally important and valuable in shaping this new global architecture.

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