



XV BRICS Academic Forum: Fostering Cooperation and Advancing Research

The 2023 BRICS Academic Forum brought together leading scholars, researchers, and policymakers from Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa to discuss pressing global challenges and opportunities for collaboration. In his opening address, on the 14th May 2023, South Africa's Minister of Higher Education, Science, and Innovation, Dr Blade Nzimande, highlighted, "The 15th BRICS Academic Forum provides us with another opportunity to strengthen our relations and reaffirm our values in an ever unfortunately polarised global order." In line with South Africa's 2023 theme, of *BRICS and Africa: Partnership for Mutually Accelerated Growth, Sustainable Development,*

and Inclusive Multilateralism, the Consul General of India, Cape Town, Mr P.K. Ashok Babu, in his message of support at the same occasion, noted that, "Today, the BRICS academic forum has become an important part of dialogue diplomacy wherein experts have the freedom to interact frankly and recommend pragmatic solutions to our concerns." Indeed, successful partnership necessitates dialogue and consensus to respond to these needs and demands of the larger international community, particularly regarding growth, sustainable development, and inclusion of the Global South in the world system.

There were five priorities under South Africa's 2023 BRICS theme with which the delegates engaged throughout the Forum. In resonance with the priorities of, Developing a partnership towards an equitable, just energy transition, and Transforming Education and Skills Development for the Future, Mr Aleksei Malenko, Consul General of Russia in Cape Town, highlighted, in his message of support at the opening of the Forum, that "Strengthening the capacity of the academic society is one of the most important aspects of the BRICS activities." Touching on the priority of Unlocking Opportunities through

the African Continental Free Trade Agreement, Minister Nzimande emphasised that the BRICS needed to pay “particular attention to developing countries and their needs” if they were to meet their “commitment to developing a more inclusive, equitable, and just global system.” He urged BRICS researchers to scrutinise “the illicit flow of finances and funds from the African continent to developed countries.”

Concerning the fourth priority, Strengthening Post-Pandemic Socio-Economic Recovery and the Attainment of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development, the progress that the BRICS has already made within this was emphasised by Mr Aleksei Malenko: “Recently, the combined GDP of the BRICS countries, for the first time, exceeded that of the G7.” Alluding to the fifth priority, Strengthening Multilateralism, including Working Toward Real Reform of Global Governance Institutions and Strengthening the Meaningful Participation of Women in Peace Processes, Dr Nzimande emphasised, “the necessity to bring about peace in the world as a precondition for equitable economic development.” He noted that as The African Union had resolved to “silence the guns” in the African continent, there should also be a similar global commitment to focus “on the achievement of human goals, of egalitarianism, and mutually beneficial development.”

POLICY PROPOSALS FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Education and skills development emerged as critical areas of focus during the Forum (See 15th BRICS Academic Forum 2023 programme). BRICS countries recognise that investing in human capital is essential for achieving sustainable development goals. By collaborating on educational initiatives and sharing knowledge, these nations can bridge the gap between educational systems and promote cross-cultural learning. This cooperation will result in a more skilled and adaptable workforce capable of meeting the challenges of the ever-evolving global job market.

Cross-cultural understanding and soft diplomacy were highlighted as essential ingredients for successful academic cooperation. By promoting mutual understanding, BRICS nations can foster an environment of trust and respect, reducing the likelihood of misunderstandings and conflicts. The intellectual exchange of ideas, cultures, and traditions creates a strong foundation for productive international relations, encouraging peaceful

coexistence and diplomatic partnerships.

One of the key focal points of the Forum was sustainable development and climate change. As the world faces environmental crises, BRICS nations recognise the urgency of adopting eco-friendly practices and policies. These nations can develop innovative solutions to combat climate change and its associated impacts by pooling their resources, expertise, and research findings. Moreover, continued academic cooperation allows for the exchange of best practices in sustainable development, enabling each member country to learn from the successes and challenges their counterparts face. Continued research cooperation among BRICS nations is paramount in driving sustainable development and global progress in the 21st century. The 2023 BRICS Academic Forum outcomes underscore the necessity for collaborative efforts to address pressing global challenges and to capitalise on emerging opportunities.

THE 15TH BRICS ACADEMIC FORUM

Recommendations, formulated by the BRICS Think Tank Council, offer guidance for the BRICS Leaders under the South African Chairship in 2023. The recommendations aim to promote partnerships for mutual growth, sustainable development, and inclusive multilateralism, focusing on benefits for all citizens, especially women and youth, to create a world free from poverty, inequalities, and disease. Specifically, the nine policy imperatives were proposed as follows:

1. Strengthening Multilateralism and Reforming Global Governance Institutions:

The BRICS should work towards transforming the international order based on international law, respecting the sovereignty of independent countries, and promoting the multilateral trading system.

2. Strengthening Peace and Security Processes:

The BRICS should address security challenges through joint efforts to respond to traditional and non-traditional threats, focusing on counterterrorism, maritime security, and development.

3. Strengthening Post-Pandemic Socio-Economic Recovery and the 2030 Agenda:

BRICS economies have been affected differently by COVID-19, so cooperation in health, entrepreneurship, and scientific and technical innovation is crucial for sustainable and inclusive development.

4. Climate Challenges for BRICS Countries:

The BRICS should support the implementation of the Paris Agreement, promote agriculture-climate adaptation and mitigation strategies, and collaborate on water resource management to combat climate change.

THE 15TH BRICS ACADEMIC FORUM (continued)

5. Developing a Partnership towards an Equitable, Just Transition, and African Agenda on Science, Technology, and Innovation:

The BRICS countries must support technological and policy collaboration in clean energy projects, critical minerals, and green technology, ensuring that the interests of vulnerable groups are addressed.

6. Transforming Education, Innovation, and Skills Development for the Future:

Knowledge exchanges, monitoring, and evaluation should be improved, and Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) cooperation should be strengthened, primarily through the BRICS Partnership for New Industrial Revolution.

7. Unlocking Opportunities through the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) agreement:

The BRICS should prioritise infrastructure investment and development, promote technology transfer and knowledge exchange, and facilitate engagement with regional trade groupings.

8. New Development Bank (NDB) and BRICS Financing:

The NDB's role in global development finance should be expanded, with a focus on renewable energy projects and infrastructure development. The BRICS must also advocate for climate finance architecture reassessment and support trade for mutual benefit.

9. People-to-People Exchanges:

The BRICS should strengthen people-to-people ties through cultural exchanges, tourism, sports, and other programs to promote mutual understanding and trust.

These policy recommendations aim to enhance cooperation, sustainable development, and inclusiveness among the BRICS nations and contribute to a safe and equal world free from poverty, inequalities, and disease.

STRENGTHENING RESEARCH COOPERATION

During the 2023 BRICS Academic Forum, the BRICS countries took a significant step towards fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange. As part of the proposal to establish a BRICS Virtual Academy, the BRICS Think Tank Council identified urgent policy research areas that will drive sustainable development and further cooperation among the BRICS nations:

BRICS Currencies:

Trade among BRICS nations and the Global South has historically relied on currency exchanges and swap mechanisms that may not always be mutually beneficial. Given the BRICS significant share of the global population and GDP (41.5% and 32.5%,

respectively), exploring the potential use of national currencies in trade and investment within the bloc and with regional partners is vital. Comprehensive research, including evidence-gathering and cost-benefit analyses, will be undertaken by scholars and researchers from BRICS nations to develop alternative currencies and enhance economic stability and cooperation.

Expansion of BRICS:

The growing interest from countries across continents to join the BRICS' calls for careful research and examination of the implications of expansion. Scholars and researchers will study the guiding principles and modalities for expanding the BRICS while preserving its original goals and intentions. Additionally, exploring collaboration frameworks with potential partner countries will strengthen BRICS' global position and foster collective progress.

New Technologies:

Critical and emerging technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence and language processing advancements, require in-depth research by BRICS scholars. Understanding the impact of these technologies on various aspects of human life, including the digital economy and security, will foster quality digital infrastructure development. Analysis of knowledge sharing and technology transfer dynamics will help bridge the digital divide and elevate digital governance. The establishment of a BRICS Platform on Digital Public Goods, as per the Delhi Declaration of 2021, will drive digital innovation, and a repository for Open-Source Technology applications under the BRICS umbrella will support the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

BRICS Declarations:

Effective implementation of BRICS' declarations necessitates the establishment of a comprehensive database of archival documents. BRICS Think Tanks will compile relevant data to produce monitoring reports on progress, achievements, and challenges, since the bloc's inception. This systematic approach will promote transparency and accountability, reinforcing the BRICS' commitment to its objectives.

Sustainable Development Goals:

Assessing the BRICS' progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (Agenda 2030) is crucial to expedite their attainment. Through comprehensive reviews, BRICS scholars and researchers can identify areas that require innovative



and cooperative measures to drive sustainable development and improve the well-being of their nations and the global community.

The establishment of the BRICS Virtual Academy marks a significant milestone in strengthening academic cooperation among BRICS nations. The prioritisation of urgent policy research initiatives by the BRICS Think Tank Council demonstrates its commitment to promoting sustainable development and finding innovative solutions to global challenges. As researchers and scholars collaborate, sharing knowledge and expertise, the BRICS bloc can harness its collective potential to drive positive change and shape a more prosperous and interconnected future for all.

In conclusion, the outcomes of the 2023 BRICS Academic Forum reinforce the critical role of continued academic cooperation among BRICS nations in advancing sustainable development and global progress. By addressing key themes such as sustainable development, technology, education, cross-cultural understanding, and research collaboration, these countries can collectively create positive impacts on a global scale. It is imperative that they sustain and strengthen their collaborative efforts to leverage their collective potential and overcome the complexities of the current world.

BRICS countries have demonstrated remarkable progress in various technological domains, from space exploration to Artificial Intelligence. By collaborating on research and development projects, these nations can accelerate technological

advancements, benefiting not only their own economies but also contributing to global technological progress. Jointly addressing the ethical and regulatory implications of emerging technologies will also foster a shared sense of responsibility and cooperation in shaping the digital future.

As the global landscape continues to evolve, nurturing academic ties among BRICS nations will remain essential for building a more sustainable, prosperous, and interconnected future for all. ●

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