



South African
BRICS Think Tank

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE BRICS ACADEMIC FORUM 2021 TO THE LEADERS

“BRICS @ 15: Intra-BRICS Cooperation for Continuity, Consolidation and Consensus”

Delegates from the five BRICS countries met online at the 13th BRICS Academic Forum in August 2021 and worked out the following conclusions and recommendations:

The establishment and growth of BRICS have been a positive factor in global affairs. The group has contributed significantly to creating an alternative narrative on growth and sustainable development for the benefit of developing countries and emerging economies. It has provided a unique forum to discuss important global governance issues and to deliberate on solutions and ideas that benefit all. We call for further strengthening of engagement among the BRICS countries at all levels --governments, academics, business, scientists and peoples.

We the participants of the BRICS academic process and members of the BRICS Think Tank Council (BTTC) appreciate the efforts of the BRICS leadership in maintaining regular interaction with the BRICS experts and academic community. We would like to recommend and communicate the following for the consideration of the BRICS Leaders as they convene in 2021 under Indian Presidency.

Multilateralism and Global Governance

1. The past year has continued to be a tumultuous one with the ongoing pandemic proving that the global community is indelibly intertwined, and we need a truly effective and representative multilateral system for successful global governance. We request the BRICS leaders to support new research and collaborative projects by the BRICS countries academics on the future of a strengthened and reformed multilateral system that is essential for promoting the well-being of people and a shared future for sustainable development of the planet.
2. The BRICS countries through their competent agencies should persist with the call for a more open and merit-based recruitment process at the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), and persist with the call for timely and successful completion of the 16th General Review of Quotas by 2023 which better reflects the voice and demands of the members.
3. We urge the leaders to infuse new momentum to the implementation of the resolution UNGA Resolution 75/1 which calls for reforms of the principal organs of the UN and instilling new life in the discussions on reform of the UN Security Council and continuing the work to revitalize the General Assembly and strengthen the Economic and Social Council with a view to making them more representative, effective and efficient and to increase the representation of the developing countries.
4. To achieve this goal the international relations should be based on international law including the fundamental principles of the UN Charter. In this regard we urge the BRICS Leaders to strengthen the BRICS position against unfair practices and coercive measures not based on international law and UN Charter which undermine the efforts to ensure sustainable development and wellbeing of the humanity.
5. We recommend that the BRICS Leaders should continue to express support for transparent, rules-based, open, inclusive and non-discriminatory multilateral trading system, with the World Trade Organization at its core.
6. We urge that the BRICS leaders to commit to and together call for reforming multilateralism that would include UN and its principal organs, and other multilateral institutions such as International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank (WB), World Trade Organization (WTO) and World Health Organization (WHO) to effectively address the diverse challenges of our time.
7. The multilateral system needs to be strengthened and reformed with action-oriented, solution-oriented, and inclusive principles. The BRICS academics and thinks tanks offer to work towards generating new ideas and suggestions to support their governments and institutions in this regard.
8. We recommend the BRICS leadership to maintain their stance on restoration and preservation of the normal functioning of a two-stage binding WTO Dispute Settlement system, including the expeditious appointment of all Appellate Body members. The BRICS countries should also voice their support for preserving the centrality, core values and fundamental principles of the WTO, including its development focus, special and differential treatment for developing countries.

International Security ---

9. The BRICS countries should work for a global "zero-tolerance" against support and provision of safe havens to terrorists as well as to recruitment and training, provision of financial assistance and arms. They should constantly raise their collective voice against threat emanating from terrorism, extremism conducive to terrorism and radicalization, in accordance with international law. They should reject double standards in countering terrorism and extremism. They should reiterate the coordinating and central role of the UN in combating international terrorism. It is also important for the BRICS to take a firmer stance on the adoption of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism at the UN which has not been concluded even after almost 25 years of the proposal first being tabled at the UN in 1996.
10. Information security is critical for the BRICS countries. We recommend sharing of regulations and country practices, countering criminal use of technologies and online misconduct in credit and finance, exchanging information on cyber threats, and sharing best practices in information security, as well as strengthening the legal framework for BRICS cooperation in this regard.
11. There is a shared concern amongst the BRICS countries that technology is becoming an enabler to very complex forms of threats to humanity including physical threats like human trafficking and drug trafficking. The deliberation during the academic process yielded the need for a comprehensive approach for the BRICS countries to respond to shared international security challenges including illicit financial flows, financing of terrorism, and cyber security. We place this aspect for the consideration of the BRICS leaders.
12. We acknowledge the threat of criminal misuse of the digital landscape in terms of terrorism and other cyber-crimes. We support concerns by the BRICS countries regarding challenges pertaining to prevention, control and prosecution of the terrorist misuse of internet and encourage sharing of best practices in the field of digital forensics, and incorporating learnings both from public and private sector to deal with these challenges. We request the leaders to widen practices of sharing national experiences and perspectives in this field that include scientific community, non-governmental organizations and technology sector corporations.
13. We recommend that the BRICS countries should jointly consider capacity building and training programmes for law enforcement and other agencies in addressing issues like darknet and new domains emerging in the digital sector and sharing of best practices.

Sustainable Development

14. The pandemic has also created new challenges to achieving the Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and the commitments made under UNFCCC's Paris Agreement of countries. We recommend the BRICS leaders to ensure that environmental protection and climate change are important to intra-BRICS initiatives. The BRICS countries are against the use of climate, environmental issues as a tool of unfair competition practices.
15. It is important to note that countries have unique conditions affecting their levels of development and ability to fulfill their SDG commitments. The BRICS academics and thinks tanks offer to work towards conducting research and generating suggestions to identify solutions in cooperation with each other but adapted to local needs.
16. We recommend that an important area of exploration for the BRICS countries should be decarbonisation initiatives and opportunities in hard-to-abate industry sectors, including Carbon Capture Utilization (CCU), use of hydrogen as a heat source or a reduction agent, electrification, use of biomass, gas and nuclear as an energy source, and material circularity.
17. We recommend further cooperation between the BRICS countries on Energy Storage Technologies. Sharing of knowledge could help accelerate the transition to climate friendly clean energy.
18. The importance of clean and renewable energy cannot be overstated. The BRICS academics and thinks tanks offer to collaborate on generating ideas and pathways to increase the use of clean and renewable energy. We request the BRICS governments to support BRICS-wide research on green transitions that are underway in member countries.
19. We recommend that investing in smart infrastructure, clean and green energy for mobility and transportation has the ability to transform markets. Smart cities are important to transforming the economy. The BRICS academics and thinks tanks offer to make all efforts to strengthen research and development in the field given that urbanisation is still an ongoing project in major parts of these countries.
20. The 2020 Memorandum of BRICS Development Finance Institutions' Principles for Responsible Financing, as approved by BRICS Inter-Bank Cooperation Mechanism, is an important step forward in ensuring that private sector provides its business activities in compliance with the sustainable development agenda committed under the respective national policies. We urge the relevant stakeholders to expedite the implementation of this memorandum.
21. Agricultural cooperation and rural development are important aspects of intra-BRICS relations. These issues are central to the improvement of production capacities of agricultural goods as well as the implementation of sustainable development goals in agriculture. The BRICS countries contribute a third of all global agricultural output and as such have an important responsibility in ensuring the sustainability of the agriculture and food sector, global food security and nutrition. Given this, it is important to accelerate the sharing of information on agriculture technology and innovation. We urge for greater intra-BRICS cooperation in this area, including the

facilitation and incubation of extensive research, including through early operationalization of the BRICS Agriculture Research Platform.

22. The BRICS countries should recognize the importance of disaster risk reduction and create robust and resilient mechanisms in this regard. Each BRICS country is facing a range of disaster-related challenges and we recommend national-level studies to identify possible solutions.
23. As biodiversity conservation has become critical to addressing the challenge of climate change, the BRICS Countries should enhance their cooperation in this domain.

Trade, Investment, and Finance ---

24. We recommend that the BRICS countries should continue to implement the strategy adopted in the BRICS Economic Partnership 2025 agreed in 2020. We urge the BRICS leaders to continue work on economic partnership, strengthening intra-BRICS trade, including in domains such as consumer protection in e-commerce, non-tariff measures, sanitary and phyto-sanitary standards, and foster customs cooperation. These are not only important to ensure that the BRICS countries can make positive contributions to multilateral reform, but also necessary to deepen trade and investment ties amongst the countries.
25. We recommend the BRICS countries to share best practices and learnings on fast payments, cross-border payments, use of national currencies in mutual payments, and developments on the financial infrastructure issues initiated by the Financial Stability Board (FSB) and the Committee on Payments and Market Infrastructures (CPMI).
26. We propose that steps be taken to operationalise the BRICS Bond Fund to strengthen the local bond markets of the BRICS countries. Efforts must be made to resolve operational and governance issues on an expedited basis.
27. Innovative financing models should be found, in cooperation with the private sector for the creation of social infrastructure and digital public goods. The BRICS academic and think tank communities must share learnings, existing research findings and experiences in this regard.
28. We appreciate the New Development Bank's (NDB's) lending push to boost economic recovery. The NDB has given emergency response loans to BRICS countries to fight the pandemic covering a broad range of welfare. We urge the BRICS countries to find ways to further strengthen the bank and call for timely expansion. We recommend further progress on the BRICS Environmentally Sound Technology Cooperation Platform for Innovation, signed in 2019.
29. We recommend initiating new studies on how Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) can be activated for new kinds of financial and economic issues that may emerge in the future in the BRICS countries.

Science, Technology, Innovation, and Digitalisation

30. We recognise the crucial role that science, technology and innovation (STI) and digitalisation, play in the development of domestic capacity to tackle global challenges. We recommend that the BRICS countries work together to build a BRICS Partnership on New Industrial Revolution, and encourage academic communities to cooperate with the BRICS PartNIR Innovation Center. The academic communities in the BRICS countries working in these important fields should strengthen their collaborations, including cooperation under the BRICS STI Programme.
31. BRICS countries should encourage further research in cutting edge technologies like High Performance Computing (HPC) and its weather-climate-environment applications, application of supercomputers to drug design, artificial intelligence, and HPC-based precision medicine and public health. Given the strong potential of BRICS countries in the field of artificial intelligence for development, they could play a leading role in shaping international rules and standards in this sphere.
32. We are enthused about the role of remote sensing technology in facilitating Early Warning Systems for disaster management, and its uses in agriculture, food security, and water resource management. We recommend the BRICS leaders facilitate and incubate studies that explore cooperation among the BRICS countries on creating disaster resilient infrastructure.
33. We recommend that scholars from the BRICS countries share existing studies and jointly research new frameworks promoting growth in the digital economy which supports small and medium enterprises and new models for economic growth.
34. We recommend that research institutions from the BRICS countries suggest models that ensure inequalities in the physical economy not get reflected in the digital economy, and do not facilitate biases in artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies.
35. We recommend that BRICS leaders commission national-level studies on use of digitalisation and data for inclusive growth and the sustainable development goals. Such national-level policy studies can also be instrumental in identifying solutions that cater to the most vulnerable sections of society. Such studies will enable the cross-pollination of ideas among the BRICS countries.
36. Digital inequality is becoming increasingly important given the background of the 4th industrial revolution in the long run and lockdowns in the short run. The BRICS countries should address this issue on all levels, including development of digital infrastructure, skills and content. We recommend that the BRICS leaders commission national-level studies on addressing the issue of digital literacy. Such studies could facilitate the cross pollination of ideas among the BRICS countries.
37. The pandemic has demonstrated the importance of digitalisation in the health sector. We call on the BRICS countries to encourage further digitalisation by promoting national-level innovation, startups, and sandboxes backed by public-sector, private industry and civil-society partnerships.

38. We encourage all efforts to support and preserve the national socio-cultural heritage, traditions as well as multilingualism in the digital environment, by making use of advanced ICT under the global digitalization process
39. Emerging markets are becoming the pathfinders in the digital economy and challenging the domination of digital incumbents through innovation. The next stage of growth in technology will come from small and medium enterprises. We call on the BRICS leaders to facilitate this transformation. We recommend that the New Development Bank (NDB) should play a role in the growth of the MSME sector. NDB should encourage technology facilitation for SDGs and this should be supported by the BRICS governments to encourage MSME and entrepreneurial activities.

Economic Recovery, Women-led and Inclusive Growth ---

40. There is a need for a collective commitment to women's economic empowerment. In this context, we recommend that scholars from the BRICS countries share existing studies and jointly research new frameworks promoting gender-responsive budgeting and trade policy, and collection of sex-disaggregated data from various sectors of the economy, especially for women's participation in MSME, digital economy and trade.
41. Unequal growth has been a problem for all the BRICS countries. The BRICS countries should adopt innovative ways to tackle increasing economic inequalities. The BRICS academics and researchers should study this aspect, and solutions found could be of use to other developing countries as well.
42. Women and youth have faced the socio-economic brunt of the pandemic. There is a need for gender-sensitive policymaking that supports women-led enterprises and youth entrepreneurs. We recommend that the New Development Bank introduces a metric that incentivizes the funding of women and youth-led enterprises. ICT technologies create opportunities for new types of employment, modes of production and business models. These can bring benefits to women employment and entrepreneurship. The BRICS countries should encourage facilitation of greater access to ICTs to empower women and bridge the digital gender divide to allow for greater participation of women and girls in STEM and develop skills needed for the job market in the digital economy.
43. In the post-pandemic economic context, the key challenge for the BRICS countries is to generate employment. It is imperative to have national-level plans to revive the service industry which provides livelihoods, particularly tourism. We recommend support for small and medium enterprises that are engaged in this industry.

Health

44. The importance of cooperation between BRICS countries on health has only increased due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We emphasize the need for robust experience sharing and research collaboration that would assist in creating effective policies to respond to global health issues like the COVID-19 pandemic, and call for increased intra-BRICS cooperation in this regard.
45. The BRICS countries should continue supporting the ongoing consideration at the WTO for the COVID-19 vaccine Intellectual Property Rights waiver to ensure timely, affordable, and equitable access to masses. We urge the BRICS leaders to commission intra-BRICS collaborative study and to develop a framework that allows maximizing access to life-saving medicines and medical equipment. We recommend early finalization of a BRICS Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the field of Regulation of Medical Products for Human Use.
46. We urge the BRICS countries and their research and scientific communities to consider sharing knowledge and best practices on next-generation pharmaceuticals and treatments.
47. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the inter-linkages between the multiple facets of national and local health infrastructure. We recommend the BRICS countries to study all the elements of health infrastructure in a holistic method which includes the development of local production capacities for medicines and vaccines, promotion of price transparency, and stability of health supply chains. The global fight against COVID-19 should be based on objective scientific principles and should be supported by all countries, avoiding political factors.
48. Given that the BRICS nations have an immense pool of Traditional Medicinal Knowledge, medicinal plant species, and rich biodiversity, we recommend that they improve cooperation and knowledge sharing to respond to diseases and public health emergencies. Promoting and encouraging the practice, education, research and training of traditional medicine to improve the quality and outreach of healthcare services is thus suggested as a policy priority towards this end.
49. The BRICS countries should enhance sharing knowledge and best practices on responding to the continuing spread of major diseases (HIV/AIDS, TB, malaria, etc.). The BRICS TB Research Network and the BRICS Vaccine Research and Development Centre, and the Integrated Early Warning System for Preventing Mass Infectious Diseases Risks can be important platforms for making access to healthcare more inclusive and strengthening capacity of the BRICS countries to address public health challenges

People-to-People ---

50. The restriction on movement due to the pandemic has impacted tourism, education, political, cultural, and academic exchanges. We, the BRICS academic and think tank community, will use digital medium to collaborate and expand the areas of partnership and joint research and find innovative ways to deepen people to people contact. At the same time, we recognize that in-person interactions remain a vital part of human life and should be restored with consideration of health and epidemiological situation.
51. We encourage the BRICS countries to further expand the scope of the BRICS Network University to perpetuate further exchanges and elevate the influence of BRICS countries in international education. Scholarships and grant programmes for students and researchers, besides easing visa norms for academic exchanges could be one method to achieve this.
52. People-to-People exchanges are a key driver behind the service economy. A coordinated response is imperative for the survival of the tourism and hospitality sector, higher education, and cultural exchanges, which help deepen our understanding of each other's cultures and foster cooperation. We urge the BRICS leaders to help support the people-to-people aspect of the BRICS.
53. All the five BRICS countries have rich cultural heritage. We recommend the use of digital technologies to facilitate cultural exchange and dissemination of information. Protecting tangible and intangible cultural heritage is an important aspect of cultural and academic cooperation and must be given due attention.
54. Facilitation of exchanges in sports and creative arts like theatre, cinema, art and music festivals, as well as developing museum and culture spaces is a very important part of the process of cultural exchange. We recommend that the BRICS countries should consider leveraging digital platforms for engagement between the youths of the BRICS countries on cultural projects which will deepen understanding of contexts and cultures building on the BRICS's shared value of mutual respect. We, the BRICS academic and think tank community, seek to promote and foster youth scholarship and promote emerging voices in our common platforms. We call on the BRICS countries to support the hosting of Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics Games and Paralympic Games and further cooperation in winter sports. We call on BRICS countries to support the BRICS Games in 2021 alongside the Khelo India Games. We also recommend that the BRICS Games be held in rotation.
55. The pandemic has demonstrated the importance, effectiveness and necessity of digital education and skilling. We recommend that the BRICS leaders should encourage national-level studies on the experiences of digital learning in the BRICS countries. This will enable the adoption of best practices and offer solutions to other countries.

BRICS Academic Process

56. During the BRICS process in 2021, under India's chairmanship of the BRICS, the members of the BRICS Think Tank Council and nominated representatives engaged in several academic dialogues on themes like reformed multilateralism, global health, SDGs, future of work, women-led economic growth, international security, digitalisation, global economic recovery, and green energy. Each dialogue brought together experts in those fields from every member country to get a holistic perspective on how BRICS countries can strengthen their efforts in the respective areas. This is also a vital step towards collecting and building data for BTTC Indicator System to monitor progress on timely and efficient implementation of the BRICS initiatives and leaders' decisions
57. From the beginning, academic activities and inputs have been an essential element in the evolution of BRICS. Many of the new ideas implemented by the BRICS have emanated from the academic process, particularly the BTTC and the BRICS Academic Forum. The best examples of this are the New Development Bank (NDB), Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) and the BRICS Network University (BNU) to name a few. We are grateful for the encouragement, guidance and support of the Leaders and the Sherpas for our activities. We hope for continued support and commit ourselves to providing new ideas and evidence-based research for the governments to work on.

Members of the BRICS Think Tank Council

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