



**BRICS**  
INDIA 2021

# Chair's Report

## Stocktaking and Recommendations for Consolidation



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**December 2021**

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# Introduction

**A**s the BRICS passes through a crucial milestone of its existence, celebrating 15 years of its formation, this 'Chair's Report' examines the initiatives launched since inception and makes recommendations for consolidating and streamlining the agenda.

The general impression is that despite the high regularity of summits and other meetings spearheaded by the respective government departments from the five member-nations, an overwhelming number of initiatives have registered slow progress, and many have had a very short shelf life.<sup>a</sup> Apprehensions are high that with the increasing share of unfulfilled commitments, particularly in areas of common concerns (since BRICS is a consensus-based process), cooperation in several thematic areas may never overcome the inertia. This has necessitated a thorough review of the BRICS cooperation mechanisms and to initiate consolidation measures across a broad spectrum of issues and themes to make the grouping more appealing to the political leadership in the future.

The BRICS remains a prominent grouping in the global governance architecture due to the individual influence of each member-state and the collective size of their economies. The confidence in BRICS from within and the perceptions outside the grouping are shaped by the

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<sup>a</sup> In 2021, the BRICS grouping completes 15 years since its formation. It reached this milestone in the middle of a global pandemic and a complex geopolitical landscape. The agenda for the BRICS is set by the chair each year in consultation with the other BRICS nations. As per our analysis of the BRICS leaders' declarations for each year since 2009, there are nearly 100 issues that BRICS have tabled for discussion since inception (See Appendix 2 for more details). However, based on availability of relevant details this assessment report focuses on select areas that carry maximum significance for BRICS.

well-known successes in institution-building and resource mobilisation. An added dimension to the BRICS's success is its strong focus on issues of financial stability and global governance reforms, particularly in areas related to macroeconomic stability and international security. These are supplemented by attention to sustainable development issues backed by finance and technology. However, the social and political capital invested in BRICS is yet to generate adequate and equitable returns for all member countries in terms of leveraging the external sector for domestic economic growth and in building stronger international partnerships, given the divergent views within the grouping on global issues of concern.

An assessment of the various tracks under the BRICS mechanism should encourage pursuing the collective agenda of economic cooperation and sustainable development. However, there have been some structural deficiencies and coordination fatigue in consensus-building efforts on thematic priorities, coupled with extremely weak follow-up processes with the implementing agencies. Even in areas where a stronger follow-up is visible, the outcome has only been recorded as signing agreements after arduous rounds of meetings. The BRICS Interbank Cooperation Mechanism, founded in 2010 during the Brazilian presidency, set up five working groups that culminated in over 10 agreements signed between 2012 and 2021. Additionally, trends suggest that most actions that have materialised satisfactorily in the BRICS, beyond the flagship initiatives of the New Development Bank (NDB) and Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA), are backed by selective ideas and their patrons. For instance, India's proposal of forming a Credit Rating Agency in 2016 did not materialise despite receiving endorsement during the South African presidency in 2018.

While South Africa's proposal to establish a BRICS Vaccine Research and Development Centre was mooted in 2018, it was only following the onslaught of the COVID -19 pandemic that the virtual centre was established during the 2021 BRICS Summit by the Indian presidency. This convergence between the two presidencies is also reflective of the cooperation between India and South Africa on the TRIPS waiver proposal for COVID-19 vaccines. It is interesting to note that the headline economic partnership in BRICS and their updated versions have actually been taken up on separate occasions under the Russian presidency in 2015 and 2020. The lofty agenda has been very heavy to carry forward with very slow progress in several identified areas. Notably, members have selected areas of cooperation independent of the comprehensive partnership statements. Such divergences in perception are rooted in the fact that, for Russia, BRICS remains one of its most important economic partnership platforms beyond its region. Similarly, the BRICS Action Plan for Innovation Cooperation (2017-2020) was adopted in the STI Ministers' Meeting in 2017 during the Chinese presidency.

The year 2021 has been a significant, with the Indian presidency underscoring 'BRICS@15: Intra-BRICS Cooperation for Continuity, Consolidation and Consensus' as the theme. The aspect of 'consolidation' received special attention. The Indian presidency also helped in concretising several action areas that remained dormant for lack of support for a long time despite the consensus-based adoption to begin with. A case in point is the Agriculture Research

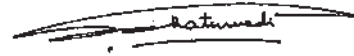
Platform (ARP) proposed by India at the 2015 Ufa Summit with a memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed during the Indian presidency in 2016. However, this could only be launched in the virtual format in 2021, again during India's presidency. The original intention to establish a physical institution based in India have not materialised thus far.

India has set a definite example to drive future consolidation in BRICS in the coming presidencies. It is also desirable that efforts towards consolidation be made during the next few presidencies to make room for emerging themes that require urgent attention. Consolidation does not always only mean weeding out weaker sprouts, but to have comprehensive approaches towards setting common goals so that even relatively weaker initiatives can be scaled up through integration. With this objective in mind, a preliminary assessment of the progress of initiatives under broader BRICS themes is presented in this Chair's Report. This also enables a convergence on issues pertaining to economic cooperation, multilateralism, sustainable development, and technological cooperation in BRICS beyond the administrative divisions in the member countries.



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# Assessment of Progress

## Economic Cooperation

**E**conomic cooperation under the BRICS has resulted in initiatives related to trade, investment, finance, taxation and the fourth industrial revolution. These initiatives cover a broad range of sectors, including those that have been elaborated in the two<sup>2</sup> strategy documents initiated by Russia during its presidencies in 2015 and 2020. These initiatives are based on the summit declarations set out by the BRICS leaders and are the result of an engaging process done at the levels of relevant ministers, central bank governors, senior officials and other experts. Careful readings of documents suggest that 14 important themes pertaining to economic cooperation have come up during last 15 BRICS summits (see Table 1). However, only four of these recurring themes of priority under economic cooperation have been consolidated over time.

### New Development Bank

The establishment of the NDB has been the most successful example of economic cooperation under the BRICS setup. The idea of setting up a NDB was conceived in 2012 at the New Delhi summit. In 2014, the BRICS leaders signed the agreement to establish the NDB during the 6<sup>th</sup> BRICS Summit in Fortaleza.

The setting up of the bank was also followed up with other MoUs to make it effective. In 2017, an MoU was signed between the BRICS Business Forum and the NDB on strategic cooperation to work effectively with businesses. In 2017, the NDB's board of governors approved the General Strategy document for 2017-2021.<sup>4</sup> The document mentions that the bank intended

to expand membership, establish regional offices (starting with Johannesburg), develop partnerships with more institutions particularly those closely connected to infrastructure and sustainable development issues, recruit more skilled and efficient professionals, and develop an independent evaluation framework for the bank's activities.

**The NDB anchors BRICS aspiration and connects it to citizens' welfare. It needs meaningful partnerships with all stakeholders from the five BRICS countries through local outreach.**

The NDB has played an instrumental role in funding infrastructure and sustainable projects in the BRICS countries. Funded projects have majorly been in areas of clean energy, transport infrastructure, irrigation, water resource management, sanitation, and sustainable urban development.<sup>5</sup> At the Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors' meeting in 2020, the NDB president declared that the bank was also providing up to US\$10 billion in crisis-related assistance and economic recovery through the Emergency COVID-19 Response Programme.

In 2021, the NDB approved the admission of its first new member countries: United Arab Emirates, Uruguay and Bangladesh. Regional offices and centres of the NDB have also been set up in all BRICS countries except India, which is expected to happen in 2021.<sup>6</sup>

### **BRICS Interbank Cooperation Mechanism**

The BRICS Interbank Cooperation Mechanism was founded in 2010 during the Brazilian presidency as a result of cooperation among the state export and development banks of the five member countries. Under this, two significant agreements—the Master Agreement on Extending Credit Facility in Local Currency and the BRICS Multilateral Letter of Credit Confirmation Facility—was signed by the national development banks of the BRICS countries during the 2012 summit in New Delhi. The Interbank Cooperation Mechanism also made a significant contribution in the creation of the NDB.<sup>7</sup>

Three further agreements were inked in the subsequent years—the Cooperation Agreement on Innovation between the BRICS development banks was signed in 2014; the MoU on cooperation with the NDB by the BRICS development banks/institutions was signed in 2015; and the MoU amongst members of the BRICS Interbank Cooperation Mechanism and the NDB on general cooperation was signed in 2016. Most recently, an MoU on Private Investment Mobilization<sup>8</sup> among the BRICS development banks was signed in 2019. Under this umbrella pact, the signatories agreed to explore the possibilities of financing, co-financing or guaranteeing private investment in the infrastructure sphere.



So far, the BRICS Interbank Cooperation Mechanism has concluded over ten agreements and formed five working groups in key cooperation areas.<sup>9</sup> Since the objectives of infrastructure development, quality of life improvement and labour productivity growth are national priorities of all BRICS countries, the BRICS development finance institutions (DFIs) have also tried to facilitate this pursuit through new and innovative lending mechanisms. To encourage funding for inclusive and sustainable development, the Memorandum of BRICS DFIs Principles for Responsible Financing was also signed among BRICS Development Banks in 2020.

**The BRICS Interbank Cooperation Mechanism is a crucial area of BRICS engagement. It has received continuous attention given its ever-widening scope but has little consolidation.**

### **Liquidity and Local Currency Instruments**

**Contingent Reserve Arrangement:** The Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors were directed to look into regional monetary arrangements in 2011 at the Brasilia Summit, following which the CRA was established in 2014<sup>10</sup> at the Fortaleza Summit. It aimed to provide short-term liquidity support to the member countries through currency swaps in response to a balance-of-payments crisis. Multiple test-runs of the CRA have been conducted successfully and other efforts are also underway to strengthen its framework and analytical support.

Apart from CRA, two other important initiatives, the BRICS payment system and BRICS Bond Fund, have also been floated under liquidity and local currency instruments. However, there has been little progress on these initiatives.

**BRICS Bond Fund:** In 2017 under the Chinese presidency, the BRICS countries agreed to jointly establish a BRICS local currency bond fund. The BRICS Bond Fund has not been operationalised yet, but the operational and governance issues related to the fund were discussed at the Central Bank Governors' meeting in 2021.

**BRICS Payment System:** Discussions on shifting to an international payment system as an alternative to the SWIFT came up in 2015 at the Ufa Summit. China had initially developed its own international payment system, the Cross-Border Inter-Bank Payments System, in 2015 to settle payments in Yuan. However, the idea of a BRICS payment system was to encourage payments

among BRICS countries in their local currencies. In this regard, a survey on international payment systems was conducted in 2019 and a BRICS payments task force was created in 2020.

### **Customs**

Active efforts have been made in customs cooperation since the 2012 summit in New Delhi but little progress was made until the next Indian presidency in 2016 when the BRICS Customs Cooperation Committee<sup>12</sup> was established to

facilitate engagements between customs authorities and experts. Since then, there has been consistent progress in this track. To enhance customs cooperation, the Framework for BRICS Single Window Cooperation was also endorsed at the 6<sup>th</sup> Trade Ministers meeting held in 2016. The development of national “single window” mechanisms began with the goal of increasing the efficiency of information exchange between businesses and governments by facilitating both exporters and importers with a single-point interface for all clearances. It also aimed to address under-invoicing and mispricing. To facilitate trade, an initiative to develop a BRICS Model E-Port Network was also taken up, which aimed to improve supply chain connectivity and trade facilitation among the member countries. The terms of reference for developing such a mechanism were laid out in 2017. The Strategic Framework of BRICS Customs Cooperation agreement was signed in 2017, and specifies the cooperation principles—information exchange, mutual recognition of supervision and mutual assistance in law enforcement.<sup>13</sup>

In 2021, the BRICS Agreement for Cooperation on Mutual Administrative Assistance on customs matters was finalised after years of discussion and consensus-building. The BRICS countries are also continuing to explore the functional compatibility of the national “single window” mechanisms. The countries have implemented various models of Authorised Economic Operator (AEO)

**The BRICS Bond Fund and payment system are significant areas of BRICS engagement driven by geopolitical necessities to improve the access to liquidity and credit, trade promotion and financial stability. Yet progress in related areas is less than satisfactory.**

**Customs cooperation in BRICS has come a long way with strong leadership from India. The sector has seen steady convergence over the years.**

programmes, which give preferential treatment to certain traders, importers and exporters. While the AEO programmes have demonstrated an effectiveness in strengthening supply chain management and economic competitiveness, the BRICS members are at different stages of development.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, the AEO programme is expected to be functional from 2022.

### **Intellectual Property Rights, Standards & Regulations**

Cooperation on intellectual property rights (IPR) has been one of the most consistent tracks under the BRICS. In 2012 at the New Delhi Summit, the BRICS trade ministers endorsed the Trade and Investment Cooperation Agreement that makes specific provisions for encouraging information exchange in IPR, jointly developing capacity building programmes, and promoting cooperation among IPR offices. Following this, the BRICS Heads of Intellectual Property Offices (HIPO) met and formulated the BRICS Intellectual Property Offices Roadmap in 2013. The IPR Coordination Mechanism (IPRCM) Action Plan was endorsed by the BRICS trade ministers in 2016, and its implementation framework was formulated by 2018.

The HIPO have met frequently and have continued to work in activities of cooperation and engagement. The only issue is the restricted scope of present activities in this area. Capacity building programmes and workshops and expert dialogues for information exchange are being held routinely, but as mentioned in the 9<sup>th</sup> Trade Ministers' Meeting, the three documents prepared so far—the

**Despite regular engagement in related areas, BRICS countries have not made progress beyond capacity building and the exchange of best practices.**

implementation framework, the cooperation guidelines, and the action plan—define a broad range of activities and goals that each Contact Group on Economic and Trade issues (CGETI) chair may choose to pursue. More efforts need to be made to fully implement the previously agreed action plan. In a significant development, in 2021, under the BRICS IPR Cooperation Mechanism, the member countries adopted the BRICS Declaration on Cooperation for Protection of Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Traditional Cultural Expressions.

Cooperation in standardisation is also an important area with regard to facilitating enhanced trade among the BRICS countries since understanding and alignment of standards within the five states is essential for carrying out trade. The working mechanism on technical regulations, standards, metrology and conformity assessment procedure has been in place since 2018 and cooperation activities among BRICS countries are being pursued under it.

The trade ministers agreed upon the BRICS Trade and Investment Cooperation Framework in 2013 and on the BRICS Trade and Investment Facilitation Action Plan in 2014. They also endorsed the Outlines for BRICS Investment Facilitation<sup>15</sup> in 2017. An MoU was signed in 2019 among the BRICS Trade and Investment Promotion Agencies/Trade Promotion Organisations, aimed at promoting sharing of experiences and best practices in this area.

### **Perpetual Work in Progress: Need for Big Push**

The tracks on export credit and taxation were initiated by India, while the discussion on MSME was initiated by South Africa. These tracks have not delivered their desired results.

**Export Credit:** Another recurring theme is of cooperation among the BRICS export credit agencies. Following the conclusion of two major agreements<sup>16</sup> on extending credit to the BRICS countries in 2012, the first MoU on cooperation among BRICS export credit and guarantees agencies was signed in 2014 at the Fortaleza Summit, with an aim to improve the support environment to increase trade opportunities among the BRICS nations. Subsequently, more MoUs were signed, and the BRICS countries agreed to establish an annual BRICS export credit agency meeting in 2015 with the purpose of exploring opportunities for cooperation and future joint action to promote exports among the five member countries and others. Although the export credit agencies have stressed on working in close cooperation with the NDB, no other significant steps seem to have been taken at these meetings.

**Taxation:** At their 2012 meeting held in Washington D.C., the BRICS Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors agreed to develop cooperation related to taxation. Subsequently, the first meeting of the heads of BRICS tax authorities was held in January 2013 in New Delhi. The principal issues highlighted by the finance ministers in 2012 were subsequently discussed in several meetings of the heads of tax administrations. The focus of the BRICS partnership in taxation has been on: (i) building a common approach in international forums on issues relating to tax evasion, international taxation and transfer pricing, and (ii) capacity building and sharing of best practices.

In 2018, the heads of revenue of all five BRICS countries agreed on a high-level capacity building action plan, under which workshops/symposia were to be held with delegations from the member countries sharing their strengths in tax matters to boost the capacity of others. A five-day training programme was held in 2019 under this action plan on “Investigation of Undisclosed Foreign Assets, Common Reporting Standards & Coercive Measures to Increase Tax Enforcement”.<sup>17</sup>

**Micro Small and Medium Enterprises:** This area has been under discussion in trade ministers' meetings since 2013. Following an expert dialogue in 2015, the “BRICS Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) Cooperation Framework” was formulated the following year, setting the agenda for cooperation in MSMEs among the member countries. In 2018, the BRICS decided that special sessions dedicated to MSMEs will be held by the CGETI.

Despite having a cooperation framework and holding special sessions to exchange knowledge and information in this area, no formal agreement has been signed and no major action taken in this area so far. MSMEs were discussed at the CGETI meeting but this has not made its way into summit level documents in a significant way. The Strategy for BRICS Economic Partnership 2025 also has a dedicated section in the trade, investment, finance chapter on MSMEs, but the language of the commitments is “intention” and not “action” based. They list priorities like cooperating to create better conditions for BRICS MSMEs and sharing information, but there is no measurable action listed.

**Table 1: BRICS Economic Cooperation Journey and Milestones**

Ser. No	Tracks/ Initiative	Presidency	Year	Outcome	Progress
1	BRICS Interbank Cooperation Mechanism	Brazil	2010	Governing council and standing committee setup, 10 agreements signed	Strong
2	Trade & Investment Facilitation	Russia	2010	Action plan formulated (2014), MoU of Trade and Investment Promotion Agencies/Trade Promotion Organisations signed (2019)	Slow
3	Contingent Reserve Arrangement	Brazil	2011	Treaty signed (2014), standing committee set up (2015)	Strong
4	New Development Bank	India	2012	Bank set up in 2014	Strong
5	Customs cooperation	India	2012	Institution established; agreement signed	Very Strong
6	Taxation	India	2012	MoU signed (2017), capacity building action plan agreed upon in 2018	Slow
7	Intellectual Property Rights	India	2012	Agreement signed, action plan endorsed, Annual meeting held since 2012	Slow

8	Export credit	Brazil	2014	MoU on export credit insurance (2018), Agreements on extending credit in BRICS (2012)	Very Slow
9	BRICS Payment System	Russia	2015	Task force created (2020)	Slow
10	E-Commerce	Russia	2015	Working group (2017), Framework for Consumer Protection in E-commerce formulated in 2021	Slow
11	Trade in services	India	2016	Trade in Services Cooperation Roadmap endorsed 2017	Very Slow
12	BRICS Bond Fund	China	2017	Working group meeting held in 2017	Slow
13	Partnership on New Industrial Revolution	China	2017	Advisory group set up (2018), work plan developed (2019)	Slow
14	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises	South Africa	2016	Only framework formulated	No Progress

### Slow but Progressing

**E-commerce:** E-commerce has also been a recurring theme at most BRICS meetings since 2015. At the Ufa Summit, the BRICS leaders endorsed a separate framework for e-commerce cooperation, which aimed to better integrate BRICS e-commerce markets. The decision to establish a working group on e-commerce was also taken at the 2017 summit under the BRICS E-Commerce Cooperation Initiative.<sup>18</sup> Other objectives of this initiative included the promotion of information and technology sharing, strengthening capacity- building and undertaking research on e-commerce in the BRICS countries.

At the last ministerial meeting in 2020, the focus of discussions on e-commerce was to create a basis for exploring the development of a practical framework for ensuring consumer protection in the BRICS countries. Further, the 2020 declaration showed that the BRICS countries had recognised the potential in the idea of establishing international associations on consumer protection in e-commerce and exploring the development of a practical framework to ensure

consumer protection among the BRICS countries, including through pilot projects and initiatives. In September 2021, the “BRICS Framework for Ensuring Consumer Protection in E-Commerce” was introduced under which the countries have committed to consider developing a plan of action on the priority areas of consumer protection in e-commerce. They have also committed to elaborating steps undertaken to control counterfeit products, fake portals, and measures to support offline retailers.

**Trade in services:** During the trade ministers’ meeting in 2016, the “Framework for Cooperation on Trade in Services” was endorsed under the Indian presidency. In 2017, the BRICS Trade in Services Cooperation Roadmap<sup>19</sup> was also endorsed to further promote cooperation among members in areas of potential mutual benefits. The roadmap lists out several potential sectors for cooperation along with pledges of information exchange, policy coordination and capacity building. The exchange of information on international trade in services between BRICS members was initiated by 2018.

### **Other initiatives**

Many other areas of cooperation among BRICS countries have also been explored within economic and financial cooperation. For instance, in 2016 during the Indian presidency, leaders agreed to welcome experts exploring the possibility of setting up an independent BRICS ratings agency based on market-oriented principles. Proposals to establish such an agency were discussed in 2018 during the South African presidency but no consensus was reached due to concerns regarding access to dependable data.<sup>20</sup>

The following year, the BRICS finance ministers and central bank governors worked together to develop a rough framework for enhanced cooperation in new areas. In this direction, the BRICS countries have agreed to foster cooperation on public private partnership mode of infrastructure financing, and a task force has been set up in this regard. Cooperation in the area of illicit financial flows is another new initiative for the BRICS. In this regard, the establishment of a BRICS Rapid Information Security Channel is being worked out. This would be a special direct communication channel between the BRICS central banks for exchanging information on cyberattacks and cyber threats.

The BRICS Business Council was also set up in 2013 during the South African presidency, which aimed at strengthening business, trade, and investment ties between the BRICS business communities. The work of the council was recognised in successive ministerial meetings and BRICS summits. During the 2020 BRICS summit in Russia, members expressed their support to enhance interactions within the framework of the BRICS Business Council as an effective way to forge closer business linkages between the member countries.

Digitalisation is another area that is getting increasing attention. The creation of a cooperation mechanism that would help in making the most use of the opportunities emerging from the new industrial revolution was first proposed in 2017 at the Xiamen Summit. The following year, a BRICS Partnership on New Industrial Revolution (PartNIR) was initiated at the 2018 summit and an advisory group was set up with representatives from the five countries' industry ministries and other related ministries. The following year, a work plan was also developed for PartNIR that laid out the vision and the way forward for this initiative. This initiative aims at fostering digitalisation and promoting industrial growth with a focus on technological and innovative capacities in an inclusive manner. The BRICS members brought out a joint declaration along with United Nations Industrial Development Organization to strengthen cooperation in the fourth industrial revolution.

### **People-to-people cooperation**

There has been some focus on developing people-to-people cooperation through the BRICS platforms on culture, youth affairs and sports. The first meeting of the BRICS culture ministers was held in 2015 under the Russian presidency and in the same year, the Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Culture was signed. Further, an action plan for the implementation of the agreement was formulated and signed in 2017 during the Chinese presidency. Most recently, an MoU on cooperation in the field of physical culture and sport was signed in 2020.

Apart from sports and culture, many forums for youth interaction have also been set up. The first BRICS Youth Forum was held in 2015 in Russia and an MoU was signed on cooperation in youth matters. Since then, other forums like the BRICS Young Diplomats Forum and BRICS Young Scientists Forum have also been initiated.

Other major initiatives to enhance people-to-people cooperation include the creation of the BRICS Think Tank Council in 2013, BRICS Civil Forum in 2015 and the BRICS Network University in 2016. These forums have been set up with the objective of enhancing cooperation in research, training and capacity building, among students and academic communities of BRICS countries. However, like many other BRICS initiatives, the lack of a review mechanism makes it hard to assess the real outcomes of these initiatives.

### **Science, Technology and Innovation**

Cooperation in Science and technology has been a priority for the BRICS association since the beginning. A commitment to engage in fundamental research and the development of advanced technologies was particularly mentioned in the 1<sup>st</sup> BRICS Summit. The 2015 MoU on cooperation in science, technology and innovation (STI) set up a basic framework for intergovernmental cooperation in the field. The BRICS STI framework was also endorsed by the five countries in the same year.



The BRICS Action Plan for Innovation Cooperation (2017-2020) was adopted in the STI Ministers' Meeting in 2017 during the Chinese presidency. It aimed to encourage and support research and development (R&D) projects in the areas of fundamental and applied research and innovation within bilateral and multilateral frameworks, boost partnerships between public and private sectors, foster strategic and long term university-industry partnerships to address the needs of industry, promote open science and sharing of research infrastructure, develop technology parks, transfer technologies, enhance skills training, academic and business mobility as well as increase the role of women and youth in STI activities.

The Innovation Cooperation Action Plan 2021-2024 was agreed upon by the BRICS members at the 11<sup>th</sup> BRICS S&T Steering Committee Meeting held in 2021. Several working groups related to these areas have been set up to take further steps on collaborative work between the BRICS countries. It would be useful to take stock of the work done under these various working groups to track progress in specific areas. To streamline the different STI activities under BRICS, a task team was set up to investigate the feasibility to establish a permanent mechanism to manage and coordinate BRICS STI activities in 2018. However, the task team could not reach a consensus around the modalities and/or format for a coordination and management mechanism. A BRICS Steering Committee was set up in 2019 to coordinate all STI activities done under the 12 thematic working groups, ministers' meetings and senior official meetings. Seven broad tracks have emerged under STI cooperation:

### **Science, Technology, Innovation and Entrepreneurship Partnership**

To harness the creativity of young entrepreneurs and scientists, a BRICS science and technology-driven entrepreneurship and innovation partnership programme was proposed to be set up at the 3<sup>rd</sup> BRICS STI Ministers Meeting in 2016 under the Indian presidency. The main purpose of the working group is to exchange experience and best practices in ensuring the innovation strategy and policy of the BRICS countries, and to develop direct cooperation between the participants in the innovation chain.<sup>22</sup>

At the 2018 working group meeting, the Enabling Framework for the Innovation BRICS Network (iBRICS Network) initiative was introduced, which aims to create mechanisms for the direct exchange of best practices between science and technology parks, incubators, accelerators, and other innovative organisations in the BRICS countries. This framework was endorsed by the BRICS STI Ministers at their sixth meeting in 2019.

At the same meeting, the executive plan of the BRICS Technology Centre 2018-2020 was also presented. The centre aims to enable mechanisms for collaboration between business incubators, accelerators and other participants of innovation chains, and technology transfer. Pursuant to the implementation of the BRICS Action Plan for Innovation Cooperation (2017 -2020), the BRICS

STI ministers also endorsed the Enabling Framework for the BRICS Network for Technology Transfer Cooperation (BRICS Techtransfer) in 2020.

### **Information and Communication Technology and High-Performance Computing**

The decision to constitute a BRICS Working Group on ICT cooperation was made at the 2015 Ufa Summit to realise and strengthen cooperation in the area of ICTs. The summit declarations identified B2B engagement, R&D, and innovation platform and Capacity building as important elements to enhance role of BRICS in the digital economy.<sup>23</sup> The first working group meeting was held in 2017 where five topics were identified as having the potential to become flagship projects—digital smart manufacturing, HPC application for life sciences, precision medicine and public health, integrated precision farming, large-scale multiagent-based simulation of virtual society, and digital earth modelling.

Also recommended was the establishment of an integrated and cyber-secured ICT and HPC infrastructure, such as a BRICS Innovation and Collaboration Cloud, to enhance and accelerate BRICS innovation collaboration in the field. A work plan for the preparation of the integrated hub was reported in the second meeting. The working group recognised the need to take a decision on the structure, governance and funding mechanisms of the integrated hub in 2019. However, the issue remains unresolved.

The BRICS Communication Ministers also endorsed the establishment of a Council of decentralised BRICS Institute of Future Networks (BIFN) in 2018 to strengthen cooperation in advance digital technologies. The council was expected to develop a mechanism on the operationalisation of the BIFN Secretariat. The China branch of BFIN was set up in 2019.

### **Outer Space**

**BRICS Remote Sensing Satellite Constellation:** Cooperation on the practical use of space was first endorsed at the 2011 summit in China. Further, the BRICS leaders expressed the need to intensify cooperation in areas of joint application of space technologies at the 2015 Ufa Summit. In this direction, a concept note on BRICS Remote Sensing Satellite Constellation was presented in 2016. The Satellite Constellation will be useful in improving satellite observations through resource sharing.<sup>24</sup> Negotiations on setting the framework for cooperation continued in the following years<sup>25</sup> and an agreement was signed in 2021 by the five countries to formally set up cooperation in virtual remote sensing satellite data sharing.

**BRICS Astronomy Working Group:** This working group has been operational since 2015. After extensive discussions, the final draft of the BRICS Framework for Scientific Cooperation in Astronomy was ratified by the working group in 2017. In 2019, it was agreed that there will be one integrated proposal that will be further developed from three flagship projects proposed

in earlier meetings. In 2020, the combined projects were formed into a flagship proposal titled the “BRICS Intelligent Telescope and Data Network (BITDN)” and will involve astrophysical transients, survey science, and time-domain astronomy. The implementation of this project is envisaged to begin in 2021.

### **Biotechnology and Biomedicine**

The main goals of the BRICS Working Group on Biotechnology and Biomedicine are to promote cooperation, exchange expertise and best practices, and to support and promote initiatives in Biotechnology and biomedicine, including human health and neuroscience STI between BRICS countries.<sup>26</sup>

The first meeting was held in 2017 under the Chinese presidency where the terms of references were agreed upon. In their third meeting in 2019, the members discussed and agreed on priority topics to be incorporated into the joint calls to support research, development and innovation within the BRICS framework. The topics included were advanced diagnostics and therapy (cell-therapy, omics, immuno-therapy), digital medicine and e-health, antimicrobial resistance, drug repurposing, and the development of new drugs and vaccines to treat and prevent infectious diseases. The onset of a global pandemic has greatly increased the significance of this working group. The establishment of the vaccine research centre for the BRICS countries was discussed in the second working group meeting in 2018 during the South African presidency, and the countries agreed to establish a virtual centre at the 2021 Summit hosted by India.

### **Research Infrastructures and Mega-Science Projects**

Cooperation in this area was first endorsed in 2015 at the Ufa Summit. The initial agenda of the BRICS Working Group on Research Infrastructures and Mega-Science Projects aimed to develop common standards/descriptors, establish a unique web portal, establish a research mobility instrument to allow quick and easy access to research infrastructures within BRICS, develop a framework on intellectual property rights for joint R&D, and identify research infrastructure projects that could be submitted to the NDB. The need to develop a strategic plan for research infrastructure coordination was recognised at the working group meeting in 2018. However, the drafting of this document has not yet been completed.

### **Ocean and Polar Science and Technology**

Proposed by Russia, the main aim of the BRICS Working Group on Ocean and Polar Science and Technology is to promote cooperation between the member countries through joint activities to generate new knowledge, train human capital, develop new technologies and applications, and improve public understanding of ocean and polar science. The first working

group meeting was held in 2018. In the following years, the BRICS countries have invited experts from other member countries to their marine expeditions, but there does not seem to have been much development beyond this.

### Material Science and Nanotechnology

Cooperation in this area was encouraged early in the BRICS S&T Senior Officials meeting held in China in 2011 but the first meeting of the BRICS Working Group on Material Science and Nanotechnology was held in 2017. The creation of the Network Centre for Materials Science and Nanotechnology of the BRICS countries was discussed in this meeting. Although several projects have been supported in this field under the BRICS calls, the working group has not established a plan or framework for cooperation. The second meeting of the working group was held three years later in 2020 where the concept for the BRICS Network Centre for Materials Science and Nanotechnology was discussed further. The terms of reference of the working group were also finally approved in this meeting.<sup>27</sup>

**Table 2: BRICS Science, Technology and Innovation Cooperation Journey**

Ser. No	Tracks/ Initiative	Presidency	Year	Outcome	Progress
1	Outer Space	China	2011	Working Group Established, Agreement signed	Strong
2	Material Science and Nanotechnology	China	2010	First Working Group meeting held in 2017	Very Slow
3	Ocean and Polar Science and Technology	Brazil	2014	Working Group meeting held in 2018	No Progress
4	ICT cooperation	Russia	2015	Action Plan launched, Institution Established	Strong
5	Research Infrastructures and Mega-Science projects	Russia	2015	BRICS Payments Task Force (BPTF) created in 2020	Very Slow
6	Science, Technology, Innovation and Entrepreneurship Partnership	India	2016	Enabling framework endorsed in 2020	Slow

## **Sustainable Development**

BRICS has stood for a comprehensive, balanced, and equitable agreement on climate change. The BRICS declarations have called upon developed countries to fulfil their commitments on providing support to developing countries made in the Paris Agreement, the G20 Action Plan on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the G20 Initiative on Supporting Industrialization in Africa and LDCs. For developing nations to adequately face the challenges of climate change, substantial financial flows and technology transfers are required.

The BRICS countries have repeatedly reaffirmed their commitment to the full implementation of the Paris Agreement adopted under the principles of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, including the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities. Under SDGs cooperation, most of the actions have been in environment, agriculture, health, and energy.

### **Environment**

The BRICS Environment Ministers began meeting annually from 2015 onwards to explore and implement further areas of cooperation. In their first meeting, they resolved to establish a working group on environment to identify and discuss the priority areas of cooperation. The working group was also expected to explore the potential of the BRICS NDB for funding environmental projects.

Based on work of the joint working group, the environment ministers of the BRICS nations started deliberating on signing a MoU and were able to reach some agreement on three areas of cooperation—air quality, water management and waste management by 2016. Technology transfer was seen as a crucial aspect of cooperation and so, the ministers also agreed to share technical expertise on air quality and water pollution, and the conservation and management of water resources and rivers through joint projects and network of national regulatory and technical institutions. In this direction, three initiatives were launched: BRICS Environmentally Friendly Technology Platform, BRICS Clean Rivers Umbrella Program, and the BRICS Partnership for Urban Environmental Sustainability Initiative. Although there has been some progress on the first initiative, the other two are still being discussed.

The BRICS ministers also agreed on enhancing cooperation in marine protection and ocean governance and an MoU on Environmental Cooperation was signed in 2018. After the 2018 and 2019 meetings, the ministers had advanced their dialogue in several key themes. The emphasis now seems to be on urban environmental management, contaminated areas and soil remediation, water quality, circular economy in the context of SCP, marine protected areas, combating marine litter and the Post- 2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. More recently, the

BRICS Alliance for Green Tourism was adopted in 2021 during the recently concluded BRICS Presidency hosted by India with the objective of mainstreaming sustainability into the tourism sector policies, support conservation efforts and encourage investment in nature-based solutions.

**BRICS Environmentally Sound Technology Platform:** Exchange of knowledge, technology and best practices in environmentally friendly technologies was first endorsed in 2012 at New Delhi Summit. Subsequently, a platform to share best environmental practices and facilitate the exchange of environmentally sound technologies and expertise was also among the resolutions made in the very first Environment Ministers' meeting in 2015. By 2018, there had been some progress in the establishment of this platform. Now called the BRICS Environmentally Sound Technology (BEST) Platform, it would include partners, science and international organisations, civil society, private sector and financial institutions, including the NDB. It was also agreed upon that the BEST Platform will be used as a coordinating mechanism for the implementation of projects and programmes under the BRICS environment MoU. In the Ministerial Meeting held in 2020, the Ministers emphasized that developing existing areas within the BEST Platform in order to make it more practical and result-oriented was of fundamental importance. To do so, they invited experts to streamline specific activities, timeframes and expected results and resolved to review the work before the next BEST Platform meeting.

## **Agriculture**

Agriculture has also been a priority for the BRICS countries since the beginning. BRICS agriculture ministers met for the first time in 2010 where long-term priorities for cooperation in this area—such as establishing technology cooperation and information sharing mechanisms to ensure food security and reduce the negative effect of climate change—were drawn out.<sup>28</sup> Over time, five priority areas were identified by each of the BRICS countries. To coordinate and streamline efforts in these areas, three action plans for agricultural cooperation have been prepared. Each priority area is coordinated by one member country.

The second action plan (2017-20) focused on using digital technologies for sustainable agricultural development and implementing the SDGs as well. Further, the third action plan (2021-2024) was adopted in the 11<sup>th</sup> Agriculture Ministers' Meeting held in 2021. The BRICS has also undertaken two important initiatives—BRICS Agricultural Research Platform and the Basic Agriculture Information Exchange System, aimed at technology cooperation and information sharing respectively.

To enhance technology cooperation and innovation in this area, a standing expert working group was set up in 2010. Initially, a “BRICS Strategic Alliance for Agricultural Research and Technology Cooperation” was envisioned to pool the efforts of BRICS countries in addressing major challenges

faced by the world in agricultural technologies. India took the charge of developing a framework for establishment of such an alliance at second expert working group meeting in 2012, but this initiative could not take off.

**BRICS Agricultural Research Platform:** In 2015, the establishment of an Agriculture Research Centre was proposed by India, and an MoU to set it up was signed in 2016 at the Goa Summit. Under this MoU, the BRICS countries have agreed to cooperate in areas of agricultural R&D, technology transfer, capacity building, and information sharing through networks of agriculture and allied disciplines. The BRICS Agricultural Research Platform was finally operationalised in 2021 as a virtual platform to facilitate interaction among focal points appointed by member countries. Further, to strengthening cooperation through the creation of open digital resources, discussions have been initiated in 2021 on setting up a BRICS Platform for Digital Public Goods to support the member countries in achievement of the SDGs.

**Basic Agriculture Information Exchange System:** The creation of an agricultural information base system was also one of the priority areas, as delineated in the BRICS Action Plan (2012-17) since first being proposed in 2011. The basic idea behind having a shared information base about agricultural markets is to facilitate a comprehensive analysis of the condition of food security in the BRICS countries. Special attention seems to have been given to avoid duplicating the work of the G20's Agricultural Market Information System. Despite being on the agenda for more than 10 years, the Basic Agriculture Information Exchange System is still under development.

## **Health**

Since 2011, BRICS has committed to strengthen dialogues and cooperation in the field of public health as most member countries face similar challenges of universal access to health services, access to health technologies, increasing costs, and the growing burden of both communicable and non-communicable diseases. To address these common challenges and come up with some cost-effective, equitable and sustainable solutions, BRICS initiated its first health ministers' meeting in July 2011 under the Chinese presidency. At the first ministerial meeting, BRICS members met with an objective to strengthen health systems and health financing in developing countries in all regions. The BRICS health ministers have emphasised collaboration and cooperation in the development of capacity and infrastructure to reduce the prevalence and incidence of tuberculosis (TB) and HIV/AIDS.

Over the years, attention was drawn to the current global threat of non-communicable diseases. The Expert Working Group on Health on Coordination and Financing of R&D for Medical Products recommended the establishment of a global health R&D observatory and holding regional consultations to set up R&D demonstration projects, which was welcomed in second ministerial meeting in 2013.

At the 2018 summit, the countries decided to establish the BRICS Vaccine Research and Development Centre, which was launched virtually in 2021. Given the present COVID-19 crisis, there is an urgent need to accelerate this track. During the 2016 summit, BRICS emphasised the importance of continuous cooperation among the member countries in promoting research and development of medicines and diagnostic tools to end epidemics, including through promoting innovative and sustainable models for health R&D financing and coordination and to facilitate access to safe, effective, quality and affordable medicines, including generic medicines, biological products, and diagnostics. Further, in 2016, BRICS members agreed to organise a high-level meeting on traditional medical knowledge to explore the value of traditional and alternative systems of medicine as a means of achieving holistic healthcare.

In 2019, the five countries agreed to establish the BRICS Network of Human Milk Banks to provide access to breastmilk for infants when the mother cannot provide her own milk. The BRICS TB Research Network was also established in the same year as a collaborative research programme. BRICS has also recognised the urgent need to improve global vaccine coverage and to strengthen access to vaccines and other quality immunobiological inputs at fair prices, taking into account the re-emergence of vaccine-preventable diseases.

## **Energy**

The BRICS countries represent some of the world's largest consumers and producers of energy. The five countries have reaffirmed the importance of promoting the deployment of renewable and clean energy, and energy efficiency technologies several times, but have also agreed that incentives for renewables must be based on national policies, priorities, and resources. In 2020, the Roadmap for Energy Cooperation was endorsed by the BRICS energy ministers with an aim to establish mid-term prospective, priority areas, stages and, actions.

**Energy Savings and Energy Efficiency:** An MoU on energy saving and energy efficiency was signed in 2015 at the Ufa Summit and a Working Group on Energy Savings and Energy Efficiency was also created. Under this pact, the member countries have agreed to compile a list of energy efficient and clean technologies of importance. Additionally, they will also pursue energy cooperation through joint research and technology projects, technology transfers, conferences, lectures and seminars, and sharing experience and best practices. Cooperation in energy efficiency and conservation through the sharing of knowledge and best practices and disseminating advanced energy efficient technologies has been encouraged. In this regard, India has already shared its experience of its energy efficient lighting programme, in which around 360 million LED light bulbs had been distributed at affordable prices.

**BRICS Energy Research Cooperation Platform:** In their second meeting in 2017 under the Chinese presidency, the energy ministers agreed to explore the feasibility of establishing a BRICS Energy Research Cooperation Platform (ERCP) to carry out joint studies on the energy cooperation potential and take advantage of each country's strength in resources, markets,



funds, technologies, and capacities. As a result, the BRICS ERCP was established at the 2018 summit. The first meeting of the BRICS ERCP was held in 2019 under a committee of senior officials, during which the terms of reference were adopted. The same year, to operationalise the platform, this committee was also invited by the energy ministers to nominate focal points in charge of the platform's work streams. The first "BRICS Energy Report" and "BRICS Energy Technology Reports" were released in 2020 along with the BRICS ERCP annual report. The "BRICS Energy Technology Reports" throws light on the prospects of collaboration in the area of energy technologies on the basis of national contributions from the BRICS countries. At the ministerial meeting held in 2020, the committee of senior energy officials was also directed to steer the work of the platform towards the earliest establishment of the work streams and strengthening organisational support through a network of national secretariats and focal points.

### **Labour and employment**

This is an area of critical importance for all the BRICS countries. The first meeting of labour ministers was held in 2016 under the Indian presidency and subsequently, an Employment Working Group was also set up. The objective of this working group was to support the ministerial body and discuss global labour market issues and share country experiences. In 2017, the labour ministers endorsed the BRICS Social Security Cooperation Framework and established a network of labour research institutes to facilitate a better understanding of the issues in the labour market. The BRICS Action Plan for Poverty Alleviation and Reduction Through Skills was also set in the same year to facilitate relevant lifelong vocational education, training, upskilling and re-skilling, and actively support labour market transitions through employment services.

The labour ministers' meetings reflect that the formalisation of labour, coverage of social security, and skill enhancement of the workforce are the main priorities for BRICS cooperation in this track. The International Labour Organization and International Social Security Association have also provided technical support to the BRICS's efforts of collaboration in this area. Additionally, the BRICS Network of Labour Research Institutes also lends their support to these efforts by providing technical inputs on key issues regarding labour market challenges and policy experiences.

In 2018, the BRICS countries signed an MoU regarding cooperation in the social and labour sphere. Under this MoU, the BRICS countries agreed to cooperate and hold mutual events in prominent areas—labour legislation and enforcement, protection of workers' rights with focus on vulnerable groups, employment and labour market policies, professional education, skills and training, and social protection.

**Table 3: Snapshot of BRICS Co-operation Journey on Sustainable Development**

Ser. No	Tracks/ Initiative	Presidency	Year	Outcome	Progress
1	Basic Agriculture Information Exchange System (BAIES)	China	2011	Action Plan formulated, BRICS-ARP setup Virtually in 2021	Slow
2	Material Science and Nanotechnology	India	2012	MoU (2018), BEST Platform set up	Slow
3	Energy Savings and Energy Efficiency	India	2012	MOU signed (2015), Workshop to share best practices are being conducted	Slow
4	BRICS TB Research Network	India	2016	BRICS TB Research Network set up (2017), Annual Technical meetings since 2017	Slow
5	Labour & employment	India	2016	MOU signed 2018	No Progress
6	BRICS Energy Research Cooperation Platform	China	2017	RICS-ERCP established in 2018	Slow
7	Health	China	2017	Institution setup, summit held	slow

## Multilateralism and International Cooperation

Generally, in relation to BRICS coordination in international fora and organisations, the focus has been on the economic-financial and political governance spheres. For instance, under economic-financial aspects, the BRICS agenda prioritised G-20 cooperation and reform of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Trade Organization (WTO). On the political aspects, the BRICS has advocated the reform of the United Nations (UN) and of its Security Council, with the purpose of making it more inclusive and democratic.

### Reform of Multilateral Institutions

The June 2021 BRICS Joint Statement on Strengthening and Reforming the Multilateral System states that it is important to pursue joint efforts to strengthen and reform the multilateral system to make it more resilient, efficient, effective, transparent, and representative. The foreign ministers acknowledged that the current interconnected international challenges should be addressed through a reinvigorated and reformed multilateral system, especially of the UN and its principal organs, and other multilateral institutions such as IMF, WTO, World Bank and World Health Organization (WHO) to enhance capacity to effectively address the diverse challenges of our time and to adapt them to 21st century realities. They reaffirmed the need for a comprehensive reform of the UN, including its Security Council, with a view to making it more representative, effective, and efficient, and to increase the representation of the developing countries so that it can adequately respond to global challenges.

The ministers also reaffirmed a commitment to broadening and strengthening the participation of emerging markets and developing countries (EMDCs) in global economic decision-making and norm-setting processes, especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. To that end, they stressed the importance of continuing efforts to reform the international financial architecture, noting that enhancing the voice and participation of EMDCs, including the least developed countries, in the Bretton Woods institutions such as IMF and World Bank, remains a continuous concern. Furthermore, the ministers reaffirmed their support for a transparent, rules-based, open, inclusive, and non-discriminatory multilateral trading system, with the WTO at its core, and in this regard reiterated their support for the necessary and urgent reform that would inter alia preserve the centrality, core values and fundamental principles of the WTO and consider the interests of all members, including developing countries and LDCs.

The BRICS declarations over the years have reiterated the urgent need to strengthen and reform the multilateral system, including the UN, the WTO, the IMF, and other international organisations. The BRICS countries stand in agreement with the demand that international governance should be more inclusive, representative, and participatory. Every year, the BRICS meetings recall the 2005 World Summit Outcome document and reaffirm the need for a comprehensive reform of such institutions.

BRICS has also pushed for reforms related to voting power and quotas in the World Bank and IMF to ensure greater legitimacy. BRICS has also called upon the IMF to make its surveillance framework more integrated and balanced. Both IMF and World Bank have been urged to reduce the lending cost and adopt innovative lending tools and truly reflect the vision of all its members. In 2018, the BRICS reaffirmed its commitment to conclude the IMF's 15th General Review of Quotas, including a new quota formula by the 2019 Spring Meetings, and also committed to support the implementation of the World Bank Group Shareholding Review. However, the IMF Board of Governors adopted a resolution on 7 February 2020, concluding the 15th General Review of Quotas, with no increase in quotas.

In 2013, after the Eurozone crisis, the IMF proposed a new bilateral borrowing programme to augment its resources for crisis prevention and to meet the potential financing needs of all IMF members. The BRICS countries have actively contributed to this arrangement, including India's contribution of US\$10 billion. These new resources were to be drawn only if they are needed after resources already available from quota and existing borrowing arrangements are substantially used.

### **Response to Global Financial Crisis**

After the Lehman Brother's bankruptcy, the Finance Ministers and Central Bankers of the BRIC Countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China) met on 7 November 2008 to discuss the possible options to overcome the severe financial crisis and to avoid recurrence of such similar events in future. In their first ministerial meeting in Sao Paulo, BRIC came up with a joint communiqué that emphasized on the need for reforming the global financial architecture. The BRIC Ministers recognised the importance of international cooperation and coordination to protect the global financial system and address the most deleterious aspects of the crisis, that was, stagnation of private credit markets. So all the members resolved to jointly find mechanisms to ease credit access, stimulate demand and resume capital flows for boosting economic growth and development.

Following this, the Finance Ministers and Central Bankers of the BRIC countries met several times in informal meetings during 2008-09. Finally, on 16 June 2009, the leaders of Brazil, Russia, India and China, met for first time to discuss the pressing issue of global development and economic recovery. In this first official meeting, the BRIC Members agreed on the need to stabilize international financial system through recapitalization, liquidity support and cleaning of bank balance sheets with such governmental action which was vital for rebuilding confidence and maintain and support credit flow to restore economic growth.

Secondly, to lend greater voice and representation to emerging and developing countries, the BRICS leaders committed to follow some principles to reform the financial and economic architecture. These principles are as follows<sup>31</sup>:

- democratic and transparent decision-making and implementation process at the international financial organisations
- solid legal basis
- compatibility of activities of effective national regulatory institutions and international standard setting bodies
- strengthening of risk management and supervisory practices

BRICS countries have given special emphasis to all financial activities especially those of systemic importance that are subject to adequate regulation and supervision, including institutions that are in the “shadow banking system”. Since 2012, the BRICS has emphasised establishing synergies and complementarities between economies, cooperation in areas of strategic importance, and strengthening economic links such that the grouping can collectively play a more central role in the ‘new normal’ of the post-crisis global economy. BRICS countries seem to have focused throughout on finance, including on development finance and measures aimed at strengthening capital markets. Making the necessary resources available for economic development has been a priority for the BRICS.

### **International trade**

All BRICS summits and the 2021 joint statement have emphasised the need to maintain a transparent, rules-based, and non-discriminatory multilateral trading system. At the first meeting in 2009, the BRICS countries agreed that the balanced results of the WTO’s Doha Development Agenda had to be pushed forward. At the heart of the Doha Declaration was the commitment to ensure that developing countries, especially LDCs can secure a share in the growth of world trade commensurate with their economic development needs. Along these lines, the BRICS countries have demanded the establishment of a transparent, rules-based, and non-discriminatory multilateral trading system to make it more inclusive and sustainable.

In their 2018 meeting, the BRICS foreign ministers noted the changing international trade scenario and declared that they were opposed to the “new wave of protectionism” and the systematic impact of unilateral measures that are incompatible with WTO rules. They emphasised that such steps undermine global trade and economic growth and, in this context, stressed the urgency of ensuring the restoration and preservation of the normal functioning of the WTO Dispute Settlement System in their 2020 meeting. Apart from WTO, the BRICS countries have also stated their willingness to contribute to other multilateral forums as well. For instance, they are committed to contribute towards strengthening the capacity of United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) to deliver on its programmes of consensus building, policy dialogue, research, technical cooperation, and capacity building, so that it is better equipped to deliver on its development mandate.

In the 2021 BRICS joint statement, the foreign ministers reiterated their support for the necessary and urgent reform of the WTO, which would inter alia preserve the centrality, core values and fundamental principles of the organization and consider the interests of all members, including developing countries and LDCs. They stressed the need for all WTO members to avoid unilateral and protectionist measures that run counter to the spirit and rules of the WTO. They also emphasised the primary importance of ensuring the restoration and preservation of the normal functioning of a two-stage WTO Dispute Settlement System, including the expeditious appointment of all appellate body members. The ministers reiterated the important role of the UNCTAD in the integrated treatment of trade and development, finance, technology, investment and sustainable development, and reaffirmed support for its vital mandate and promotion of an open and inclusive global economy and provision of development-oriented policy analysis.

### **International Security**

The BRICS has been taking note of developments in international conflicts, especially those in Africa and West Asia (most recently Afghanistan). The issue of security has been a priority for BRICS since the beginning. The national security advisors of the BRICS countries have been meeting since 2009 to expand dialogue on security issues and exchange information. To streamline these efforts, a BRICS Joint Working Group on Counterterrorism was also set up, which held its first meeting in 2016. In 2019, the working group decided to constitute five sub committees on terrorist financing, the use of Internet for terrorist purposes, countering radicalisation, the issue of foreign terrorist fighters, and capacity building. Most recently, the BRICS Counterterrorism Action Plan was adopted at the 2021 summit.

In the June 2021 BRICS Joint Statement on Strengthening and Reforming the Multilateral System, the foreign ministers called for continued efforts to strengthen the system of arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation treaties and agreements, and to preserve their integrity for maintaining global stability and international peace and security. They also stressed the need to maintain the effectiveness and efficiency and the consensus-based nature of the relevant multilateral instruments in the field of disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control.

**Securing ICTs:** The potential for BRICS cooperation in peace building and counterterrorism is very high. But since the BRICS countries are not aligned on these issues, there is limited coordinated action in this area. Despite divergences, the group has been able to develop some level of coordination in cybersecurity measures. The BRICS leaders have advocated for the establishment of internationally applicable rules for the security of ICT infrastructure, data protection and the Internet. These rules need to be widely accepted and efforts now need to be directed towards jointly building a safe and secure network. A BRICS Working Group on Security in the Use of ICTs was set up for this purpose and to work out other potential areas of cooperation in this area. Establishing legal frameworks of cooperation among

BRICS member states on ensuring security in the use of ICTs is important and the working group will work to consider and elaborate proposals on this matter. The working group has been successful in formulating the BRICS Roadmap of Practical Cooperation on Ensuring Security in the Use of ICTs, which was declared in the 2019 summit. An intergovernmental agreement for cooperation in this area was also announced at the summit. The BRICS has also emphasised the centrality of the UN in the development of multilaterally agreed norms, and rules and principles for responsible behaviour of states with regard to use of ICTs. At the 2019 summit, the BRICS welcomed the establishment of a UN open-ended working group on this matter as well as the launch of a new edition of the Group of Governmental Experts.

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# BRICS Consolidation: Recommendations on Way Forward

## Areas of Strength in BRICS

- **New Development Bank:** The establishment of the NDB in 2014 has been the most significant outcome of BRICS cooperation. This initiative has witnessed strong follow-up and it has played an instrumental role in funding infrastructure and sustainable projects in the BRICS countries. The bank is presently headquartered in Shanghai with regional centres in South Africa, Brazil and Russia. India remains the only BRICS country to not have a regional centre, and efforts to expediting the process will be welcomed.
- **Contingent Reserve Arrangement:** The CRA has also been a successful initiative with strong follow-up. Efforts to fully operationalise the CRA are underway and multiple test-runs of have been conducted successfully over the past years. However, to emerge as a viable BRICS alternative to the IMF in the long term, its analytical capacity related to macroeconomic research needs to be augmented.
- **Interbank Cooperation Mechanism:** The Interbank Cooperation Mechanism has been initiated as an umbrella arrangement to develop long-term cooperation among BRICS development banks to facilitate cross-border transactions and support projects of common interest. With the signing of over ten agreements and the establishment of five working groups, this initiative has also witnessed strong



follow-up. However, the outcome of these agreements in terms of the investment generated can only be assessed if regular reports are published on the work done.

- **Customs:** Customs cooperation has been one of the early BRICS priorities that has seen strong follow-up. The Strategic Framework of BRICS Customs Cooperation was signed in 2017 and a Customs Mutual Assistance Agreement was also finalised in 2021. However, specific programmes in this area like the E-port network and the Authorised Economic Operator programme need to be streamlined further.
- **Information and Communication Technologies:** ICTs have also been an important area of cooperation. The working group on ICT was set up in 2015 and an Action Plan was launched the following year. The working group also initiated the BRICS Institute of Future Network, which was endorsed in 2018 by BRICS ministers to strengthen cooperation on research and innovation in advanced digital technologies. The terms of references have been finalised and now needs to be operationalised.
- **Outer Space:** Cooperation in outer space technologies has also been an active area with strong follow-up. The BRICS Astronomy Working Group has been operational since 2015 and it has already initiated work on its flagship project—BRICS Intelligent Telescope and Data Network. The agreement on setting up the BRICS Remote Sensing Satellite Constellation was also signed in 2021.
- **Counterterrorism:** Repeated discussions on the security situations in West Asia and Africa shows that international security has been high on the BRICS agenda. The BRICS national security advisors have met annually since 2009 and the working group on counterterrorism since 2016. The publication of the Counterterrorism Action Plan in 2021 reaffirms the priority accorded to security. In this direction, the BRICS Roadmap of Practical Cooperation on Ensuring Security in the Use of ICTs should be strengthened further.

### **Cooperation in Global Governance: Need for Consistent Themes and Persistent Diplomacy**

- **Joint Statement 2021:** The BRICS countries should fully adhere to the agreed provisions under the seminal joint statement issued on 1 June 2021 on ‘strengthening and reforming the multilateral system’. The statement reflects the significance BRICS leaders attribute to the issue. While it is not always easy to attribute reforms of the multilateral institutions to the BRICS, the pressure from the member nations on the boards of the multilateral institutions and through forums such as the G20, has helped in prioritising and expediting the reforms process.
- **WTO:** BRICS has opposed the “new wave of protectionism” and the systematic impact of unilateral measures that are incompatible with WTO rules. Further, BRICS should continue to push forward the balanced results of the WTO’s Doha Development Agenda and contribute towards strengthening UNCTAD capacity. The restoration

and preservation of the normal functioning of a two-stage WTO Dispute Settlement System, including the expeditious appointment of all appellate body members, must also be ensured.

- IMF: Despite the IMF Board of Governors concluding the 15th General Review of Quotas with no increase in quotas, the BRICS should continue to push for reforms related to quotas and the IMF's governance. Further, the IMF should also be urged to reduce the lending cost and adopt innovative lending tools and also, make its surveillance framework fairer and more integrated.

### **'Work In Progress' Hampering the BRICS's Sustainable Development Agenda**

- **Agricultural Research Platform:** Agriculture has been an early priority of BRICS cooperation. An expert working group was set up in 2010 and three Action Plans for Agriculture Cooperation (2012-16, 2017-20 and 2021-24) have been formulated. The Agricultural Research Platform has emerged as the most successful initiative within this area. The MoU on setting up the platform was signed in 2016 and it has been fully operationalised virtually in 2021.
- **Health:** Access to affordable healthcare is emerging as one of the most important areas of BRICS cooperation. Collaboration in R&D has been the focus of many initiatives. In this direction, the BRICS TB Research Network was launched in 2016 and the BRICS Vaccine Research and Development Centre was set up virtually in 2021. Other initiatives like the high-level meeting on traditional medicines, BRICS Network of Human Milk Banks and digital health summits are also coming up but there is lack of a clear and comprehensive action plans with regard to healthcare.
- **Innovation Networks:** Sharing of knowledge and technologies is emerging as an important area within STI cooperation. In this direction, the iBRICS Network has been established as a mechanism for direct dialogue among actors of innovation in the member countries to promote the exchange of best practices with a view to advancing systems of innovation. Further, the Enabling Framework for the BRICS Network for Technology Transfer Cooperation (BRICS TechTransfer) was also endorsed in 2020. In this direction, the STI Declaration 2020 had called on each of the five countries to nominate technology transfer organisations to form the network.
- **BEST Platform:** Environmental cooperation is also emerging as an important segment of BRICS collaboration. BRICS has been consistent in calling upon developed countries to fulfil their commitments made in the Paris Agreement, the G20 Action Plan on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the G20 Initiative on Supporting Industrialization in Africa and LDCs. The Working Group on Environment was established in 2015 and an MoU on environmental cooperation was signed in 2018. The most successful initiative within this area has been the

establishment of the BEST Platform. Although, this platform has already been set up virtually, there is still a need to streamline specific activities that are to be taken up under this platform.

- **Energy Research Cooperation Platform:** The energy sector is also emerging as an important area for BRICS cooperation. The first BRICS energy ministers' meeting was held in 2016 and a roadmap for BRICS energy cooperation was endorsed in 2020. The establishment of the BRICS ERCP is one of the most significant outcomes under this area of cooperation. The early establishment of work streams and strengthening of organisational support are the next priorities for the BRICS-ERCP.
- **Investment Facilitation:** Foreign investment has been recognised as an important driver of economic growth by the BRICS countries and there has been continuous progress in investment facilitation. In this direction, the BRICS Trade and Investment Facilitation Action Plan was formulated in 2014 and the Outlines for BRICS Investment Facilitation was endorsed in 2017. Enhancing transparency and information flows regarding the member countries' legal frameworks is the most significant aspect of cooperation in this area. An MoU among BRICS Trade and Investment Promotion Agencies/Trade Promotion Organizations was signed in 2019.
- **E-commerce:** E-commerce has been a recurring theme in most of the BRICS summits. A working group on e-commerce was established in 2017. The aspect of consumer protection is gaining importance and, in this direction, the BRICS Framework for Ensuring Consumer Protection in E-Commerce was introduced in 2021.
- **PartNIR:** Digitalisation is another important area for BRICS collaboration, which is gaining increased focus in recent times. PartNIR has already been established and a work plan was developed in 2019. It is important to follow up the work plan with collaborative actions in mutually agreed directions.

#### **Mismatch Between Aspiration And Action: Areas Limited To Capacity Building**

- **Taxation:** The heads of tax authorities have met routinely since 2013, and in 2018, agreed on a High-Level Capacity Building Action Plan with the follow-up action of conducting a workshop. The issue of tax evasion is important for all BRICS countries and there is a need to develop an action plan in this direction as well.
- **IPR:** The area of IPR cooperation has been one of the most consistent tracks under BRICS. The HIPOs have met frequently and have continued to work in activities of cooperation and engagement. However, the scope of activities being pursued presently is very restricted. More efforts need to be made to fully implement the action plan agreed upon in 2016.

- **Energy efficiency:** Another important segment of collaboration within the area of energy is that of energy savings and energy efficiency. A working group was set up in 2015 and an MoU in energy savings and energy efficiency was signed in 2015. However, the scope of activities being conducted as of now is restricted to member countries sharing their best practices in this area.

#### **Areas Under Discussion or With Slow Progress: Need for Big Push or Recast**

- **Finance:** Areas where cooperation can be further strengthened include the BRICS Bond Fund, BRICS payment system and BRICS Credit Rating Agency, all of which are considered important instruments for financial integration. The establishment of the BRICS Bond Fund was agreed upon in 2017 but is yet to be operationalised. However, its governance issues were discussed in 2021. Discussions on switching to an alternative payments system (instead of SWIFT) began in 2015 and a BRICS payments task force was created in 2020. The idea of setting up a BRICS Credit Rating Agency came up in 2016 and was agreed upon by the BRICS members in 2018. However, no steps have been taken thereafter.
- **Export Credit:** Many agreements have been signed since 2012 for cooperation in extending credit in BRICS countries and the BRICS Export Credit Agencies have met annually since 2015. However, as pointed out in the 4th Export Credit Agencies meeting in 2018, there is a need for “an exact and coordinated approach”.
- **Trade in Services:** The Framework for Cooperation on Trade in Services was endorsed in 2016 and subsequently the Trade in Services Cooperation Roadmap was endorsed in 2017. The services sector accounts for half to two-thirds of the individual economies of the five countries. In recent years, the BRICS countries seem to have focused on enhancing Mode-3 trade in services by liberalising foreign equity restrictions. Clearly, there is scope for strengthening cooperation in this area.
- **Science, Technology and Innovation:** STI has been an early priority area for BRICS cooperation but some of the initiatives under it have not gained much traction. The initiatives on research infrastructure and mega-science projects, ocean and polar science and technology, materials science and nanotechnology, and high-performance computing need to be re-examined for their salience and efficacy.
- **Basic Agriculture Information Exchange System:** Despite being on the agenda for more than a decade, the initiative of creating the Basic Agriculture Information Exchange System is still under development.
- **Environment:** Two initiatives launched in 2019 related to environmental cooperation—the Clean Rivers Umbrella Programme and the BRICS Partnership for Urban Environmental Sustainability Initiative—have not seen any progress.

- **Labour Issues:** An Employment Working Group was set up in 2016 to deliberate upon issues related to labour and employment in the BRICS countries. An MoU on cooperation in the social and labour sphere was signed in 2018. However, there seems to have been no significant progress in this direction since then.
- **MSMEs:** Other initiatives such as the cooperation on standardisation, industrial cooperation, cooperation on MSMEs, cooperation in manufacturing and minerals processing, and tourism should be re-examined for salience and efficacy. The BRICS had decided in 2018 that special sessions dedicated to MSMEs will be held by the CGETI. However, no agreement for MSMEs has been signed and no major action has been taken in this direction yet.

### **Some Stalled Initiatives**

(Limited information in public domain)

- BRICS Railways Research Network 2016
- Agreement to Resolve the Crisis in South Sudan 2014
- BRICS Cooperation on Population Matters for 2015-2020
- MoU on Collaborative Research on Distributed Ledger and Blockchain Technology in the Context of the Development of the Digital Economy 2018
- Multilateral Agreement on Infrastructure Co-Financing for Africa 2013
- BRICS Single Window Cooperation
- BRICS Exchange Alliance
- BRICS MoU on Regional Aviation
- BRICS Network of Human Milk Banks
- Multilateral Agreement on Cooperation and Co-financing for Sustainable Development, 2013

# Appendix 1: List of BRICS Initiatives and Agreements

## Science, Technology, Innovation

BRICS MoUs/Agreements/Working Groups/Action Plans	
1	BRICS Science, Technology and Innovation Work Plan 2019-2022/Action Plan 2017-2018 in the Framework of BRICS 2015-2018 STI Work Plan/BRICS Science, Technology and Innovation Work Plan 2015-2018/ Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in Science, Technology and Innovation 2015/ Memorandum of Understanding on Science, Technology and Innovation 2014
2	Agreement on BRICS Cooperation on <b>Remote Sensing</b> Satellite Constellation 2021
3	Innovation Cooperation Action Plan 2021-2024/BRICS Innovation Cooperation Action Plan 2017-2020/ Innovation BRICS Network (iBRICS) 2019/ BRICS Research and Innovation Initiative 2016
4	Work Plan of the BRICS Partnership on <b>New Industrial Revolution</b> (PartNIR) 2019/ Framework on BRICS Partnership on New Industrial Revolution (PartNIR) 2017
5	Implementation Framework for <b>Intellectual Property</b> Rights Cooperation Mechanism (IPRCM), 2018/The Action Plan on BRICS IPR Cooperation, 2017/BRICS IPR Cooperation Guidelines 2017/Initiative on Strengthening IPR Cooperation among the BRICS Countries 2015/ BRICS Intellectual Property Offices Roadmap in 2013
6	Council of the BRICS <b>Institute for Future Networks</b>

## Finance and Economy

	BRICS MoUs/Agreements/Working Groups/Action Plans
7	2020 Strategy for BRICS <b>Economic Partnership</b> 2025/Strategy for the BRICS Economic Partnership 2015/ Framework on Strengthening the Economic and Technical Cooperation for BRICS Countries 2017/ Framework of BRICS Closer Economic Partnership, 2014
8	Memorandum of BRICS DFIs Principles for <b>Responsible Financing</b> 2020
9	Memorandum of Understanding on <b>Private Investment</b> Mobilization among BRICS Development Banks 2018
10	BRICS High-Level Capacity Building Action Plan 2018/ BRICS Memorandum of Cooperation in Respect of <b>Tax</b> Matters, 2017
11	Interbank Local Currency Credit Line Agreement Under BRICS <b>Interbank Cooperation</b> Mechanism 2017/Cooperation Memorandum Relating to Credit Ratings Under BRICS Interbank Cooperation Mechanism 2017/Cooperation Agreement on Innovation within the BRICS Interbank Cooperation Mechanism 2014/Master Agreement on Extending Credit Facility in Local Currency under BRICS Interbank Cooperation Mechanism, 2012/The BRICS Interbank Cooperation Mechanism formed in 2010
12	BRICS <b>Social Security Cooperation</b> Framework 2017
13	BRICS CRA System of Exchange in Macroeconomic Information (SEMI) 2017/ Treaty for the establishment of the BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) 2014
14	BRICS Inter-Central Bank Agreement 2015
15	Cooperation Agreement on Innovation between BRICS Development Banks, 2014/Bank's General Strategy document for 2017-2021/ Agreement establishing the New Development Bank ( <b>NDB</b> ) MoUs with New Development Bank: BRICS Interbank Cooperation Mechanism, 2016/National Development Banks/institutions, 2015
16	Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation among BRICS <b>Export Credit</b> and Guarantees Agencies 2014/ Multilateral Letter of Credit Confirmation Facility Agreement between our EXIM/ Development Banks 2012
17	BRICS <b>Exchange</b> Alliance
18	BRICS Local Currency <b>Bond Fund</b>
19	System to Pay Internationally (SPIN), 2019

## Trade and Investment

	BRICS MoUs/Agreements/Working Groups/Action Plans
20	BRICS Agreement on Cooperation and Mutual Administrative Assistance in <b>Customs</b> Matters 2021/Strategic Framework of BRICS Customs Cooperation 2017/MoU on Regulations on Customs Cooperation Committee of the BRICS 2016
21	Implementation Roadmap on <b>Trade and Investment</b> 2021/BRICS Understanding on Investment Facilitation 2020/Memorandum of Understanding among BRICS Trade and Investment Promotion Agencies (TIPAs) 2019/BRICS CGETI Monitoring Mechanism 2018/ Outline for BRICS Investment Facilitation, 2017/BRICS Action Agenda on Economic and Trade Cooperation 2017/BRICS Economic Cooperation Strategy 2014/BRICS Trade and Investment Facilitation Action Plan, 2014/BRICS Trade and Investment Cooperation Framework 2013/Trade and Investment Cooperation Agreement, 2012/

22	Authorised Economic Operators (AEOs) 2019/Terms of Reference (ToR) of BRICS Model E-Port Network, 2017/ BRICS Model E-Port Network, 2017
23	BRICS <b>Trade in Services</b> Cooperation Roadmap, 2017/Framework for Cooperation on Trade in Services, 2016
24	BRICS Cooperation Framework on inclusive <b>e-commerce</b> development 2017/BRICS E-Commerce Cooperation Initiative, Framework for BRICS Ecommerce Cooperation 2015
25	Framework for BRICS Single Window Cooperation 2016
26	Framework for Cooperation on Standardisation 2016
27	Terms of Reference to strengthen institutional arrangements on <b>MSME</b> cooperation 2015/BRICS Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) Cooperation Framework, 2015
28	Action Plan for Deepening <b>Industrial Cooperation</b> Among BRICS Countries

## Agriculture

	BRICS MoUs/Agreements/Working Groups/Action Plans
29	Action Plan 2021-2024 for Agricultural Cooperation/Action Plan 2017-2020 for Agricultural Cooperation of BRICS Countries
30	BRICS Agricultural Research Platform 2021/MoU for Establishment of the BRICS Agricultural Research Platform 2016
31	BRICS Agriculture Information Exchange System 2021

## People to People

	BRICS MoUs/Agreements/Working Groups/Action Plans
32	BRICS Youth Forum Action Plan 2017/Guwahati BRICS Youth Summit 2016 Call to Action
33	Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the field of Physical <b>Culture</b> and Sports/ Action Plan for the Implementation of the Agreement between the 34 Governments of the BRICS States on Cooperation in the Field of Culture (2017-2021)/ Agreement between the Governments of the BRICS Member States on Cooperation in the Field of Culture 2015/Letter of Interest for BRICS Alliance of Libraries Cooperation, Museums, Art Museums and National Galleries, Theater for Children and Young People 2017 BFA Program for BRICS Film Students and Talents 2017
34	Action Plan of Promoting BRICS Media Cooperation 2017
35	Memorandum of Understanding between BRICS Diplomatic Academies 2016
36	MoU on the Creation of the Joint BRICS Website 2015



## Health

	BRICS MoUs/Agreements/Working Groups/Action Plans
37	BRICS Vaccine Research and Development Centre 2020
38	Collaborative Research Program for TB, BRICS TB Research Network 2018
39	BRICS Drug Regulatory Collaboration 2017

## International Security and Global Affairs

	BRICS MoUs/Agreements/Working Groups/Action Plans
40	BRICS <b>Counter-Terrorism</b> Action Plan 2021/BRICS Counter Terrorism Strategy 2020
41	BRICS Roadmap of Practical Cooperation on Ensuring Security in the Use of ICTs 2017
42	Agreement to Resolve the Crisis in South Sudan 2014
43	Multilateral Agreement on Infrastructure Co-Financing for Africa 2013

## SDG, Energy, Infrastructure, Poverty Alleviation

	BRICS MoUs/Agreements/Working Groups/Action Plans
44	BRICS Alliance for Green Tourism 2021
45	BRICS Environmentally Sound Technology (BEST) Platform 2018
46	BRICS Energy Research Cooperation Platform (ERCP) 2018/ Memorandum of Understanding in Energy Saving and Energy Efficiency 2015
47	Memorandum of Understanding on Environmental Cooperation 2018
48	BRICS Public-Private Partnership and Infrastructure Task Force 2018/Terms of Reference of the Public Private Partnership and Infrastructure Task Force, 2018
49	BRICS Partnership for Urban Environmental Sustainability Initiative 2017
50	The BRICS Action Plan for Poverty Alleviation and Reduction Through Skills 2017
51	BRICS Railways Research Network 2016
52	Agenda for BRICS Cooperation on Population Matters for 2015-2020
53	Multilateral Agreement on Cooperation and Co-financing for Sustainable Development, 2018

## Miscellaneous

	<b>BRICS MoUs/Agreements/Working Groups/Action Plans</b>
54	Creation of the BRICS Network of Human Milk Banks 2019
55	BRICS Network of Labor Research Institutes 2019/BRICS Network of Labour Research Institutes Terms of Reference 2017
56	Memorandum of Understanding on Collaborative Research on Distributed Ledger and Blockchain Technology in the Context of the Development of the Digital Economy 2018
57	BRICS Memorandum of Understanding on Regional Aviation 2018
58	NDB Africa Regional Center 2017

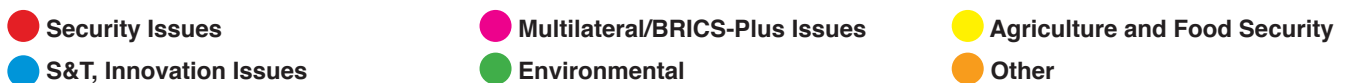
# Appendix 2: List of Issues on the BRICS Agenda

## BRICS

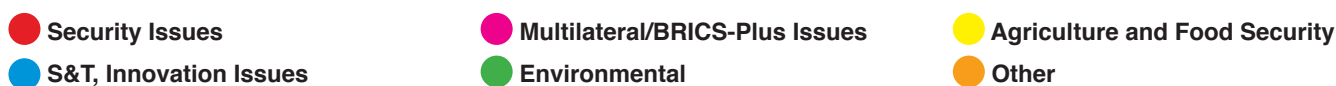
ISSUES/AREAS FOR COOPERATION	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Nuclear Disarmament, Non-Proliferation Regime, Nuclear Energy Use (Denuclearising Korean Peninsula, Iran, Middle East)				●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●
Education (all tiers)	●			●		●	●	●	●	●		●	●
Blue Economy									●	●			
African Peace and Security (Peace in CAR, DRC, Sierra Leone, Sudan)					●	●	●		●			●	
African Union Agenda 2063								●	●	●		●	
Agriculture		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Anti-corruption					●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
BRICS Central Banks Cooperation					●			●	●	●	●	●	

- Security Issues
- Multilateral/BRICS-Plus Issues
- Agriculture and Food Security
- S&T, Innovation Issues
- Environmental
- Other

ISSUES/AREAS FOR COOPERATION	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
BRICS Export Credit and Guarantees Agencies						●		●	●		●		
Business		●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●	●	●
Cities, municipal and local governments			●	●	●			●	●	●		●	
Climate change	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Cybercrime			●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Illicit financial flows, money laundering, terrorism financing, FATF							●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Piracy and armed robbery at sea						●	●						
Transnational organised crime							●	●		●	●	●	
Outer-Space (Space technologies, satellite navigation and space sciences, remote sensing satellites, peaceful use of space)							●		●		●	●	●
Cooperation on Counter-Terrorism	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Convention on Biological Diversity				●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●
Libya			●				●		●		●	●	
SDG/2030 Agenda (poverty eradication, climate)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Commitment to UN and UN Charter	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Reform of the UN	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Cooperation with UN Agencies - UNESCO, UNIDO, UNCTAD			●	●	●	●	●						
Financial Cooperation - (BRICS Bond Fund, Currency Cooperation, Accounting Standards, Audits)								●	●	●	●	●	●



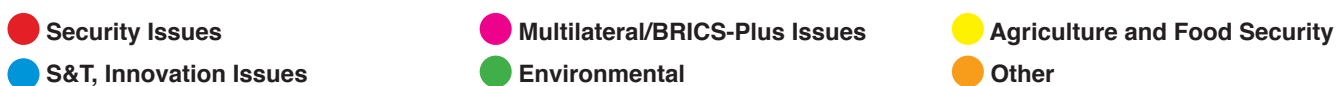
ISSUES/AREAS FOR COOPERATION	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises					●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
State-Owned Enterprises					●	●		●	●				
Food Security	●	●	●	●			●		●		●	●	●
Cooperation on competition and between Competition Authorities		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Consumer protection												●	●
Customs						●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Cooperation on Development Finance	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Dialogue with non-BRICS countries, including through BRICS Plus cooperation							●		●				
Dialogue with South America						●							
Digital economy								●	●	●	●	●	●
Disaster Management	●	●					●	●	●	●		●	●
Disease Prevention (Ebola crisis in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, COVID 19)			●	●			●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Drug control					●	●	●	●	●			●	●
E-commerce							●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Energy cooperation + efficiency + renewable energy and green technologies	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Global financial crisis													
Gender equality			●				●	●					
Global Governance (economic/ security/ internet)									●				
Green economy, green financing			●	●					●	●			



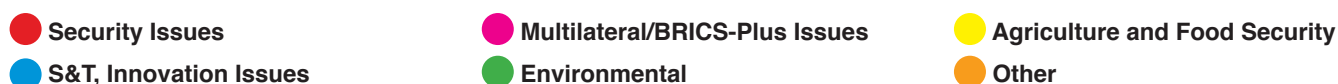
ISSUES/AREAS FOR COOPERATION	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Upholding Human rights	●	●			●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Joint BRICS research, development and innovation in ICT					●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Biological Weapons, bio terrorism								●		●	●	●	●
Industrial growth, development, parks, energy safety							●	●	●	●	●	●	
Infrastructure and industrialisation in Africa			●	●	●			●	●	●		●	
Intellectual property rights (IPR)							●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Inter-parliamentary exchanges							●	●	●	●	●	●	
Intra-BRICS economic, industrial, trade & investment cooperation		●	●			●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Investment opportunities, research and development in infrastructure projects among BRICS countries							●	●				●	●
Israeli-Palestinian conflict				●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Tsunami in Japan			●										
Labour, market and employment		●					●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Manufacturing and minerals processing							●		●		●		
National payment systems												●	
National statistical institutions		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Peacekeeping							●	●	●	●	●	●	●
People-to-people exchanges and connectivity/mobility (Cooperatives, Culture, Magistrates, Judges, Population issues, public diplomacy, media professionals)		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

- Security Issues
- S&T, Innovation Issues
- Multilateral/BRICS-Plus Issues
- Environmental
- Agriculture and Food Security
- Other

ISSUES/AREAS FOR COOPERATION	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Cooperation in Pharmaceuticals R&D			●	●			●						
Pooling capacities of insurance and reinsurance markets						●		●					
Post-pandemic economic agenda.												●	●
Urban Infrastructure and connectivity (Railways, Aviation, Ports, etc.)				●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Public health and global health governance			●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Public private partnerships (PPPs)								●	●		●	●	●
Reform IMF	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Resolve existing disagreements and diplomatic crisis in the Gulf region										●	●	●	
Safety of children on the Internet												●	●
Science, technology and innovation	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Security in the use of ICT		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Skills development								●	●	●	●	●	●
South-South cooperation for international development							●	●			●	●	
Sports		●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●
Yemen										●	●	●	●
Sudan										●	●		
Chemical Weapons Convention						●		●		●	●	●	●
Somalia							●		●				
Burundi							●						



ISSUES/AREAS FOR COOPERATION	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Support greater role in the UN for Brazil, India, and South Africa	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●
Peace in Azerbaijan-Armenian region.												●	
Central role of the G20	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Iraq						●	●	●	●			●	
South Sudan						●	●		●		●	●	
Supreme Audit Institutions								●	●		●		
Syria				●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Cooperation on Taxation (International, domestic standards)						●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Technical regulations, standards, metrology and conformity assessment and accreditation								●	●	●		●	●
Think tanks, Academia and research centres		●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Tourism				●	●		●	●	●	●		●	●
Trade & investment cooperation with BIMSTEC								●					
Trade in services								●	●				●
WTO-led trading order and Doha Development Agenda	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
WTO Reform	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Trade Unions							●		●			●	
Use of national currencies in BRICS transactions.							●		●			●	
Vaccine and medicine research development							●		●	●	●	●	●
Water								●		●	●	●	●
Women's economic empowerment								●	●	●	●	●	●
Youth exchanges			●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●





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# Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> In 2021, the BRICS grouping completes 15 years since its formation. It reached this milestone in the middle of a global pandemic and a complex geopolitical landscape. The agenda for the BRICS is set by the chair each year in consultation with the other BRICS nations. As per our analysis of the BRICS leaders' declarations for each year since 2009, there are nearly 100 issues that BRICS have tabled for discussion since inception (See Appendix 2 for more details). However, based on availability of relevant details this assessment report focuses on select areas that carry maximum significance for BRICS.
- <sup>2</sup> The Strategy for BRICS Economic Partnership, <http://www.brics.utoronto.ca/docs/150709-partnership-strategy-en.html>
- <sup>3</sup> The Strategy for BRICS Economic Partnership 2025, <https://eng.brics-russia2020.ru/images/114/81/1148155.pdf>
- <sup>4</sup> NDB's General Strategy: 2017-2021, <https://www.ndb.int/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/NDB-Strategy-Final.pdf>
- <sup>5</sup> New Development Bank Sustainable Financing Policy Framework Governing the Issuances of Green/Social/Sustainability Debt Instruments, [https://www.ndb.int/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/2020\\_FC22\\_AI13\\_018\\_b-NDB-Sustainable-Financing-Policy-Framework.pdf](https://www.ndb.int/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/2020_FC22_AI13_018_b-NDB-Sustainable-Financing-Policy-Framework.pdf)
- <sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Roche, "BRICS nations call for India Office of New Development Bank," *Live Mint*, 2 June 2021, <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/brics-nations-call-for-india-office-of-new-development-bank-11622634600083.html>.
- <sup>7</sup> State Corporation Vnesheconombank, "BRICS Bank Consortium to collaborate on Blockchain," *Finextra Research*, 27 July 2018, <https://www.finextra.com/pressarticle/74892/brics-bank-consortium-to-collaborate-on-blockchain>
- <sup>8</sup> The MOU was signed during the Annual Financial Forum, organised under the aegis of BRICS Interbank Cooperation Mechanism. Retrieved from <https://globalprimenews.com/2019/11/13/exim-bank-of-india-along-with-other-member-development-banks-of-brics-nations-signed-mou-for-mobilisation-of-private-investment-in-infrastructure/>
- <sup>9</sup> Brics Inter-Bank Cooperation Mechanism, <https://brics-ibcm.org/>
- <sup>10</sup> Treaty for Establishing BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement, 2014
- <sup>11</sup> "BRICS consider Alternative SWIFT Funds Transfer System," *Anadolu Agency*, 17 June 2015, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/brics-consider-alternative-swift-funds-transfer-system/35300>.
- <sup>12</sup> Regulations on Customs Cooperation Committee of the BRICS, 2016
- <sup>13</sup> Xu Wei, "BRICS states sign Strategic Framework for Customs Cooperation," *Yicai Global*, 5 September 2017, <https://www.yicaiglobal.com/news/brics-states-sign-strategic-framework-for-customs-cooperation>.
- <sup>14</sup> South African Revenue Service, "BRICS members to strengthen customs co-operation," 19 April 2018, <https://www.sars.gov.za/media-release/19-april-2018-brics-members-to-strengthen-customs-co-operation/>
- <sup>15</sup> Annexure II to the 7th Meeting of the BRICS Trade Ministers Statement, 2017
- <sup>16</sup> Master Agreement on Extending Credit Facility in Local Currency under BRICS Interbank Cooperation Mechanism and the Multilateral Letter of Credit Confirmation Facility Agreement between our EXIM/Development Banks
- <sup>17</sup> <http://nadt.gov.in/writereaddata/MenuContentImages/BRICS636945735644990294.pdf>
- <sup>18</sup> Annexure IV to the 7th Meeting of the BRICS Trade Ministers Statement, 2017

- <sup>19</sup> Annexure III to the 7th Meeting of the BRICS Trade Ministers Statement, 2017
- <sup>20</sup> “BRICS leaders fail to reach consensus on Credit Rating Agency,” *Indian Express*, 17 October 2016, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/brics-leaders-fail-to-reach-consensus-on-credit-rating-agency-3086326/>.
- <sup>21</sup> New BRICS STI Architecture, [http://brics2019.itamaraty.gov.br/images/documentos/The\\_New\\_BRICS\\_STI\\_Architecture%20Steering\\_Com%20mittee%20Final\\_19\\_9\\_19.pdf](http://brics2019.itamaraty.gov.br/images/documentos/The_New_BRICS_STI_Architecture%20Steering_Com%20mittee%20Final_19_9_19.pdf)
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