

CONFERENCE REVIEW NOTES

BRICS DEVELOPMENT THROUGH SOCIALLY RESPONSIVE ECONOMY

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DOI: 10.21684/2412-2343-2018-5-3-152-159

Recommended citation: Elena Gladun, *BRICS Development Through Socially Responsive Economy*, 5(3) BRICS Law Journal 152–159 (2018).

Introduction

The 10th BRICS Academic Forum, consisting of scholars, think tanks and non-governmental organizations from Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, took place in *Johannesburg, South Africa* on 28–31 May 2018. The event was hosted jointly by the BRICS Think Tank Council (BTTC) and the South African BRICS Think Tank (SABTT) with the support of the South African government and the National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS) as the SABTT custodian and coordinator.

Under South Africa's direction as chair of BRICS, participation at the Academic Forum was extended to other African countries as part of the Africa Outreach Initiative: Angola, Burundi, Ethiopia, Gabon, Namibia, Uganda, Togo, Rwanda and Senegal accepted invitations. Participants commended the efforts made by China during its turn as chair of BRICS to promote BRICS cooperation and suggested working together to strengthen the three-wheel-driven areas of economy, peace and security, and people-to-people exchanges.

For the final four days of May, Johannesburg became a vibrant intellectual capital offering for the Academic Forum participants much debate and discussion, plenary sessions and side events all united under the theme "Envisioning Inclusive

Development Through a Socially Responsive Economy.” The 2018 Academic Forum focused on the topics most important for the BRICS group ranging from peace and security, energy, gender relations and health to regional integration. The Forum was a complete success with broad consensus and submitted a list of recommendations for the consideration of the leaders of BRICS.

1. Background of the BRICS Academic Forum

The first meeting of the BRIC think tanks was organized in 2009 in New Delhi, India, later redesigned as the Academic Forum and officially approved in 2010 during the BRIC countries second summit in Brazil (the “S” in BRICS for South Africa was added in 2011). The Forum was conceived as a channel for academia and civil society with regard to issues related to these five countries. Since then, the BRICS Academic Forum has taken place on a regular basis. Over time, the Forum has evolved into a broad framework of discussion giving it its significant intellectual integrity.

The core objective of the Forum is to encourage academic and research interest, bring together collective knowledge and expertise, and, in this way, shape the intellectual remit of intra-BRICS discussions. Today the BRICS Academic Forum is an annual event preceding the BRICS Summit in the host country. At the annual forums academicians from the five countries deliberate on issues of crucial importance to BRICS, speak on important themes and develop ideas and recommendations.¹ The Academic Forum has become a platform for academicians and researchers in which to exchange knowledge and forge closer cooperation for knowledge generation and dissemination.

The BRICS Academic Forum is an important initiative, as it provides one of the channels through which civil society can make explicit its views about relevant issues. Also, it is a platform where experts and scholars from the academic communities of the member countries meet and are engaged in the free exchange of ideas and thematic discussions. In this respect, the Forum has three main objectives: (1) to deepen collaboration in respect of research of mutual interest; (2) to establish networks between the academic and civil communities; and (3) to provide the BRICS leaders with a research resource in respect of issues under discussion at the BRICS Summit. The aim is therefore to encourage academic exchange, strengthen dialogue with civil society as well as provide policy advice.

The year 2018 marks the coming of age for the BRICS nations as the start of the second Golden Decade of BRICS cooperation and solidarity. Over the past ten years, BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) have intensified their cooperation in their political, economic and social agendas. Indeed, BRICS represent the explicit case of the democratization of the inter-state system and oppose Western and U.S.

¹ Observer Research Foundation. Events (Sep. 10, 2018), available at <http://www.orfonline.org/research/brics-academic-forum-2016/>.

dominance of global governance. Keeping this in mind, South Africa extended the Academic Forum participation to the BRICS+ pattern, which positively affected the scenario and results of the Forum.

2. Summary of the 10th BRICS Academic Forum

The Forum, which annually brings together top academicians from each of the BRICS countries to address some of the developing world's most pressing socio-economic challenges and to propose actionable solutions, took place at the Sandton Convention Centre in Johannesburg from 28 to 31 May 2018.

The Forum theme "Envisioning Inclusive Development Through a Socially Responsive Economy" allowed participants to discuss and elaborate many issues, with a focus on the following:

- Gender and inequality in BRICS;
- Economic prosperity in the 21st century;
- Health coverage in BRICS;
- Comprehensive social protection, agriculture and food security in BRICS;
- Governance, peace and security;
- BRICS education, scientific and productive sectors;
- Education exchange;
- Global South knowledge commons;
- Energy research in BRICS.

The opening address for the Forum was given by Naledi Pandor, the South African Minister of Higher Education and Training. Welcoming remarks to the participants were offered by Ari Sitas, Chairperson of SABTT, Ivan Oliveira, Director of International Studies of the Institute for Applied Economic Research (Brazil), Georgy Toloraya, Executive Director of the Russian National Committee on BRICS Research (Russia), Samir Saran, President of the Observer Research Foundation (India) and Dong Weihua, Deputy Secretary General of the China Council for the BRICS Think Tank Cooperation (CCBTC).

The theme of injustice was particularly evident at the second plenary devoted to "Gender and Inequality in BRICS." As Gao Hao from the Chinese delegation pointed out, inclusivity is beneficial not just for women but for the economy as well. "Research shows that if gender equality and women's empowerment are realized in most countries, the global GDP bonus will reach 28 trillion dollars," she said.

The key speakers at the plenary were distinguished researchers and public figures – Joana Mostafa (economist and civil servant in the government of Brazil, and specialist in social policy and gender research at the Institute for Applied Economic Research), Victoria Panova (Vice President for International Relations of the Far Eastern Federal University, Russia), Tanoubi Ngangom (associate fellow with the Climate Change and Development Initiative, India), Gao Hao (with the International Department All-China Women's Federation, China), and Lulama Nare (from the Commission for Gender Equality, South Africa).

Victoria Panova highlighted the need for the BRICS group to advance its work towards enhancement of the voice and representation of women in order to promote an open, inclusive and balanced economic globalization. The Russian proposal at this session to establish the BRICS Women's Business Club for professional communication of women entrepreneurs was supported by the BRICS partners; moreover, participants expressed the necessity of holding such events on a regular basis. This shows the deep interest BRICS women have in sharing relevant experiences and overcoming challenges together. Russia also put forward the idea of establishing the BRICS Public-Private Dialogue "Women and Economy."

The opening day sessions were followed by three days of discussion divided into eight sessions. The Forum assembled best practices, ideas and suggestions aimed at bringing closer together BRICS group cooperation and shared governance. The blueprint of Session 1 "Rethinking Economic Prosperity in BRICS, and 21st Century Manufacturing and Financial Initiatives for Sustainable Development" was changes in the dominant patterns of global trade witnessed in the early 21st century. Growth in the economic process and political influence of emerging market nations in the global arena is a ubiquitous trend in international relations. The researchers argued that BRICS have intensified the coordination of their economic, political and social agendas, including increased trade. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, BRICS call for the democratization of the inter-state system and oppose Western and U.S. dominance of global governance. Yaroslav Lissovlik (Managing Director for Research and Chief Economist of the Eurasian Development Bank, Russia) outlined several trajectories of BRICS+ cooperation in the financial sphere. One such area is mutual policy coordination with respect to international financial organizations. Other promising areas include those related to the use of national currencies in cross-country transactions as well as the creation of common payment systems encompassing BRICS and their regional partners.

The session participants proposed a strategy which may include measures to boost trade and investment among BRICS+ (cooperation between the respective RTAs to create broader scope for the use of national currencies), cooperation between development institutions in using national currencies to fund investment and long-term projects, creation of common payment card systems and common settlement/payment systems, as well as cooperation in promoting BRICS+ currencies towards reserve currency status.

Another highlight was the discussion surrounding how universal health coverage (UHC) can be achieved in the BRICS countries. That was the focus of Session 2 "Towards Universal Health Coverage in BRICS." It began by addressing the elephant in the room, which is that the developing world still has a long way to go in terms of ending epidemics such as AIDS, tuberculosis (TB) and malaria by 2030.

Inclusive development requires a focus on responsive socio-economic policies that promote health care and healthy populations. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) situate health as a key feature of human development,

emphasizing that social, economic and environmental factors influence good health and health inequalities. Aquina Thulare, senior technical specialist on Health Economics for National Health Insurance (NHI) in the National Department of Health, South Africa, proposed that a Virtual Innovation and Knowledge Sharing Platform be developed to promote intra-BRICS and inter-sectoral research and development. To achieve universal health coverage as agreed in the U.N. 2030 Agenda, it is important that systems for innovation to improve access to medicines and knowledge-sharing as well as systems for monitoring and evaluating progress towards UHC are institutionalized.

Session 3 "Comprehensive Social Protection, Agriculture and Food Security in BRICS" raised issues of access to water and food in BRICS. Insecurity of food and unequal distribution of water rights are active drivers of instability and violent conflicts. These crises are no less evident in BRICS. Studies addressing the crises in BRICS are localized, making the articulation of water and food policy for BRICS as a body a necessity.

For example, Alexandra Arkhangelskaya, researcher at the Centre of Southern African Studies, Institute for African Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Russia, in her presentation "Comprehensive Approach to the Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities in the BRICS Countries," argued that BRICS not only put forward a new world order, but also set a new stage for social protection. Yet, in the middle of global policy dialogues disability care, rights and readiness get little or no attention. The emergence of BRICS as an actor in global health governance was considered an opportunity to reduce the vulnerability of global health financing being dependent on a single source or country.

Session 4 "Governance, Peace and Security" was more than important in the Forum agenda because questions of development and solidarity are a crucial heritage for BRICS to build upon. At the session, Eduardo Gomes, Director of the BRICS Research Center, Brazil, commented on Brazil-China relations within BRICS. Georgy Toloraya in his presentation "BRICS Peace Efforts: Steps to New Global Normality" explained the need for remaking an equal world and reducing the moral deficit, and the need for the creation of global governance institutes and practices with more just representation. "Establishing a mechanism to exclude unilateral actions or defiance of established norms is vital," he said. Ideally, a new global *New Westphalian* system might be a step forward, not backward, in providing public goods in international security and peace preservation.

The session question *How to increase BRICS's role in global governance?* was answered by proposals to launch the pilot project on BRICS Prevention of Conflicts Institution-Building, which could address not BRICS-related issues, but local conflicts in the "area of responsibility" of the BRICS members (Africa, CIS, Latin America, South Asia and East Asia). Also, an official Working Group or Conflict Prevention Center might be established to review issues upon the request by the parties to the conflict. At some stage "terms of reference" for preventive diplomacy may be adopted as guidelines at the official level. These efforts should concentrate in areas historically connected to each of the BRICS

countries, where conflict parties are reluctant to engage with global conflict-resolution institutions (heavily influenced by the USA) or a single “dominating” power.

Session 5 “Leveraging the Collective Strengths of the BRICS Education, Scientific and Productive Sectors” was opened by Minghao Shen (of the Institute for International Strategies, China) who emphasized that the BRICS countries have their own characteristics, but they share common aspects including huge development potential, a fast economic growth rate, surging growth in the number of college students and in the scale of R&D funding as well as the constantly upgrading of their industrial structures. In these terms, it is vitally important first to understand the relationships between enterprises, universities, research institutes and applications, and then resolve problems through the appropriate measures.

Thaiane Oliveira (Fluminense Federal University, Brazil) proposed to undertake a study on international cooperation between the countries during the last ten years through the Dimensions Platform, based on the incidence of co-authoring and co-funding of research agencies from the five BRICS countries, highlighting the following points: the networks that consolidate the international cooperation among BRICS, the areas that emerge from the co-authorship and how research networks have been developed in the five strategic areas defined in the Cape Town BRICS statement.

Carla Carvalho (Professor at the Geochemistry Department, Fluminense Federal University, Brazil) in this context came up with an integrated initiative at her university to promote excellence in the training of human resources through courses and scientific research development on Climate Change focused on South America. Also, a group of Brazilian researchers proposed the creation of the SACC Graduate Program (South America Climate Change – from the past to the future) aimed at the training of national and international students, with the focus on regional issues from South America (Paleo) Climate Change and comparison with observed changes within ongoing studies in Asia and Africa, where collaborators from the BRICS countries are based.

An important question was posed by Russia during the discussion about leveraging the collective strengths of the BRICS nations in educational, scientific and productive sectors. Leonid Grigoryev of the Russian delegation said that it was critical to ask whether we are producing innovations or importing them. Thaiane Oliveira from Brazil suggested that the BRICS countries might need to invest in more open access platforms to improve the visibility of their scientific research. The greater need for building collaborations and synergies in the cognitive sciences was emphasized by Varun Sahni from the Indian delegation, who pointed out that challenges such as climate change and water scarcity cannot be solved by science and technology alone.

Echoing the important issue of education, Session 6 “Advancing BRICS Creative Powers for Education Exchange” discussed the need for the BRICS countries to boost education cooperation in different areas of the BRICS countries’ excellence programs.

Boris Martynov, Head of Department of International Relations and Foreign Policy of Russia at MGIMO University, Russia, delivered a presentation titled “Advancing BRICS Creative Power for Educational Exchange.” He noted that,

The supreme task is to contribute to the profound transformation of the whole of the world politics and economy, which cannot be realized without a complex revision of many basic, philosophic problems of modern being and, accordingly, without their proper innovations, introduced in the education systems of our states.

The esteemed researcher considered the next step in the development of the BRICS idea to be the creation of a new education infrastructure which will correspond to the new realities.

Valeriya Gorbacheva (of the Institute for African Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Russia) at Session 7 “A Case for Accessible Global South Knowledge Commons for Forward-looking and Impactful Research in the BRICS” explained that vibrant academic activity forced the development of public and youth diplomacy in the BRICS countries and also gave impetus to important decisions on Track 1: establishment of the BRICS Network University and the BRICS University League, launch of common Internet Platforms, development of inter-media cooperation among the BRICS countries, increasing educational and academic exchanges, extension of engagement between civil society, BRICS sports activities, volunteer movements, development of cultural diversity, etc., together with ministerial working groups on science, technology and innovation, cybersecurity, e-commerce, the environment, energy efficiency, interbank cooperation, and more.

Session 8 “Energy Research in BRICS” described the current state of the generation of renewable energy in Brazil, assessing how the development of this sector may help Brazil deal with its commitments under the Paris Agreement; discussed tools for mobilizing greater energy investment and financing in BRICS; debated opportunities to cooperate in energy development among the BRICS members and between BRICS and Africa; and proposed opportunities and policy recommendations to catalyze private capital flows within the Indian nation.

3. Recommendations of the 10th BRICS Academic Forum

The outcome of the 10th Academic Forum was the “Recommendations to the 10th BRICS Leaders’ Summit,” a document released during the closing ceremony. The document included the following recommendations:

- 1) Joint deep research to ensure that the trade and economic regimes serve to create livelihood and job opportunities for all.
- 2) Further cooperation between the BRICS countries to ensure the multilateral trading system meets the new demands of the evolving global trade situation.
- 3) The establishment of a Forum on Women’s Equality.
- 4) Networks of Smart Manufacturing Hubs in the BRICS domain for pooling together knowledge, technology and new ideas and for constructing new and interconnected economic frontiers.

5) Relevant cooperative initiatives and joint projects that are highly compatible with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and can serve as important impetus to the sustainable development of participating countries.

6) The establishment of an African Academy for Development and Beneficiation. In this, the BRICS countries and BRICS-related tertiary institutions and experts would participate in assisting in the creation and the definition of priorities for such an Academy.

7) The establishment of a Vaccination Research Platform to respond to disease challenges.

8) The development of a cooperative Food Security-Driven MSME's Programme which would link agrarian production, small-scale manufacturing and servicing the nutritional integrity of our peoples.

9) A "new" revolution integral to the post-school and higher education sectors that reinforces synchronized cross-national curricula to facilitate knowledge-sharing and collaborative efforts in universities and vocational training institutions in BRICS.

10) A series of initiatives, namely: the creation of (a) the BRICS Astrophysics and Space Research Scientific Committee, (b) a Joint R&D Research Platform and (c) the establishment of an advanced-studies international institute on South American, African and Eurasian social challenges.

11) The launch of the BRICS Energy Research Platform for joint research to provide actual and quality information on key trends in the energy sector.

12) The creation of a BRICS Centre for Policy Research on Energy, Innovation and Sustainable Development as a flagship project of the BRICS Think Tank, the BRICS University system and Departments of Energy.

13) The establishment of a BRICS Institute of Peace Research as a flagship project of the BRICS University system.

14) The idea of the creation of a multilateral BRICS Research Consortium that should be thoroughly discussed within BTTC by the time of the next Academic Forum.

The next BRICS Academic Forum will be hosted by Brazil in 2018.

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