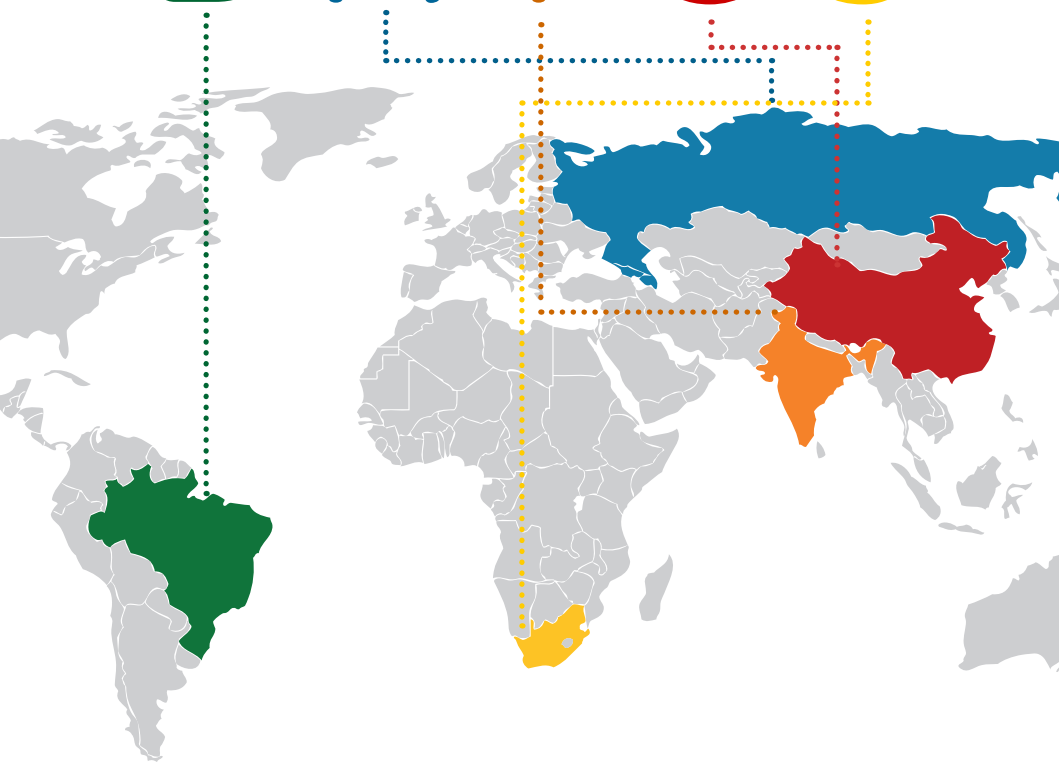


Women in the

BRICS



INEQUALITIES, CONTRADICTIONS AND CHALLENGES

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Women in the BRICS

Inequalities, contradictions and challenges

The world has changed substantially in recent years. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall in the early 1990s, several battles have been slowly eroding the unipolar power of the United States. This is leading towards a more multi-lateral system of global governance.

The social movements mobilised initially by the cycle of United Nations social conferences and, shortly after, the fight against free trade and investment treaties played a key role in strengthening the human rights agenda and the resistance to agreements such as the Multilateral Agreement on Investments (MAI) and the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), as well as the consolidation of the liberalising agenda of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Bolstered by the struggles of the 1990s and the early 2000s, some governments acquired the strength to confront the Washington Consensus and the hegemonic neoliberal model and to expand multi-lateralism in the global arena.

Even though the neoliberal agenda has suffered important defeats since the late 1990s, it has taken advantage of the 2008 economic and financial crisis to resume its offensive. It is revealing once again the force of its expansion, its domination of the economy and political control.

It was also in the context of the global crisis that the interests of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa converged and the economic bloc of the BRICS was created. Due to their economic weight and the size of their foreign exchange reserves, the BRICS have seen their bargaining power and their role in the decisions on the global financial architecture increase. Furthermore, the adoption of a critical position vis-à-vis the international financial system and in the geostrategic reconfiguration of the global scene has strengthened the bloc.

Even so, the BRICS' political and economic guidelines have still not been clearly defined. As a result, they have been the subject of much debate and the object of dispute, not only among the governments of the member countries, but also transnational corporations and, increasingly, civil society organisations. The impacts of the global crisis are now affecting the BRICS countries, causing their growth rates to decline, just as those of the more developed countries have.



Women in the BRICS

The role of women in the world, and in the countries of the Global South in particular, have also undergone important changes in recent decades. This is especially true in relation to women's growing participation in the labour market and power structures.

The advance of industrialisation, particularly through the globalisation process, transformed production and "fuelled the urbanisation process ...[These elements, together with the decline in fertility rates observed in less developed countries as well,] ...increased women's chances of finding jobs in society. The dawn of the urban-industrial society brought change to all social classes in Brazil and the rest of the world"¹.

Even so, the majority of women have not broken the interdependence between family life and work. As a result, women's work in the home continues to be invisible, as do the inequalities that mark their integration into production. Women all over the world confront common problems such as domestic and sexual violence, the lack of guarantees of their sexual and reproductive rights, wage gaps between men and women, their concentration in the informal labour market and the other

¹ Pereira de Melo, Hildete. "Building Equality in Brazil" in **Development and Gender in the Global South**, Instituto EQUIT. 2015. Available from <http://www.equit.org.br/novo/?p=1559>



forms that the various inequalities, and gender discrimination in particular, assume. These issues are strongly present in the BRICS countries, which are not exempt from this reality. On the contrary, data reveal that profound inequalities exist in these countries.

In light of this common issue, we believe that the BRICS - countries that have proven to be important in the dispute over what course of development the Global South will take - offer us an opportunity to further the debate on these inequalities and to strengthen the efforts of civil society in these countries in order to tackle these social ills.

In our view, we must fight to define the political and economic path the BRICS will take. To do so, greater coordination among civil society in these countries is needed and, in this case, among women's and feminist movements in the BRICS and others countries. For this, initial information is required on the situation of these women and the main challenges they face in their countries. We would like to contribute by providing data that we feel is important to gain an initial understanding of the social context in the BRICS countries, their development model and the daily struggle waged by the women of these countries to care for life and sustainability.



Introduction

In 2001, Jim O'Neill, the chief economist of the Goldman Sachs international financial group at the time, coined the term “BRIC”: the acronym formed from the initials of Brazil, Russia, India and China. It was to indicate a group of emerging nations that shared common economic characteristics and clearly had the potential to challenge the existing world economic order by acting as a counterweight to the dominant economies of the G-8 or the G-20 and directly influencing the configuration of global governance. In the paper entitled “Building Better Global Economic BRICs”, O'Neill affirmed that these countries' economies could be among the most important ones on the planet in fifty years time².

² O'Neill, Jim. Building Better Global Economic BRICs. **Global Economics Paper No. 66**, November 2001. Goldman Sachs.



In September 2006, the first meeting of foreign ministers from the BRIC countries was held in parallel to the 61st session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in New York. After a few meetings of ministers and heads of state in 2007 and 2008, the inaugural BRIC summit took place in Yekaterinburg, Russia. At the summit, the leaders of these countries stressed their commitment to work together to promote the reform of the international financial institutions and uphold the multilateral trade system.

In April 2011, encouraged by China and full backed by Russia, South Africa - the smallest country of the bloc in terms of population, territory and economy - became a member of the group, whose name was changed to 'BRICS'. Despite the intense debate generated by its adhesion to the group, the country was key for providing BRICS members access

to the African continent, which corroborated the idea of it being of great economic value.

The Fifth BRICS Summit was held in Durban, South Africa in March 2013. It marked the end of the first cycle of BRICS summits in which the countries reaffirmed their commitment to the promotion of international law, multilateralism and a central role for the United Nations. Since the bloc's institutionalisation, efforts have been undertaken to strengthen the political, economic and commercial ties within the group. Regular meetings of heads of state, ministers and senior officials, the creation of a business council, plans to establish a development bank, joint funding for infrastructure projects in Africa, among other initiatives, are part of the BRICS' agenda for cooperation.

The Sixth BRICS Summit was held in Fortaleza, Brazil on July 15th and 16th, 2014. There, social movements accompanied the main decisions made, one of which was the creation of the New Bank of the South. This important project will have substantial impacts on development processes in the BRICS countries.

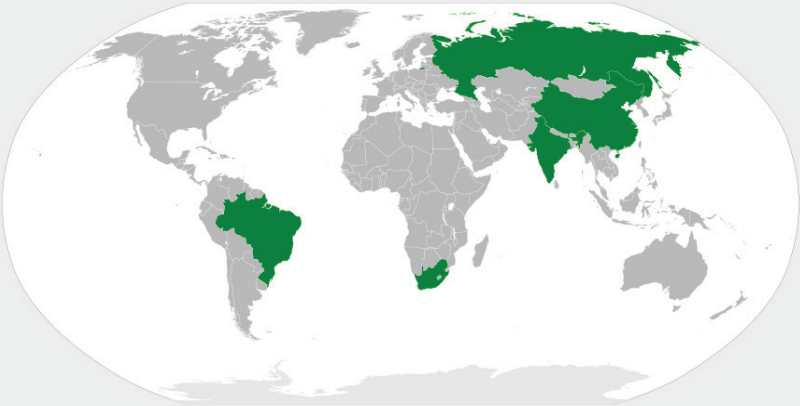
In 2015, the Seventh Summit took place in the city of Ufa in Russia. The results, however, were not very promising. While the agreements signed created expectations, the results and advances were few.

The 2016 Summit was organised in New Delhi, India. It was a critical moment for the future of the coordination of the BRICS, which have also been hit by the economic and financial crisis that continues to extend its reach and depth.

Achieving the comprehensive Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), making advances to meet the targets on climate change and ensuring that international trade negotiations continue in multilateral arenas, especially in the area of agriculture, will be some of the enormous global challenges that the BRICS will have to face in upcoming years.

It is still uncertain what direction the BRICS will take and how much influence they will have on the global geopolitical scene. Even so, we can clearly confirm that these countries will play an important role due to the size of their economies and population. In fact, it is expected that they will increase their efforts to multilateralise the international stage and pursue a course of development that strives to achieve equality and sustainability - that is, if they wish to end the poverty and inequalities that continue to plague their people.

Government, territory and population



	Localização	Capital	Governo	Moeda
Federative Republic of Brazil	South America	Brasília	President (head of state and government): Dilma Rousseff	Real
Russian Federation	Eastern Europe	Moscow	President (head of state): Vladimir Putin	Ruble
			Prime Minister (head of government): Dmitri Medvedev	
Republic of India	South Asia	New Delhi	President (head of state): Shri Pranab Mukherjee	Indian rupee
			Prime Minister (head of government): Shri Narendra Modi	
People's Republic of China	East Asia	Beijing	President (head of state): Xi Jinping	Renminbi
			Prime Minister (head of government): Li Keqiang	
Republic of South Africa	Southern Africa	Pretoria, Cape Town, Bloemfontein	President (head of state and government): Jacob Zuma	Rand

Source: IBGE Países - 2014

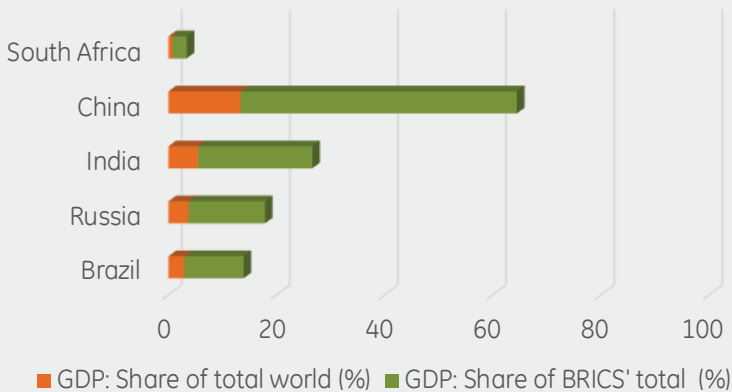
Territory and population

	Territory (km ²)	Population	Population density (inhab./km ²)	Average annual population growth rate (2010 - 2015)	Population residing in urban areas
Brazil	8.515.767,05	202.033.670	24	0,84%	85,4%
Russia	17.098.240	142.467.651	8	-0,10%	73,9%
India	3.287.260	1.267.401.849	386	1,32%	32,4%
China	9.600.000,5	1.393.783.836	145	0,42%	54,4%
South Africa	1.219.090	53.139.528	44	0,51%	64,3%

Source: IBGE Países - 2014

Economic development and trade

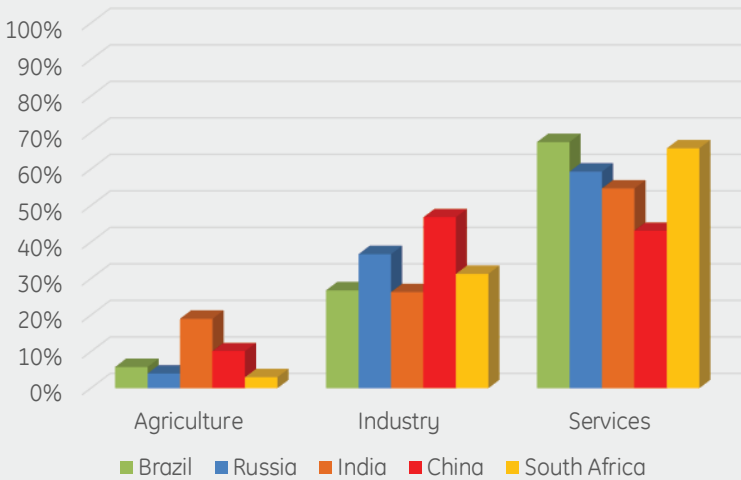
Share of total world GDP (%) and of total BRICS' GDP (%)



Note: Year of reference - 2010

Source: UNIDO-UNU (2012). Structural Change, Poverty Reduction and Industrial Policy in the BRICS.

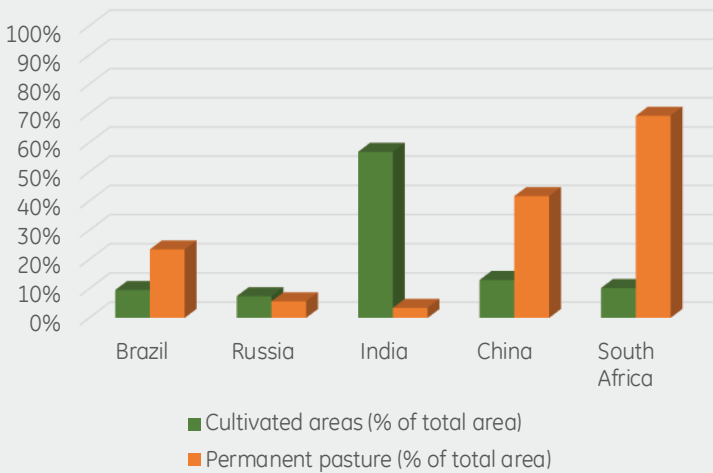
GDP by sector



Note: Year of reference - 2010

Source: UNIDO-UNU (2012). Structural Change, Poverty Reduction and Industrial Policy in the BRICS.

Agriculture

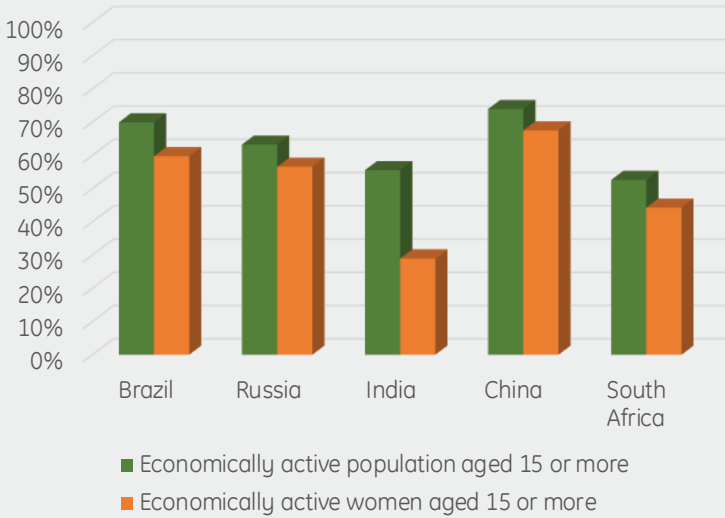


Note: The year of reference is 2012.

Source: IBGE Países (<http://www.ibge.gov.br/paisesat/main.php>)

Labour market

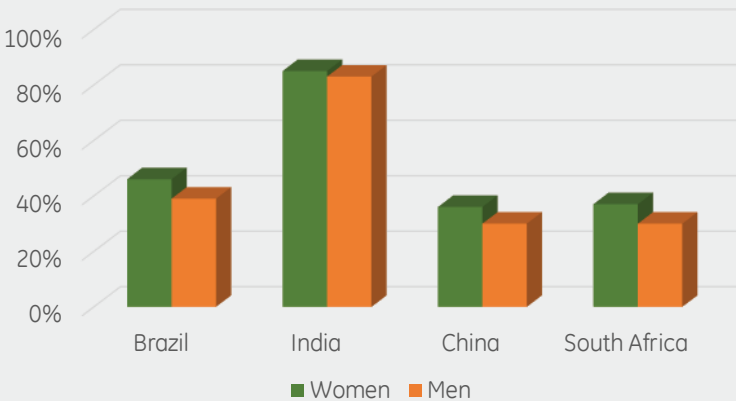
Economically active population



Note: Data from 2012.

Source: IBGE países (<http://www.ibge.gov.br/paisesat/main.php>)

Informal labour (% of non-agricultural work)

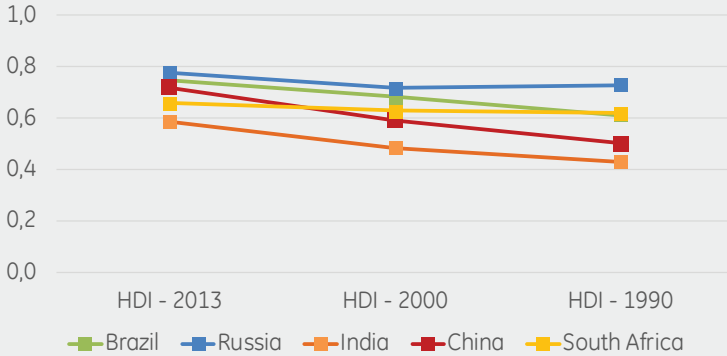


Note: Data for Russia are not available.

Source: World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report, 2013.

Social development

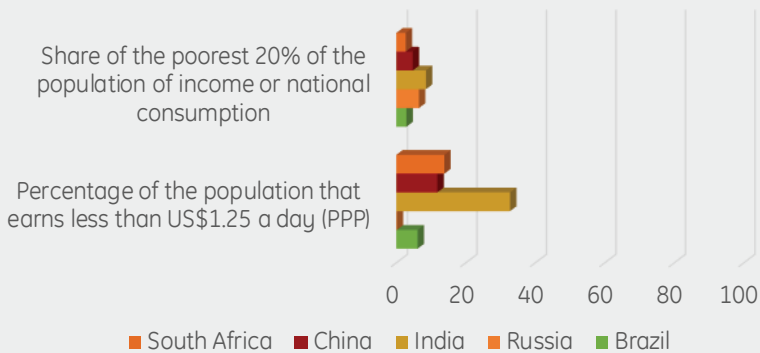
Human Development Index (HDI)



Note: 0 = Minimum human development / 1 = Maximum human development.

Note: The Human Development Index (HDI) is a summary measure of long-term achievements in the three basic dimensions of human development: income, education and health. The HDI was created with the goal of offering an alternative to GDP per capita, which only takes into account the economic dimension of development. Created by Mahbub ul Haq in collaboration with Indian economist Amartya Sen, the HDI is meant to be a general measure that summarises various elements and that, even though it widens the perspective on human development, it does not cover, nor exhaustively explore, all aspects of development. Source: UNDP Human Development Report 2014

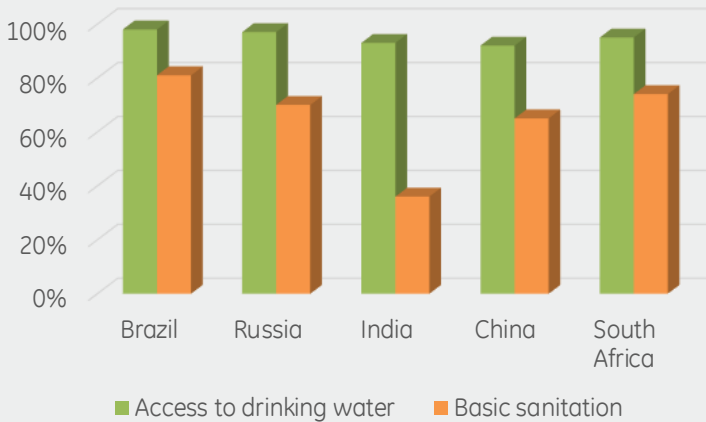
Income



Note: Data on Brazil, Russia, China and South Africa: 2009; India: 2010.

Source: IBGE países (<http://www.ibge.gov.br/paisesat/main.php>)

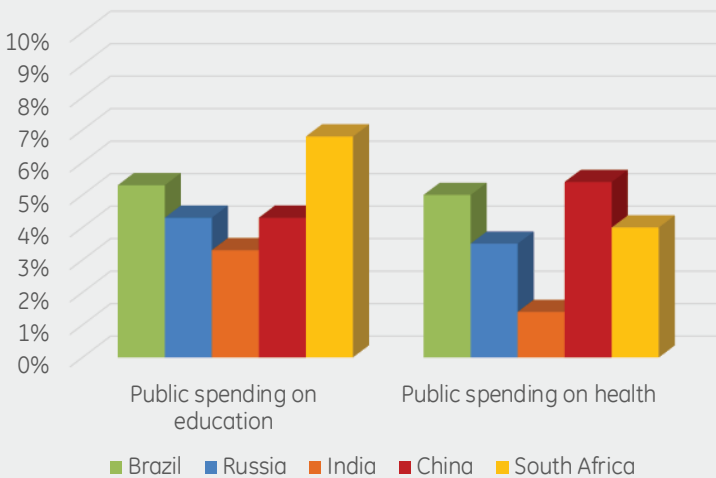
Percentage of the population with access to basic sanitation and drinking water (% of total population)



Note: 'Access to basic sanitation' refers to the percentage of the population that has adequate access to sewage disposal facilities that effectively prevent humans, animals and insects from coming into contact with sewage.

Source: IBGE países (<http://www.ibge.gov.br/paisesat/main.php>)

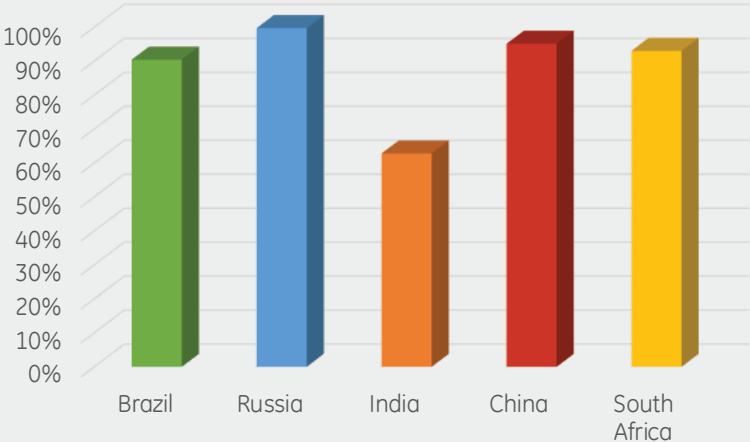
Public spending on education and health (% of GDP)



Note: Data on South Africa, 2011; Brazil, India and China: 2012; and Russia, 2013.

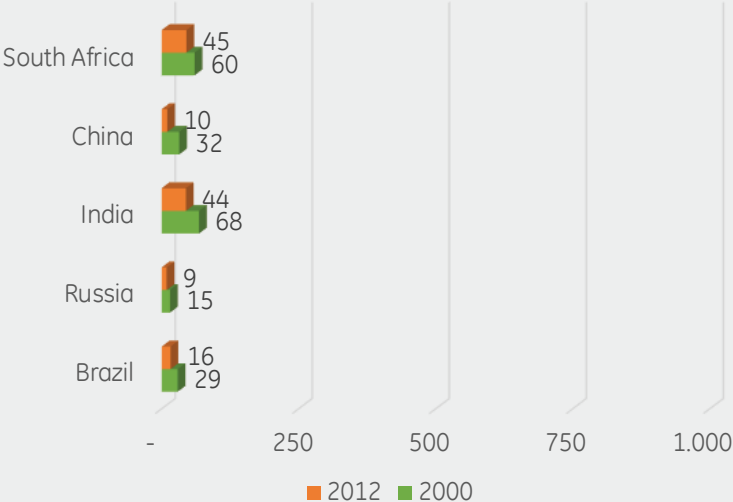
Source: BRICS Joint Statistical Publication 2014

Literacy rate



Note: Data from 2012.
 Source: IBGE países (<http://www.ibge.gov.br/paisesat/main.php>)

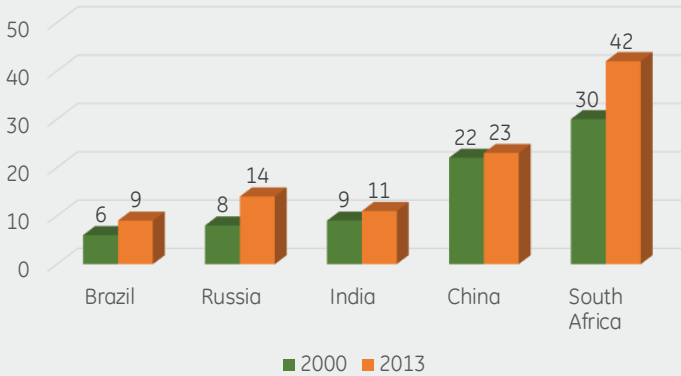
Infant mortality rate (under the age of 1 - per thousand live births)



Note: Data on South Africa: 2004 and 2012.
 Source: BRICS Joint Statistical Publication 2014.

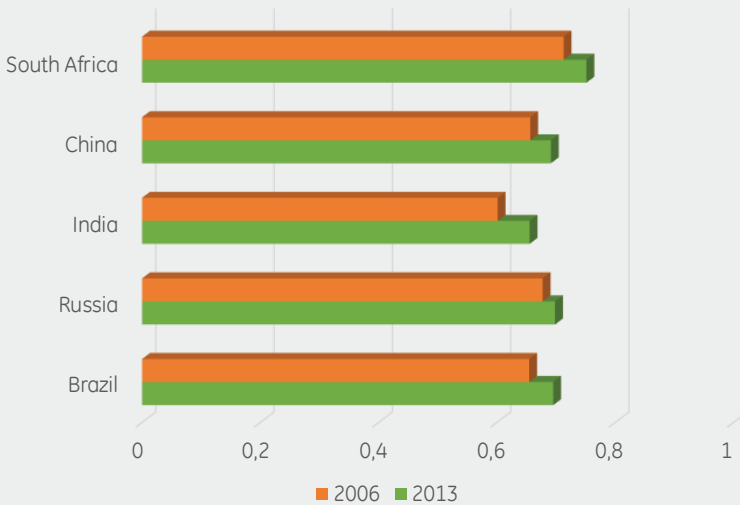
Data on women

% of women with seats in national parliaments



Source: World Bank| World Development Indicators.

Global Gender Gap Index (2006 – 2013)



Note: The index varies from 0 (most unequal) to 1 (most equal).

The Global Gender Gap Index examines the gap between men and women in four fundamental categories (subindexes): Economic Participation and Opportunity (outcomes on salaries, participation levels and access to high-skilled employment), Educational

Attainment (outcomes on access to basic and higher level education), Health and Survival (outcomes on life expectancy and sex ratio) and Political Empowerment (outcomes on representation in decision-making structures).Source: Global Gender Gap Report 2014 - World Economic Forum

Government mechanisms for public policies for women

Brazil	Secretaria de Políticas para as Mulheres (SPM)
Russia	Ministry of Labour and Social Protection
India	Ministry of Women & Child Development
China	National Working Committee on Women and Children under the State Council (NWCCW)
South Africa	Ministry of Women, Children and Persons with Disabilities

Ratification of the CEDAW - Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women

Brazil	Ratified
Russia	Ratified
India	Ratified
China	Ratified
South Africa	Ratified

History of the BRICS

Since 2009, BRICS heads of state have been meeting on an annual basis. Between 2009 and 2015, seven summits were held with all of the bloc's leaders in attendance:

First Summit: Yekaterinburg, Russia, 2009;

Second Summit: Brasília, Brazil, 2010;

Third Summit: Sanya, China, 2011;

Fourth Summit: New Delhi, India, 2012;

Fifth Summit: Durban, South Africa, 2013;

Sixth Summit: Fortaleza, Brazil, 2014;

Seventh Summit: Ufa, Russia, 2015.

Strategic issues for the BRICS in the main global debates

- Reform of the international financial institutions;
- Trade initiatives;
- Food security and agriculture;
- Climate change;
- Development cooperation with Africa and Latin America;
- Financing for development;
- Financial and tax regulations;
- Poverty and inequality.

Source: John, L., 'Engaging BRICS: Challenges and Opportunities for Civil Society', **Oxfam India Working Paper Series**, OIWPS - XII, Oxfam India, New Delhi, 2012

Other developments

The BRICS Bank

The New Development Bank (NDB) has generated both a lot of expectation and considerable scepticism since the idea of creating it as a new source of international financing or an alternative to institutions such as the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund was launched in 2012. This enthusiasm continued until the agreement to establish it was signed at the Sixth BRICS Summit in Fortaleza in 2014, which was an important step in the institutionalisation of the group. With its headquarters in Shanghai, China, the bank began its operations in 2016 with an initial subscribed capital of US\$50 billion. This amount is to be increased to US\$100 billion in the following years. Its objective is to fund infrastructure and sustainable development projects in signatory countries first and later, in other developing countries.

Membership is open to members of the United Nations in accordance with the provisions of the Agreement on the New Development Bank. Even so, a minimum of 55% of total voting power must remain in the hands of the founding members and no other country is allowed to have more voting power. Contrary to the vertical structure of the World Bank, each NDB member is assigned one vote and no country has veto power. In other words, Brazil, Russia, China, India and South Africa have equal weight in the bank's decisions.

According to Article 10, the members are represented politically by a board of governors, which is the highest decision-making body composed of government representatives from the ministerial level. The board of governors appoints the board of directors, which is responsible for conducting the bank's general operations. The president and vice-presidents are also appointed by the board of governors. They must observe and safeguard the interests of the institution, but they are accountable to the political bodies mentioned above that represent the countries. India was the first to assume the presidency, which will be passed to Brazil five years later. The bank's first regional office is located in South Africa. The first chair of the board of governors is from Russia and that of the board of directors, from Brazil.

Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA)

The Contingent Reserve Arrangement of the BRICS is a “virtual” reserve fund that, according to the treaty that established it, seeks to “forestall short-term balance of payments pressures, provide mutual support and further strengthen financial stability”. The fund has an initial capital of US\$100 billion, of which China is its largest contributor: it alone contributed US\$41 billion. Russia, India and Brazil committed US\$18 billion and South Africa, US\$5 billion. The countries hold these funds in their international reserves until a member country submits a request for support.

Limits on the maximum amount of the fund’s resources a member of the bloc can access are determined by applying a multiplier to the country’s individual contribution: China has a multiplier of 0.5; Brazil, India and Russia, a multiplier of 1; and South Africa, of 2. Each party may request support for up to 30% of its limit, provided it complies with the conditions, safeguards and necessary documents mentioned in Article 14 of the Treaty for the Establishment of a BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement. To access the amount that exceeds this limit (that is, the remaining 70%), a country must have an agreement with the IMF.

The CRA’s governance structure is composed of the Governing Council and the Standing Committee. The former is constituted by one governor and one substitute from each member state, which must be either finance ministers or central bank presidents. As for the Standing Committee, each country must appoint one director and one alternate director from the central bank. The Governing Council is in charge of strategic and high-level decisions, which are made by consensus, whereas the Standing Committee is responsible for executive-level and operational decisions. The country assuming the presidency of the BRICS also chairs both the Governing Council and the Standing Committee.

Civil society in the BRICS countries

It is clear that the direction the BRICS will take will be strongly connected to the actions of civil society in the countries of the bloc. There is an increasingly urgent need to analyse the similarities and differences in the composition of the social movements and the kinds of action they take in the BRICS countries in order to reflect on the role that the BRICS can play in not only global governance, but also the global changes that will take place in the years to come.

It is well known that the social organisations and movements in each of the countries of the bloc face an enormous diversity of situations. Difficulties range from control and cooptation to repression and criminalisation. The BRICS countries still have a long way to go to raise the standards of participation and democracy in their societies.

That said, and despite the major obstacles to increasing coordination among the BRICS further, the countries and their social organisations and movements have before them the possibility and the challenge of promoting such changes. The importance of these emerging countries joining as one voice that seeks to be heard in global arenas lies primarily in their goal to “strengthen a new formula for global governance”³. However, it is the dispute between these governments and their societies (and societies from other countries) on many political factors that will be key in defining the direction of the changes to be made and the victories that will be achieved in the process to democratise global governance.

The BRICS summits can serve as a reference point for coordinating joint civil society actions.

Experience in Brazil has shown that the participation of civil society in government decisions can lead to many advances, including greater political legitimacy, more effective policies, as they are more closely connected to citizens’ demands and needs, and the possibility of mediating conflicts. Spaces of participation allow a variety of social actors to be incorporated into the decision-making processes regarding public policy, instead of being open only to the social groups that traditional-

³ OLIVEIRA, Ivan and THORSTENSEN, Vera. **Os BRICS na OMC: Políticas Comerciais Comparadas de Brasil, Rússia, Índia, China e África do Sul**. IPEA, Brasília, 2012, p. 23.

ly influence decision-makers. Furthermore, social participation helps to strengthen democracy, as it is a mechanism that ensures public participation in, social control and democratic management of public policy and that public interest prevails.

The annual BRICS Summits of heads of state and government have been of tremendous value to the strengthening of the dialogue among social organisations and groups in these countries. However, an annual meeting alone is not enough. It is also necessary to follow-up and monitor the decisions and accompany and coordinate the proposals that emerge.

Therefore, the implementation of a mechanism for social participation, such as a “BRICS civil society forum” that has an active say in the bloc’s processes and initiatives, could be an effective way to lend legitimacy and strength to the BRICS’ decisions and actions.

The establishment of a mechanism of democratic social participation - representative and participatory - could be another effective line of work to advance in the bloc. This would contribute significantly to enhancing the legitimacy and effectiveness of the BRICS’ actions, not only in their own countries, but also on the regional and international scenes. Transparency in negotiations, access to information on the debates and decisions, and public funding for participation are fundamental principles to ensure a more diversified and sound participation.



Final Considerations

The initiatives to democratise global governance and to make international relations more multilateral have multiplied over the past decade. While the BRICS countries have played a fundamental role in them, this has not produced structural changes in the global economic-financial system.

Nonetheless, these countries can continue to advance on certain elements in various areas, ranging from the fight against poverty to changes in the global division of labour, financial regulations and the use of the dollar as the universal currency for global trade, among others. They can also strengthen the dialogue among themselves by seeking to identify convergences and increase cooperation in specific sectors, such as agriculture, education and the technological-scientific fields. They can also direct the NDB's funds to support sustainable development.

However, the direction and significance of these changes will mainly be the result of the participation of and pressure from civil society in the BRICS countries - that is, the interventions of their social movements. This is why the exchange of information and political coordination among civil society organisations in the BRICS countries are fundamental.

Women's participation and political coordination within and among the BRICS countries could be what guarantees that specific public policies designed to overcome the grave gender inequalities that permeate all BRICS countries and to advance towards more just and equitable global development are implemented.

It is clear that civil society in the BRICS countries must definitely assume the necessary tasks to build a multipolar world in which no one has hegemonic power - that is, a more democratic world.

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