

BRICS: TEN YEARS AND NEW CHALLENGES¹

Last year the BRICS group completed ten years. This milestone urges us to take a broad look at its achievements, potential, and limitations. The year 2020 brought numerous hazards both natural and man-made. Among them, there were events such as the Australian fires, Iranian crisis, arms control challenge, Brexit, ongoing Sino-American trade war and, most recently, the COVID-19 outbreak. These events brought about a stress-test to peoples, states, and international institutions. Established powers and institutions failed to provide genuine leadership during these multiple crises. Meanwhile the BRICS' history relates to a benevolent complementarity of the current multilateral institutions. These rising challenges pose new difficulties to the group, and require active role and leadership from the Big Five. Will this be possible? What elements are lacking to ensure the BRICS' capacity to respond to those challenges and to lead?

We have put together this issue of *Revista Tempo do Mundo (The Perspective of the World Review)* to analyze the past and to set the scene for the future. This thematic issue features ten articles discussing in depth different aspects of the BRICS group, especially in a context of widespread public health, economic and global governance crisis and commercial and technological tensions between the two major world powers (United States and China).

The current moment requires the use of all available tools to structure economic recovery. The BRICS have institutionalized important new tools – such as financing with the New Development Bank (NDB) – that already provide important response mechanisms. Yet, it still needs to consolidate others in energy and science and technology, as well as to establish new ones in areas such as agriculture, biodiversity and joint responses to global crises. The main challenges of BRICS states' foreign policies are to connect actions, both regarding global governance and cooperation among its members, with internal agendas of economic growth resuming and overcoming the global health crisis.

BRICS was created from a concrete demand of international reconfiguration. Since its creation in 2009, the grouping has achieved the remarkable accomplishment of bringing together every year five major emerging countries' heads of government

1. <https://doi.org/10.38116/rtm22pre>

located in different continents. This unprecedented political effort has shaped a very broad agenda, which increases with each presidency *pro tempore*. In their last joint statement in November 2019 in Brasília, the five BRICS countries agreed to 73 paragraphs of an extensive agenda of actions and intentions.

For its members, the grouping has remained as a relevant instrument for their global ambitions in different areas. Under different administrations, it has been an important space for building and reaffirming national interests. The BRICS' potential, however, is still underestimated by its members. It is still necessary to overcome a shared perception of division among its members. A means to provide it more functionality should start from a basic agenda that highlights what the five countries could gain from grouping. The new joint agenda should have this as a starting point.

Regarding the economic growth recovery in the short term, there are issues that the BRICS has relatively defined agendas, such as financing, energy, and science and technology. These, however, must be better executed. Other themes would need to be strengthened or structured, such as agriculture and food trade and the deepening of dialogue and cooperation on biodiversity.

During the Brasília Summit in November 2019, they reaffirmed the need for greater participation of developing countries in global value chains and in global governance. The five countries agreed to continue to cooperate at the G20 and to promote the interests of emerging markets (EMEs) and developing countries. They also stated that they are convinced that continued implementation of structural reforms will increase growth potential.

The announcements of concrete actions, however, were restricted to the opening of the NDB Regional Offices and their activities in member countries. In 2019 the Regional Office of the Americas was established in São Paulo, along with its sub-office in Brasília, and in 2020 two more NDB Regional Offices will be opened in Russia and India.

Special attention should be given to the BRICS Innovation Network (iBRICS) with the implementation of the New Architecture in Science, Technology and Innovation (ST&I), which will be implemented through the BRICS ST&I Steering Committee and the BRICS Energy Research Cooperation Platform to ensure that both instruments have synergistic actions with internal policies to growth recovery.

On 29 April 2020, the Extraordinary Conference of BRICS Foreign Ministers on COVID-19 was held by videoconference and chaired by the Russian Chancellor Sergei Lavrov. The conference was also attended by his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi, the Brazilian Foreign Minister, Ernesto Araujo, the Indian

Foreign Minister, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, and the South African Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Naledi Pandor. This initiative, although timid for its initial objective, revealed the will for cooperation between countries and could be repeated for the construction of a post-COVID-19 economic recovery agenda.

The decline of international trade and foreign direct investments as well as the outflow of capital are factors that reinforce the rising economic crisis. Part of the significant growth restrictions in Brazil and other countries is expressed in the external sector.

The post-COVID-19 economic recovery must focus on problems that are not just pandemic-related, and that worsen our long-term development prospects. The articles compiled in this issue of *Revista Tempo do Mundo* (*The Perspective of the World Review*) provide an analysis of the activities carried out by the grouping over the past decade and, at the same time, contribute to strengthen it at this difficult time for global governance and world economy.

The first five articles are contributions from participants of the BRICS Think Tanks Council (BTTC), one article from each member country, which address different and relevant issues of global governance and international cooperation. The article written by the Russians Georgy Toloraya and Victoria Panova discusses the panorama of global security, analyzing the actions of BRICS and the position of its five members. Zhao Zhongxiu and Lan Qingxin, from China, discuss BRICS cooperation on trade and development. H. H. S. Viswanathan and Mihir Swarup Sharma, from India, discuss the challenges of multipolarity and globalization, focusing on various institutions of global governance, and how BRICS are making efforts to overcome them. BRICS' broad social agenda, including social development, education, health and culture, and how BRICS's countries address them in comparative terms, is the theme of the contribution of the South Africans Godfrey Netswera, Jaya Josie, Philani Mthembu, Elias Phaahla, and Idah Makukule. Finally, the Brazilian Luis Claudio Kubota presents the progress of BRICS cooperation in ST&I over the years, highlighting the development of each country and comparing its evolution with other countries and blocs.

Revista Tempo do Mundo (*The Perspective of the World Review*) also brings in this issue five other articles submitted through our digital platform by authors from different research institutions. Krisley Mendes and André Araújo Luchine, from University of Brasília and Ipea, analyze the evolution, structure, and intensity of non-tariff measures (NTMs) affecting the trade of agricultural products between BRICS countries from 1995 to 2018. Ana Saggiro Garcia, from the Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro, assesses the institutional

arrangements, actors, and impacts of China's investments in Brazil, South Africa, and India. Karin Costa Vazquez, of the Fudan University (China), analyses the New BRICS Development Bank. Juan Sebastián Schulz, from the National University of La Plata (Argentina), assess the ten years of BRICS from the perspective of building a multipolar global government and the crisis of Western hegemony. Finally, Robson Cunha Rael of the International Security Research and Study Group of University of Brasília analyses the voting patterns of each member in the United Nations General Assembly resolutions on reform of the international order, inferring that the BRICS countries have common interests.

With this 22nd issue of *Revista Tempo do Mundo* (*The Perspective of the World Review*), Ipea seeks to fulfill its mission of producing and disseminating knowledge on key issues for strategic decisions of the Brazilian State and to strengthen the dissemination of the debates held within the BRICS Think Tanks Council, chaired by Ipea in 2019. It is expected that these ten articles can contribute both to the analysis of the first ten years of BRICS and to the reflection of its challenges, which are even greater facing the different aspects of the current crisis. It also intends that those thoughts provoke further bolder ideas to consider by both, officials and epistemic community, to overcome COVID-ridden societies and achieve the world of common well-being, mutual respect and understanding.

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