BRICS PLUS: ENHANCING MULTILATERALISM AND MACROECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

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From its genesis in the early 2000s to the present, BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) has evolved into a purposeful alliance advocating for reforms in major multilateral institutions. This paper analyses the macroeconomic landscape within BRICS, emphasizing the strengthening of partnerships, burgeoning trade, and strategic economic collaborations among its members. The expanding influence of BRICS is examined through the lens of the recent addition of six new members, including, Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, aiming to unite countries representing 30% of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 43% of global oil production.[3] While presenting opportunities for economic growth and geopolitical influence, this expansion also poses challenges in aligning diverse interests. The paper scrutinises the potential impact of BRICS Plus on global markets, emphasising its potential to realign international trade and finance and its role in shaping the future of global supply chains. Brazil and India, the two largest BRICS economies following China, and their consecutive Group of Twenty (G20) Presidencies, can play a crucial role in shaping the internal structure of BRICS Plus and the group's international standing. Thus, the paper delves into the intricate dynamics of India-Brazil ties within BRICS, considering the historical context, economic collaborations, and strategic partnerships. The study concludes by highlighting BRICS' potential to catalyse inclusive and sustainable global development, addressing challenges, and navigating uncertainties through diplomatic collaboration and shared objectives – the untapped potential within BRICS beckons, positioning it as a transformative force in international economic relations.

Keywords: BRICS; global governance; geopolitical influence; India-Brazil ties; BRICS Plus Six; sustainability.

BRICS PLUS: FORTALECENDO O MULTILATERALISMO E OPORTUNIDADES MACROECONÔMICAS

Desde sua gênese no início dos anos 2000 até o presente, o BRICS (Brasil, Rússia, Índia, China e África do Sul) evoluiu para uma aliança com propósitos definidos, advogando por reformas em importantes instituições multilaterais. Este artigo analisa a paisagem macroeconômica dentro do BRICS, enfatizando o fortalecimento de parcerias, o aumento do comércio e as colaborações econômicas estratégicas entre seus membros. A influência crescente do BRICS é examinada através da recente adição de seis novos membros, incluindo Argentina, Egito, Etiópia, Irã, Arábia Saudita e Emirados Árabes Unidos, com o objetivo de unir países que representam 30% do produto interno

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3. At the time of writing this paper, Argentina was expected to join the BRICS. However, following the change of government in Argentina, they withdrew their membership. The figures and statistics used in the paper refer to BRICS Plus Six, including Argentina.

bruto (PIB) global e 43% da produção global de petróleo. Enquanto apresenta oportunidades para crescimento econômico e influência geopolítica, essa expansão também apresenta desafios em alinhar interesses diversos. O artigo escrutina o impacto potencial do BRICS Plus nos mercados globais, enfatizando sua capacidade de realinhar o comércio e as finanças internacionais e seu papel na modelagem do futuro das cadeias de suprimentos globais. Brasil e Índia, as duas maiores economias do BRICS após a China, e suas presidências consecutivas no Grupo dos Vinte (G20), podem desempenhar um papel crucial na formação da estrutura interna do BRICS Plus e na posição internacional do grupo. Assim, o artigo explora as dinâmicas intricadas das relações Índia-Brasil dentro do BRICS, considerando o contexto histórico, as colaborações econômicas e as parcerias estratégicas. O estudo conclui destacando o potencial do BRICS para catalisar um desenvolvimento global inclusivo e sustentável, enfrentando desafios e navegando incertezas através da colaboração diplomática e objetivos compartilhados – o potencial inexplorado dentro do BRICS convida, posicionando-o como uma força transformadora nas relações econômicas internacionais.

Palavras-chave: BRICS; governança global; influência geopolítica; laços Índia-Brasil; BRICS Plus Six; sustentabilidade.

BRICS PLUS: POTENCIANDO EL MULTILATERALISMO Y OPORTUNIDADES MACROECONÓMICAS

Desde su génesis a principios de los años 2000 hasta el presente, BRICS (Brasil, Rusia, India, China y Sudáfrica) ha evolucionado hacia una alianza con propósitos definidos que aboga por reformas en importantes instituciones multilaterales. Este documento analiza el panorama macroeconómico dentro de BRICS, enfatizando el fortalecimiento de asociaciones, el comercio en aumento y las colaboraciones económicas estratégicas entre sus miembros. La creciente influencia de BRICS se examina a través de la reciente adición de seis nuevos miembros, incluidos Argentina, Egipto, Etiopía, Irán, Arabia Saudita y los Emiratos Árabes Unidos, con el objetivo de unir países que representan el 30% del producto interno bruto (PIB) global y el 43% de la producción global de petróleo. Mientras presenta oportunidades para el crecimiento económico y la influencia geopolítica, esta expansión también plantea desafíos en alinear intereses diversos. El documento escudriña el impacto potencial de BRICS Plus en los mercados globales, enfatizando su capacidad para realinear el comercio y las finanzas internacionales y su papel en la configuración del futuro de las cadenas de suministro globales. Brasil e India, las dos economías más grandes de BRICS después de China, y sus presidencias consecutivas del Grupo de los Veinte (G20), pueden desempeñar un papel crucial en la configuración de la estructura interna de BRICS Plus y en el posicionamiento internacional del grupo. Por lo tanto, el documento se adentra en la dinámica intrincada de los lazos India-Brasil dentro de BRICS, considerando el contexto histórico, las colaboraciones económicas y las asociaciones estratégicas. El estudio concluye destacando el potencial de BRICS para catalizar un desarrollo global inclusivo y sostenible, abordando desafíos y navegando incertidumbres a través de la colaboración diplomática y objetivos compartidos – el potencial sin explotar dentro de BRICS invita, posicionándolo como una fuerza transformadora en las relaciones económicas internacionales.

Palabras clave: BRICS; gobernanza mundial; influencia geopolítica; lazos India-Brasil; BRICS más seis; sostenibilidad.

JEL: E6; F1; F5.

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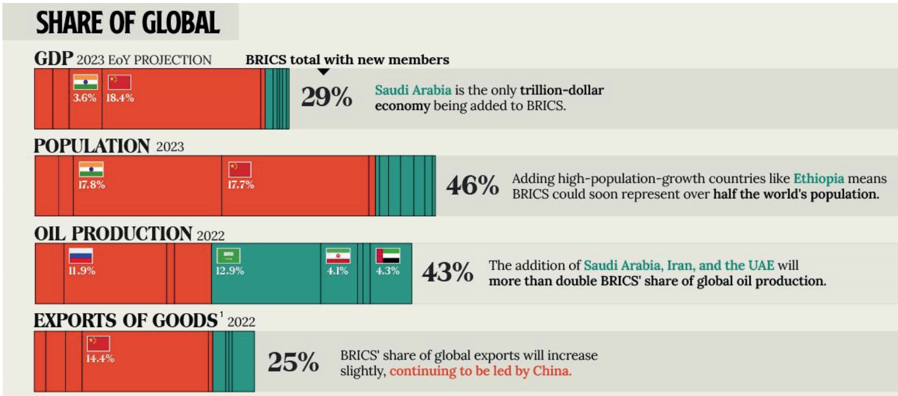
1 INTRODUCTION

In the present global panorama, the course of multilateral institutions is undergoing a decisive shift, and the BRICS alliance stands as a critical player in this transformative journey. As we explore the realms of trade, investment, and finance within BRICS, we find ourselves navigating the intricacies of an ever-evolving geo-economic and geopolitical paradigm. The roots of the BRICS initiative can be traced back to the early 2000s when Brazil, Russia, India, and China formed a loose consortium known as BRIC (Ali et al., 2018). However, South Africa's inclusion in 2009 solidified the alliance. The primary impetus behind this collaboration was a response to the shifting dynamics of the global economic landscape. A pivotal milestone in this trajectory was the establishment of the New Development Bank (NDB) in 2013, with an initial capital of US$ 50 billion (BRICS, 2014). The NDB was conceived as a credible alternative to existing financial institutions, reflecting the group's determination to challenge and reform the global economic landscape. Headquartered in Shanghai, the NDB has significantly increased its disbursements, catalysing infrastructure, and sustainable development across four continents, highlighting the commitment to collective action.

A major outcome of the 15th BRICS Summit at Johannesburg was the expansion of membership to include Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (Plessis, Miridzhanian and Acharya, 2023). Besides greater representation of the West Asian and African regions, the expansion also has serious economic implications for the group. In 2023, the collective Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the original BRICS members was forecasted to be US$ 27.6 trillion (Kienzle, 2023), constituting about a quarter of the global GDP. With the expansion, the combined GDP of these nations is projected to increase to US$ 30.8 trillion, accounting for nearly a third of the global GDP (Lu, 2023). Population-wise, BRICS, with its expanded membership, represents a substantial portion of the global population. This is primarily due to the massive populations of India and China. Additional members like Ethiopia and Egypt contribute significantly to this demographic footprint. In the realm of oil production, BRICS's influence is set to grow markedly. This is particularly notable with the inclusion of top oil-producing countries. The group's share of global oil production is anticipated to almost double.[4] However, Argentina pulled out of the grouping with a change in its presidency (Argentina…, 2023).

4. Available at: https://www.iea.org/news/growth-in-global-oil-demand-is-set-to-slow-significantly-by-2028.

FIGURE 1
BRICS Plus Six expansion



Source: Visual Capitalist (2023).
Obs.: Figure whose layout and texts could not be formatted and proofread due to the technical characteristics of the original files (Publisher's note).

The impact of BRICS is also felt in global trade. The expansion of the group is expected to increase its share in global merchandise trade exports from just over 20% to more than a quarter.[5] This growth in export share highlights BRICS's expanding role in international trade. BRICS's evolution, particularly with the addition of new members rich in natural resources and burgeoning economies, marks a significant development in global economic dynamics. It suggests a move towards a more diverse and multipolar international order, where the influence of established economic powers is balanced by the rise of emerging economies. This shift in the global economic landscape underlines the increasing importance and influence of emerging economies in shaping the future of international economic governance, trade, and diplomacy, signalling a move towards a more inclusive and balanced global economic framework.

The expansion of BRICS underscores the bloc's ambition to create a more balanced and multipolar world economy. Economically, it signifies an intent to forge stronger South-South cooperation, facilitating economic growth and development opportunities for both current and prospective member nations. By broadening its economic base, BRICS aims to amplify its voice in international economic discussions, challenging the dominance of Western economic paradigms and institutions. The emergence of BRICS in parallel with the decline in the hegemony of Western nations has reformed geopolitics, presenting the possibility of a counter-hegemonic bloc as BRICS strengthens its frameworks and institutions (Özekin and Sune, 2023). However, some scholars

5. Available at: https://www.wto.org/english/news_e/pres22_e/pr909_e.htm.

are critical of this view and believe the expansion of BRICS is enabled by the Western-led capitalist order. This strategic enlargement is anticipated to boost intra-BRICS trade and investment, leveraging the diverse economic profiles and complementarities among the member states. Furthermore, the economic analysis of BRICS expansion involves assessing the challenges and opportunities it presents in terms of policy coordination, trade negotiations, and addressing the disparities in development levels among member countries. It requires a nuanced understanding of how expanded membership will affect the existing dynamics within BRICS, including the potential for increased economic clout and the difficulties in harmonizing policies across a broader and more diverse membership base.

Thus, this paper delves into the implications of the BRICS expansion – analysing economic, partnership and sustainability outcomes. The economic analysis discusses the role of the expanded group in driving global growth and the associated challenges. It is pointed out how the Global South can lead towards a more inclusive, holistic growth. To facilitate higher growth, innovation and technological progress are imperative – highlighting the need for investment. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is usually preferred over debt or short-term investments which are more volatile and make the domestic currency susceptible to external risks. Thus, the role of foreign investments is discussed in detail, and how the expansion can enhance the cumulative investment drawing potential of the member nations. The emphasis on Global South leadership entailed a discussion on India-Brazil ties – the successive Group of Twenty (G20) Presidencies. The Global South needs to internalise the principles of sustainable development to allow for the decoupling of economic growth and resource depletion. BRICS has the potential to become a frontrunner of the sustainable growth phenomenon, portraying best practices to be adopted by other emerging economies. Thus, the 2030 Agenda is discussed in the context of this alliance and how sustainability can be promoted through innovations and collaboration.

Based on the review of the existing literature, the expansion of BRICS should be seen through its economic power, though the findings also underline its geopolitical relevance. Even if BRICS is able to gain more economic power, cohesion may remain a point of issue, as the inability of the member countries to work in unison may limit the strength of the community in world politics. It may prevent the group from making significant changes in the governance structure of the world, even though the size increases. As Carmody (2013) demonstrates, BRICS expansion into Africa realigns geopolitical and economic interests that challenge the historic dominance of Western countries, thereby creating new tension and competition in the region.

More generally, Hurrell (2006) and Paul (2016) give a context for how existing powers might react to the rise of new powers on the global stage. The two contend that the assertion of the BRICS group, most especially in its role as a counter-hegemonic bloc, is likely to trigger strategic reactions from Western countries for the purpose of keeping their traditional influence and control over international norms and institutions. This may be in the form of economic sanctions and diplomatic pressures – both things that are bound to complicate the undertakings of the BRICS in changing global economic policies. More so, Narlikar (2010) adds that, for a group of emerging powers such as the BRICS, a well-managed system of internal disparities and external challenges is also a requirement for the group to be successful. The incorporation of such diverse economies and politically significant members to expand the global footprint of the bloc comes with the same dimension of multiplying the risk of internal conflict and external pushback, hence further complicating the way forward for a more multipolar world. This requires careful management to ensure that the increasing size of the BRICS will indeed result in a positive and constructive change in the paradigm of international relations.

The existing literature addresses the potential risks associated with the BRICS not achieving its ambitious goals. Firstly, the lack of a clear expansion strategy and the challenges of maintaining consensus among an increasingly diverse membership could impede BRICS' effectiveness and cohesion. The process of integrating new members with varied economic and political agendas, as seen with the inclusion of countries like Egypt and Ethiopia, further complicates achieving a unified stance on key global issues (Klomegah, 2023).

Moreover, the expansion poses geopolitical risks. As BRICS becomes a more significant player on the world stage, its actions may provoke reactions from established powers, especially if the bloc appears to challenge Western dominance in international finance and trade.[6] The incorporation of major oil-producing countries into the bloc also raises questions about the balance between pursuing energy dominance and adhering to sustainable development goals (SDGs), a dichotomy that could strain internal unity and external relations (Klomegah, 2023). These dynamics highlight that while BRICS has the potential to reshape global economic and political structures, the path forward is fraught with challenges that could undermine its objectives. The success of BRICS in fostering a more balanced global order will depend significantly on its ability to manage these internal and external pressures effectively.

In the context of these challenges and opportunities, this paper aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the BRICS nations' economic strategies,

6. Available at: https://www.bcg.com/publications/2024/brics-enlargement-and-shifting-world-order.

their aspirations for global influence, and the challenges they face in fostering cohesive and effective cooperation. By highlighting the potential for enhanced economic integration and the pivotal role of strategic partnerships, it sets the stage for a deeper exploration of how these emerging powers can navigate the future, shaping the contours of international relations and economic policies in the process.

2 THE ECONOMIC OUTCOMES OF THE EXPANSION

In the evolving landscape of global economics and politics, the BRICS nations stand as a testament to the shifting paradigms of power and collaboration. This section delves into the intricacies of macroeconomic dynamics, FDI, and the strategic bilateral ties between these emerging economies. Extending this discussion, we also lay emphasis on the importance of the emerging India-Brazil ties in the context of the expanding memberships. As these nations navigate through the complexities of international trade, investment, and diplomatic relations, they collectively influence the global economic order, challenging established norms and advocating for a more inclusive and equitable world governance structure.

The narrative unfolds by examining the trade and investment flows within the BRICS, highlighting the critical economic dialogues and partnerships, notably between India and Brazil, and their impact on the group's overall dynamics. It further explores the significant increase in FDI within these countries, underscoring China's dominant role and the nuanced growth patterns across the bloc. The discussion extends to the strategic India-Brazil relationship, illustrating their collaboration across various platforms and their shared vision for a balanced global governance system.

Incorporating the analysis of BRICS expansion into the section adds a critical dimension to understanding the evolving dynamics within this influential bloc. The expansion of BRICS is not just a geopolitical manoeuvre but a strategic economic initiative that seeks to redefine the global economic architecture, diversify the centres of power, and introduce new avenues for trade and investment. The expansion has led BRICS to account for nearly 46% of the world population and over 35.6% of world GDP, which is significantly higher than the Group of Seven (G7) share (Afota et al., 2024). Further, higher projected growth rates of the emerging economies will lead to reduction in the divergence of income level between BRICS and the G7. Increased emphasis on the "Financial and Economic cooperation" pillar of BRICS can forge the way for greater intra-BRICS trade, stimulating key sectors like energy and information and communication technology (ICT).

This move is analysed in economic terms by evaluating its potential to enhance market access, increase the flow of FDI, and strengthen the collective bargaining power of emerging economies on the global stage. In subsection 2.3, we look at some important macroeconomic parameters of the BRICS Plus nations to gauge their potential for growth and how the group can collectively catalyse a convergence to higher income levels. Greater export orientation and leveraging each country's comparative advantage can reduce Western dependence and allow development of resilient and new-age supply chains.

2.1 Trade dynamics: towards economic growth

Examining the trade and investment landscape within BRICS unveils a tapestry of significant strides. The BRICS Plus held a 25% share of global exports in 2021, delineating the significant contribution of the group to global trade (Afota et al., 2024). The expansion has especially increased the group's share of energy commodity exports. Thus, with elevated control over energy trade, BRICS has the capacity to influence and partner with other developing economies to catalyse the growth of the Global South. An increase in the number of BRICS allies, in parallel with, the reduction in Western economic sway can make trade cheaper, by significantly reducing transaction costs and eliminating barriers to trade.

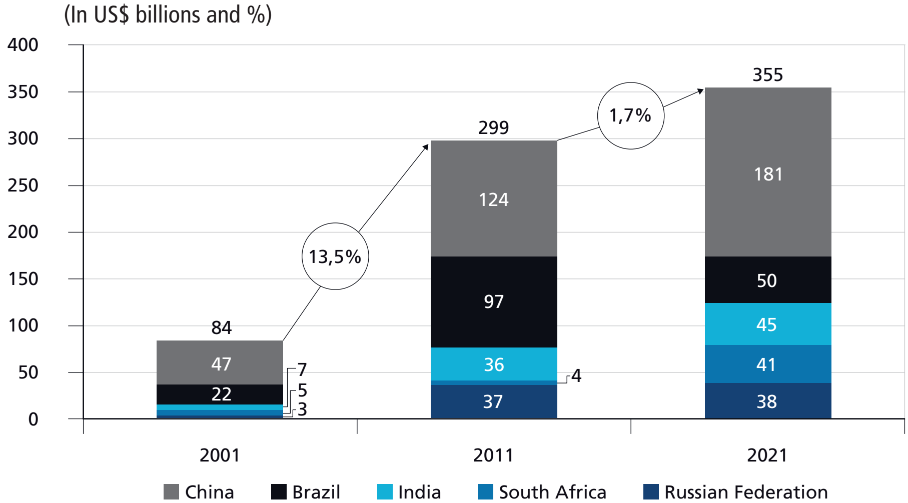
However, the diversity among BRICS countries challenges consensus-based decision-making, a complexity exacerbated by the group's expansion. The heterogeneity among BRICS Plus countries in terms of per capita GDP, current account deficit and international investment position does not allow them to adopt a unified policy framework. Unlike the G7, a single monetary policy or exchange rate regime is not currently applicable to BRICS plus. However, this also provides the opportunity to expand intra group trade to put the countries on convergent trajectories of growth. As of 2021, intra BRICS plus trade only accounted for 3.7% of global trade, indicating a significant gap for enhancing trade (Afota et al., 2024). Targeted trade policies and trade facilitating interventions like subsidies or tariff elimination can exponentially increase the volume of trade, providing a conduit to channel the demand of the entire BRICS Plus population. Moreover, the members can utilise the existing trade agreements of allies to gain entry into new markets and extract the benefits of freer trade. However, opening up of trade channels alone will not suffice to boost economic activity. There is need for supply side interventions and stimulation, achievable through greater investment and sharing of knowledge resources. This can be achieved through attracting greater FDI from multiple sources, discussed in the next subsection.

2.2 Foreign direct investments

According to the UNCTAD (2023), cumulative FDI holdings within the BRICS nations substantially increased from US$ 27 billion in 2010 to US$ 167 billion in 2020. This shift collectively represented 1.3% to 4.7% of their total FDI assets (UNCTAD, 2023), marking considerable growth. China played a predominant role, being the most significant contributor and recipient of FDI among BRICS nations. Moreover, Brazil and India also observed robust investment expansions from fellow BRICS members. In contrast, Russia experienced relatively modest growth, and South Africa witnessed a slight decrease in its intra-BRICS investment holdings.

The BRICS nations recognise the need to strengthen trade and investment cooperation to enhance the efficiency of global and regional supply chains (BRICS, 2020). The group aims to increase domestic economies through increased value added, which can be achieved through strengthened investment cooperation. Drawing in quality, direct investment requires capacity building of intra BRICS investment agencies. Thus, a regulatory framework can be put in place that provides best practices on monitoring and supervision of capital flows. Especially, direct investment into infrastructure development projects can be aided via innovative instruments from the NDB. Thus, it is also critical to innovate the investment instruments available with the NDB to attract foreign capital.

FIGURE 2
FDI inflows to the BRICS (2001-2021) and compound annual growth rate
(In US$ billions and %)



Source: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

While there has been an increase in intra-BRICS investment in recent years, there is still potential for further investment within the group, especially given the significant volume of intra-regional trade. Enhanced investment cooperation has the potential to be a crucial factor in expanding economic collaboration within the group, stimulating sustainable and inclusive domestic economic growth by increasing capital formation, facilitating technology transfer, and generating employment opportunities. Intra BRICS cooperation has become increasingly important in the last decade with the slowdown of global direct investment flows, denoted by the flight of capital back to the developed world. Thus, the countries need to assess and evaluate domestic characteristics to determine a sustainable investment plan, which can eventually enhance trade and in turn, economic growth.

As BRICS navigates the evolving global economic landscape, its progress in trade, investment, and finance underscores its significance as a transformative force. The establishment of the NDB and the deepening economic cooperation among member nations signals a commitment to reshaping global governance. With strategic partnerships, economic heft, and a proactive approach to integration, BRICS is not just a consortium but a dynamic entity shaping the future contours of international economic relations. The untapped potential and prospects beckon, presenting BRICS with an opportunity to catalyse inclusive and sustainable global development. In order to delve deeper into the national prospects presented by the expansion, the next subsection scrutinises in detail the macroeconomic landscape of the member nations.

2.3 Country-level macroeconomic analysis

2.3.1 Brazil

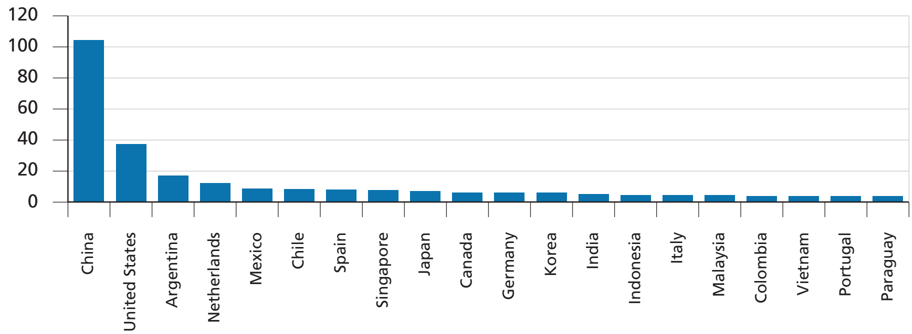
TABLE 1
Brazil's macroeconomic indicators

GDP (in current US$)	2.27 trillion
GDP per capita (in current US$)	11,030
Projected Real GDP Growth	1.7%
Inflation	4.5%
Unemployment Rate	8.2%
Current Account Balance	40.77 billion (deficit)
General Government Gross Debt (as a percentage of GDP)	90.3

Source: International Monetary Fund (IMF). Available at: https://www.imf.org/en/Countries/BRA.
Authors' elaboration.

The Brazilian President, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, expects the economy to grow by over 2%, while the central bank is targeting an inflation rate of 3%, with a margin of deviation of 1.5%. Declining interest rates should stimulate investment and start a new business cycle (Versiani, Romani and Madry, 2024). The Brazilian economy has shown great resilience in 2023 with an exceptional labour market recovery in the aftermath of covid-19, partly driven by a strong services sector. In 2024, growth is expected to be driven by multiple sectors – augmented with labour market resilience, lower inflationary pressures and various systemic reforms introduced in recent years (Kalish, 2024).

FIGURE 3
Brazil's top 20 export destinations
(In US$ millions)



Source: International Trade Centre (ITC). Available at: https://www.trademap.org/Country_SelProductCountry_Graph.aspx?nvpm=1%7c076%7c%7c%7c%7cTOTAL%7c%7c%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c2.

Further, as Brazil presides over the G20 Presidency, it has the opportunity to shape the economic landscape for the Global South. With the inclusion of the African Union into the G20 and the subsequent expansion of the BRICS membership, Brazil has two channels to influence the developmental priorities of the emerging market and developing economies. Brazil can strengthen its current account with the expansion by entering into favourable agreements with the new members, increasing its exports and lowering the import bill. There is scope to circumvent the global economic slowdown by shifting its exports away from China, towards countries with growing demand.

2.3.2 Russia

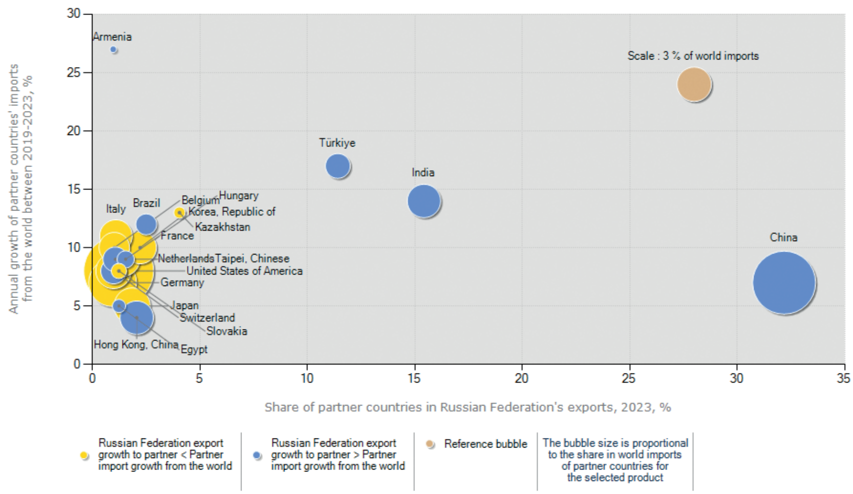
TABLE 2
Russia's macroeconomic indicators

GDP (in current US$)	1.9 trillion
GDP per capita (in current US$)	13,320
Projected Real GDP Growth	2.6%
Inflation	6.3%
Unemployment Rate	3.1%
Current Account Balance	75.73 billion (surplus)
General Government Gross Debt (as a percentage of GDP)	21.8

Source: IMF. Available at: https://www.imf.org/en/Countries/RUS.
Authors' elaboration.

Russia's growth rate was revised upwards from 1.1% to 2.6% given its increased military spending and the anticipated multiplier effect on the economy. However, sanctions imposed on Russia to curb its political and military finances have put a damper on the optimistic figure, revealing that this growth might not be sustained. Continued fiscal discipline in the Russian economy enabled them to maintain significantly low levels of government debt, which has now allowed them the freedom to disburse substantial amounts of defence funding.

FIGURE 4
Russia's export diversification potential
(In %)



Source: ITC. Available at: https://www.trademap.org/Country_SelProductCountry_Graph.aspx?nvpm=1%7c643%7c%7c%7c%7cTOTAL%7c%7c%7c2%7c1%7c2%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c2.
Obs.: Figure whose layout and texts could not be formatted and proofread due to the technical characteristics of the original files (Publisher's note).

Russia still needs to reorient its economic policies to boost and sustain consumption – which seems highly unlikely in the face of the Russia-Ukraine crisis causing mass emigration. Looking at its trade patterns, figure 4 shows the prospective countries for export diversification, in blue. Brazil, India, China, and now, United Arab Emirates, have not only maintained their ties with Russia, but also increased their share of imports. This highlights the need for Russia to leverage its position in the BRICS to utilise the economic strength of the expansion and grow its exports. Beyond trade, Russia also needs to invigorate its relationship with the nations to maintain its position as an economic power.

2.3.3 India

TABLE 3
India's macroeconomic indicators

GDP (in current US$)	4.11 trillion
GDP per capita (in current US$)	2,850
Projected Real GDP Growth	6.3%
Inflation	4.6%
Unemployment Rate (International Labour Organization – ILO)	4.7%
Current Account Balance	74.17 billion (deficit)
General Government Gross Debt (as a percentage of GDP)	82.3

Source: IMF. Available at: https://www.imf.org/en/Countries/IND.
Authors' elaboration.

India has the highest projected growth rate among the emerging market and developing economies. As it progresses towards the US$ 5 trillion GDP mark, there are two key issues that need to be addressed – the alarmingly low GDP per capita and the high dependence on imports. Initiatives like Make in India and the Production-Linked Incentive Scheme have heavily subsidised manufacturing to promote domestic industries and lower the country's current account deficit. Further, the country's increased focus on sustainable development, from both production and consumption ends, has placed it at a central position in the Global South, to spearhead the 2030 Agenda.

TABLE 4
India's export diversification from 2013-2023
(In %)

	Share of exports in overall	Share of exports in overall exports in FY23	Change
Traditional basket	19.3	12.4	- 6.8
Gems and jewelry	14.5	8.4	- 6.0
Textiles (excluding readymade garments)	4.8	4.0	- 0.8
High-value basket	23.6	32.1	8.5
Engineering goods	19.0	22.3	3.4
Electronic goods	2.7	5.6	2.9
Organic and inorganic chemicals	2.0	4.2	2.2

Source: Deloitte (2024).

As shown in table 4, the country has successfully transformed its export basket, and shifted in favour of high-quality, cost-competitive goods, to enhance its trade position. During its G20 Presidency, India prioritised digital transformation and gender equity as cross-cutting issues across all SDGs, solidifying its goal for unified world. With the expansion of the BRICS alliance, bringing in countries like the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, India can expect to ease its import costs and focus on prioritising services in the economy. This will enable sustained employment and further stimulate consumption.

2.3.4 China

TABLE 5
China's macroeconomic indicators

GDP (in current US$)	18.56 trillion
GDP per capita (in current US$)	13,160
Projected Real GDP Growth	4.6%
Inflation	1.7%
Unemployment Rate	5.2%
Current Account Balance	250.86 billion
General Government Gross Debt (as a percentage of GDP)	87.4

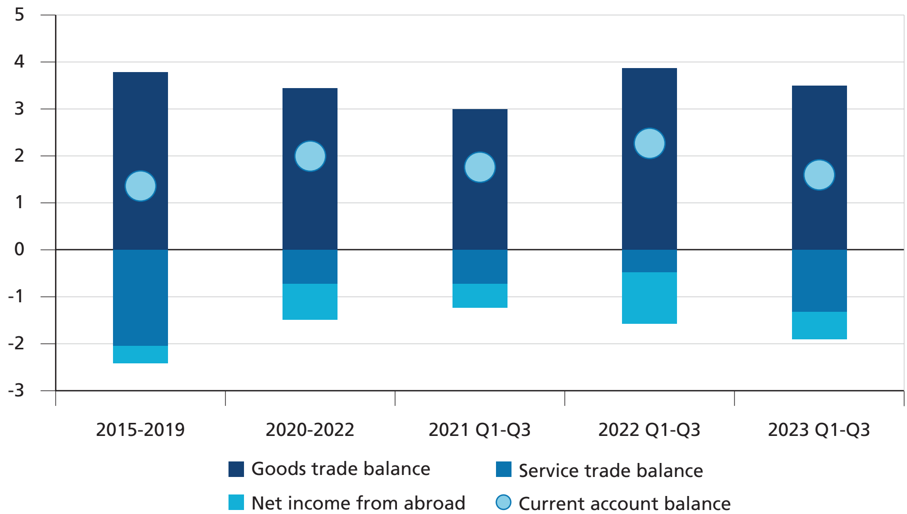
Source: IMF. Available at: https://www.imf.org/en/Countries/CHN#data.
Authors' elaboration.

Driven by growing services demand, public spending and manufacturing investment, the Chinese economy grew at an impressive 5.2% in 2023.[7] Exposed to the global economic slowdown and stagnant export demand, China is expected to have a less lucrative 2024. Domestically, consumer sentiments have still not picked up to the pre-pandemic levels and the real estate downturn stands as a serious impediment to growth. High levels of debt coupled with the ageing population often result in economic imbalances, threatening both short – and long – term prospects of the Chinese economy.

To combat these internal risks and the external disruptions, there is need for continuous policy intervention, which will also structurally reorient the economy. The BRICS alliance provides China a unique opportunity to establish itself as a cooperative partner and reintroduce itself in the global order as an ally instead of a competitor. This is imperative when the country's current account surplus is diminishing to pre-pandemic levels and the currency is coming under pressure from a stable US dollar. The alternative institutions and mutual interests offered by BRICS nations can provide China the much-needed avenue to restore its economic prowess.

7. Available at: https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2023/12/14/sustained-policy-support-and-deeper-structural-reforms-to-revive-china-s-growth-momentum-world-bank-report.

FIGURE 5
China's current account balance
(In %)



Source: World Bank.

2.3.5 South Africa

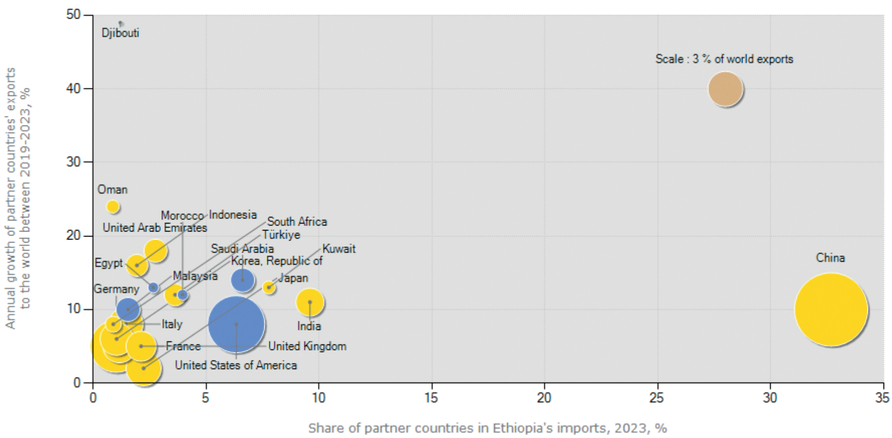
TABLE 6
South Africa's macroeconomic indicators

GDP (in current US$)	401.47 billion
GDP per capita (in current US$)	6,430
Projected Real GDP Growth	1.0%
Inflation	4.8%
Unemployment Rate	32.8%
Current Account Balance	11.14 billion (deficit)
General Government Gross Debt (as a percentage of GDP)	75.8

Source: IMF. Available at: https://www.imf.org/en/Countries/ZAF.
Authors' elaboration.

South Africa is projected to grow at a meagre 1%, in the face of burgeoning problems like high unemployment and profuse electricity load-shedding problems. To add to its macroeconomic vulnerabilities, South Africa is also impeded by its access to healthcare and struggling public institutions. Its upcoming G20 Presidency can be utilised to replicate the G20 mechanisms which promote public-private collaboration to improve delivery of public services, and this also includes healthcare. Moreover, high levels of public debt can weaken the consolidatory stance of the government, further reducing expenditure and limiting stimulus to the economy.

FIGURE 6
Public debt in South Africa
(In %)



Source: OECD (2023).
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On the external front, the country will face a dual problem – exports reducing due to weakening global demand and imports rising to meet capital needs for energy investment. Thus, as the trade balance worsens, it will need the other components of aggregate demand to mobilise growth. However, worsening fiscal deficit and low per capita income indicate that investment will have to be the primary driver of growth for South Africa. This is a timely opportunity for South Africa to leverage its upcoming G20 Presidency and the BRICS expansion to widen its exports basket, as well as, shift to cheaper import alternatives through trade agreements.

2.3.6 Argentina

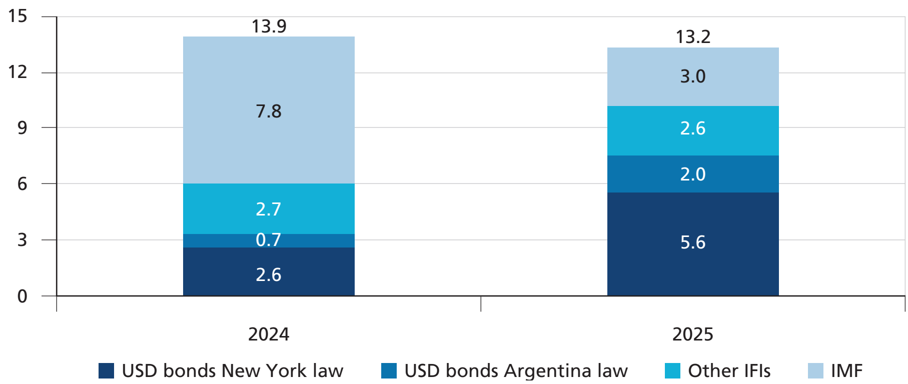
TABLE 7
Argentina's macroeconomic parameters

GDP (in current US$)	632.63 billion
GDP per capita (in current US$)	13,390
Projected Real GDP Growth	2.8%
Inflation	93.7%
Unemployment Rate	7.2%
Current Account Balance	7.3 billion (surplus)
General Government Gross Debt (as a percentage of GDP)	79.9

Source: IMF. Available at: https://www.imf.org/en/Countries/ARG#countrydata.
Authors' elaboration.

Although Argentina is projected to grow at 2.8%, the precarious inflation rate poses a serious threat to its economic stability. The new government in Argentina which retracted its BRICS membership, has declared its inclination towards austerity practices. Sharp decline in public expenditure will slow down economic growth and might also add to the unemployment woes. While an improvement in the current account is anticipated due to the recovery of agriculture and performance of the energy industry, they still face large sums of external debt as well as interest payments.

FIGURE 7
Argentina's public debt
(In US$ billions)



Source: Bianco et al. (2023).

Argentina's exit should be viewed as a missed opportunity to engage with the emerging economies and place itself in a comfortable position in the new economic order. The BRICS inclination towards alternative currencies and new institutions could have provided Argentina an opportunity to restructure its US dollar denominated debt.

2.3.7 Ethiopia

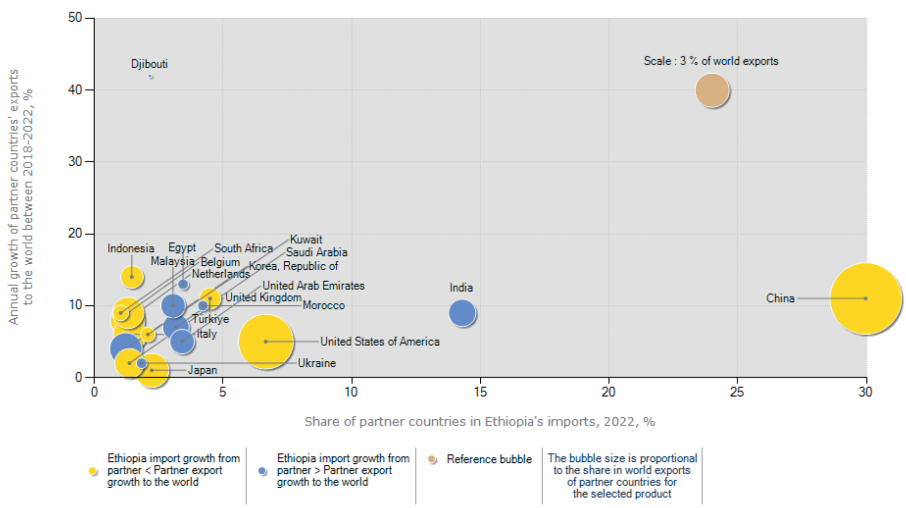
TABLE 8
Ethiopia's macroeconomic indicators

GDP (in current US$)	192.01 billion
GDP per capita (in current US$)	1,790
Projected Real GDP Growth	6.2%
Inflation	20.7%
Unemployment Rate (ILO)	3.3%
Current Account Balance	3.88 billion (Deficit)
General Government Gross Debt (as a percentage of GDP)	31.2

Source: IMF and ILO. Available at: https://www.imf.org/en/Countries/ETH.
Authors' elaboration.

Ethiopia, a landlocked country in East Africa, has the lowest per capita GDP among the BRICS Plus Six alliance, but is projected to exhibit a robust 6.2% real growth rate. Ethiopia grew at an average rate of 10% over the last decade,[8] driven by high savings and simultaneous investment in public infrastructure. Its economic potential makes it a great addition to the BRICS, as a representative of the African Union. However, in addition to its macroeconomic disparities, there are multiple other developmental problems that need to be addressed.

FIGURE 8
Ethiopia's import potential
(In %)



Source: ITC. Available at: https://www.trademap.org/Country_SelProductCountry_Graph.aspx?nvpm=1%7c231%7c%7c%7c%7cTOTAL%7c%7c%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c2.
Obs.: Figure whose layout and texts could not be formatted and proofread due to the technical characteristics of the original files (Publisher's note).

Multiple instances of conflict, low food security, lack of decent jobs and constraints on the private sector are the problems which require immediate policy intervention. Figure 8 shows Ethiopia's import patterns and its potential partners. It can be seen that countries like India, China, United Arab Emirates, South Africa, and Saudi Arabia reserve a large share in Ethiopia's imports. With its introduction to the BRICS, Ethiopia can fully utilise the economic cooperation aspect of the BRICS group and significantly improve its trade balance. Moreover, it can replicate the developmental frameworks adopted by India and Brazil to catalyse its own development trajectory.

8. Available at: https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/ethiopia/overview.

2.3.8 Egypt

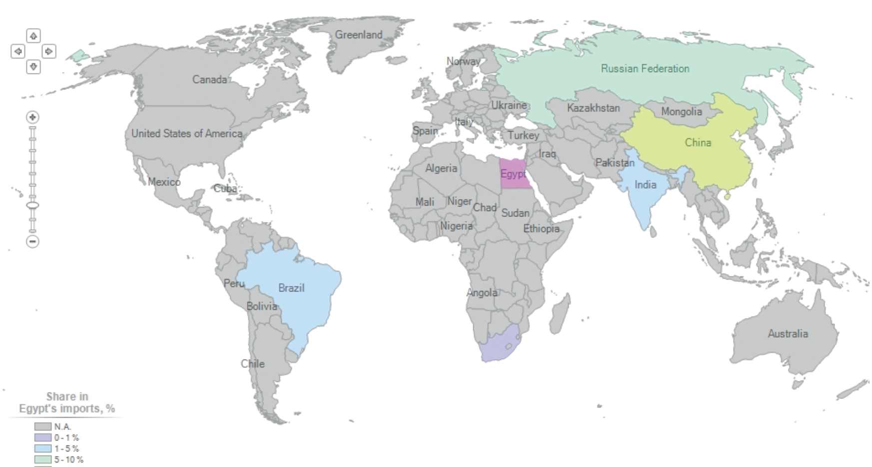
TABLE 9
Egypt's macroeconomic parameters

GDP (in current US$)	357.83 billion
GDP per capita (in current US$)	3,320
Projected Real GDP Growth	3.6%
Inflation	32.2%
Unemployment Rate	7.5%
Current Account Balance	8.629 billion (deficit)
General Government Gross Debt (as a percentage of GDP)	88.1

Source: IMF. Available at: https://imf.org/en/Countries/EGY#countrydata.
Authors' elaboration.

Egypt faces a range of economic problems – historically high inflation rates, high unemployment, a foreign exchange crisis and heavy external bills. The BRICS inclusion will present Egypt with a chance to attenuate its debt obligations and improve the current account structure. While Egyptian policymakers have introduced financial and macroeconomic instruments to alleviate the economic burden, BRICS can further provide knowledge and economic support to fasten its recovery.

FIGURE 9
Egypt imports from BRICS nations
(In %)



Source: ITC. Available at: https://www.trademap.org/Country_SelProductCountry_Map.
aspx?nvpm=1%7c818%7c%7c%7c6757%7cTOTAL%7c%7c%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c3.

High debt and inflation levels have continued to daunt Egyptian policymakers, at a time when public investment needs to be increased for domestic welfare. While the BRICS preference for alternative currencies can aid Egypt to ease its debt obligations, the BRICS nations can also gain from the multi-billion-dollar Egyptian renewable energy market (Helwa, 2024). Similarly, while agreements with BRICS countries can restore the tourism sector in Egypt, it also has a huge youth population which can be leveraged for economic growth in the region. Further, it can expect an expansion in its FDI inflows from BRICS nations for promotion of the renewable energy sector and a holistic development of the external sector. Its past failures with respect to pro-market strategies can be fixed under the aegis of BRICS.

2.3.9 Iran

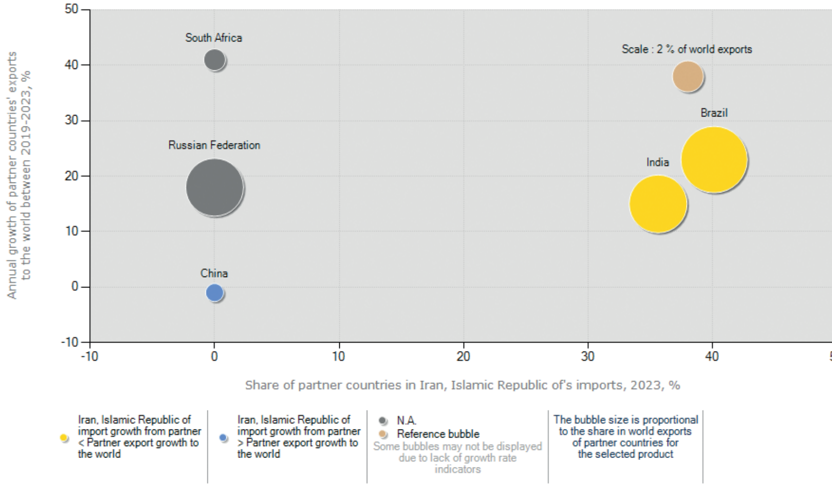
TABLE 10
Iran's macroeconomic parameters

GDP (in current US$)	386.22 billion
GDP per capita (in current US$)	4,420
Projected Real GDP Growth	2.5%
Inflation	32.5%
Unemployment Rate	9.6%
Current Account Balance	14.16 billion (surplus)
General Government Gross Debt (as a percentage of GDP)	30.5

Source: IMF. Available at: https://www.imf.org/en/Countries/IRN#countrydata.
Authors' elaboration.

Iran has the second largest reserves of natural gas and the fourth largest reserves of proven crude oil, making it a key player in the global energy market. Due to the imposition of external sanctions and energy price volatility, Iran has experienced a decade of economic stagnation. However, post-covid, the country's growth has rebound with a projected growth rate of 2.5% for 2024. While Iran is enjoying higher revenues from increased oil prices, its severe climate often places constraints on agricultural production. At a time when global food prices are skyrocketing, Iran might be looking at increased food security despite a positive external account.

FIGURE 10
BRICS share in Iran's imports of cereals
(In %)



Source: ITC. Available at: https://www.trademap.org/Country_SelProductCountry_Graph.aspx?nvpm=1%7c364%7c%7c%7c6757%7c10%7c%7c%7c2%7c1%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c2.
Obs.: Figure whose layout and texts could not be formatted and proofread due to the technical characteristics of the original files (Publisher's note).

Iran can ensure food security by leveraging its energy resources with the BRICS nations. India and China are major exporters of cereals and can significantly lower Iran's food uncertainty. Moreover, Iran can seek developmental assistance in terms of knowledge products to adapt to the impacts of climate change. Long term agreements can be worked out among the BRICS nations to ensure a fruitful and economically beneficial partnership.

2.3.10 Saudi Arabia

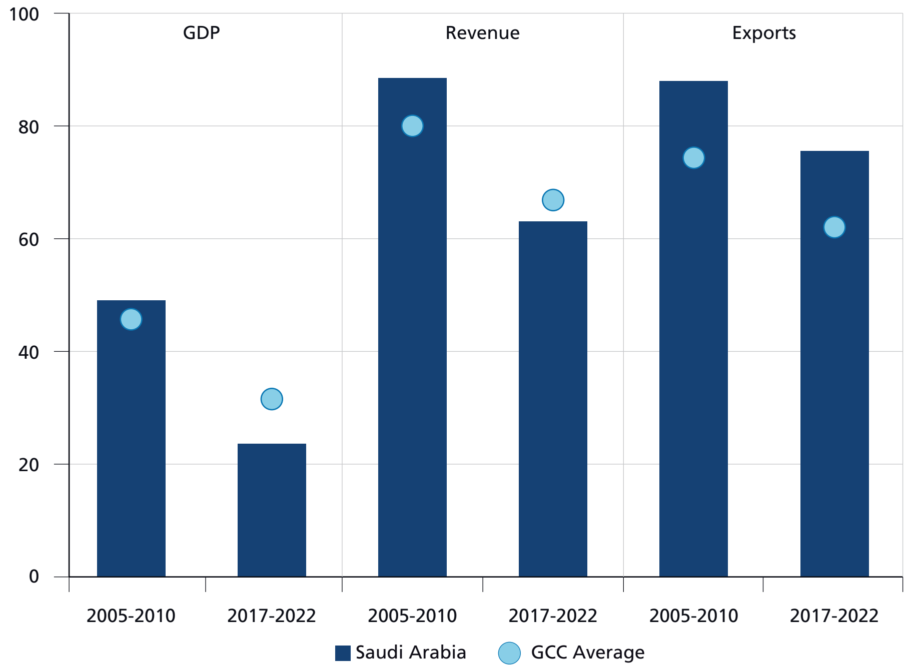
TABLE 11
Saudi Arabia's macroeconomic indicators

GDP (in current US$)	1.11 trillion
GDP per capita (in current US$)	33,140
Projected Real GDP Growth	4%
Inflation	2.2%
Unemployment Rate (ILO)	4.8%
Current Account Balance	59.86 billion (surplus)
General Government Gross Debt (as a percentage of GDP)	22.4

Source: IMF. Available at: https://www.imf.org/en/Countries/SAU.
Authors' elaboration.

Although the Saudi economy contracted in 2023, owing to decline in oil production and slowdown in investment activity, it is expected to grow at a healthy rate in 2024. Policies directed at the transformation of the economy to reduce oil dependence are being implemented. To promote investment, necessary diversification has been made in the regulatory frameworks governing businesses. The growth of the non-oil sector needs to be driven by strong domestic demand and parallel investment to sustain the growth.

FIGURE 11
Saudi Arabia's oil dependence
(In %)



Source: IMF. Available at: https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2023/09/28/cf-saudi-arabias-economy-grows-as-it-diversifies.

With the inclusion of Saudi Arabia in BRICS, the nations championing Global South leadership can comfortably reduce oil uncertainty and tame inflation. Further, Saudi's oil supply can be successfully directed towards correct markets, reducing the demand-supply divide. Although no immediate transformations are expected in the order of business of these nations, alignment of Gulf countries into the BRICS can positively affect the financial performance of these countries through the NDB. Better business and investment opportunities will also allow the services sectors in Saudi Arabia to flourish.

2.3.11 United Arab Emirates

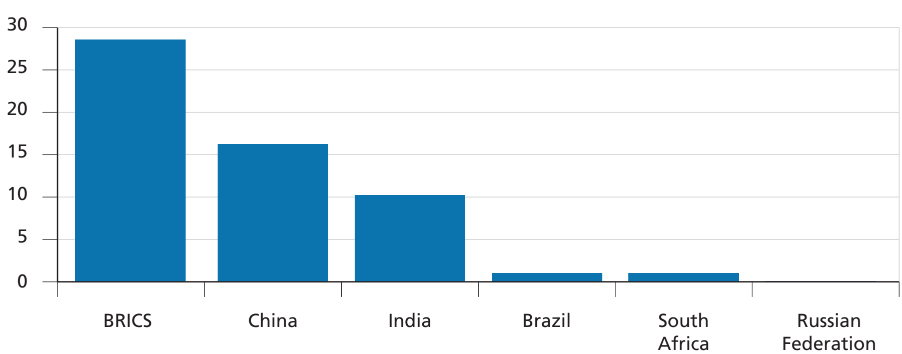
TABLE 12
United Arab Emirates macroeconomic indicators

GDP (in current US$)	536.83 billion
GDP per capita (in current US$)	52,410
Projected Real GDP Growth	4%
Inflation	2.2%
Unemployment Rate (ILO)	2.9%
Current Account Balance	41.251 billion (surplus)
General Government Gross Debt (as a percentage of GDP)	28.7

Source: IMF. Available at: https://www.imf.org/en/Countries/ARE.
Authors' elaboration.

The United Arab Emirates is one of the largest investment destinations and has successfully managed to diversify its economy, reducing oil dependence, such that the non-oil economy reserves a 70% share now (United Arab Emirates MoF). The country has fiscal balance, low inflation, and low unemployment rates, in addition to a large trade surplus. The country's medium-term outlook involves increasing private sector employment and making a sustainable green transition.

FIGURE 12
Imports of United Arab Emirates from the BRICS
(In %)



Source: ITC. Available at: https://www.trademap.org/Country_SelProductCountry_Graph.aspx?nvpm=1%7c784%7c%7c%7c6757%7cTOTAL%7c%7c%7c2%7c1%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c1%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c2.

India and China are two of United Arab Emirates's largest trading partners. The entry into BRICS will thus, strengthen both economic and diplomatic ties, allowing the countries to work towards a mutually agreed upon agenda. United Arab Emirates's goal to increase its GDP to over US$ 800 billion will need it to engage in bilateral and multilateral trade agreements, which can be facilitated via the BRICS alliance. Further, trading with these countries in non-dollar currencies will progress the overall BRICS goal of reducing dollar dependence.

3 ADVANCING INDIA-BRAZIL TIES

The India-Brazil partnership within BRICS is pivotal for the consortium, offering economic, political, and strategic benefits that align with the bloc's goals of promoting economic growth, political cooperation, and equitable global governance. Further, as vocal champions of the Global South, India and Brazil's collaboration within BRICS strengthens the bloc's position as an advocate for issues critical to developing nations, such as poverty alleviation, climate change, and sustainable development. Their partnership fosters cultural and people-to-people ties, building a foundation for deeper economic and political collaboration. Strategically, this relationship balances the influences within BRICS, adding diversity and ensuring that policies and initiatives reflect a broad spectrum of member states' interests. Together, India and Brazil enhance BRICS's credibility and effectiveness as a force for democratic governance and equitable global influence, reinforcing the consortium's role in shaping a more inclusive and balanced international architecture. Their strong and comprehensive partnership is evident in their close cooperation within bilateral and multilateral frameworks like: BRICS; Brazil, South Africa, India and China (BASIC); G20; Group of Four (G4); India, Brazil, South Africa (IBSA) and the International Solar Alliance, as well as in broader international bodies like the United Nations (UN), World Trade Organization (WTO), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO).

Since 2006, they have held the status of Strategic Partners. This relationship is built upon a shared global vision, common democratic principles, and a mutual dedication to promoting economic growth that includes social welfare for the people of both nations. Due to their strategic locations and relative strengths, Brazil in South America and India in South Asia are recognised as "regional" powers that wield influence in their respective regions. Their recent economic growth, coupled with active foreign policy engagements, presents alternative narratives to those of the Western powers. This approach is formalised through their participation in multilateral groups like BRICS and IBSA, reflecting a "soft balancing" strategy that challenges the prevailing Western perspectives. Both nations are seen as emerging powers with aspirations for greater global influence. Nevertheless, India and Brazil must look beyond these shared attributes to provide direction to their somewhat underdeveloped bilateral relationship (Mehta, 2019).

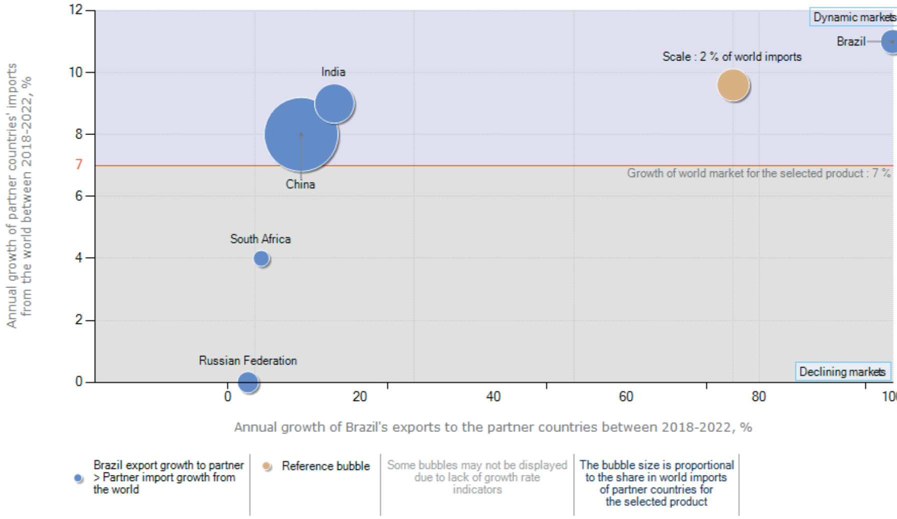
With respect to the BRICS Summit in South Africa, both nations recognised the positive outcomes, notably the reinvigorated and reinforced encouragement for reforming the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). They also underscored the outreach to six nations for full membership in BRICS, spotlighting their crucial positions as leading global agricultural producers. The leaders from these countries reaffirmed their dedication to boosting cooperation in sustainable farming and rural advancement, both bilaterally and on a global level. This commitment aims at securing food and nutritional well-being for their own populations as well as the international community. They emphasized the necessity of keeping food supply chains open, uninterrupted, and reliable, calling on the global community to protect agricultural commerce from one-sided restrictions and protectionist policies in compliance with multilateral trading regulations. The leaders voiced their satisfaction with the creation of Joint Technical Committees aimed at enhancing the trade in agricultural and livestock products.[9]

India's Strategic Partnership with Brazil has deepened through various high-level interactions and by maintaining their distinctive roles in global affairs. In January 2020, President Jair Messias Bolsonaro, at the invitation of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, undertook a State Visit to India, where he served as the Chief Guest during India's Republic Day Parade. During this visit, an Action Plan to enhance the Strategic Partnership was adopted, outlining a roadmap for advancing ongoing collaborations in a targeted manner. The visit also saw the signing of fifteen MoUs and Agreements across diverse sectors, encompassing investment, cooperation in criminal matters, cyber security, oil and gas, bio-energy, science and technology, culture, animal husbandry, health, and traditional medicine. In May 2023, during the G7 Summit in Hiroshima, Prime Minister Modi and President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva held a meeting, and President Lula also attended the G20 Summit in India in September 2023. Marking the 75th anniversary of diplomatic ties between Brazil and India in 2023, both leaders highlighted the strong relationship between the two nations, founded on shared principles and objectives, particularly in promoting peace, cooperation, and sustainable growth. They were pleased with the advancements made through various channels of institutional dialogue. The leaders reaffirmed their dedication to a comprehensive reform of the Security Council, advocating for its expansion in both the permanent and non-permanent member categories to improve the council's effectiveness, efficiency, inclusiveness, and legitimacy in tackling current global peace and security issues. Additionally, they reiterated their mutual

9. Available at: https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/37098/IndiaBrazil_Joint_Statement#:~:text=The%20two%20countries%20commit%20to,Protocol%20and%20its%20Paris%20Agreement.

endorsement for their countries' inclusion as permanent members in a reformed UNSC (India, 2022).

FIGURE 13
Growth in demand for a product exported by Brazil in 2022
(In %)



Source: ITC. Available at: https://www.trademap.org/Country_SelProductCountry_Graph.aspx?nvpm=1%7c076%7c%7c%7c%7c6757%7cTOTAL%7c%7c%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c2%7c1%7c1%7c2.
Obs.: Figure whose layout and texts could not be formatted and proofread due to the technical characteristics of the original files (Publisher's note).

As of 2022, India has ascended to become Brazil's fifth-largest trading partner. India's exports to Brazil in 2022 amounted to US$ 9.72 billion, marking a substantial rise from the US$ 6.77 billion recorded in 2021 (Devonshire-Ellis, 2023). In the same year, Brazil's exports to India totalled US$ 6.34 billion, reflecting an increase from US$ 4.9 billion in 2021. India's primary exports to Brazil encompass refined petroleum, pesticides, and packaged medicaments. Meanwhile, Brazil primarily exports crude petroleum, soybean oil, and gold to India. Brazil and India continue to be the key actors in safeguarding an effective multilateral system and promoting the democratisation of the structures of global governance.

4 BRICS PLUS SIX: CHARTING GLOBAL CHALLENGES AND EXPANDING INFLUENCE

Within the complex realm of international economic relations, the BRICS alliance has emerged as a dynamic force, transcending mere cooperation, and aspiring to establish a global economic system where nations freely trade using their currencies, diminishing reliance on foreign entities. The visionary “BRICS Plus” concept, symbolising an expanded membership to include countries beyond the original five, has taken a significant step with the inclusion of Iran, Egypt, Argentina, Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, effective from January 1, 2024 (Ismail, 2023).

The challenge for the West in comprehending BRICS lies in its diverse membership and the bloc’s role as an alternative to the Western-dominated world order. The recent BRICS Plus Six expansion has garnered unprecedented international attention, transforming it from an overlooked subject to a crucial global discussion. While this expansion promises enhanced economic cooperation, geopolitical influence, diverse perspectives, and renewed dynamism, it also poses challenges in aligning varied interests and, simultaneously, presents collaboration opportunities in trade and security.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has expressed support for this expansion, emphasising that India has always advocated for it, believing that new members will enhance BRICS significantly. Representing a quarter of the world’s economy and comprising powerful emerging nations, these new members are expected to shape global economic and geopolitical dynamics significantly.

The expansion of BRICS into a larger coalition of developing and emerging economies is a critical development with profound geopolitical and sustainability implications. Geopolitically, it signifies a shift in the global power dynamics, moving towards a more multipolar world order and challenging the dominance of Western powers in international affairs. This strategic enlargement aims to enhance BRICS’ collective influence, forge new alliances, and contribute to regional stability and security by integrating nations with diverse geopolitical backgrounds.

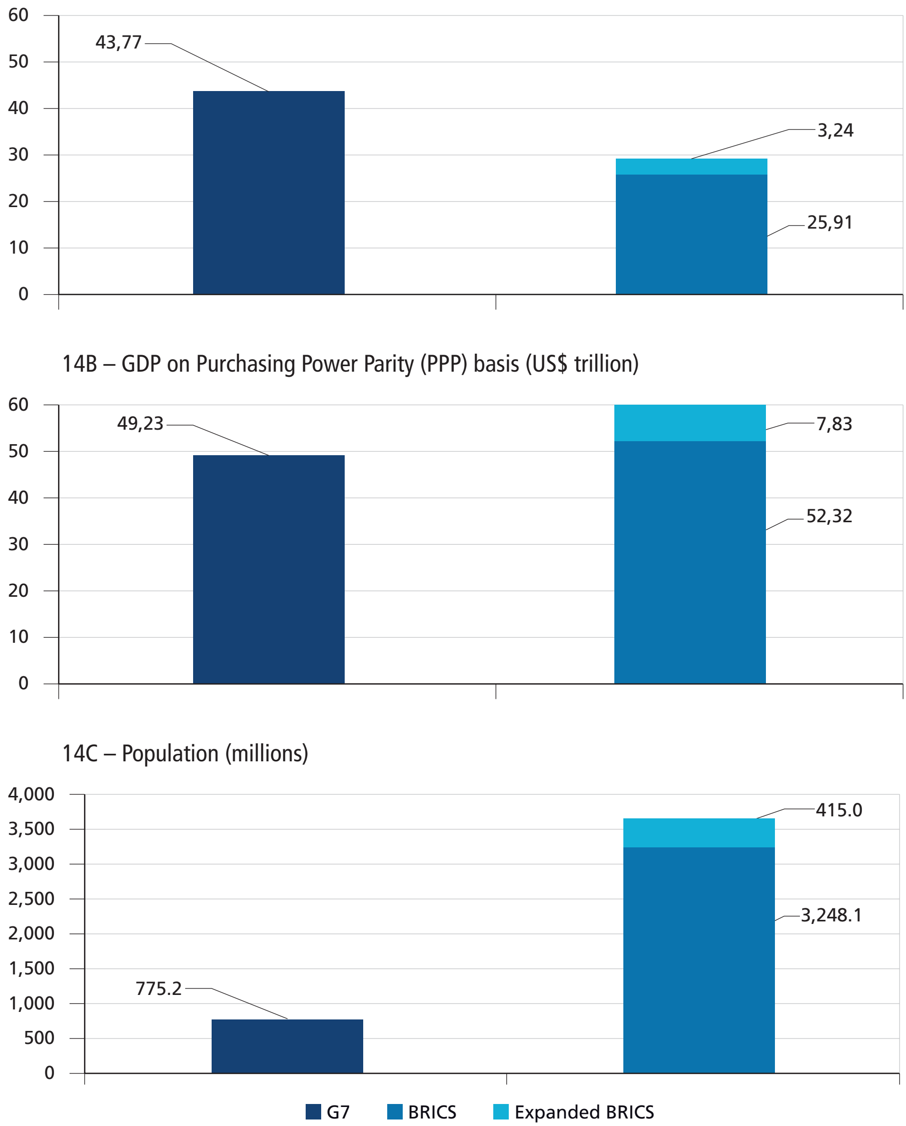
From a sustainability perspective, the expansion emphasizes the importance of economic diversification, resilience, and the incorporation of sustainable development principles. It brings to the forefront the need for collaborative approaches to environmental governance, renewable energy, and inclusive development, aiming to address global challenges such as climate change, resource depletion, and social inequalities. By pooling resources and knowledge, an expanded BRICS seeks to promote green infrastructure, sustainable investment, and equitable growth, aligning its objectives with global sustainability goals. The following analysis highlights the necessity of navigating the complexities associated with fostering a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable global order, underlining BRICS’ potential role in shaping future international relations and development trajectories.

FIGURE 14
Comparison between the G7 and expanded BRICS

14A – Nominal GDP (US$ trillion)

14B – GDP on Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) basis (US$ trillion)

14C – Population (millions)



Sources: Reuters, the World Bank.

4.1 Market expansion and contemporary geopolitics

The BRICS Plus Six expansion facilitates market growth by providing access to new markets and trade and investment opportunities, potentially enhancing economic growth and stability within the group. Diversifying economic interests is crucial for mitigating risks and creating a more resilient financial ecosystem. Moreover, these new members bring fresh perspectives and experiences to the table, enriching the economic discourse and providing opportunities for shared learning and collaboration. The diversity within BRICS Plus Six is an asset, encouraging a broader view of global economic issues and solutions.

The geopolitical implications of including these six new members are substantial. The expansion strengthens the collective influence of BRICS on global affairs, providing a more robust platform for negotiations and decision-making on international economic issues. BRICS Plus Six, with increased geopolitical significance, can wield greater leverage in shaping global economic policies and challenging traditional power structures. Furthermore, this expanded BRICS is better poised to address global challenges collectively. Climate change, pandemics, terrorism, and regional conflicts require a united front. The diversity and collective strength of BRICS Plus Six enable a more comprehensive and effective response to these challenges, enhancing the group's capacity to mediate conflicts, facilitate humanitarian aid, and promote peace and stability in regions facing turmoil.

Trade dynamics within BRICS Plus Six have already witnessed positive growth. China's trade with other BRICS members has expanded substantially, emphasising economic interdependence and the potential for increased cooperation within the group. This burgeoning trade activity further underscores the economic vitality of BRICS Plus Six and its role in fostering regional and global economic connectivity. In essence, incorporating six new members into BRICS extends its economic and geopolitical significance, offering avenues for market expansion, trade growth, and amplified influence in global financial affairs. This expansion positions BRICS as a potential voice for the Global South in economic, trade, and investment matters.

4.2 Sustainable development within the BRICS

The SDGs are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure peace and prosperity by 2030. Set by the United Nations in 2015, these 17 interlinked goals are a blueprint for a more sustainable future. The covid-19 pandemic, a global crisis, posed significant threats to the progress of these goals, particularly in developing countries.

In India, the pandemic severely strained the healthcare system and disrupted economic activities, affecting millions. The government's response involved a synergy of political and administrative efforts, leading to innovative solutions like the Co-WIN platform for vaccine distribution (Kumar et al., 2023). However, key SDGs such as poverty reduction (Goal 1), quality education (Goal 4), and good health and well-being (Goal 3) faced setbacks. Initiatives like the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana aimed to support the vulnerable, but the scale of the challenge was unprecedented.[10]

Brazil's pre-existing issues like health inequality and economic crisis were amplified by the pandemic. The country faced challenges in maintaining primary health coverage and dealing with systemic unemployment. The pandemic's impact on SDGs related to health (Goal 3), economic growth (Goal 8), and reduced inequalities (Goal 10) was profound. Brazil's commitment to renewable energy and its influence on achieving SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) was also crucial, but progress was hindered.

The pandemic's impact in India and Brazil showcases the varied nature of challenges and responses in different socio-political contexts. India's approach was more centralised and tech-driven, while Brazil struggled with political and resource constraints. The crisis highlighted the significance of governance, public health infrastructure, and economic resilience in addressing such global challenges. Both countries demonstrated adaptability but also revealed vulnerabilities in their pursuit of the SDGs.

The post-pandemic period offers a critical juncture for India and Brazil to reassess and realign their SDG strategies. The crisis has underlined the need for sustainable economic models, resilient healthcare systems, and inclusive policies. Both nations face the challenge of balancing immediate recovery with long-term sustainability goals. International cooperation, technological innovation, and a renewed commitment to the SDGs are essential for a resilient recovery.

The covid-19 pandemic has undeniably impacted the trajectory of SDGs in India and Brazil, presenting both challenges and opportunities. This analysis underscores the need for adaptable strategies, robust governance, and international collaboration in the face of global crises. The lessons learned from these nations' experiences are invaluable for other developing countries in navigating the path towards the SDGs in a post-pandemic world.

10. Available at: https://pib.gov.in/PressReleseDetailm.aspx?PRID=1901914.

5 CONCLUSION

The economic impact of covid-19 was evident, with the GDP of Brazil, Russia, India, and South Africa decreasing in 2020. However, a steady recovery was observed in 2021. Faced with economic downturns, the world has witnessed heightened economic protectionism and a meltdown of international cooperation. In response to these challenges, BRICS nations must strengthen macroeconomic policy coordination and multilateral cooperation to facilitate recovery. In an interdependent world, further fragmentation will only deepen global recessions and exacerbate inflation. Therefore, BRICS countries must work closely with other emerging economies and engage within frameworks such as the G20, WTO, World Bank, and IMF to improve global economic governance. India's G20 presidency underscores the importance of representing the interests and concerns of countries from the Global South. This collaboration within influential international forums is essential for shaping policies that address developing nations' unique challenges.

In this dynamic and ever-changing landscape, BRICS plays a pivotal role in global trade, investment, and finance. Challenges undoubtedly exist, but the collective strength and shared objectives make BRICS a platform of immense potential. As BRICS navigates these complexities, diplomatic collaboration becomes paramount, ensuring it continues evolving and finding common ground among its diverse members. Amid growing global economic tensions and the limitations of traditional multilateral institutions, BRICS stands as a focal point for discussions on economic, trade, and investment matters.

The ongoing expansion reflects the increasing interest in the grouping's economic potential. However, the success or failure of BRICS hinges on its ability to align diverse economic aspirations and expectations. The heterogeneity of the group delineated in the paper, can stand in the way of mutual cooperation and realisation of common goals. Thus, the need for increased deliberations and alignment of economic goals is paramount. To counter Western hegemony, attaining a higher share of global output will not suffice – there is need for joint collaboration and concerted action to facilitate greater intra-BRICS trade.

The paper shows intra-group trade and expansion of investment flows is crucial to alleviate the domestic constraints and allow for faster economic growth. However, as the mouthpiece of the Global South, BRICS plus also needs to incorporate sustainability in its joint policy framework. While it undertakes measures to challenge Western authority, the BRICS should also leverage its existing trade and investment channels with the developed world to catalyse the growth of smaller economies. Striking the balance between building a new global economic order and exploiting the existing complementarities of the Western framework will enable the ascendancy of the BRICS.

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