



**BRICS AND CIVIL SOCIETY:
GENDER IMPLICATIONS OF THIS
CHEQUERED RELATIONSHIP**

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BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India China, and South Africa) as a multilateral body has emerged at a point when there has been a reconfiguration of global power. While the primary aim of the forum was to strengthen cooperation among the States in international relations, over time it has expanded into varied areas of cooperation. This paper starts with a snapshot of the BRICS summits that have been held, moves on to offer an overview of BRICS's approach to gender (for a detailed discussion on New Development Bank and Gender, please see Taking it to the Bank: Gender Issues at the New Development Bank and Why NDB Needs A Gender Policy¹). The paper then explores BRICS's relationship with civil society and ends with a few recommendations for BRICS and civil society.

BRICS: An introduction

It was in the aftermath of the 2007 financial crisis that BRICS, an acronym for a political/economic coalition involving Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, started to emerge. BRICS is considered the new kid on the bloc in the current international system that is characterised by an upsurge in the number of security-organisations, trading associations and economic blocs. BRICS "offers the advantage of opening the system by reorienting the global balance of power in a direction more favorable to emerging countries²"

The association of the BRICS countries has grown into a formidable one that collectively account for 21% of the global GDP. Goldman Sachs economists predicted that the BRIC economies (Brazil, Russia, India and China) would out perform that of the G7 countries (the richest countries) before the middle of the century³.

BRICS as a formation has also merited attention as it includes countries that have shown dramatic economic growth and are increasingly playing important roles in the world economy⁴. Their formation is viewed as a mechanism to boost South-South co-operation and BRICS has been

¹<https://www.pwescr.org/Taking-it-to-the-Bank.pdf> and <http://pwescr.org/BFW-Policy-Brief-Why-the-NDB-Should-Have-a-Gender-Policy.pdf>

²<https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/35303004.pdf> BRICS: Sovereignty power and weakness Zaki Laïdi Accessed Feb 01 2021

³<https://www.goldmansachs.com/insights/archive/brics-dream.html>

⁴Luckhurst, Jonathan. "Building Cooperation between the BRICS and Leading Industrialized States." Latin American Policy, 2013: 251-268

“emphasising its difference from the North-South Cooperation⁵ carried out by “traditional” donors, the members of the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee (DAC)⁶”. Desai (2013) also concurs and says “Not since the days of the Non-Aligned Movement and its demand for a New International Economic Order in the 1970s has the world seen such a coordinated challenge to western supremacy in the world economy from developing countries⁷”

BRICS has made some significant gains. BRICS has used its enhanced capacity to successfully negotiate and litigate in the WTO⁸ and increase its influence at the G20⁹.

The biggest achievement to date remains the establishing of the New Development Bank and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA). All five countries have an equal share of capital (US\$ 10 billion each currently), all members have equal votes and no country has veto powers. Countries can increase their share of capital only with the approval of the other four members of the bank. This is to ensure that one country does not overly dictate terms - a dominant feature of the World Bank. A CRA of US\$ 100 billion was made up with individual commitments as follows - US\$ 41 billion from China, US\$ 18 billion each from Brazil, Russia, and India and US\$ 5 billion from South Africa. It is a framework to deal with any short-term balance of payments pressures.

On one hand, BRICS has emerged from “a shared and common experience in that they were all negatively affected by being on the periphery of a world order dominated by the United States and its allies¹⁰.” On the other hand, BRICS

itself is a product of economic globalisation. BRICS countries are working to successfully merge themselves with the existing market economy predominantly because of its cheap labour pool and cost-effective production possibilities that facilitates international investments in them¹¹.

What has become evident is that global governance discourse has had to move out of its traditional notion on how emerging powers are to fit into the existing international order to understand it as a “two-way process where the emerging powers are shaped by, but are also shaping, existing and new norms¹².”

Some authors emphasise the weight of China’s economy in promoting the group as a whole¹³; other scholars prefer to see BRICS’ emergence against the backdrop of the world international crisis and the relative economic power the bloc has gained at the expense of Europe and the USA¹⁴. There are other analysts who view it as an initiative of soft balancing to counter the hegemony of the USA¹⁵. The jury is still out on the implications of BRICS to a new world order, but what is undeniable is that it is a player worth watching.

The story so far

It is important to note that, unlike other organisations, BRICS does not strictly have an organisational structure. Although not binding, its summits every year provide the concerned countries with a framework by reinstating their faith on the issues of economic growth, sustainable development and economic order and wanting to expand their sphere of influence in the world.

⁵Moore, Candice. BRICS Partnership: A Case of South-South Cooperation? Institute for Global Dialogue, 2012

⁶Seifert, J., & Renzio, P. D. (n.d.). Beyond the NorthSouth Divide: Triangular Cooperation in the New Development Cooperation. Retrieved December 08, 2021, from Beyond the NorthSouth Divide: Triangular Cooperation in the New Development Cooperation

⁷Radhika Desai The Brics are building a challenge to western economic supremacy 02/April/2013 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/apr/02/brics-challenge-western-supremacy>

⁸Trubek, David M. Reversal of Fortune? International Economic Governance, Alternative Development Strategies, unpublished manuscript, presented at the European University Institute 2012 http://www.law.wisc.edu/facstaff/trubek/eui_paper_final_june_2012.pdf.

⁹Rolland, Sonia E. “The BRICS’ Contributions to the Architecture and Norms of International Economic Law.” Proceedings of the Annual Meeting (American Society of International Law), 2013: 164-170

¹⁰Coning, Mandrup and Odgaard 2015 as cited by Chatterjee, Debangana Gendering BRICS: Studying the Gendered Language of BRICS Declarations ISA Asia-Pacific Conference, Hong Kong 2016

¹¹Chatterjee, Debangana. “Gendering BRICS: Studying the Gendered Language of BRICS Declarations.” (2016): 1-24

¹²Beverly Loke, “Analytical Toolkit: Key Concepts and Select Readings” Marie Curie Initial Training Network Programme: Power and Region in a Multipolar Order (PRIMO), Dec 18 2017

<http://www.primo-itn.eu/PRIMO/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/PRIMO-Analytical-Toolkit-Loke.pdf>

¹³Arturo Oropeza Garcia, “The role of China and the Brics project,” Mexican Law Review (2014), accessed , <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1870057816300105>

¹⁴Aalborg University, “The BRICS as an Emerging Power: Reality or Myth?” Department of Culture and Global Studies, Aalborg University, April 15, 2017, accessed June 06 2017, <http://www.en.cgs.aau.dk/research/conferences/emerging-power>.

¹⁵Fabiano Mielniczuk, “Brics in the Contemporary World: changing identities, converging interests,” Third World Quarterly, 34:6 (2013): 1075-1090, June 30 2017

Sr. No.	Date(s)	Host country	Host leader	Location	Issues Covered
1st	June 2009	Russia	Dmitry Medvedev	Yekaterinburg South Africa yet to join the grouping	This meeting took place at the peak of the recession <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperation • Trade • Reform of international financial institutions
2nd	April 2010	Brazil	Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva	Brasília	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global recession, • Climate change • Better cooperation between States • The IMF
3rd	April 2011	China	Hu Jintao	Sanya South Africa formally joins the grouping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Debates on the global and internal economies of countries • Reforms in the UN (including security council), safe nuclear energy
4th	March 2012	India	Manmohan Singh	New Delhi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surviving the global recession • How BRICS can improve its global power • Green economy, without trade and investment barriers
5th	March 2013	South Africa	Jacob Zuma	Durban	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Development Bank and Contingent Reserve Agreement • Business Council and the Think Tank Council announced • How to increase engagement with non-BRICS countries, in particular Emerging Markets and Developing Countries (EMDCs)
6th	July 2014	Brazil	Dilma Rousseff	Fortaleza	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NDB and CRA agreements signed • Discussions around political coordination, development, economic growth • Fortaleza Declaration and Action Plan
7th	July 2015	Russia	Vladimir Putin	Ufa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global, economic problems, and better ways to foster cooperation between member states • Joint summit with BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) for a New World Order
8th	October 2016	India	Narendra Modi	Benaulim Goa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counter-terrorism, economies, and climate change • Goa Declaration and Action Plan to consolidate relationships • Joint summit with Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)
9th	September 2017	China	Xi Jinping	Xiamen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The future and goals for BRICS • International and regional issues • Joint summit with Emerging Markets and Developing Countries (EMDCD)
10th	July 2018	South Africa	Cyril Ramaphosa	Johannesburg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussions around increasing the market share of rising industries
11th	November 2019	Brazil	Jair Bolsonaro	Brasília	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advancements in the BRICS's science and innovation fields, especially advances in technology and digital currency/ Advancements in BRICS's science and innovation fields, especially technology and digital currency? • Ways to stop drug trafficking and organised crime; both internationally and internally/both internal and international?
12th	November 2020 (video conference due to the Covid19 pandemic)	Russia	Vladimir Putin	Saint Petersburg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint summit with Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) • Support for dealing with fallout of Covid19 • Fostering better living standards and quality of life • Plans to focus on peace, economies, cultural and societal issues

BRICS and Gender

Each of the countries which are a part of BRICS has had a history of strong feminist movements. These movements have had a local as well as a global impact. Despite this, the focus on gender in the BRICS summit has been minimal. The first and the fourth summits did not have a single mention of the issues of gender and women. The fifth summit celebrated the appointment of a woman as the chairperson of the African Union for the first time and saw it as a step towards women's empowerment but, apart from this, no other issues around gender featured.

Although the second and third summits made a passing mention of gender, it was clubbed together with social protection, decent work, employment, public health and other issues. The second summit pointed to the need for technical and financial cooperation to achieve 'sustainable social development with social protection, full employment, and decent work policies and programmes for vulnerable groups including women, migrants, youth and persons with disabilities'. The third summit also added public health and prevention of HIV to this list. Gender equality as a goal, however, appears to have been merely pushed into this laundry list of demands. Gender as a term has not been defined, and there is no specific strategy to achieve the objective of gender equality.

Gender made an appearance through protectionist statements. The term used was 'women and children' and the emphasis was on defending these groups from the impact of terrorism and conflict. In the sixth summit, this was done by condemning the abduction by Boko Haram. In the seventh summit, while discussing the situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo, it was stressed that special efforts were to be made towards women and children in areas of conflict. There was, in addition, an attempt to understand the gendered nature of conflict and the specific impact it had on women.

A commitment was made to look into issues of gender inequality and women's rights in the context of population-related matters in the sixth and seventh summits. Also, at the seventh Summit in Ufa, there was an open and positive commitment to "sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights for all." This was a strong endorsement of gender issues although it failed to include sexual health (given only Brazil and South Africa endorse the rights of LGBTQ communities).

Women's empowerment and gender equality were addressed within the SDG framework in the seventh and eighth summits. In the seventh summit it was stated that ICTs would be deployed towards empowerment of women and other vulnerable groups towards achieving the agenda of the SDGs. In the eighth summit, commitment towards 'gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls' aligning with the SDGs was stressed upon. This was the first summit that called upon ensuring accountability in the implementation of this commitment. Prior to the eighth summit, there was also a BRICS Women Parliamentarians' Forum held in Jaipur, India. The Jaipur Declaration, which also aligned with the SDGs, stressed 'the commitment to strengthen parliamentary strategic partnerships on all three dimensions of sustainable development, fostering gender equality and women empowerment'¹⁶. The framing of the SDGs gave a push to concerns around gender and laid greater emphasis on gender equality than in previous summits.

At the tenth Summit in Johannesburg in 2018, the mention of "gender inequality" and "women's rights" in the context of population matters continued. The importance of parliamentary exchanges, including of Women Parliamentarians, was underlined and there was a signalling of the importance of the formation of BRICS Women's Forum and the BRICS Women's Business Alliance (WBA).

The BRICS Women's Forum offers hope since it serves as a platform "to exchange best practices and forge partnerships across BRICS countries to promote women's advancement"¹⁷. The key objectives of the Women's Forum are also defined broadly and include "the promotion of women's full participation in political, social and economic life and promote women's issues within the broader BRICS agenda"¹⁸. While initially conceived of as the BRICS Women and Gender Forum, the Forum was renamed the BRICS Women's Forum indicating the discomfort, if not hostility, that some of the member states had to the word "gender". This narrowed the scope of the body. It excluded transgender people and others who did not identify within the man/woman binary. Besides, going forward, it may fail to recognize and deal with the gender relations and power dynamics between men and women.

The WBA was established in 2019 and aims at increasing the role of women as drivers of economic growth, contributing to the economic empowerment of women in the BRICS countries¹⁹ and bringing "a distinctive perspective

¹⁶<http://www.brics.utoronto.ca/docs/160821-parliamentarians.html>

¹⁷<https://www.gov.za/speeches/departement-women-first-brics-senior-officials-and-experts-meeting-13-dec-2018-0000#>

¹⁸<https://www.iol.co.za/business-report/brics/no-inclusivity-without-gender-equality-brics-womens-forum-18495978>

¹⁹<https://yadi.sk/i/Wn9Ft2RKX5eFJw>

on issues of interest for the BRICS business community²⁰.” WBA’s focus is the economic agenda, including increasing trade between the BRICS States, facilitating the access of women’s small and medium-sized businesses to new markets through e-commerce channels, developing remote rural territories and encouraging the active participation of women in the economy through access to online education and digital services. The BRICS Women’s Business Alliance had its inaugural meeting as late as November 2020. The composition of the WBA of “5 nominees per each BRICS country, who have founded their own enterprises or are CEOs of companies and other business enterprises, manage their businesses, occupy a high rank or position in business companies²¹” betrays a slant towards bigger companies and corporations and thereby ignores women entrepreneurs in the informal sector who make up the majority in most of the BRICS countries²².

The 2020 BRICS Summit was held virtually amidst the COVID-19 pandemic with Russia as the chair. NDB committed \$10 billion to help members deal with the cost of the coronavirus crisis. An important outcome included the acceptance of the Strategy for BRICS Economic Partnership 2025²³. The strategy declares three priority areas – trade, investment and finance; digital economy; and sustainable development. The only mention of women in this document alludes to “economic cooperation between women entrepreneurs of BRICS” and to stimulate the participation of women-led MSMEs in global trade. The other document that was signed was the BRICS Counter-terrorism Strategy²⁴ designed to strengthen BRICS coordination in this area while furthering global efforts. Women or gender find no mention in this document, pointing again that issues around security are considered “gender neutral”.

Civil BRICS

There is growing consensus that the strong presence and participation of a range of actors including civil society –

“NGOs, community groups, local action networks, social movements, faith-based groups – “philanthrocapitalists” and new foundations is fundamental to solutions to the key human development challenges of today²⁵”.

Creating space for Civil BRICS

While CSO organisations have been engaging with the BRICS process from its inception, the more formal space for engagement was not easy to carve out. Even though a major thrust in the 2011 agreement at the China Summit was “to strengthen co-operation amongst BRICS countries beyond the official government bodies” mention of the various exchanges and dialogues that could be promoted among civil society organisations were conspicuously absent²⁶.

Formation of Civil BRICS

The first BRICS CSO forum, called ‘Civil BRICS’, held in Ufa, Russia in July 2015, was at least partially “in response to the increasingly loud critique of state-centred BRICS by activist networks, NGOs, grassroots movements and critical analysts²⁷.” The space was to foster the participation of a range of actors from the BRICS countries and outside (other than member states and businesses). Before this, BRICS engagement with civil society was primarily with think tanks²⁸.

These have become institutionalised spaces that are, simultaneously, “invented” spaces (i.e., those that civil society has created for itself) and “invited” spaces (i.e., those created by the formal structure)²⁹.

Characterising Civil BRICS

One way of understanding Civil BRICS is as a Track 3 stream. Here, Track 1 refers to state-to-state initiatives, and Track 2 to the BRICS Think Tanks which are academic institutional spaces and, the BRICS Business Councils. This Track 3, which opened up in 2015, was to be the one promoting people-to-people engagement. Feminists have often used the space accorded to them by Track 2 and Track

²⁰<https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/brics-on-the-ball/article30009282.ece>

²¹<https://yadi.sk/i/Wn9Ft2RKX5eFJw>

²²Lalthapersad-Pillay, P., 2014. Gender Influences in the Labour Market: The Case of BRICS. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*,

²³<https://eng.brics-russia2020.ru/images/114/81/1148155.pdf>

²⁴<https://eng.brics-russia2020.ru/images/114/81/1148168.pdf>

²⁵Steve Tibbett Towards a Peoples’ Multilateralism: The United Nations, Development Networks and Civil Society A synthesis and literature review paper, United Nations Development Programme ,2009

²⁶Civil Society – BRICS Engagement: Opportunities and Challenges. (2013). Forum for Democratic Global Governance.

²⁷Lisa Thompson & Pamela Tsolekile De Wet (2018) BRICS civil society initiatives: towards the inclusion of affected communities in collective development?, *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal*, 3:5-6, 745-764, DOI: 10.1080/23802014.2018.1599690

²⁸Poskitt, Adele, Alex Shankland, and Katia Taela. “Civil Society from the BRICS: Emerging Roles in the New International Development Landscape.” *Rising Powers in International Development (IDS)*, February 2016

²⁹Lisa Thompson & Pamela Tsolekile De Wet (2018) BRICS civil society initiatives: towards the inclusion of affected communities in collective development?, *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal*, 3:5-6, 745-764

3 diplomacy to push for changes in the system, a prime example being UN Resolution 1325³⁰

BRICS has become well-established with what Patrick Bond describes as three processes feeding into each other³¹. The BRICS from above, made up of heads of states, business forums and elite allies within which BRICS can be viewed as a counter to the 'anti-imperialist' forces or diametrically opposite, as a 'sub-imperialist' force. BRICS from the middle, which is constituted of the Academic Forum, trade unions, NGOs. These include those who are "pro BRICS advocates" as well as those more circumspect of BRICS's capacity or willingness to usher in a more equitable world. BRICS from below is the third aspect which includes localists (who are preoccupied with local concerns) and those more committed to social justice issues³². Another way of looking at them is as 'commentators, collaborators and critics'³³. In this framework, the academics are largely seen as the commentators, the Business Councils and other such bodies as the collaborators, and counter-summits as the critics. Civil BRICS itself can, in a way, bring these forces together.

Civil BRICS : Achievements so far

CSOs at BRICS have vast experience and have played various roles. These include "implementing social policies and working closely with development agencies in their domestic contexts, often leading to innovations that have subsequently been spread internationally through South-South Development Cooperation (SSDC) processes³⁴". Some of the achievements of civil society's engagement with BRICS include

Regularity: The Civil BRICS forums have been held every year since its formation. Besides civil society, civil society leaders from BRICS countries, as well as leaders from other countries like Argentina, Mexico, Indonesia, Egypt have participated in these meetings.

Strengthening role: The purpose of the forum is to promote constructive dialogue between civil society and the

governments of the BRICS countries on a range of social issues in such spheres" as security, healthcare, education, finances, culture, ecology, and the living environment³⁵". These forums are envisaged as spaces that would help governments to pool resources and "leverage experiences from different sectors and nations and to serve as links between government and civil society" ultimately resulting in 'transparency' and 'accountability' in development aid and cooperation", among others³⁶.

Working Groups: From 2015, when Civil BRICS discussed a variety of social issues like healthcare, education, conflict management etc³⁷, they formed the following working groups "healthcare, education and science, culture and inter-civilisational dialogue, sustainable development, peace and security, economics and trade, harmonisation of inter ethnic affairs³⁸" to come up with recommendations. At subsequent Civil BRICS meetings too, various working groups were formed. For example, in 2020 it was Food and Healthcare; Education and Science; Economic Development in the Digital Era; Information Strategies and Society; the Environment, Climate and Energy; Sustainable Cities and Rural Development; Women and Girls; and People-to-People Exchanges³⁹. The idea of the working group is to delve deeper into each of the issues. Feminist groups, as well as those working on the "outside", also tailored their responses to Civil BRICS in general and to each of these working groups. Issues like gender and youth were intended to be cross-cutting.

Citizens' Voice: Notionally this track is an opportunity for the voice and concerns of citizens of the BRICS countries to be heard and to facilitate the 'scaling up' of community concerns onto a variety of government policy platforms through a Statement of Recommendations that is communicated to the official Sherpas for consideration at the intergovernmental BRICS summits? These recommendations address various sectors, including, notably, Inclusive Development in BRICS states. "Even while this takes place (as always) through representation (by activist community members themselves) the scaling up of

³⁰Karin Aggestam & Ann Towns (2019) The gender turn in diplomacy: a new research agenda, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 21:1, 9-28, DOI: 10.1080/14616742.2018.1483206

³¹Bond, P. (2015) 'Co-dependent BRICS from Above, Co-opted BRICS from the Middle, and Confrontational BRICS from Below', in P. Bond and A. Garcia (eds), *BRICS: An AntiCapitalist Critique*, Auckland Park: Jacana Media

³²<https://www.bricsfrombelow.org/> Accessed on Feb 1st 2021

³³Mawdsley, E. and Roychoudhury, S. (2014) 'Civil Society Organisations and Indian Development Assistance: Emerging Roles for Commentators, Collaborators and Critics', paper presented at the Asia Foundation-RIS Conference on Indian Development Cooperation, New Delhi, May as quoted by Poskitt, Adele, Alex Shankland, and Katia Taela. "Civil Society from the BRICS: Emerging Roles in the New International Development Landscape." *Rising Powers in International Development (IDS)*, February 2016

³⁴Poskitt, Adele, Alex Shankland, and Katia Taela. "Civil Society from the BRICS: Emerging Roles in the New International Development Landscape." *Rising Powers in International Development (IDS)*, February 2016

³⁵Peryshkina, A Human Wellbeing as the Cornerstone of the Cooperation Among BRICS Nations <https://infobrics.org/post/31135>

³⁶<https://indianexpress.com/article/blogs/inequality-and-institutionalizing-civil-brics-process-3087756/>

³⁷<http://fidc.ris.org.in/sites/default/files/ConceptNote-pre-BRICSregionalConsultation%20%281%29.pdf>

³⁸<http://civilbrics.ru/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Civil-BRICS-Forum-Statement-2015.pdf>

³⁹<http://eng.iabrics.org/page14799076.html>

the voices of communities directly affected by acute socio-economic deprivation presents a historically distinct moment⁴⁰.

Growing Numbers: The engagement of civil society with BRICS has swollen over the years. While the formal Civil BRICS space is restricted and participation controlled, the people's summits or counter-summits draw many participants.

The 2013 Durban counter-summit had over 40 organisations participating and brought out a "pamphlet reflecting a spectrum of views on BRICS". At the 2014 counter-summit in Fortaleza, too, a range of INGOs, NGOs and other civil society actors participated. By the People's Forum in Goa (2016), social movements were able to articulate a clearer position on BRICS and, by the 2018 Forum in Johannesburg, the participation of grassroots activists had increased substantially. In 2017, since civil society organisations found it difficult to get visas for China, where the BRICS summit was being held, they organised a meeting in Hong Kong.

In an important deviation, in 2014 in Fortaleza, rather than a Civil BRICS meet there was a larger "People's Summit" with over 120 activists participating⁴¹. This was prior to the meeting of the heads of state. In this instance, the counter-summit and Civil BRICS overlapped. The message from the People's Summit was a strong critique of the current development paradigm which resulted in "a crisis that produces decisive contradictions with regards to environment, politics, economics and society⁴²" and went on to add "in this new phase of Neoliberalism, the appropriation of the state, of funds and of public services adds itself to the privatisation of common goods such as water, land, biodiversity and air".

Greater Inclusion: The formation of the Civil BRICS forum is seen as a diplomatic breakthrough given this required the consent of all the states at a time when social movements are faced with shrinking spaces. Further, the establishment of the BRICS Youth in Development, and the Women's Forum, are also considered as progress towards greater inclusion of multiple stakeholders.

Feminists' engagement: Feminists have been consistently working with People's Forum as well as Civil BRICS to ensure that the concerns of women and the LGBTQ

communities are not erased or lost. Laura Trajber Waisbich, in her report on the Goa People's summit, says that there was a clear articulation of the need for more universal support for issues around sexuality, as well as in countering the rampant sexism in these spaces⁴³.

This is evident in the transnational coalitions that started to coalesce, such as the BRICS Feminist Watch, the Sexuality Policy Watch. The women's movement took the lead in organising some of the more significant street protests seen during the summits; they also succeeded in institutionalising the BRICS Women's Forum.

The feminists' engagement with BRICS spawned not only numerous new organisations, but helped create a more organised network. The BRICS Feminist Watch, for example, has developed as a platform for a wide range of organisations and individuals – from those more closely linked to grassroots women and LGBTQ organisations, to academics and practitioners. The feminists, in this instance, are not only from BRICS countries, but also from other (re)emerging economies including the global South.

This broad alliance pledges its commitment to "bringing the voices of women into policy making spaces, upholding the economic, social, and cultural rights of women, and ensuring gender and social equality⁴⁴." They have regularly issued statements and brought out documents on policy matters such as water and the green economy as well as on the impact of infrastructure projects such as roads. These documents are designed to inform and influence policy makers as well as civil society organisations. Efforts have also been made to build capacities of feminist organisations to engage with multilateral bodies such as BRICS, AIIB and G20. BFW has also been consistently engaging with the NDB. At the 2nd NDB Annual meeting in Delhi in April, 2017 they "urged the Bank to set up a multi stakeholder task force and to develop a comprehensive policy geared to delivering gender-responsive, sustainable and inclusive development". It was BFW's communication with the top management of NDB that resulted in the Bank creating space for regular, structured dialogues with representatives of civil society at CSO Forums in Shanghai.

The remarkable organisational capacity of BFW was evident in its ability to persuade over a hundred feminist organisations to endorse a set of asks that was tabled at a 2017 meeting with the NDB. The three main demands were

⁴⁰Lisa Thompson & Pamela Tsolekile De Wet (2018) BRICS civil society initiatives: towards the inclusion of affected communities in collective development?, Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal, 3:5-6, 745-764, DOI: 10.1080/23802014.2018.1599690

⁴¹Patrick Bond and Ana Gracia BRICS from above and Commoning from Below The Routledge Handbook of Transformative Global Studies

⁴²<https://www.brasildefato.com.br/2019/11/12/peoples-brics-summit-closing-statement-we-demand-changes-so-we-can-have-a-future>

⁴³<https://sxpolitics.org/diverse-voices-a-brief-account-on-the-civil-society-spaces-at-the-margins-of-the-8th-brics-summit-in-india/16206>

⁴⁴BRICS Feminist Watch Statement to the BRICS Leadership

to adopt a gender policy, constitute a gender unit and set up an external gender advisory committee.

Challenges for Civil Society

While the engagement has made some progress, there are deep challenges that BRICS faces.

Lack of control: While the forum is meant to be a space for civil society actors, there is a lack of transparency in the selection of organising bodies. The controlling of the organisations that are likely to be chosen to participate in the Civil BRICS forum translates into government control over the body. The selection of topics for discussion are not led by civil society⁴⁵.

Peripheral Space: Despite the creation of a space such as Civil BRICS, the disinterest of the state leaders in it is evident. For example, at the Durban Summit, the Civil BRICS Sherpa from DIRCO could not attend any of the of the official events; “nor did any state department representatives avail themselves of the opportunity to listen to the voices from below.” To date, none of the Civil BRICS recommendations have been taken up at the Summit level.

The leaders have also failed to support the recommendations of Civil BRICS and have, instead, gone ahead with their own agreements that were drafted well before the summit. In 2018, some of those who were part of the Steering Committee felt short-changed as the Civil BRICS agenda seemed preset and they had little control over the agenda or the workings of the Forum⁴⁶. Besides being disempowering and frustrating, this could lead to legitimising agendas that civil society does not endorse.

Attitude of governments: The governments in the BRICS countries too often regard civil society organisations, especially international nongovernmental organisations (INGOs), with suspicion. Many local civil society organisations are also uncomfortable with the role of some INGOs. The heavy lifting of the workings in the invented spaces is done by the activists, then fed into the invited, Civil BRICS space that is often managed by INGOs. INGOs are viewed as usurping the space of local civil society organisations and disempowering them, or at least diminishing the credibility of local organisations⁴⁷.

Heterogeneity: BRICS countries are moving from being primarily aid recipients (except Russia) to being rising powers in development cooperation. However, there are vast variations in the political systems, as well as in the maturity, nature, and shape of civil society in BRICS countries. Besides this, there are significant differences in context and issues in each of these countries. All of this makes it difficult to forge a common platform among the many constituents of the Forum. According to Alena Peryshkina, “the formation of a single platform on key issues, and as a result, the preparation of a consolidated declaration by civil society is not a one day process⁴⁸.”

Divisions within: Deep divisions exist among civil society, including in their approach to BRICS. The positions include those who are strong cheerleaders of BRICS and believe it offers an opportunity to advance an agenda for social change, the pragmatists who seek to make incremental changes within a flawed system and those who believe that civil society engagement with BRICS only serves to legitimise a body that is fundamentally imperialistic. The divisions that surfaced at Durban became chasms at the Fortaleza counter-summit. One of the mechanisms to narrow these gaps would be to work together to expand areas of convergence and expand their resources and strength as they negotiate their relationships with each other. However, there are often numerous parallel sessions at these meetings where the opportunities for such cross learning and building a comprehensive response to BRICS are lost.

Representation Issues: There are also issues around representation and voice, as civil society spaces are deeply contested ones with different communities, organisations and networks all jockeying for space and to present their viewpoint. Making it a feminist, inclusive and democratic space is a challenge. There are also challenges to organising a parallel civil society event that can be structured in a way that avoids 'surrender to co-optation and political capture by the governments⁴⁹'

Weak alliances: The various forums associated with BRICS, including the Civil BRICS, Young Diplomats Forum, Parliamentarian Forum, Trade Union Forum, Business Forum and the Media Forum, as well as the think tanks, meet

⁴⁵Oxfam, Improving Global Governance Through Engagement with Civil Society The case of BRICS https://d1tn3vj7xz9fdh.cloudfront.net/s3fs-public/file_attachments/bn-brics-civil-society-310316-en.pdf

⁴⁶Lisa Thompson & Pamela Tsolekile De Wet (2018) BRICS civil society initiatives: towards the inclusion of affected communities in collective development?, Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal, 3:5-6, 745-764, DOI: 10.1080/23802014.2018.1599690

⁴⁷ibid

⁴⁸Alena Peryshkina Human Wellbeing as the Cornerstone of the Cooperation Among BRICS Nations <https://infobrics.org/post/31135>

⁴⁹Salles de Carvalho, Janine, and Nathalie Beghin. 2015. For an Inclusive, Democratic Social Participation Space in the BRICS. BRICS Voices (Vasudha Foundation), September: 1–4. As quoted by Poskitt, Adele, Alex Shankland, and Katia Taela. “Civil Society from the BRICS: Emerging Roles in the New International Development Landscape.” Rising Powers in International Development (IDS), February 2016

separately and the chance to build a strategic alliance which 'could be a considerable force to generate public debate and discussion on the BRICS policies, programmes and practices' is missed.

Multilateral Bodies not a priority: Given that these countries still have high levels of poverty and inequality, the majority of CSOs understandably believe that their primary mission must continue to be engaged on domestic issues. Many also lack the basic level of familiarity with the policy debates in this field that would enable them to participate fully. This is particularly true of more poorly funded organisations, such as smaller women's and LGBT organisations and grassroots movements.

Flawed Model and civil society: BRICS, as individual countries and through their arms such as the New Development Bank, continue to follow a path of growth that has resulted in rising inequality. The super exploitative labour practices "in which social reproduction costs are not met... lead to exploitation of the family structure, for example, through women's unpaid domestic and reproductive labour to support the household⁵⁰." Therefore the challenge for civil society organisations is to deal with making these spaces more inclusive and responsive to the concerns of the marginalised while remaining critical of the development model that is embraced by these countries (and indeed, most countries).

Recommendations

It is inarguable that CSOs in the BRICS countries must increase their participation in global governance, while also establishing that the opening up of a dialogue with BRICS should not be read as a blanket endorsement of BRICS as a global governance mechanism.

The following draw upon the recommendations by the Inequality Movement and BFW in their submissions to BRICS as well as other policymakers:

For Civil Society

- The thrust of civil society engaging with BRICS should be the issues affecting civil society within all BRICS countries, and/or civil society globally
- Civil society engaging diplomatically with BRICS will not present itself as a gatekeeper of civil society throughout the BRICS countries

- The diversity within the sector should be acknowledged and celebrated
- The connections between the local and global should not be lost in terms of issues and movements
- Mapping of current capacities of civil society should be undertaken, especially among the more marginalised groups including women's and LGBTQ organisations, and capacities built to engage with BRICS, while leveraging the existing expertise. Civil society should be able to monitor and evaluate the policies and projects of BRICS, including the gender impact of these decisions. The proposals that civil society presents to BRICS should be relevant and actionable while keeping intact the commitment to principles of social justice and sustainability
- Being open and transparent about whom they represent and to whom they are accountable, while being actively committed to their long-term vision and goals
- It should be made clear that engaging with the official forum is not an endorsement for the narrative put out by these bodies
- Diversity of representation, expertise, experience and positions are essential to ensure that a wide swathe of issues get due attention.
- Generating evidence of short-term results as well as longer-term effects of BRICS policies, especially on marginalised populations

For BRICS

- Develop a strong gender policy and strategy for the BRICS and the New Development Bank. Since 2017, BRICS Feminist Watch (BFW) has consistently urged NDB to set up an external gender advisory, and recruit senior level gender experts to support the bank to ensure that a gender analysis of all its structures and operations are carried out in a timely and systematic manner.
- Recognise the multiple roles women play - in the economy, as well as political leaders and social change makers

⁵⁰Lisa Thompson & Pamela Tsolekile De Wet (2018) BRICS civil society initiatives: towards the inclusion of affected communities in collective development?, Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal, 3:5-6, 745-764, DOI: 10.1080/23802014.2018.1599690

- Create a conducive atmosphere for civil society to thrive in their own countries and within BRICS. This will allow the marginalised, including women and LGBTQ groups, to get organised and also participate in larger numbers in forums like the counter summit and Civil BRICS.
- Ensure that Track III is taken seriously and linked to the other Tracks in a manner that takes cognisance of the concerns of movements for social justice, including feminist movements
- Make Civil BRICS an autonomous forum that decides on its structure, the agenda for the meetings and the invitees. BRICS should support Civil BRICS by providing logistical and other kinds of assistance such as visas etc. This would facilitate the participation of newer groups and organisations, including feminist ones.
- Encourage BRICS to work closely with Civil BRICS, thereby, “ensuring that the Civil BRICS process, such as the submission of civil society policy recommendations, is in alignment with those of the official BRICS Summit. Such an alignment will ensure that the BRICS host government receives the Civil BRICS policy recommendations in a timely manner for incorporation in the BRICS Summit Declaration and

Action Plan. The BRICS Sherpa and other relevant government entities (of the BRICS host government) will be expected to take part in the Civil BRICS forum to receive civil society policy recommendations for incorporation in the BRICS Summit Declaration and Action Plan.”

- Support research on various aspects of gender across BRICS as an entity, as well as in specific BRICS countries

As Lisa Thompson & Pamela Tsolekile De Wet argue “to be effective, activist mobilisation requires involvement within invited spaces like Civil BRICS for social justice gains (‘jam making’), perhaps most importantly for insider understanding and knowledge of how these formal spaces are constituted, and the power dynamics within them. Pressure from outside (‘tree shaking’) in the form of BRICS contestations in self-created/invented spaces (such as the large-scale mobilisations in Durban, Fortaleza and Goa) is arguably even more important⁵¹.” It would be the working of the two together that will result in greater gains for movements. Feminists have deployed this strategy with the United Nations where “women worked with the existing structures and spaces, strategising to make the most of them⁵².” And have forged alliances amongst themselves. The importance of South-South Cooperation should not be undervalued.

⁵¹Lisa Thompson & Pamela Tsolekile De Wet (2018) BRICS civil society initiatives: towards the inclusion of affected communities in collective development?, Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal, 3:5-6, 745-764, DOI: 10.1080/23802014.2018.1599690

⁵²Jain, Devaki & Chacko, Shubha. (2008). Unfolding Women’s Engagement with Development and the UN: Pointers for the Future. Forum for Development Studies. 35. 10.1080/08039410.2008.9666393. 13

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