

BRICS Expansion and Implications for Africa

Seun Bamidele

Department of Sociology, University of Johannesburg, South Africa
Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, Federal University Oye-Ekiti, Nigeria
oluwaseun.bamidele@gmail.com

<https://doi.org/10.35293/srsa.v46i1.5347>

Abstract

The expansion of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) has become a focal point in global discussions, particularly regarding its implications for Africa. This article critically examines the multifaceted dimensions of the BRICS expansion and its implications for Africa across economic, political, and strategic realms. Drawing upon a comprehensive review of scholarly literature and expert opinions, the economic implications of the BRICS expansion, including opportunities for growth, investment, and development, as well as challenges related to trade imbalances and debt sustainability, are analysed. The article explores how the BRICS engagement influences regional power dynamics, international alignments, and global governance structures. The role of BRICS in advocating multipolarity and institutional, global governance reform is highlighted, while tensions and complexities within the bloc are considered. By synthesising diverse perspectives, the article offers insights into navigating the complexities of BRICS-Africa relations and provides recommendations for policymakers and stakeholders to maximise the benefits of this evolving partnership while mitigating risks and vulnerabilities.

Keywords: BRICS, BRICS-Africa relations, Expansion, Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa



1. Introduction

It is significant to state that the expansion of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) was not a sudden occurrence but a realisation of antecedent developments. The expansion of BRICS marks a turning point in the history of Africa as it creates room for African states to solidify their relations politically and promises to strengthen their economic relations and development. However, even though the US-led Western bloc is in support of the establishment and objectives of BRICS, the West is also in diverse trade partnership agreements with African states across the region. BRICS has been positioned as an anti-status quo roleplayer or competitor to the established order in the international and regional systems (Monyae and Ndzendze, 2021; Rewizorski, 2015; Stuenkel, 2015). In this regard, the issues of the West's trade partnership agreements across Africa require critical academic debate in light of BRICS's objectives. The BRICS bloc, initially comprised of Brazil, Russia, India, and China, and later joined by South Africa, has emerged as a formidable force reshaping the contours of global geopolitics and economics. Since its inception, BRICS has garnered considerable attention for its potential to challenge the dominance of traditional Western powers and advocate for a more equitable and multipolar world order. As BRICS expands its outreach, particularly in regions like Africa, it prompts a critical examination of the implications of this expansion for the African continent. This article delves into the multifaceted dimensions of the BRICS expansion and its implications for Africa, encompassing economic, political, and strategic facets.

Africa, with its diverse array of nations and burgeoning economies, occupies a central position in the discourse surrounding the BRICS expansion. The continent's rich natural resources, growing consumer markets, and strategic significance have made it a focal point for international engagement and investment. Against this backdrop, the increasing involvement of BRICS nations in Africa raises pertinent questions about the potential benefits and challenges for African countries. How does the BRICS expansion shape Africa's economic development trajectory? What are the geopolitical implications of BRICS-Africa relations? How does the BRICS engagement influence global governance structures, and what are the implications for African representation and agency within these frameworks?

By exploring these questions, this article aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the evolving dynamics of BRICS-Africa relations, offering insights into navigating the complexities of this evolving partnership. Through an examination of scholarly

literature, policy reports, and expert opinions, it seeks to elucidate the opportunities and challenges arising from the BRICS expansion for Africa. It contributes to a deeper understanding of the interplay between BRICS and Africa and offers recommendations for policymakers, stakeholders, and future research endeavours in this field.

2. BRICS's Growing Role in African States

It is important for African states to factor in BRICS's quest for expanding its presence and influence over the politics and security matrix of neighbouring countries. Over the years, BRICS has steadily increased its presence in Africa and carefully crafted economic, political, and military linkages with African States to find its own space in the region. African states have reasons to be concerned about BRICS's undisguised thrust to constrain its leadership and status in Africa. On the one hand, Africa's geostrategic location and power make for its inevitable centrality. Paradoxically, however, Africa's extensive religious, linguistic, ethnic, and cultural diversities have led to greater distance between them. Heightened anxieties regarding national identities and sovereignty contribute to more significant discord with their more prominent neighbour in BRICS. In that context, bilateral issues of trade and transit facilities, ethnic overspill and migration, and, in more recent years, cross-border terrorism, have acquired such deep, emotive overtones that they continue to defy rational settlement.

On the other hand, BRICS comes with no baggage of historical memories and bilateral disputes. More importantly, BRICS is seen by many African states as an effective counterweight to Africa's preponderant power. This gives a certain edge on which BRICS can capitalise on the prevalent anti-African sentiment to build its own bridges of membership with these countries. Given these ground realities, BRICS's gradual encroachment into Africa's traditional sphere of influence has long-term implications for Africa's regional status, which Africa cannot ignore (Atif and Akbar, 2019). BRICS has, over the years, developed extensive socio-economic links with African states and has emerged as its largest economic cooperation. It signed an economic cooperation agreement with African states and has also assisted it in developing unilateral and multilateral cooperation with African states. BRICS has also steadily expanded its trade and economic cooperation with members in Africa, surpassing Russia and China as its largest aid donor to Africa (Guimei, 2024). Gradual reduction of aid and engagement by Africa, following the Russia/Ukraine war, left a void that BRICS was quick to utilise for its increased interaction with African States. BRICS has continued to play an important

role in the reconstruction and rehabilitation of many African states by upgrading facilities and infrastructure (roads, buildings, hospitals) in African countries' war-affected areas (International Monetary Fund, 2011). Brics has also been actively collaborating with Africa in oil exploration and developing port and harbour facilities in Africa. BRICS has also built a steady political relationship with Africa, and has ever been willing to play the BRICS card to offset Africa. Africa remains particularly sensitive to BRICS's forays in South Africa given its strategic location on the southern border adjoining BRICS countries. BRICS's investment in infrastructural development in South Africa and India has been extensive (Africa Development Bank, 2013). It has also extended generous financial assistance to South Africa, and its annual aid has increased by 50 per cent. BRICS's growing links with members, which technically do not fall within Africa but abut Africa's sensitive eastern flank while also sharing borders with members of BRICS, cause deep concern in Africa. BRICS has, over the past few years, established extensive military linkages with significant arms sales and infrastructural development with members. South Africa remains BRICS's largest benefactor in the supply of defence equipment and technical assistance (Yola and Christine, 2013). BRICS has also assisted with the construction of naval bases, roads waterways, and oil and gas pipelines among members. BRICS is helping members with the establishment and advancement of radar and communications systems and refuelling facilities in Africa. Closely related to the expansion of BRICS's military and economic presence in its immediate neighbourhood is its relentless urge to secure the energy resources in the African region. BRICS members such as South Africa today are one of the largest consumers of energy, and as their needs grow, they are bound to compete for control and access to markets and resources. Africa remains concerned about BRICS's success in gaining exploration rights for developing natural gas fields in Africa. BRICS members are also engaged in the exploration and production of gas pipelines linking offshore platforms in Africa. India, which is expected to face a huge energy crunch in the years ahead, has yet to make any headway in accessing natural gas from BRICS. Deeply aware that BRICS's inroads into Africa's immediate States cut into its power base, Africa has sought to mend its fences with BRICS and taken manifold steps, even unilaterally, to strengthen its economic and political ties with members of African countries. Capitalising on the anti-status quo or competitor to the US-led Western bloc for many years, Russia and China have taken significant steps to engage with the governments of African States on a number of issues. These include bilateral trade, financial aid and assistance, and cooperation on curbing terrorism among others. Russia and China recently extended

a line of credit to Africa (CCTV Africa, 2014). In recent years, BRICS's policies in African member states have also undergone a visible shift in its engagement with economic and political development. After realising that its deliberate distancing from the US-led Western bloc was benefitting some African states and the consolidation of its presence in Africa at the expense of the US-led Western bloc, the latter has, for the past few years, been engaged in improving its relations with Africa. BRICS's interests in African States are spread across various sectors including telecommunications, energy, agriculture, industry, IT, and education. In line with these priorities, BRICS has taken on a more active role in disbursing aid and building infrastructure. It is also assisting in building a transport corridor in African member states. The last meeting of BRICS in South Africa provided a further impetus to growing relations between the group and the African region. Even as South Africa accords the highest priority to its 'membership diplomacy' to maintain its preeminent position in the Southern African region, there is little doubt that BRICS's growing expansion and influence in its own backyard serves to heighten members' long term strategic and economic concerns vis-à-vis its giant members. More important, as long as BRICS keeps up its pressure on African States, there is little possibility of any alleviation in the subtle competition between BRICS and the US-Led Western bloc in Africa's membership in the foreseeable future.

3. BRICS's Engagement with Africa: Competing Dynamics

BRICS has also been actively engaging with its members in the African region, a strategically vital region in terms of BRICS's political and economic interests (Simon and Stevens, 2013). During the Cold War years, members of BRICS had chosen to stay on the margins and allowed its interaction with the African region to fall into a state of benign neglect (Simon and Stevens, 2013). The end of the Cold War and the altered geopolitical regional dynamics have seen members take several steps to engage more constructively with the African countries. BRICS's Global South policy signalled the members' desire to revitalise its economic and political interaction with the African region (Adam, 2013). Given BRICS's rapidly developing technological and economic capabilities, African States have also found it helpful to cooperate with BRICS to reap the benefits of extensive economic and technological linkages. Over the years, BRICS has forged strong economic ties with most African states. Russia, China, and India have already emerged as important trading and investment partners for members, especially in Africa. More importantly, BRICS members have steadily expanded its

strategic presence in Africa. Over the years, BRICS members like China and Russia have also forged strong defence and naval ties with many African nations. It has a significant strategic relationship with South Africa and others. BRICS also signed a defence agreement with many African nations. BRICS members had signed a defence pact with many African countries and have been holding joint naval exercises as part of the new strategic partnership (Gaunt, 2010). BRICS has also been helping members to significantly increase their naval and air power. It is pushing for a naval base in many African countries, which would go a long way in augmenting its naval capability in the strategic region (BRICS New Delhi, Summit, 2012). Russia and China have been a keen player in Africa for historical reasons because of the existence of trade and investment linkages and the protection of its maritime interests (Mlambo, 2022). It is also viewed with a certain degree of fear by most African nations regarding its territorial claims on disputed boundaries (Sven, 2013). BRICS, on the other hand, has the advantage of not carrying any historical memories or baggage of bilateral disputes in the African region. Over the last decade or so, BRICS has steadily emerged as an important player in Africa, with many people in the region seeing it as a balancer against the US-led Western bloc. There is little doubt that the African states will have some interest in maintaining a geopolitical balance of power between BRICS and the US-led Western bloc to maximise their economic strength and security. This could well lead to a quiet competition between them over the expansion of their geopolitical influence and naval capabilities in the African region.

3.1. Economic Implications

The economic dimension of BRICS's expansion holds significant implications for Africa, offering both opportunities for growth and development as well as challenges to navigate. The deepening economic ties between the BRICS nations and African countries have been a subject of extensive analysis in scholarly literature, shedding light on the multifaceted nature of this relationship.

One prominent aspect of BRICS-African economic relations is the potential for enhanced trade and investment cooperation. According to Asuelime and Jethro (2013), the expansion of BRICS has led to increased trade flows between BRICS nations and Africa, particularly in sectors such as infrastructure, energy, and manufacturing. This trend is further supported by Africanews (2023), which emphasises the role of BRICS in providing alternative financing mechanisms for African infrastructure projects

through institutions like the New Development Bank. Such investments have the potential to catalyse economic growth, create employment opportunities, and foster industrialization in African countries.

However, the economic implications of BRICS's expansion also raise concerns regarding trade imbalances and competition with local industries. Research by Chen et al. (2024) highlights the challenges African economies face in balancing trade relations with BRICS nations, particularly China, which has emerged as a dominant trading partner for many African countries. The influx of cheap Chinese goods into African markets has raised concerns about the competitiveness of local industries and the sustainability of domestic manufacturing sectors.

Additionally, the issue of debt sustainability has come to the forefront of discussions surrounding BRICS-Africa economic relations. According to UNCTAD (2013), African countries have increasingly turned to BRICS nations for financing, often through loans and infrastructure projects. While these investments hold the promise of driving economic development, they also raise questions about debt vulnerabilities and the long-term sustainability of African economies. As BRICS expands its economic footprint in Africa, policymakers must carefully consider the implications of debt accumulation and strive for sustainable financing models prioritising long-term development objectives.

Another critical aspect to consider is the potential for technology transfer and knowledge sharing between BRICS nations and African countries. According to Walz et al. (2008), BRICS countries possess advanced technological capabilities in sectors such as information technology, renewable energy, and telecommunications. Collaborative ventures and partnerships between BRICS and African entities offer opportunities for technology transfer, skills development, and innovation diffusion. For instance, joint research and development initiatives in renewable energy could facilitate the transition towards sustainable and clean energy sources in Africa, contributing to both economic development and environmental sustainability.

Conversely, the economic implications of BRICS's expansion also entail challenges related to market access and trade diversification. Research by Oyewole (2023) highlights the need for African countries to diversify their export destinations and reduce dependence on primary commodity exports to BRICS nations. While BRICS markets offer significant potential for African exports, trade relations often remain concentrated in raw materials and natural resources. Diversifying export portfolios and enhancing value-added production capacities are essential steps for African countries to maximise the benefits of trade with BRICS nations and mitigate vulnerabilities to

commodity price fluctuations.

Besides, the issue of infrastructure development emerges as a key driver and enabler of economic cooperation between BRICS and African countries. According to ElGanainy et al. (2024), infrastructure investment is crucial for enhancing connectivity, facilitating trade flows, and fostering regional integration within Africa. BRICS-led initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the BRICS New Development Bank (NDB) have the potential to address Africa's infrastructure deficit and unlock economic growth opportunities. However, concerns exist regarding the sustainability, transparency, and governance frameworks associated with large-scale infrastructure projects, highlighting the importance of accountable and inclusive development strategies.

To conclude, the economic implications of BRICS's expansion for Africa are multifaceted, encompassing opportunities for technology transfer, market access, and infrastructure development alongside challenges related to trade diversification, debt sustainability, and governance. By leveraging collaborative partnerships, embracing innovation, and adopting sustainable development practices, African countries can harness the potential benefits of BRICS-African economic cooperation while addressing underlying vulnerabilities and ensuring inclusive growth.

3.2. Political and Strategic Implications

One significant aspect of the BRICS expansion is its geopolitical implications for Africa, particularly in shaping regional power dynamics and international alignments. According to Soko (2017), BRICS's engagement in Africa is driven by strategic interests, including access to natural resources, market expansion, and geopolitical influence. African countries, in turn, view BRICS as strategic partners in counterbalancing Western hegemony and fostering South-South cooperation. This alignment is evident in the increasing collaboration between BRICS and African regional organisations, such as the African Union (AU), in areas such as peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and sustainable development.

However, the geopolitical rivalries within BRICS present challenges and complexities for Africa. Research by Tran (2023) highlights the tensions between China and India within the BRICS framework, particularly concerning their competing interests and influence in Africa. These tensions can manifest in proxy conflicts, geopolitical manoeuvring, and economic competition, potentially exacerbating instability and

insecurity in the region. Moreover, the divergent foreign policy priorities and approaches of BRICS members towards Africa challenge African countries in navigating their diplomatic engagements with the bloc.

Also, the issue of global governance reform is central to the political implications of BRICS expansion for Africa. According to Vyas-Doorgapersad (2022), African countries support BRICS's calls for reforming global governance institutions, such as the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), to reflect contemporary geopolitical realities and enhance African representation. BRICS's advocacy for multipolarity and a greater voice for emerging economies resonates with Africa's aspirations for equitable representation and decision-making power in global governance forums. However, the divergent interests and priorities among BRICS members as well as the complexities of international diplomacy pose challenges to achieving meaningful reforms that address Africa's concerns.

One key aspect to consider is the evolving nature of security cooperation between BRICS nations and African countries. According to Carmody (2017), BRICS's engagement in Africa extends beyond economic interests to encompass security cooperation, including peacekeeping, counterterrorism, and maritime security initiatives. The BRICS bloc has increasingly positioned itself as a partner in addressing security challenges on the African continent, reflecting shared concerns about regional stability and conflict resolution. This cooperation is exemplified by joint peacekeeping missions, such as those in Mali and the Democratic Republic of Congo, where BRICS nations contribute troops and logistical support.

The strategic implications of BRICS expansion also raise concerns about potential power rivalries and competition for influence in Africa. Hagan (2023) also highlights the geopolitical dynamics between China and other BRICS members, particularly regarding their strategic interests and investments in African countries. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and infrastructure projects in Africa have drawn scrutiny from other BRICS nations, raising questions about competition for geopolitical influence and economic dominance. These dynamics underscore the complexities of BRICS-African relations and the need for African countries to navigate competing interests and power dynamics within the bloc.

Moreover, the issue of sovereignty and agency is central to the political implications of BRICS's expansion for Africa. According to the BRICS Summit's Declarations (2023), African countries seek to maintain autonomy and agency in their engagements with BRICS nations, ensuring that partnerships are mutually beneficial and aligned with

national development priorities. This requires African countries to adopt a nuanced approach in their diplomacy with BRICS, balancing the pursuit of strategic interests with safeguarding sovereignty and preserving political independence. By asserting agency and leveraging diplomatic channels effectively, African countries can shape the terms of engagement with BRICS nations and maximise the benefits of cooperation.

To put it briefly, the political and strategic implications of BRICS's expansion for Africa are characterised by a complex interplay of security cooperation, power rivalries, and sovereignty considerations. While BRICS's engagement offers opportunities for addressing security challenges, promoting regional stability, and fostering strategic partnerships, it also presents challenges related to competition for influence, geopolitical tensions, and safeguarding sovereignty. By navigating these dynamics with resilience and foresight, African countries can harness the potential benefits of BRICS-African relations while safeguarding their national interests and autonomy.

4. Implications for Global Governance

One significant implication of BRICS's expansion for global governance is the call for reforming international institutions to reflect the changing geopolitical landscape and accommodate the voices of emerging economies, including African countries. According to Cynthia et al. (2017), BRICS nations advocate for a more equitable distribution of power and decision-making authority in global governance structures, particularly in institutions like the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). African countries align with BRICS in their calls for reform, seeking greater representation and participation in global decision-making processes to address the continent's unique challenges and priorities.

Nevertheless, the implications of BRICS's expansion for global governance also raise questions about the coherence and effectiveness of collective action within the bloc. Research by Darnal et al. (2023) features the divergent interests and priorities among BRICS members, particularly regarding their approaches to global governance issues such as human rights, climate change, and peacekeeping. These differences can complicate consensus-building and hinder coordinated action within international forums, limiting the bloc's ability to effect meaningful change in global governance structures.

In addition, the issue of institutional innovation and alternative mechanisms of global governance is central to the implications of BRICS's expansion for Africa.

According to Duggan et al. (2022), BRICS nations have established new institutions and platforms, such as the New Development Bank (NDB) and the BRICS Business Council, to complement existing global governance frameworks and address gaps in development financing and infrastructure investment. These initiatives offer African countries alternative sources of funding and cooperation outside traditional Western-dominated institutions, providing greater flexibility and autonomy in pursuing their development agendas.

One crucial aspect to consider is the role of BRICS in advocating for multipolarity and greater representation of emerging economies in global governance institutions. To Duggan (2022), BRICS nations challenge the existing hegemony of Western powers in shaping global governance norms and policies. African countries align with BRICS in their calls for a more inclusive and representative international order that accommodates the diverse interests and perspectives of the global South. This shared vision resonates with Africa's aspirations for enhanced agency and participation in global decision-making processes, particularly in areas such as peace and security, development, and environmental sustainability.

Also, the implications of BRICS's expansion for global governance also raise questions about the effectiveness of existing institutions in addressing contemporary challenges. In addition, Bas (2021) draws attention to the limitations of traditional global governance structures in accommodating the diverse interests and priorities of BRICS nations and African countries. This calls for innovative approaches and reforms to enhance the responsiveness, legitimacy, and effectiveness of global governance mechanisms in addressing pressing global issues such as poverty, inequality, and climate change.

The issue of South-South cooperation and solidarity is central to the implications of BRICS's expansion for Africa within the context of global governance. According to Stephan and Bas (2014), BRICS nations and African countries share common interests and challenges, including the pursuit of sustainable development, poverty alleviation, and social inclusion. This convergence of interests provides opportunities for collaborative initiatives and partnerships within global governance frameworks, fostering greater solidarity and collective action among developing countries.

The implications of BRICS's expansion for global governance underscore the need for inclusive, responsive, and effective mechanisms that accommodate the diverse interests and priorities of BRICS nations, African countries, and the broader

global South. By advocating for multipolarity, institutional reform, and South-South cooperation, BRICS nations and African countries can contribute to shaping a more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable global governance architecture that addresses the complex challenges of the twenty-first century.

5. Conclusion

The expansion of BRICS holds significant implications for the African continent across economic, political, and strategic dimensions. As BRICS extends its outreach to Africa, it presents both opportunities and challenges for African countries in navigating this evolving partnership.

Economically, BRICS's expansion offers avenues for growth, investment, and development through enhanced trade and investment cooperation. Initiatives like the BRICS New Development Bank provide alternative financing mechanisms for infrastructure projects, supporting economic growth and industrialisation in Africa. However, concerns about trade imbalances, competition with local industries, and debt sustainability underscore the need to carefully manage economic relations with BRICS nations.

Politically and strategically, BRICS's engagement in Africa influences regional power dynamics and international alignments. African countries view BRICS as strategic partners in counterbalancing Western hegemony and fostering South-South cooperation. However, geopolitical rivalries within BRICS, particularly between China and India, pose challenges and complexities for Africa, necessitating careful navigation of diplomatic engagements and power dynamics within the bloc.

Moreover, BRICS's expansion raises questions about global governance reform and the representation of emerging economies in international institutions. African countries support BRICS's calls for reforming global governance structures to reflect contemporary realities and enhance African representation. However, divergent interests and institutional constraints within BRICS complicate consensus-building and hinder coordinated action on global governance issues.

In navigating the implications of BRICS's expansion, African countries must adopt a nuanced approach that balances the pursuit of national interests with the imperatives of regional integration and collective bargaining. By leveraging opportunities for economic cooperation, fostering strategic partnerships, and advocating for inclusive global governance frameworks, African countries can maximise the benefits of BRICS's

engagement while addressing challenges and vulnerabilities.

BRICS's expansion presents Africa with a dynamic landscape of opportunities and challenges, shaping the continent's development trajectory and its role in the evolving global order. By embracing strategic foresight, diplomacy, and collaboration, African countries can harness the potential of BRICS-Africa relations to advance shared prosperity, stability, and sustainable development in the twenty-first century.

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