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The Limitations of BRICS New Development Bank and their Implications to South Africa's Development Objectives: An Afro-Decolonial Perspective

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Abstract

With South Africa joining the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) forum in 2011 and being the proponent of the newly established BRICS New Development Bank, the limitations of the bank and their implications for her development objectives have been neglected in the current scholarly debate. The existing body of knowledge focus largely on South Africa's broader membership in BRICS formation and those conducted about the New Development Bank have not interrogated the limitations of the bank and their implications for Pretoria's development objectives. Given this knowledge deficit, the current article examines the limitations of the BRICS New Development Bank and their implications for South Africa's development objectives. Leaning on the Afro-Decolonial lens as an alternative perspective, the article adopted a desktop qualitative approach that relied heavily on secondary data. The collected data was analysed through document analysis and discourse analysis in their broadest form. It established that the Bank undercuts

the South African effort at advancing growth and prosperity in a transformed world order. Additionally, the Bank is delinked from South African national and continental development disparities. To remedy this, South Africa, along with other African countries, should draft an Afrocentric policy meant to draw funding that is in keeping with their development patterns from the bank. The South African national government should collaborate with rural provinces and local governments to identify infrastructure projects for funding from the BRICS New Development Bank. On issues about global reform, an Afrocentric policy tailored to make the reform of the United Nations Security Council a priority and binding towards BRICS should be adopted. This will curb contradictory postures undertaken by China and Russia on the Council reform.

Keywords: *Afro-Decolonial, BRICS New Development Bank, Limitations, Implications, South Africa*

Introduction

Since her integration into the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) in 2011, South Africa's membership in the bloc remains the subject of scholarly debate and criticism, with proponents supporting and detractors questioning its credentials as part of the formation. South Africa entered the BRICS to fulfil three objectives, namely, to promote its national interests, the development of infrastructure on the African continent and support the initiatives such as the Continental Free Trade Area and join efforts with other countries of the Global South to push for the reform of the global economic and governance institutions (Shoba 2018). Established in 2014, the New BRICS Development Bank (Stephany 2015; Cooper and Farooq 2015; Anthony, Tembe and Gull 2015; Latino 2017) is viewed as a strategic organ that would enable South Africa to realise the foregoing objectives. The existing research on South Africa's BRICS membership largely overlooks the limitations of the New Development Bank and their implications for Pretoria's development objectives. Demarcated into four sections, the current article examines the limitations of the BRICS New Development Bank and their implications for South Africa's development objectives. The first section expounds the Afro-Decolonial perspective as an alternative lens underpinning the study. This is followed by the provision of the research methodology, anchoring the article. The third section of the paper unpacks the limitations of the BRICS New Development Bank and

shows their implication for South Africa's development objectives. The last part of the article provides a conclusion and recommendations of the study.

Afro-Decolonial Lens of Analysis

Afro-Decolonial lens has its roots in decoloniality and Afrocentricity, which analyse African phenomena or communities from their position to dismantle perpetual epistemic dislocation advanced by Euro-American theories. The Afro-Decolonial lens shifts the focus from Eurocentric perspectives, which study African phenomena and communities through a foreign lens, to a more localised geography of reason. In this regard, the lens represents an epistemic rejection of fragmentary analysis undertaken by Euro-American mainstream theories imposed on Africans, notably Realism and Marxism, etc. (Zondi 2019). The use and adoption of Afro-Decolonial lens position Africans epistemically to think based on their experience as the locus of reasoning, studying, and understanding African phenomenon (Shai 2016; Rapanyane and Sethole 2021). Since epistemic rebellion occurs in diverse contexts across the Global South, it is essential to contextualise each instance. In this article, Afro-Decoloniality is deployed as a contextual and alternative lens to reclaim the intellectual space of Africans that has been previously occupied by the Euro-Americans who, in their study of African phenomenon distorted, and provided a fragmentary analysis and understanding of research about Africa and her people. Engaging in an ongoing decolonial course of unmuting African voices, the lens is deployed by the marginalised decolonial thinker to dismantle the ontological crisis brought by Euro-American coloniality, by repositioning the African ontological claims on their epistemic locus. Other aspects of African dislocation in the socio-economic realm are unmasked, and remedies are proposed to enable the relocation of Africa and its people from the margins to the centre of the globe (Zondi 2019; Shai 2016). The article, as part of the decolonial discourse, unmask epistemic injustice by dismissing the Eurocentric claim of universality, neutrality, and single truth. This is so because individual arguments are informed by their position to certain classes, sexuality, gender, spirituality, linguistic, class, race and on the globe in the contemporary world order (Grosfoguel 2010). In this regard, the article does not hide or delink the researcher from the analysis, like Euro-American perspective.

Research Methodology

The article is anchored on a desktop qualitative approach that relied on secondary data. Leaning on Afrocentric theory, the acquisition and examination of data is informed and shaped by African people, norms, values, and culture. In this regard, the findings and recommendations of the study are shaped and informed by African values, interests, problems, needs, history and their contemporary experience (Schreiber 2000; Mazama 2001; Asante 2007; Ntseane 2011; Reviere 2001; Mkabela 2005; Shai 2016). The article gleaned data from official policy documents, briefs, books, academic theses/dissertations, and journal articles. The collected data was analysed through document analysis and discourse analysis in their broadest form.

Limitations of the BRICS New Development Bank and their Implications for South Africa's Development Objectives

BRICS New Development Bank and South Africa's Development Objectives

BRICS New Development Bank was established to accelerate the reform of the global economic and governance institutions as well as providing funds for infrastructure and sustainable development projects of its member states, and other emerging and developing countries. Specifically, the bank is envisaged to facilitate the reform of the international financial institutions (the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and World Trade Organisation) to enhance the voice and representation of developing and emerging countries. The bank forms part of South Africa's strategic plan to use multilateral institutions to increase its influence in global reform issues (Maphaka 2020a; Asuelime 2018; Latino 2017; Sidiropoulos, Prinsloo, Mpungose and Grobbelaar 2018; Qobo and Soko 2015).

Similarly, Maphaka (2020b) avers that the BRICSm New Development Bank particularly during Zuma's administration was seen as a strategic organ to complement the South African efforts at calling for the reform of global governance. Equally, Gumede (2014) underscores that Zuma's administration viewed BRICS as a strategic bloc to boost South Africa's call for reform of the world trade, economic and political system. Among others, South Africa's multilateral engagements

are informed and shaped by its desire for a reformed United Nations Security Council, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (Naidu 2015). In this context, Asuelime (2018) indicates that the BRICS partners boost South Africa's diplomatic clout as her voice gain weight relative to when Pretoria is making a unitary call. Given the above arguments, the New Development Bank boost BRICS call for a shift from global coloniality mirrored by Western domination and exploitation of global economic governance institutions, a phenomenon that aligns with South Africa's Afrocentric foreign policy that seeks a reformed global system to improve the representation of the African continent and facilitate the reduction of myriad challenges facing the region.

While the New Development Bank is seen as a strategic institution to push and accelerate reform of global economic and governance institutions, the BRICS call for global reform is confined to the international financial institutions. The reform of the United Nations Security Council remains a rhetoric, and the BRICS veto-holding member states, such as China, take a contradictory posture by supporting non-member states to the bloc, notably, Pakistan. Conversely, China is against the inclusion of G4 (Germany, Japan, India, and Brazil). Specifically, Beijing (the Capital City and Administrative hub of China) objects the inclusion of Japan and India, countries that compete for the sphere of influence with it in the Asian region. BRICS downplays Pretoria's (South Africa's administrative capital) quest for UN Security Council reform, which is advanced through a coalition of like-minded democratic states including India, Brazil, and South Africa (Maphaka 2020a). Adding weight to the above arguments, Maphaka (2020a) describes BRICS as a multilateral institution that complements South African efforts at relocating from the margins of global economic governance, and simultaneously deployed by China and Russia to frustrate the integration of South Africa, India, and Brazil in the United Nations Security Council. He thus concludes that BRICS replicates the elements of dependency, underdevelopment, and domination faced by South Africa in its relations with developed Euro-American countries. Notshulwana (2012) argues that China is dismissing India's and Brazil's lobbying efforts to be integrated into an expanded United Nations Security Council. In the same line of arguments, Cilliers (2017) asserts that South Africa's BRICS membership comes at the expense of global reform championed by India, Brazil, and the South Africa forum. Chiyemura (2014) demonstrates that BRICS member states have divergent interests. For its part, China uses BRICS to advance global

change, while Russia seeks support and collaboration with emerging economies. Conversely, India, South Africa and Brazil utilise the forum to push for their integration into the United Nations Security Council, a move that is curbed by Russia and China's reluctance to dilute their veto power. Equally, Xiong (2012) states that China opposes the expansion of the UN Security Council to include the G4 (Brazil, India, Japan, and Germany) because the group contains its Asian rivals, India and Japan. Speaking at the United Nations General Assembly in 2011, China expressed its support for Pakistan on its quest for a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council. The foregoing development is a direct frustration of Japan and India's quest for a permanent seat on the Council. In agreement, Pant (2013) underlines that BRICS has called for a comprehensive reform of the United Nations to transform it into a more effective, efficient, and representative organisation. But China and Russia remained hurdles for the realisation of a transformed United Nations Security Council.

South Africa underscores that a transformed world order will facilitate its growth and development objectives (Maloka 2019). Given the above, Russia and China's reluctance to support UN Security Council reform undermines the bank's efforts to accelerate the reform agenda, thereby hindering South Africa's prosperity in a transformed world order. The foregoing development is alarming, as multilateral institutions are often used to advance the interests of states in the international system. In a world characterised by what Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2014) describes as global coloniality of asymmetrical relations between the Global South and North, developing countries such as South Africa are used to advance the interests of emerging and developed countries. It is within this context that the limitations and implications of the BRICS New Development Bank to South Africa's development objectives should be viewed and understood. Russia and China's reluctance to support the reform of the United Nations Security Council suggests that the two countries perpetuate coloniality that limits South Africa's development prospects.

In this context, South Africa, India, and Brazil act like colonial subjects that respond more to the interests of China and Russia while their interests receive scant attention. Through the BRICS Outreach Dialogue and the New Development Bank's funding of African infrastructure, China and Russia are able to gain support of African countries in their multilateral engagements. Moreover, the no-strings-

attached policy advanced by the BRICS New Development Bank provides an enabling environment for China and Russia to advance their alternative policies to those of the West in the Global South, including the African continent. In agreement, Anthony *et al.* (2015) indicate that the no-strings-attached policy of the BRICS offers an alternative avenue to Western loans and development aid pretext as a tool of interference to advance Western neo-liberal policies in Africa and other parts of the Global South. Beyond advocating for the reform of the global economic and governance system, BRICS countries seek to introduce new ideas and remedies to myriad challenges facing the world (Gumede 2014). With this, it is safe to argue that the New Development Bank is used by Russia in its endeavour to reclaim its erstwhile status and frustrate any threat from the West. On the other hand, China is using the bank to advance its ambition of climbing to the peak of the globe.

The foregoing developments are corroborated by Besada and Tok's (2014: 76) argument that "other countries, particularly China and Russia, are instrumentalising the forum to get what they want out of African countries without formalising the grouping's policies and effecting change to global institutions at the global level, as was initially promised". Arguing on the BRICS New Development Bank, Hooijmaaijers (2021) asserts that the bank enables states such as Russia to evade sanctions imposed by Western European countries and the United States of America. Unlike other multilateral financial institutions, the New Development Bank can provide loans to sanctioned Russia in local currency, bypassing sanctions that typically target transactions made in U.S. dollars. This allows Russia to receive funding despite international restrictions. Senona (2010: 10) underscores that "countries of the South, in particular African countries outside of IBSA and the BRIC, need to be circumspect when dealing with these emerging powers. Africa should ask probing questions and not take these alliances at face value, as these countries are strong, fast-emerging economies already claiming a serious stake in global economic dominance". The presence of BRIC countries on the African continent is not largely driven by their wish to support development in the region. At the heart of their policy towards Africa is a striving to use the continent to advance their commercial interests, draw political and diplomatic support in the international community and multilateral institutions (Soko and Qobo 2016).

The Global South's growth and prosperity, including Africa's, are hindered by global political, trade and economic rules that unfairly favour Euro-American developed countries. The African continent has a limited

voice in multilateral institutions such as the United Nations, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organisation, the Group of Eight and the Group of Twenty countries. Further, African countries have no leeway to make economic policies that are responsive to their development needs (Gumede 2014). While BRICS New Development Bank no-strings attached policies could enable South Africa to address its development needs on its own terms, implementing these policies within a colonial world order limits the country growth potential.

These developments imply that South Africa and the entire African continent remain, as Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2014) states, net recipients of norms, rules, and policies created for them, not with them. The selective reform advanced by China and Russia perpetuates coloniality that positions South Africa, India, and Brazil on the margins of the asymmetrical globe dominated by Euro-American developed countries. This is so because the undecolonised Council sustain the Western control, domination, and exploitation of the Global South, including the African continent. This is so because most Council missions are undertaken on the Global South, particularly the African continent, thus their absence in the organ implies that their destiny is designed for them without them. The latter is supported by Carvalho, Gruzd and Mutangadura (2019) argument that the majority of issues addressed by the United Nations Security Council are on the African continent. The continent stood at number 27 out of 53 regions that the United Nations Security Council had to deal with in 2018, hosting 14 United Nations Peacekeeping missions.

As mentioned previously, the New Development Bank was also established to fund infrastructure and other sustainable development projects of BRICS member states and in other emerging and developing countries. Asuelime (2018) avers that the development and funding of infrastructure projects in developing and emerging countries is an apex priority for the BRICS formation. He states that this is mirrored by the pledges made by the BRICS New Development Bank to employ resources to fund infrastructure and sustainable development projects, both private and public projects in BRICS member states and other emerging and developing countries. Asuelime (2018) further asserts that cooperation among BRICS states covers various areas, including industrialisation and infrastructure development, prioritised by South African development policies such as the National Development Plan Vision 2030. The African National Congress-led government view the

BRICS New Development Bank as an alternative funding for poor countries, supporting South Africa's efforts in African Renaissance and South-South cooperation (Maphaka 2020b).

It is within this context that the South African state-owned power utility, Eskom, received a loan for \$180 million in 2016. Through the loan, Eskom planned to form transmission lines to connect 500 megawatts of renewable energy constructed by independent power producers to the national grid. Eskom received another loan of R6 billion in 2019 to fund a battery storage project. If implemented, the said storage will constitute 360 megawatts of battery storage sites in four South African provinces. Significantly, the project is meant to meet the high demand for electricity in the provinces and contribute to the reduction of carbon emissions through alternative sources such as renewable energy. In another development, the New Development Bank is set to fund Eskom's Medupi Thermal Power Plant and the Industrial Development Corporation. In this regard, the bank is envisaged to grant Eskom a loan of \$480 million to fund the environmental protection project undertaken by the Medupi Thermal Power Plant, while the Industrial Development Corporation is set to receive a R1.15 billion loan to construct sustainable and renewable energy projects meant to reduce carbon emissions. The loan is set to boost South Africa's quest for alternative energy sources and provide sustainable energy for Pretoria's economy (Maphaka 2020a; Neethling 2017; Cooper 2017).

The South African National Development Plan Vision 2030, as articulated by the National Planning Commission of 2011, cited by Asuelime (2018b: 139), asserts that 'industrialisation along with the development of infrastructure is imperative to promote economic growth, employment, and provide citizens with a means to enhance their living conditions and their incomes'. Significantly, the Plan emphasises that infrastructure is imperative to development. Given the above, Asuelime (2018b) underscores that the National Development Plan aligns with South Africa's quest for industrialisation, articulated by the Industrial Policy Action Plan and its prioritisation of infrastructure dovetails with areas targeted by BRICS formation. Because South Africa is largely rural and its development favours urban areas, the New Development Bank's lack of small-scale infrastructure projects perpetuates the country's unequal colonial-apartheid development patterns. The net effects of these are that South African rural areas receive scant attention in national infrastructure development funding and alternative multilateral financial institutions such as the BRICS New

Development Bank. Given the above, the BRICS New Development Bank is delinked from the South African development disparities, and this limits its ability to respond to South Africa's development objectives. Apart from energy projects, South African rural areas are largely neglected in the projects funded by the New Development Bank. South Africa should engage with BRICS countries using a comprehensive Afrocentric policy that is informed by its own interests, needs, problems, and development dynamics.

The post-apartheid South African government has since 1994 prioritised its national development and that of the continent (Naidu 2015; Neethling 2017). South Africa's foreign policy posture is shaped by this stance, and the country provides support to the African Union, including its initiatives such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development and the African Peer Review Mechanism as well as the regional institutions such as the Southern African Development Community (Bohler-Muller 2012). Naidu (2015) points out that Zuma lobbied BRICS countries to fund infrastructure development and other sustainable development projects on the continent. To make this a reality, South Africa lobbied for the establishment of the New Development Bank African Regional Centre in Johannesburg in 2017. South Africa's self-proclaimed gateway status to BRICS is negated by bilateral and multilateral forums of individual BRICS partners' engagement with other African countries, but Pretoria has pushed for the establishment of the BRICS Regional African Centre to fund the continental infrastructure (Alden and Wu 2014).

In this context, South Africa integrates the African Agenda, particularly the continent's development priorities, into its BRICS commitments. For example, the 2013 BRICS Summit was tailored to respond to African interests through the theme called 'BRICS and Africa: Partnership for Development, Integration and Industrialisation' (Dube 2013: 1). According to Dube (2013: 3) the objectives South Africa is set to promote through her BRICS membership are 'to advance its national interests; to promote its regional integration programme (with specific reference to the Tripartite Free Trade Area) and related infrastructure development programmes; and to develop a South-South partnership for the reform of global governance'. The former President Zuma has, in this regard, invited leaders from the African continent and various institutions on the continent to hold deliberations with other BRICS partners during the 2013 Summit held in Durban, South Africa (Khan

and Karodia 2014; Gumede 2014). The declaration of the 2013 Durban Summit underscores BRICS' commitment to support the African development initiatives such as the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA), the African Union Plan 2010-2015, the New Partnership for Africa's Development Presidential Infrastructure Championing Initiative, and the Regional Infrastructure Master Plans (Qobo and Soko 2015).

Citing the African Union Programme for Infrastructure Development, Bertelsmann-Scott, Prinsloo, Sidiropoulos, Wentworth and Wood (2016) reported that Africa's infrastructure funding needs are 60% for energy, 37% for transport, and 2.5% for water. The infrastructure development, particularly investment in the development of roads, railways, ports, water, electricity, and telecommunication, is mentioned by the New Growth Path (South African development policy) as the apex priorities for the South African government. As part of the African National Congress-led government's efforts to attract trade and investment from overseas to the African continent, South Africa's infrastructure development drive covers the whole continent of Africa. Among other areas targeted by South Africa's infrastructure development objectives is the move to a green economy to reduce its heavy reliance on coal as the main source of energy. Through the Zuma-led Presidential Infrastructure Champion Initiative, South Africa contributed to infrastructure development projects targeted by the African continent, notably, roads, bridges, border posts, fibre-optic networks, gas pipelines and management systems. At the heart of this programme is a vision to form a network route that will connect Cape Town to Cairo, Durban to Dar es Salaam as part of the North-South Corridor. In the Southern African region, South Africa is dedicated to promoting infrastructure and industrial development with an intention to facilitate regional integration accompanied by smooth trade (Besharati 2013).

During his presidency, as a champion of the New Partnership for Africa's Development's North-South Corridor, Zuma lobbied other BRICS partners to support Africa's development objectives. Speaking at the BRICS Sanya Summit held in China in 2011, Zuma remarked that BRICS countries could use their major savings pool to support infrastructure development and manufacturing on the African continent. He further indicated that Africa will need \$480 billion to fund infrastructure development in the next ten years, and BRICS countries should tap into this opportunity. Zuma echoed the same sentiments

during the 2013 BRICS Business Council and lobbied the business community from other BRICS partners to cooperate with Pretoria to build infrastructure, especially road and rail (Sidiropoulos, Prinsloo, Mpungose and Grobbelaar 2018; Moore 2012; Shubin 2015).

On continental projects, the New Development Bank is envisaged to grant R3.2 billion to the Trans-Caledon Tunnel Authority (TCTA) to implement the second phase of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project and fund the construction of water transfer infrastructure. If implemented, the Lesotho Highlands Water Project will provide water to the residents of Gauteng, North West, Mpumalanga and Free State (Maphaka 2020a). Arguing on this one, Asuelime (2018) underscores that the New Development Bank boosts the funding of the national and continental infrastructure, and this could further improve the regional industrial integration programme. South Africa's membership to BRICS makes the formation to be a legitimate representative of developing regions through the inclusion of African representation, this extends and boosts the promotion of African interests through South Africa backed by other BRICS partners in multilateral forums and institutions that Pretoria is the only African member state (Asuelime 2018; Besada, Tok and Winters 2013; Asuelime and Jethro 2013). Equally, the New Development Bank's infrastructure projects in Southern Africa exacerbate the colonial development disparity between rural and urban areas. This development implies that Africans staying in rural areas remain at the margins of national development. To remedy this, South Africa should join efforts with other African countries to craft a comprehensive BRICS Afrocentric policy that is befitting of the continent's development interests, needs and problems.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Leaning on the Afro-Decolonial perspective, the article contributes to the academic discourse on the BRICS New Development Bank by providing the limitations of the bank and their implications for South Africa's development objectives. The selective global reforms advocated by China and Russia undercut South Africa's efforts to use the bank's contributions to advance global reform, which would enable Pretoria's growth and prosperity in a transformed world order. Instead, the bank is used by China and Russia to subsume South Africa and other African countries, along with BRICS non-permanent member states (India and

Brazil) to the United Nations Security Council and other developing countries to advance their foreign policy objectives. Significantly, the bank is delinked from the pressing need of addressing the colonial-apartheid development disparities in South Africa and other African countries.

Recommendations

1. South Africa should join efforts with other African Union member states to draft an Afrocentric policy through which they will lobby the BRICS Bank to fund their infrastructure in a manner that is in keeping with their development patterns.
2. The South African national government should coordinate with rural provinces and their local governments to identify infrastructure projects that could be funded by the BRICS New Development Bank
3. On issues about global reform, an Afrocentric policy tailored to make the reform of the United Nations Security Council a priority and binding towards BRICS should be adopted. This will curb contradictory postures undertaken by China and Russia on the Council reform.

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