

Problems and Prospects of BRICS+ - Inclusive Development, Climate Change and Alternative Finance

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BRICS (now BRICS+) is an intergovernmental organization (which is still now loosely held) comprising ten countries – Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates. The term BRIC was originally developed in the context of foreign investment strategies. BRICS+ is not a very cohesive formation of groups although it is considered as a non-Western group which would, instead of a unipolar world with USA at its hegemonic position, usher, as is expected, a multipolar world in the 21st Century.

BRICS+ accounts for 46% of world's population, 25% of the world's land mass. The economy of the BRICS has increased by 356.27% between 1990 and 2019 with China leading the show followed by India. In 2022, BRICS+ share of world GDP at Purchasing Power Parity is 35.6%. Intra-BRICS trade was US\$ 614.8 billion as of 2022. BRICS has 4716 centi-millionaires and 549 billionaires. BRICS+ countries have over 1200 satellites in orbit. BRICS have 40% of existing internet users worldwide. Brazil, India and China are among the world's top largest countries by population, area and GDP and have an estimated US\$ 5.2 trillion in combined foreign reserves. In 2017 BRICS accounted for 19% of global investment flows.

Given the above descriptions of BRICS (or BRICS+) the proposed work wants to delve into three major issues in the current context of global economic, political, cultural and natural, which are very much intertwined with each other. They include – (a) BRICS+ and inclusive development, (b) BRICS+ and climate change and (c) BRICS+ and alternative financial architecture. The idea is to see whether the BRICS+ has any comparative advantage in dealing with these three inter-related issues at stake and if yes, what are the problems and prospects of them. We provide below a brief introduction of these three issues as they are now getting unfurled (may be or may not be in the official agenda of BRICS+ which is yet to have a permanent secretariat apart from holding annual summit every year since 2009).

1. BRICS+ and Inclusive Development:

Of late, the idea of inclusive development has got momentum in the policy circle of Global South including India as the trickle down approach of increasing economic growth rate failed in reality to touch the marginal or vulnerable sections of the population in terms of several dimensions of human development as used in the policy-related decision making in Global South. The official connotation of the very idea of inclusive development signifies mainstreaming of the marginal in terms of market-centric logic. BRICS+ being a group of southern countries and being heralding the renewed notion of south-south cooperation is expected to come out with a definite route map of inclusive development in its member countries at least. Now, the question that is of paramount interest involves whether the BRICS+ is ready to challenge or negotiate with neoliberal policy making in the South in the name of economic

liberalization at the dictate of the West-centric multilateral financial institutions like the IMF and the World Bank or not? Does the BRICS+ have the potential agenda in mind or will it follow the same path of neoliberalism in the name of ushering inclusive development? At different annual summits of BRICS development (especially infrastructure development in the form of Chinese belt and road strategy) remained one of the main topics of inter-ministerial discussion and the ultimate result so far being some rhetoric statements with not much ado regarding what is inclusive development. Does not then BRICS+ have the potential to think otherwise to combat the West-centric TINA (There is no alternative)? Or is it the geopolitical conundrum within the countries of the BRICS+ does not garner to think otherwise which will pose a definite no to neoliberalism radically? Or is it the fact that radicalism within BRICS+ in the post-neoliberal time a far cry? Does the BRICS+ take into account the space of socially determined needs of various kinds when talking about development?

2. BRICS+ and Climate Change:

Climate change is now the key issue between North and South. It is well known now that the pledge of rendering annually US\$ 100 billion by the North to the South has not been kept and the onus of strategizing finance for mitigation and adaptation has befallen mostly on the Global South. The major stakeholders of climate finance as it is called today are the nation states of the Global South; and it is expected that the BRICS+ being the most important Southern cooperation of late in the post-neoliberal age would come out with at least BRICS+ focused plans and programmes for climate finance. As is well known, most of the climate finance that has come from the North is in the form of mitigation finance and not in the form of adaptation finance, there is thus expectation from the BRICS+ to do something to arrange climate finance for the Global South. Will it do it? Or will it like the other non-BRICS+ nation states wait for the private finance to come to aid the need for mitigation and adaptation of climate change? Does not the BRICS+ need a separate institution to deal with the matter? At different annual summits of BRICS climate change and the need for doing something for it has been discussed. However, the million dollar question is if BRICS+ is at least partially capable of meeting the climate finance needs of the Global South then why there is no avowed concern for it in the BRICS+? Or is it once again the political within the BRICS+ vis-à-vis G7 or G20 that is not allowing tracing some way out for climate finance need in hand?

3. BRICS+ and Alternative Finance:

Related with the above two concerns viz. inclusive development and climate finance, the most impending question is whether the BRICS+ is fit for providing alternative to West-based multilateral institutions like the IMF and the World Bank to make the present global order more multi-polar? An initiative in the form of instituting a New Development Bank (NDB, henceforth) has been taken. But is it capable to be an alternative to the IMF and the World Bank? An alternative which will not tie conditionalities with every dollar that is extended as credit support to the Southern countries by these two Breton Woods institutions? Also, is the question of

making alternative to dollar as reserve currency of the world in the post-WW II era? Or is once again the political – especially geo-political in intra-BRICS+ that is more compelling than thinking in terms of common currency, free trade area within BRICS+ and South-focused conditionality less development finance.

These are some of the questions which the proposed work will make an attempt to decipher and from the empirical analysis will endeavour to get some analytical underpinnings as BRICS+ of late is concerned.