

Report
Research Planning Meeting on
Towards a Policy Framing Agenda of the Global South: BRICS and the Challenges of Geopolitics in a Globalised World
Organised by
Calcutta Research Group
in collaboration with
Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung-South Asia
CRG Office, 17 June 2025, 4:00 PM

Introduction

The director of CRG welcomed the audience and invited Anita Sengupta, coordinator of the CRG-RLS programme for 2025, to introduce the programme for this year. Anita Sengupta welcomed the guests and provided a brief overview of the project, including the proposed research papers and other programmes under the project. She also mentioned that CRG plans to organise webinars and online panel discussions, which will involve a larger audience. With this brief introduction, she invited Anindya Jyoti Majumdar to initiate the panel discussion.



Introduction: Planning Meeting

Panel Discussion 1: Sharing the Research Idea on BRICS and Essential Political Questions in the Global South

Presentations

Anita Sengupta was the first speaker of this panel. Her proposed research was on *BRICS and the Making of an Alternative Global Order*. The core idea of the paper was whether the formation of BRICS can create an alternative global order during the era of de-globalisation. The core idea of the paper questioned the overlapping identities and the role of bilateral relations between member countries within BRICS. The bilateral relationship between the countries creates obstacles towards framing a common agenda under BRICS. BRICS emerged from a

market-driven intellectual inspiration which brought together a group of states with diverse socio-economic and political conditions. The primary objective was to establish an equitable work environment in the countries. The conflictual relationship among countries will evolve into a relationship with globally interconnected visions. Quoting scholars such as Maria Lagutina and Amitabh Acharya, Sengupta noted that regional cooperation gradually became more important than the unified global order. Through these discussions, the proposed research would focus on two questions. First, the consequence of the emergence of BRICS as a global economic and strategic power, and second, the challenges posed by the socio-economic and political interests of each State within these multiple understandings.

Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury and Rajat Kanti Sur's paper was based on the *State of migrant labour in BRICS Countries*. The discussion began with the BRICS newsletter on labour and inflation. A research paper has been proposed to analyse the policies adopted by the BRICS labour ministers' conference since 2016. The transition from the transformation of employment from informality to formality in 2016 to sustainable skill development in the post-pandemic era has several important elements that warrant analysis in the paper. Ensuring a "Decent Work" atmosphere for all would be one of the key focuses of the proposed research. Both researchers proposed that, apart from policy analysis, the study would focus on the conditions of migrant labour in at least two to three BRICS+ countries other than India. They will analyse the labour acts, statistics, policies implemented by governments, pamphlets released by various political and labour organisations, reports from civil society organisations, news clippings, and debates in legislative bodies to assess the situation of migrant labourers in BRICS countries. Through these analyses, the research aims to identify the possibilities of cooperation between these BRICS countries and present global and bilateral conflicts. The researchers proposed consulting the labour policies of China, India, and South Africa, among the core BRICS countries, as well as one or two countries under BRICS+, to analyse the situation of migrant labourers and possible solutions in the Global South.



Panel 1: Presentation by Ratnadeep Maitra



Discussion after Participants' Presentation

Sohini Sengupta was the third speaker of the panel. She was presenting the proposed idea for a joint paper titled "*BRICS and Climate Change: Debating Issues, Policies, Politics, and Actions*." Shatabdi Das and she would do joint research on it. Beginning with the history of the initiative on BRICS and Climate Change, the proposed research aims to determine whether a coalition is possible among the BRICS countries. The paper will focus on disaster risk reduction policies in the BRICS countries, especially water security policies in South Africa, flood and other disaster management in China, and Storm and other management in India. Therefore, the paper also focused on the development policies and development financing, which played a crucial role in shaping the idea of climate governance. The role of the helping idea is whether they can include policies acceptable to the BRICS countries. Lastly, the proposed research aimed to study the counterarguments to and the role of decarbonisation as a policy of climate governance. Based on the concept of climate justice and climate narrative, this paper will explore climate justice.

The last speaker of the panel was Ratnadeep Maitra. The tentative theme of his proposed research was *Putting Hunger First: BRICS and the Question of Food Security*. Beginning with the idea of BRICS's importance as one of the crucial geopolitical groups, the proposed research would be divided into three parts. He wanted to question whether the concept of food security remains relevant in today's diplomatic atmosphere within BRICS. The idea that hunger is a significant concern in some underdeveloped regions, deeply related to land ownership, is a pressing concern for some BRICS countries, which are facing deep insecurity. Based on historical experiences, the researcher proposes to examine the role of ensuring food security in understanding contemporary politics regarding the goal of feeding everyone. Through this study, the proposed research aims to analyse the theoretical understanding of security in international relations and how food security is considered within the broader framework of security, as well as the role of BRICS countries in ensuring food security through various policies. The proposed paper will analyse the food security policies and acts in the BRICS countries. The researcher will take the case studies of India and Brazil to understand the role of food security in the internal and foreign policies. The proposed research will be based on textual analysis, semi-structured interviews, and a study of sources from public websites, among other methods.

Discussions (Panel 1)

Anindyo Jyoti Majumdar, Professor of International Relations, Jadavpur University, was the discussant of the first panel. He began by commenting that BRICS should not be equated with the Global South Movement; it can only be a tool to understand the region known as the Global South. He mentioned that when the experts discussed the challenges of geopolitics and human security, the basic idea of the panel was to address specific questions and propose policy prescriptions. The BRICS emerged as a platform for economic governance and cooperation among its partner countries. However, this would not be considered an easy task due to the bilateral relations between the countries of the Global South. Although the countries of the Global South share common

problems and challenges, they are keen to engage in the field of geopolitics to enhance their status in international politics. At the same time, these countries sought to capitalise on opportunities through cooperation among themselves. He mentioned that these countries could be considered supporters of the system, rather than challengers.

Considering these questions, the discussant commented that BRICS has not been considered an alternative to the existing global order. The countries of the Global South have different challenges. It would not be possible for BRICS to resolve these challenges and build a bridge between the countries. The BRICS can utilise these challenges to strengthen their position in the Global South.

Regarding the situation of migrant labour, the shift from employment generation to skill development has been considered one of the important transitions due to the barriers in transnational labour flows. Therefore, it would be beneficial to examine how the BRICS and BRICS+ countries apply the concepts of labour, sustainable work, and skill development to enhance the conditions within their own countries. The discussant also asked the researcher of the second presentation to identify more specific questions apart from labour policy analysis in the BRICS countries.

Regarding the third presentation on climate change, the discussant questioned the idea of BRICS within the broader context of climate change globally and an alternative perspective on climate change in the Global South. Similarly, the researchers have been advised to study various alliances for a sustainable climate and environment, and examine policies through the lens of climate justice in the Global South. A study on the role of BRICS in drafting a common climate change policy should also be conducted.

The final presentation on food security advised the discussant to examine the study, the food security policies of countries in the Global South, and whether they can move beyond the level of cooperation. The study on knowledge sharing between the BRICS countries is important. The synchronisation between the theoretical and study parts of the proposed paper is also necessary.

Arup Kumar Sen advised studying the alternative global order through the lens of a larger sense of justice. He also mentioned that, considering BRICS as part of the capitalist order, the policies regarding migrant labour should be informed by the same idea. Therefore, the study on labour should examine whether BRICS labour policies can create an alternative labour regime.

Anjan Chakrabarti advised studying China's policy on climate governance and climate security. He also advised reading Wen Tai Chung's ideas on China's agricultural and rural development. The concept of a non-eurocentric development model, with a focus on rural revitalisation, should be examined in the context of climate governance and climate justice in the Global South. He also mentioned that the same study can be applied to examine food security.

Jayanta Roy Chaudhury advised that the study on BRICS should be viewed through the lens of other global political cooperation, especially in the context of climate change and other aspects of the study.

Panel Discussion 2: Sharing the Research Idea on Climate Change, Gender, Minority Rights & Economic Development in BRICS+ Countries

Presentations

Byasdeb Dasgupta was the first speaker of this session. The title of his proposed research was *Problems and Prospects for BRICS+ for inclusive Development, Concern for Climate Change and Alternative Finance in the Global South*. The proposed work wanted to deal with the three major issues: a) BRICS+ in inclusive development, b) BRICS+ and Climate Change and c) BRICS+ and alternative financial architecture. According to the researcher, all three of these issues are important in the global socio-economic and political context. The basic idea of this research is based on analysing the role of BRICS+ in three interrelated issues (development, climate change, and alternative financial order) and the problems and prospects in the countries of the Global South. The research will provide a brief introduction to the three major concepts and analyse the role of inclusive development in the context of the market economy of the Global South. The research questioned the role of BRICS+ in the neoliberal policymaking process of the South. Secondly, the proposed research would examine the challenges faced by the BRICS+ countries in exploring alternative ideas to combat climate change and develop innovative approaches to climate finance. Thirdly, the paper would analyse whether BRICS+ countries can create an alternative finance model that would impose changes on global financial agencies, such as the World Bank and the IMF.

Priya Singh and Paula Banerjee were the following speakers of the second session. The tentative title of their paper was *Precarity, Empowerment, and Digital Labour: Gendered Experiences of Platform Work in India, South Africa and Brazil*. The research will study and compare the contradictory realities of women in the digital world and the contributions of the women's workforce in the gig economy. The research aims to investigate women's contributions to the gig economy in the Global South. The research aims to explore the role of the ILO's resolution on Decent Work in a platform economy and its impact on women workers. This research aims to understand the role of security for women workers through the lens of public safety and security. Researchers mentioned that they would examine the role of digital literacy among women workers to understand the algorithmic structure of the gig economy to fight against inequality in the workforce. According to the researchers, the study will examine the condition of women platform workers in India, Brazil, and South Africa to understand the gender dimension among platform workers in the BRICS countries.

The last presentation was given by Iman Kumar Mitra. The tentative title of his proposed research was *Changing Direction in Infrastructure Finance and the Role of BRICS+ in Making of a "New Global South"*. The proposed research would examine the role of infrastructure finance in BRICS+ countries to explore the possibilities of creating a

new Global South. The researcher presented the Kazan Declaration on "BRICS and Global South: Building a Better World Together" and identified the role of Emerging Markets in Developing Countries (EMDCs). These countries were added to the BRICS as partner countries. According to Mitra, the BRICS+ countries would aim to upgrade themselves as a potential economic and geopolitical force. The paper therefore analyses the role of infrastructure economies in EMDCs, especially since the COVID-19 outbreak in 2019, and attempts to identify the potential for creating a new Global South with BRICS+. To understand the potentialities, the proposed paper will examine emerging initiatives, such as New Development Banks (NDBs), Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs), and the BRICS Interbank Cooperation Mechanism (ICM), as examples of creating a new economic order that challenges the economies of the First World.

Discussions (Panel 2)

Anjan Chakrabarti, Professor of Economics, University of Calcutta, was the discussant of the second panel. He mentioned that all the papers have excellent possibilities. He gave some suggestion which may improve the research.

The transformation of BRICS as an alternative model had one of the important points to study. The transition from a bipolar to unipolar world order in the beginning of the twenty-first century created a huge impact during the formation of BRICS. Later the attempt to transit the unipolar world to a multipolar world involved more countries in the second decade of the twenty-first century. The rise of China as an economic superpower along with US imposed more challenges in the idea of creation of an alternative world order. Chakrabarti mentioned about the recent policies of Donald Trump, the president of US, as one of the important points to study. The countries under BRICS+ should navigate among this complicated geopolitical scenario which, according to Chakrabarti, is unpredictable. The internal tensions within the BRICS countries based on specific national interests would also be a problem for BRICS as one of the alternatives for the Global South. Therefore, according to Anjan Chakrabarti, researchers should consider two points. A) Whether the BRICS+ countries would be considered as a sum total of nation states, or, B) Is it would be considered as a coherent bloc like EU?

Therefore, Byasdeb Dasgupta's paper has been considered as one of the important papers because it discussed the idea of common currency. Common currency would be one of the important aspects to integrate the countries under the bloc. The dominance of US dollar as the only currency in all over the world has been challenged through this idea. According to Chakrabarti, the fear of US towards the economic policies of BRICS would also be examined in this context because it was it could be able to challenge the dominance of US dollar. The strength of BRICS would lay in the emergence of a single currency or a smooth currency transaction between the partner countries of BRICS which can de-throne the US dollar.

The role of bank as mentioned in Iman's paper is crucial at this point. The high possibility of the banking system would take off if the countries would be able to make an understandable cooperation. Chakrabarti mentioned that the banking system in Brazil, India and China has controlled by the states. Therefore, the role of the state regarding finance is crucial here. The researcher should consult the institutional arrangement that may be created an alternative power house of finance and an alternative currency. If the researcher has been considered as one of the power blocs, then the things should be considered. The bilateral relations of the BRICS countries, especially between India and China should be another important aspect if the researcher consider BRICS has a crucial role in geopolitics.

Considering the research idea on women workers in the gig economy as one of the crucial challenges in the labour market of the BRICS countries, Chakrabarti advised to study the condition of the women labours in the BRICS countries as a bloc. Object of this research should complicate the issue of the condition of the digital labours in BRICS countries with a special focus on women so that it would question the policy formulation of the BRICS countries and question the view towards the women platform workers. He advised the researchers to analyse the role of previously mentioned policies towards women with this.

Arup Kumar Sen commented to put thrust on the role of a dominant regional cooperations to compete the global capital should be an interesting angle to study the financial and economic policies of the countries under BRICS+.

Alisha Chandranath commented that the study on the role of the carbon market in the research proposal on climate was important. She also mentioned the research on women and digital labour was an important intervention because a recent study on the role of algorithms in the modern workplace, from the NLS Bengaluru and RLS-South Asia mentioned the same concern in their study.

Lastly, Rajat Kanti Sur read Debashree Chakraborty's brief note titled *Gender and Minority Rights: A Literature Review* as Debashree was out of the country. The short review considered to study the literatures of India, Brazil and South Africa with special emphasis on Minority Rights and Gender.

Rajat gave the vote of thanks at the end of the meeting.