BRICS’ DEVELOPMENT PROMISE: DECOLONISING INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Siphamandla Zondi
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**INTRODUCTION**

The BRIC emerged in 2009 as a platform for interaction, dialogue and alliance between countries considered to be emerging global economic powers was only partly what Goldman Sachs anticipated in 2003 when they predicted that Brazil, Russia, India and China (BRIC) would become major economic powers. But the BRIC, and later BRICS, forum was much more than anticipated; it was a significant geopolitical platform for global reform. It immediately became a focus of all those hoping for an impetus to the global push for reform of institutions of global governance, principally the United Nations Security Council, IMF and the World Bank. These countries have taken advantage of the size of their populations, land area and opportunities in the world economy to achieve economic significance on a global scale. This and their development agenda could help decolonize the world economy, from one in which the North Atlantic is the prosperous centre and a largely poor periphery with a sprinkling of states in-between (the semi-periphery). This is the colonial power matrix that Anibal Quijano calls coloniality that BRICS may help transform the coloniality of international development whose genealogy includes slavery from the 15th century, the civilizing mission of the 19th century, development aid of the 20th century and now development partnership.

Because the historical context of the BRICS can be traced to the agency of the periphery in the form of south-south solidarity and alliances that have challenged the hegemony of the North Atlantic in the world system since 1950s, the BRICS’ normative framework on international development is well developed for it to embrace fully, being epitomized by the ideas of collective self-reliance, endogenous development and solidarity. Both its position on the current discussions on international development in respect of the post-2015 development agenda debate
code-named ‘The World We Want’ and the discussions on development effectiveness through the High Level Forum on Development Effectiveness, on the one hand, and, the potential role of the BRICS Development Bank, suggests that the BRICS may cause a reset of the idea (and perhaps even practice) of international development. This paper suggests that on this basis the BRICS has a potential to transform how we think about, discourse on and practise international development.

WHAT DEVELOPMENT EFFECTIVENESS WITHIN GLOBAL COLONIALITY: ON BRICS AGENCY

With new power has come a new measure of global responsibility for BRICS countries, especially in respect of resolving the problem of elusive development for the marginalised people within BRICS and for the people of the global periphery in general. It is an expectation that true to the age-old southern spirit of solidarity and collective self-reliance, BRICS countries will use their wealth and voice to promote a significant change in the nature of global developmental partnerships. Opportunities for responding to this imperative about in the areas generation of ideas about alternative or better ways of responding to the underdevelopment question as well as in the form practical interventions through effective and concerted development cooperation. This paper argues that with increased diplomatic clout, the BRICS have a precious opportunity to change the discourse going on today through the UN High Level Forum on Development Effectiveness, by focusing it back to questions of ownership and alignment of assistance with national priorities and efforts.

The conference of the High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (HLFAE), which has become known as the Busan or post-Busan process, had its major meeting in November 2011 to negotiate and agree a new approach to partnership with regard to international development, covering both the traditional aid modality called North-South cooperation and the growing one of South-South cooperation. The conference was a culmination of previous attempts to redefine the manner in which development aid was designed and delivered, beginning with the Millennium Declaration in 2000 that adopted the 8 MDGs with the eight being global development partnership or aid;
the UN Conference on Financing for Development in 2002 that shifted the focus of discussions from the quantum of aid to its quality; Rome conference in 2003 that agreed principles for harmonisation of aid; the Marrakech Roundtable on Managing for Development Results in 2004 that agreed principles regarding impact of aid; the 2005 Paris Declaration where principles for aid effectiveness were adopted; and the 2008 HLFAE in Accra, Ghana, which translated all the above commitments into an action plan called the Accra Agenda for Action.

The Busan conference saw strong activism on the part of developing countries as they sought to shift the initiative in these important discussions from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which represents the interests of donor countries, to the global south where most beneficiary countries are found. The OECD had conceptualised and convened HLFAE since 2003, seeking to ensure that the agenda in the reform of global partnership generally and aid in particular remained in the hands of traditional donor countries. Although, the OECD or donor countries recognised the need to grow the voice of beneficiary or developing countries from 2005, this had not led to improvement in the quality of developing country participation. A key challenge is this regard was the fact that they remained agenda takers rather than agenda setters. In spite of the change in the language of these dialogues from donorship to partnership and from aid to development, the underlying logic of unequal relationship and power asymmetry continued to undermine the quality of the dialogue. In this sense, lacking the immense power of knowledge, technical expertise, negotiation capacity, facilities and resources, developing countries remained junior partners in what was marketed as a horizontal dialogue. For example, donor countries took the responsibility for monitoring implementation against the 12 performance indicators set in Paris and elaborated in Accra, giving them power to assess themselves as having made progress and also to judge the compliance of developing countries. The OECD and a host of western institutions remained repositories of knowledge and data used to make these judgments, thus exercising control over the direction that ideas of development would go.

Developing countries have approached Busan with great confidence and a sense of
agency because the development landscape has changed. The impact of development cooperation between countries of the South had started to show as early as the mid-2000s. Big developing countries like Brazil, China and India had helped alter the model of aid in the South-South direction. Individually, these and many other emerging powers had provided alternative sources of development finance, aid and technical assistance that remained invisible in the eyes of the OECD that had for decades tracked traditional North-South development aid. This had an impact on the tenor of discussions in Accra already as consensus developed around the south's idea of development effectiveness rather than aid effectiveness. It was not only that the former expanded the focus beyond aid to investment, trade, debt relief and so forth, but also that this was to recognise the model of development partnership that south countries represented, which was, as the South Commission Report of 1990 put it, about "growing self-reliance both in individual and collective" and that "the base for a nation's development must be its resources, both human and material, fully used to its needs." The same Report said while traditional aid has the capacity to lead to development thus defined, it could only do so if it is “integrated into the national effort and applied to the purpose of those it is meant to benefit”.

Secondly, the south understood development to imply freedom and self-determination. It must be designed to build the capacity of south countries and peoples to determine their destinies rather than mere to catch-up with others or to mimic them. It thus understand that development as conceived within coloniality was unfreedom, it was what Walter Rodney called underdevelopment of developing countries and prosperity of developed countries.

The BRICS positions since its inception in 2009 has been to call for the full implementation of the MDGs especially Goal 8 on global partnerships. This position is meant to put pressure on the global north to honour its commitments in 2000 to increase aid flows to developing countries to correct the structural and historical inequalities in development. The donor countries also committed to provide additional support for the special needs of the least developed countries, landlocked countries and small developing states. Through Goal 8, developed countries also committed to

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develop open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system or to avert protectionism that has been blamed for the asymmetric trade balance between the north and the south and for imposing constraints on the south's exports to developed country markets. The goal also included a commitment to ensure reduction in the developing countries 'external debt, a major binding constraint to their economic self-reliance. Lastly, developed countries also committed to ensure technology transfer to developing countries on the understanding that technology was an enabler for economic growth and for development. 2 Every single BRICS declaration insists on full implementation of these commitments, thus reminding the global north of their responsibilities for building a global development partnership and suggesting that they are to blame largely for the failure of this to materialise.

Sensing that the western financial crisis from 2008 might cause developed countries to reduce their aid flow and thus renege on these commitments an additional emphasis is made in BRICS Summits and by individual country statements especially at the G20 and the UN General Assessment that there should be no reduction in development aid to poor countries. As it said in its Second Summit in Brasilia in 2010, this was a matter of solidarity seen as strategic for global political and economic stability.

Secondly, BRIC countries commit regularly to improve their provision on the individual country basis of development partnership and international humanitarian assistance, especially in response to food crises. It is important that true to the thinking of the south represented by the South Commission Report quoted above, BRIC (now BRICS) do not call their efforts aid or development assistance, as this represents the paternalistic paradigm of assistance that has characterised the conduct of donor countries, neither do they regard themselves as donors for the same reason, but they prefer development partners and partners. They see themselves as being solidarity with the affected peoples rather than as saviours.

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Thirdly, BRICS see development finance by development banks like the World Bank and regional banks as essential for the solution of the scandal of underdevelopment on the periphery. They have pushed the matter of non-diversion of resources away from developing and emerging countries as the World Bank became heavily involved in containing the economic crisis in Europe.

BRICS AND THE POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

As it has been the case since the emergence of south multilateralism in Bandung in 1955, the south agenda has been to ensure to that the UN takes the centre stage in the generation of ideas for global prosperity. Although both the UN and the Bretton Woods Institutions were products of the western powers that won the Second World War, the UN had changed its composition and therefore its ideological role with the mass entry of former colonies. In the same period, Bretton Woods institutions fell even more firmly in the hands of former colonial powers, becoming strategic tools for advancing not just their narrow national interests, but also their imperial global designs for the world. Under these conditions, they become anti-developmental from the viewpoint of those on the periphery, while the UN assumed an important role as an inclusive platform where states raise, discuss and decide issues on the basis of the principle of sovereign equality. Its role in promoting and defending the idea of development during the heydays of narrow economics and the hegemony of the growth discourse supported by powerful forces of the centre of global power.

So, typical of the south and emerging countries contending with implications of subordination under the North Atlantic centre of the world, BRICS have faith in the role of the United Nations as the inclusive and legitimate international organisations to ensure security, stability and development for all in the world. The iconic Asia-Africa Solidarity Conference held in Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955 underlined this faith by stating that it was in full support of the fundamental principles of the UN Charter as “a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations”. This means they hung on this their hope for decolonisation of the world system from one that entrenched a hierarchy of people with peoples of the west living in prosperity and
privilege, while the rest lived in poverty and shame. They saw the Charter as the basis on which to build a world system wherein the scandal of domination of one by the other, both in terms of countries and peoples, would be ended.

As mentioned at Bandung, the Charter established two critical principles for South agency: the sovereign equality of states and the principle of self-determination of peoples and nations (Final Communiqué of the Asian-African Conference, 24 April 2055). Of course, the UN went to take many resolutions in this regard, thus building a corpus of legal positions in support of de-imperialisation of the international system.

Indeed, the countries of the south went on to become active members of the UN and its constituent bodies including regional negotiating groups through which interests of developing countries were championed.

The South Commission Report quoted above took the position that developing countries needed to provide “consistent support for the United Nations and for efforts to make it more effective.” This was described as central to the South's strategy. It was thought that the push for the reform of international institutions including organs of the UN needed to be made with this aim in mind, to make the UN more effective for the south. The reasoning was that without the UN platform individual developing countries were too weak to stake their claims in international negotiations. And therefore a movement towards a just international system (meaning the system in 1990 was still not), one that allows equitable share in decision and rule-making and one that suited the self-reliance of developing countries in terms of development was seen as crucial ('The Challenge of the South,' p. 22).

Of course, Africa would be among the most energetic supporters of the push for development in the UN, beginning the development decade in the 1960s and leading to summits on development themes that culminated in the Millennium Summit of 2000. The other summits developed consensus on international responses to food security and hunger, environment, human settlements, basic needs, employment, science and technology, and gender. These helped clarify the comprehensive
development agenda for the world and laid the basis for the eight goals chosen in 2000 as MDGs. MDG reports have shown time and again that there were failures to address many of the goals and therefore the condition of the developing world was improving at rate less than expected. There were also achievements registered in several areas such as primary school enrolment, infant mortality and so forth.

The general position of the developing countries with regard to the post-2015 agenda is that the MDGs need to be fully implemented and no new commitments should dislocate previous ones. They have argued that the discussions about post-2015 should not cause countries to look beyond MDGs before they are fully implemented. The particular challenges of vulnerable, small and island states are being raised as a crucial reminder that the MDG timespans has not expired. This is the position also that the BRICS have re-iterated.

The second position is that commitments with regard to goal eight on global development partnerships should be maintained and even improved. The decline in ODA flows, for instance, during the period of an economic crisis has been a cause of concern, as indicate in this paper. This position means that at least these commitments must be carried over to the next phase after 2015.

The third position is that there should be an alignment between sustainability and international development commitments and goals. In this regard, developing countries call for harmonisation of developmental goals and sustainable development goals that are emerging from the 1992 Rio agenda and the 2002 Johannesburg agenda. In this way, the increased compliance burden on developing countries will be avoided. The BRICS are campaigning for this vociferously.

**BRICS BANK: A DEVELOPMENT BANK OF THE SOUTH?**

Fourthly, in New Delhi, India, the BRICS decided to establish their own development bank to provide additional assistance to poor countries in the context where there was insufficient funding available anyway and here this funding was reducing due to the
western economic crisis. While this does not relate to the subject of development cooperation as understood by the OECD and its member countries, it is an important part of the south's agenda for development partnership as a provider of soft loans and technical expertise in the areas of infrastructure and sustainable development.

The BRICS argue that this bank is, unlike the Banco del Sur of Latin America, not a counterpoise to the World Bank and other western financial institution, not being meant to replace, but to supplement their support. This concession, though surprising for pro-South activists and thinkers for whom a clear alternative to the citadels of western control over international development is necessary, is designed to moderate expectations and allow the BRICS bank to gradually grow in stature and become by default the desired alternative. It is unlikely that BRICS countries would have agreed to directly challenge the imperialism of western global power as most of them generally avoid confrontation with the west, preferring instead subtle subversion and slowly reforming the asymmetry of power relations. In this sense, the countries would have found it much easier to agree on an institution that is seen as additional source of resources and expertise in its early stages rather than an "alternative".

This can be criticised as too soft, cowardly and effect indicative of emerging countries' co-option. But it should be understood that they face what could be called ambiguities of the semi-periphery, the fact that they are close to the centre and can exercise significant influence, but the western core being still control, confrontational approaches could lead to reprisals that they least afford at this stage of their development.

Also important to factor into the analysis is the fact that development banks of the south have played a critically important role in defence of development as an ideology of solidarity and collective self-reliance. A 2008 UNCTAD research paper found that given unreliable, limited and costly nature of finance from private capital markets and the many gaps in global development finance institutions, regional development banks were assuming a growing strategic role in providing assistance in specific and localised areas, attending to the diverse and specific needs of countries in the
developing world especially. It therefore welcomed the idea of establishing a Bank of the South to provide valuable additional resources to meet unmet needs of south regions. It envisaged an emergence of several regional development banks as the countries of the south increased their pools of savings and foreign exchange reserves, but also because there was a growing need for such institutions.\(^3\)

When the late Venezuelan president, Hugo Chavez, announced the creation of the Bank of the South or Banco del Sur, he declared that they were not pleased with the role of Bretton Woods institutions for being mere tools of Washington and for perpetuating imperialist relations between the north and the south. Yet, the founding countries emphasised that the bank was for fraternity and solidarity towards South American countries, having slowly paid off their debts to Bretton Woods institutions in order to end their painful dependency on them. “The idea is to rely on a development agency for us, led by us,” the Venezuelan finance minister is quoted as having said. “There will be no credit that produces a calamity for our people”, it was also said. Nobel Laureate economic, Joseph Stiglitz, described this as part of the growing agency of the south, refusing to remain trapped in subordinate conditions in return for limited development.\(^4\) More than the provision of additional resources such regional development banks also reflect perspectives of those in the south generally silenced in the western-controlled global financial institutions.

While the BRICS language is not as robust and direct, but it is clear that BRICS countries also refuse to be trapped in subordinate positions through asymmetric power relations in the global development finance space. They also see the role of the Western-controlled finance as problematic hence their insistence on their reform “to make them more representative and to reflect the growing weight of BRICS and other developing countries”, the BRICS resolved at its Fifth Summit in Durban, South Africa, in 2013. It went on to insist on the representation of the voice of developing countries especially.

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countries. As a criticism of the opaque procedures for selection of heads of the Bretton Woods Institution where the colonial period arrangement where by Europe and the USA split the headships between them, BRICS countries called for an open, transparent and merit-based process. In that score, BRICS countries also stressed the critical role to be played by regional development banks because support by established was not steady, adequate and predictable. It is this context that we should understand the diplomatic language of the BRICS, saying that their bank was a "positive" contribution and would supplement existing efforts. In an media interview, the South African Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Ms. Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, gave indications of a bolder step when she said the bank was justified "because the other development banks have not necessarily responded to the challenges of the developing world" ('Another BRICS in the Wall: Interview with Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, Daily Maverick, 26 March 2013). In Durban, they agreed that each member states would make a substantial contribution.

Also important to note, hardly publicised in BRICS communication, is the fact that the BRICS want to assume greater responsibility and role in international financing for development. They desire to reshape the global development agenda and best time to do so is when they are economically strong and have a diplomatic clout as well as while the dominant countries of the west are in economic doldrums. They have interest in translating their reputation into real power to re-align international development such that countries of the south benefit more. Being leading states of the south comes with the responsibility to achieve the south's age-old agenda for global reform, solidarity and collective self-reliance. They are in a pole position to impact international finance architecture, according to Samir Saran and Vivan Sharan.6

WHAT TO MAKE OF ALL THIS?

Clearly, BRICS countries have become important actors in the on-going efforts to

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shape a new global development partnership agenda or international development, as it is commonly known. Four conditions seem to be crucial for BRICS' potential impact on this agenda to materialise.

The first is the point that intra-BRICS development partnership is one of the fast growing focuses of BRICS countries as ministerial meetings designed to flash out the BRICS agenda with regard to a few areas of social/human development, trade and investment and science and technology.

The second is the ability of the BRICS to play a catalytic role in global dialogues and negotiations, one that draws also from the collective wisdom of the many developing countries.

The third is the concrete demonstration of solidarity with less developed countries to enable them to achieve collective self-reliance. The proof of the BRICS development agenda pudding is in how it conducts its development partnerships in ways less constraining, less patronising, less subordinating than what developing countries have become accustomed to in their experiences of the OECD approaches to development assistance. The BRICS' commitment to the Paris Declaration, Accra Agenda for Action and Development Effectiveness should be shown to be superior and more genuine than what we have seen from the OECD.

Fourthly, the BRICS will also have to harness the unique experiences of developing countries and regional initiatives designed to find alternatives to coloniality of so-called development assistance to build its knowledge-based and wisdom to effectively shift the geography, geopolitics and biopolitics, of knowledge underpinning international development.

To fulfill the promise of decolonial development, BRICS need greater internal cohesion regarding the various tracks of discussion at global level regarding the international development agenda. This cohesion must be than alignment in technical positions on this or that proposal, but it must be a more fundamental convergence of
ideological, theoretical and practical positions about the “the world we (in the south) want”, to use the UN pay-off line for post-2015 discussions. Such a fundamental consensus would, of course, build upon the age-old south consensus on three pivotal principles: collective self-reliance, endogenous development and solidarity.

The BRICS forum could buttress the heritage of thought generated by dialogues in defence of development up to Busan, while also propagating comprehensive approaches focused on achieving the above-mentioned principles. This would help in strengthening the solidity and cohesion of the south voice in these conversations that are increasingly being deliberately diluted by the power of western institutions like so-called international NGOs, research institutions and intergovernmental organisations like the OECD.

The extent to which voices from below percolate within the BRICS countries themselves will determine whether these south voices are merely government and elite voices or they are truly a cacophony of voices from the peoples of the south. The diversity of these and even contradiction among them is not a weakness, but a strength in that it would reflected the lived and historical experiences of a diverse people. Homogenising of any kind requires injustice, silencing and erasure of diversal experiences, as some call it.

BRICS countries should consider establishing a platform for discussions internal focusing purely on development consensus within the organization and its positions on international development discussions. Such a platform would best be at ministerial and senior officials level supported by academic and think tank forums, the meeting of development finance institutions and other stakeholders. It must consider among others the idea of creation a council of development agencies of BRICS countries, enabling them to develop synergy and harmony in their response to the changing nature of global development partnership, thus helping to decolonizing the discourse and practice in this area. Aid is dead, but its underlying ideology and logic remains alive in the new rhetoric of “development partners” and “strategic partnerships” where the so-called partners are not only unequal, but one dominates the
other.

**CONCLUSION**

This paper has suggested that the emergence of BRICS countries and the growth of their forum has a potential to decolonize development, especially as this refers to collective self-reliance, endogenous development and solidarity. In order to make this case, this paper has provided a context for dissonance in the understanding of what development means and what implications that has on this idea of development partnership. We could have explored this latter idea more as it may be more than a change in rhetoric, but space did not permit. We have linked the development promise to the iteration of the idea of development as an alternative south agenda, its strengths and weaknesses. We use this as the basis for assessing the emerging messages on development within BRICS, both in response to the development effectiveness discourse and to the discussions on the post-2015 development agenda.