

## BRICS summit 2023: An opportunity for the creation of a platform for an innovative clan of researchers

The Federative Republic of Brazil, the Russian Federation, the Republic of India, the People's Republic of China and the Republic of South Africa (SA) presently make up the BRICS group of countries. The BRICS country co-operation originated on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in 2006, as the BRIC co-operation. In April 2011 SA participated, for the first time, in the 3rd BRICS Summit held in Sanya, China.<sup>[1]</sup> Since then, the countries have continued to meet annually, and the 15th summit of BRICS countries is set to take place in Durban, SA, in late August 2023. BRICS has become a manifestation of global multipolarity that is strengthening regional identity in the developing regions of the world, and the influence of these countries in the international arena has risen in recent decades.<sup>[2]</sup>

The issue of health appeared for the first time as a discussion point at the 3rd BRICS Summit in 2011, where the issue of HIV/AIDS was included on the agenda. Since then, BRICS has held ministerial-level meetings devoted to health, with the first meeting of BRICS health ministers taking place in Beijing in July 2011. At this meeting, it was agreed to institutionalise the dialogue among BRICS Ministers of Health. A working group to discuss specific proposals of BRICS co-operation in health was also established.<sup>[3]</sup> At the 6th BRICS health ministers' meeting (2016), the ministers resolved to continue co-operation in the sphere of health through the working group and the BRICS Framework for Collaboration on Strategic Projects in Health. The strength of BRICS in health lies in presenting fresh, relevant, inclusive and collaborative approaches to global health, through robust intra-BRICS engagement, based on developmental partnership and South-to-South co-operation models for reshaping global health architecture and mechanisms.<sup>[4]</sup>

The 2022 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) report found that globally, there has been little progress in achieving SDGs in the past 2 years.<sup>[5]</sup> SDG progress is variable across health indicators, among countries and subnationally across BRICS and other developing countries.<sup>[6,7]</sup> BRICS countries represent ~25% of the world's gross national income, >40% of the world's population and 40% of the global burden of disease.<sup>[2]</sup> Though most BRICS countries are experiencing rapid economic growth, these countries are confronting growing, ageing populations and epidemiological shifts that require increased healthcare spending.<sup>[8]</sup> BRICS countries account for ~50% of the world's poor, and are experiencing accompanying health inequity, despite the fact that Brazil, China and India are leading in the manufacturing of low-cost medicines and vaccines. BRICS countries also face multiple health challenges such as non-communicable diseases, tuberculosis (TB), increases in injuries linked to road traffic accidents as well as in diseases associated with air and water pollution.<sup>[7,9,10]</sup> Strategies to improve healthcare systems and alleviate poverty and other social determinants of health in the BRICS populations would result in

marked improvements in global health, and fast-track progress towards achieving universal health coverage and the 2030 global SDG agenda.<sup>[4]</sup>

The increasing momentum of inter-BRICS health co-operation represents a promising channel for improving health. Such co-operation provides a platform for BRICS and other developing countries to share their experiences and to work together to address key public health issues, including neglected tropical diseases. There are various BRICS co-operation mechanisms, such as the collaborative TB research network, which has a vision to accelerate TB research and innovation,<sup>[11]</sup> and the BRICS Cardiovascular Health Innovation Roundtable 2022.<sup>[12]</sup> There is, however, still a need for joint action in BRICS with regard to diplomacy in health, which reinforces the concept of sustainable development.<sup>[13]</sup> Health advocates and professionals, learning institutions, industries and governments from BRICS and other developing countries must take this opportunity to be involved in the upcoming research symposium that will take place during the BRICS Summit to be held in August 2023. The symposium will enable BRICS and other developing countries to deliberate on key issues such as prevention, control and surveillance of diseases of public health importance, innovation in health technology and strategies to improve health and achieve the 2030 SDGs.

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