



# BRICS:

## Challenges to the fight against inequalities and for Environmental Justice

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**BRICS:**  
Challenges to the fight  
against inequalities and  
for Environmental Justice

Produced by



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**BRICS: Challenges to the fight  
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## BRICS: Challenges to the fight against inequalities and for Environmental Justice

### Factsheet

February 2015

The BRICS countries bloc, made up of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, has made a strong entrance into the world arena. Since the crisis of 2008, it has coordinated actions on economic and financial agendas in fora such as the G20. More recently, it has also taken common positions on other agendas, such as international security and conflicts. Tools created at its latest summit meeting reveal the bloc's own organizational ambitions. These include, for example, a financial dimension with the creation of the Contingency Reserve Arrangement (CRA) and a broader development and political agenda, expressed in the founding of the bloc's own bank, the New Development Bank (NDB), as well as many cooperation agreements.

Its potential for becoming a major international political and economic player, however, does not mean this group's development model is fundamentally different from that of Northern countries. These countries fit into international production chains as suppliers of raw materials and cheap manufactured goods, produced with intensive exploitation of their respective labor forces and raw materials. The BRICS are intrinsically involved in the dynamics of global capitalism and their development models give rise to significant social inequities and environmental injustice in each member country.

This factsheet brings out these dimensions for the bloc. On the one hand, it brings greater economic, political, counter-hegemonic and pro-democracy potential to the international system. Yet the members face huge challenges to overcome inequalities and an unjust development model that violates human rights and is rooted in the overexploitation of nature.

We hope it will help further discussions in society on the directions the bloc is taking, so that the challenges can be faced and the BRICS can become a force for social and environmental justice worldwide, and inside each member country.







## Introduction

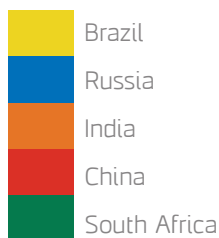
The classic indications of power resources in the international system leave no doubt that the BRICS carry great weight, since its five member countries possess nearly half of the world's population and labor force. They occupy a quarter of the planet's land area and the bloc's GDP is a significant and growing percentage of the global GDP.

### General information on BRICS countries – 2013

Source: BRICS Joint Statistical Publication 2014.

	Area of territory (1.000 km <sup>2</sup> )	Capital city	Mid-year population (million persons)	Population density (persons per sq.km)	National currency
Brazil	8 515	Brasília	201	23.60	Real - R\$
Russia	17 098	Moscow	144	8.4	Rublo - Rub
India	3 287	New Delhi	1 211	382.0	Rupia - ₹
China	9 600	Beijing	1 357	141.0	Renminbi - RMB
South Africa	1 221	Pretoria	52	42.3	Rand - ZAR

43%  
of global population

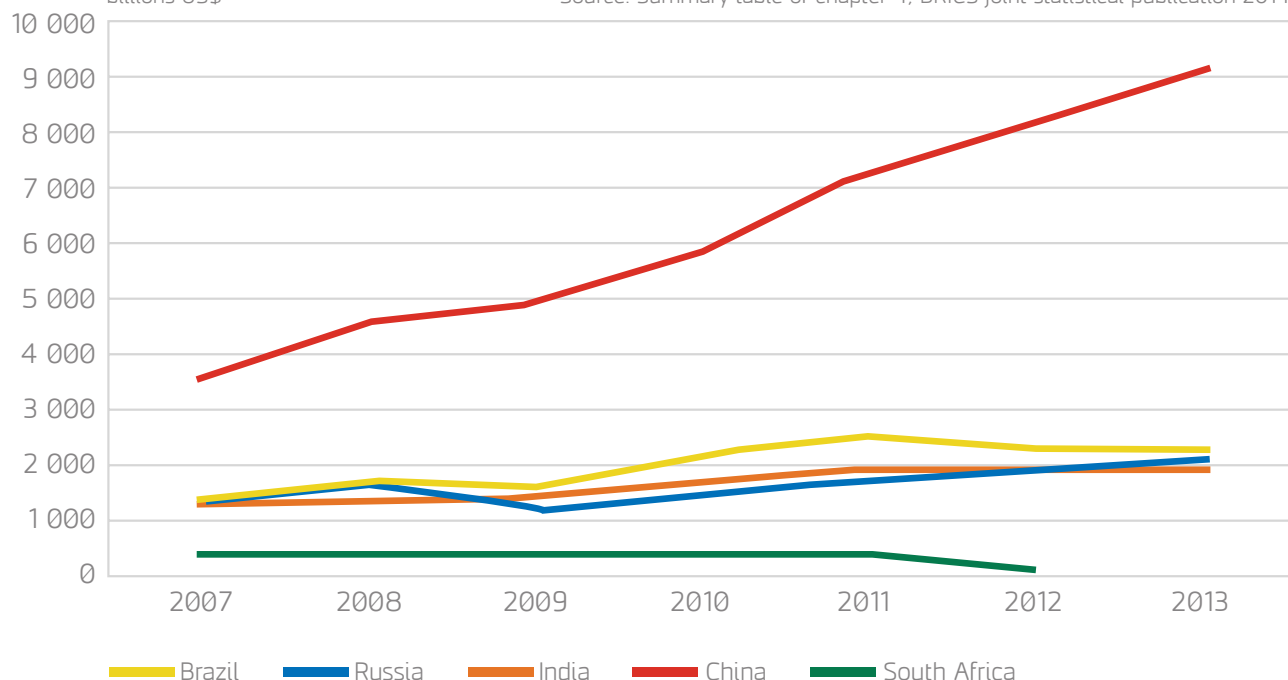


Source: Nivela Population Infograph - BRICS Joint Statistical Publication, 2013 - [www.gip.net.br](http://www.gip.net.br).

## Gross Domestic Product - GDP - 2007-2013

billions US\$

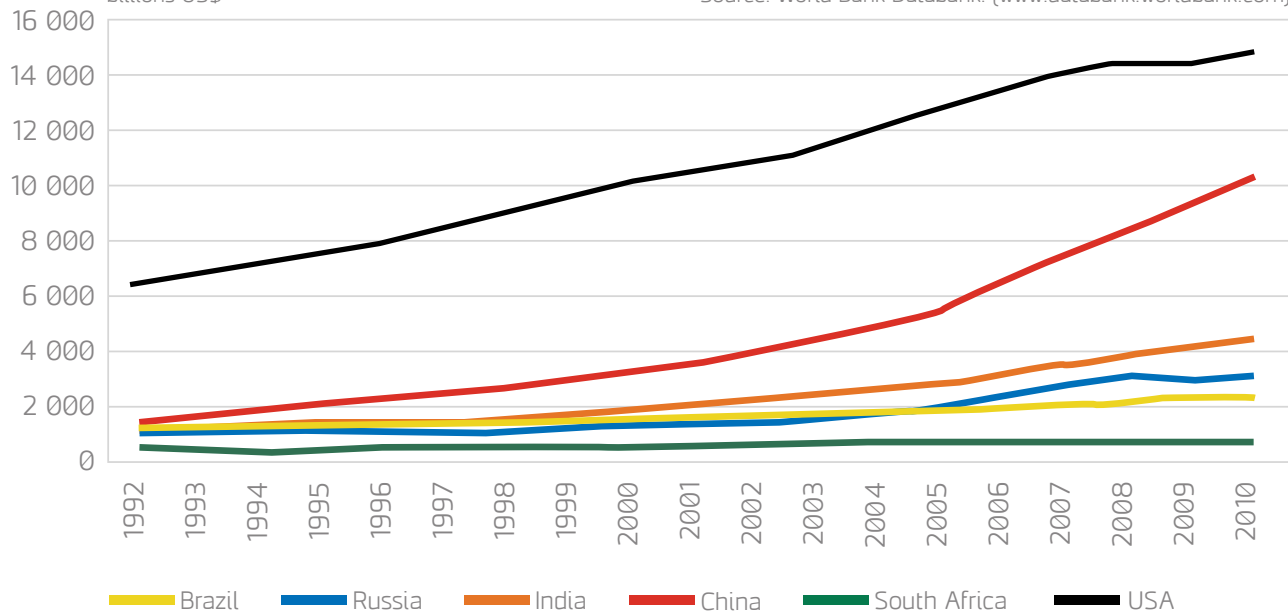
Source: Summary table of chapter 4, BRICS joint statistical publication 2014.



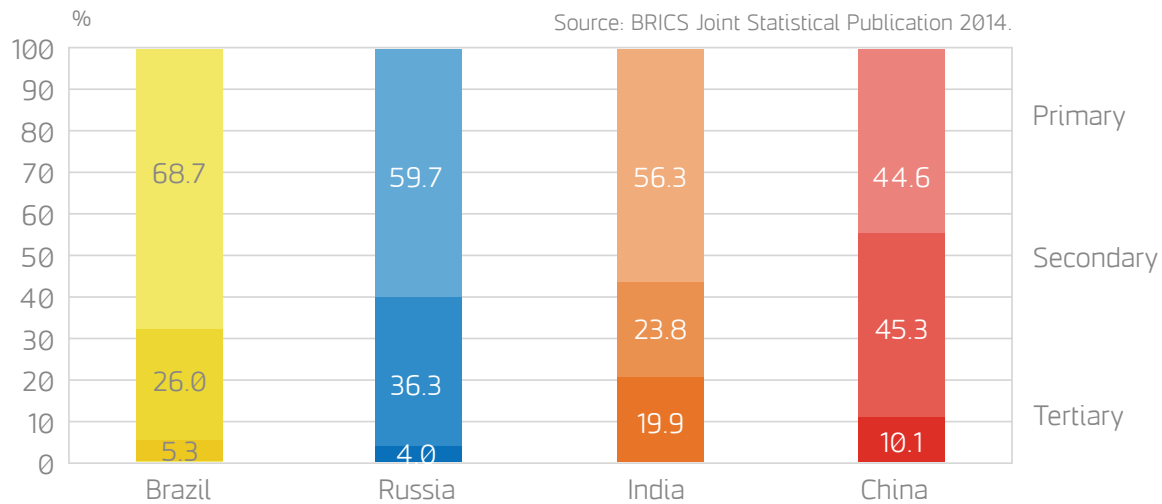
## GDPs: BRICS and the USA (in PPP), 1992-2010

billions US\$

Source: World Bank Databank. ([www.databank.worldbank.com](http://www.databank.worldbank.com))



## Share of GDP in different sectors - 2012



## BRICS and Inequalities

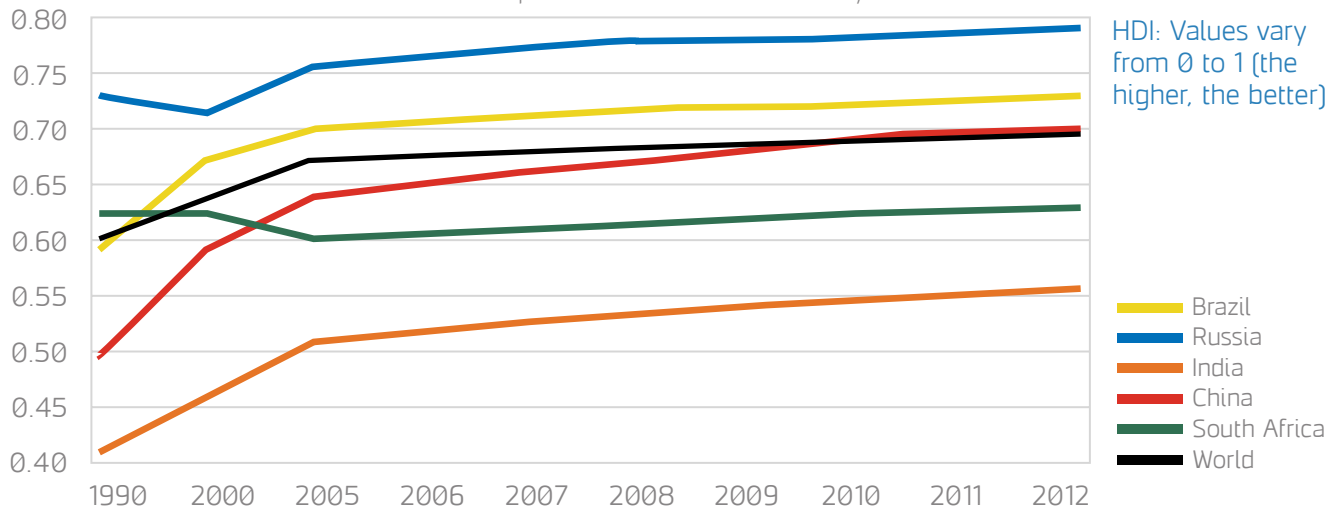
The BRICS' countries tremendous wealth in their economies and natural resources could bring well-being and equity and assure economic, social, environmental and cultural rights. Their wealth, however, at the service of a development model that concentrates income and overexploits natural resources, means high rates of poverty and inequalities, along with low standards of living and of access to social rights such as health and education.

The UNDP (United Nations Development Program) defines the Human Development Index (HDI) as "a summary measure of long-term achievement in three key dimensions of human development: income, education and health. The HDI was created with the goal of providing a counterpoint to another widely used indicator, per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which only considers the economic dimension of development."

<http://www.pnud.org.br/IDH/DH.aspx>

## Human Development Index (HDI): evolution in BRICS countries and world averages, for selected years

Source: International Human Development Indicators - UN. Processed by DIEESE/CUT-Nacional.

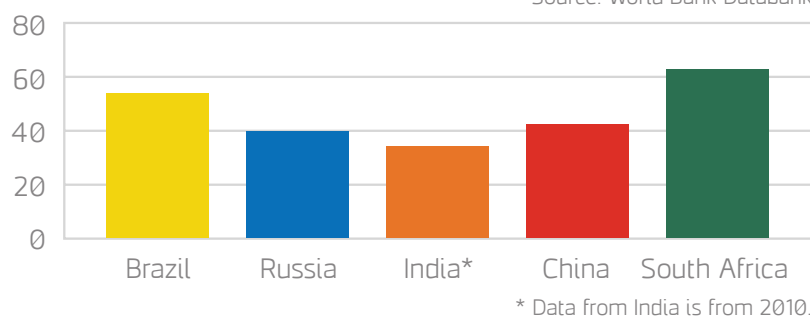


## Income

The Gini coefficient measures income concentration. It varies from zero to one or from zero to one hundred, with zero representing a situation of total equality when the entire population has equal incomes, and the value one (or one hundred) at the opposite extreme, when a single individual concentrates all the income. In this graph, we see that South Africa and Brazil have the highest Gini coefficients among BRICS members.

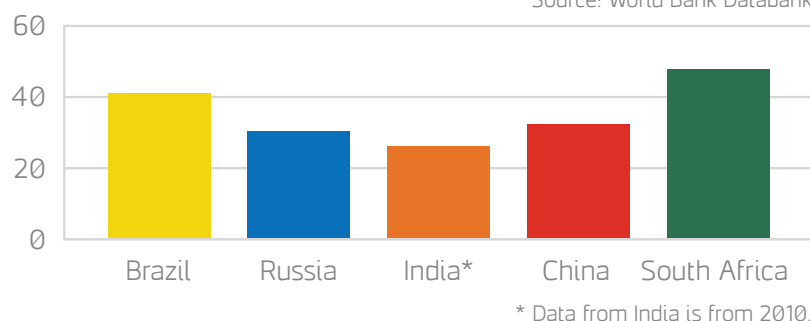
### Gini coefficient (income inequality), 2009

Source: World Bank Databank.



### Percentage of national income earned by the richest 10% - 2009

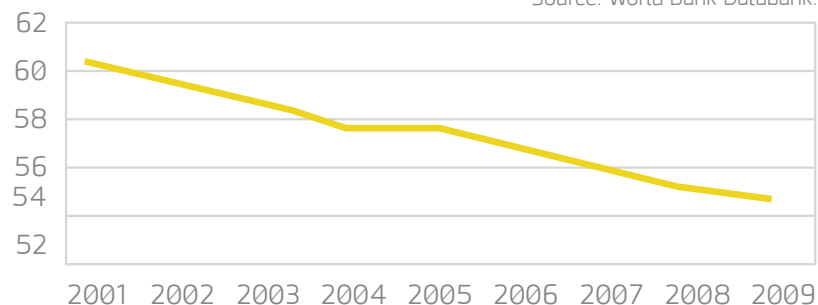
Source: World Bank Databank.



While its income is still highly concentrated, Brazil stands out among the bloc's members for recent gains achieved in de-concentrating its income:

### Gini Coefficient - Brazil (2001-2009)

Source: World Bank Databank.

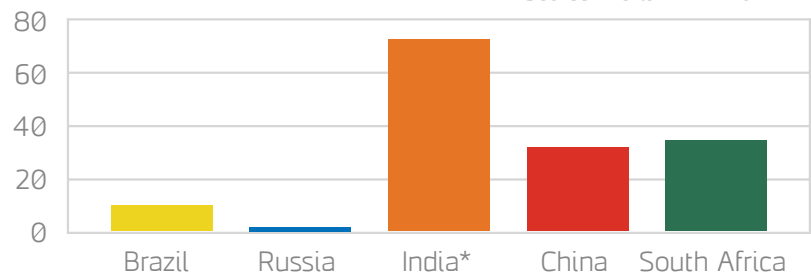






## Population earning less than US\$2 PPP/day (%) - 2009

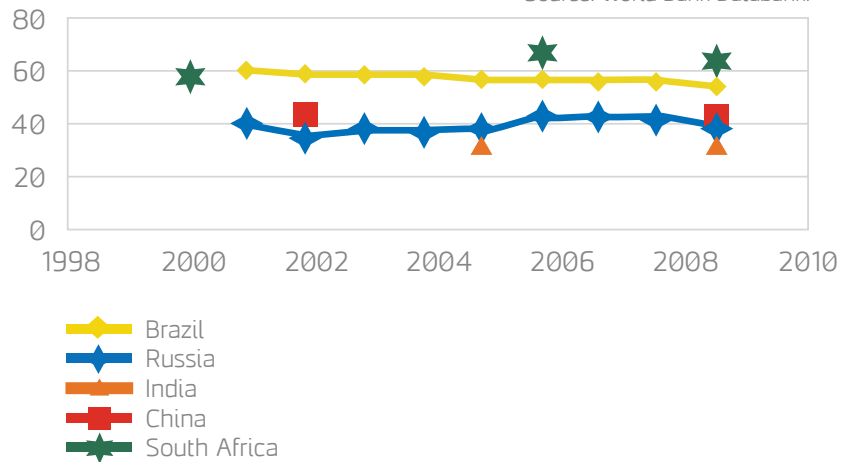
Source: World Bank Databank.



\* Data from India is from 2010.

## Gini coefficient - trends for BRICS (2000-2009)

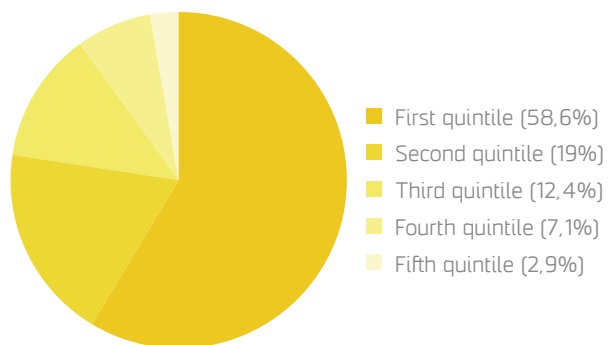
Source: World Bank Databank.



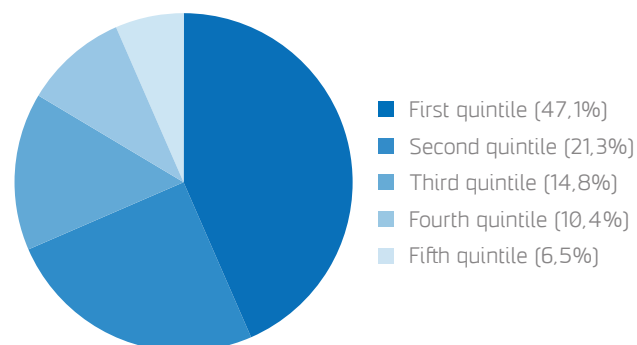
This graph shows the evolution of the Gini indicator for BRICS countries from 2000 to 2009. Only Brazil and Russia actually produced data for the entire period, and their respective time series are shown as curves. This was not possible for the other countries (China, India and South Africa), whose data is shown as separate points.

In Brazil, the richest 20% earn 58.6% of national income, while in South Africa the richest 20% earn 68.2% of national income.

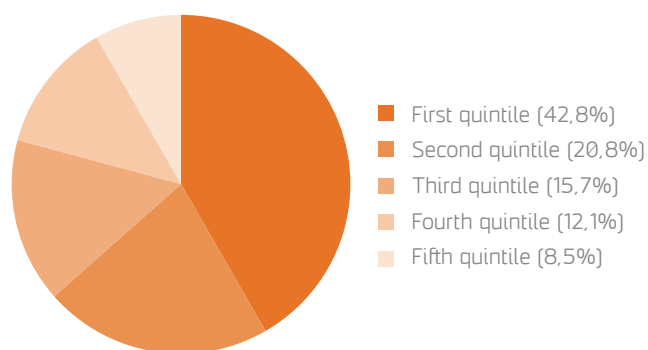
Income distribution in Brazil (2009)



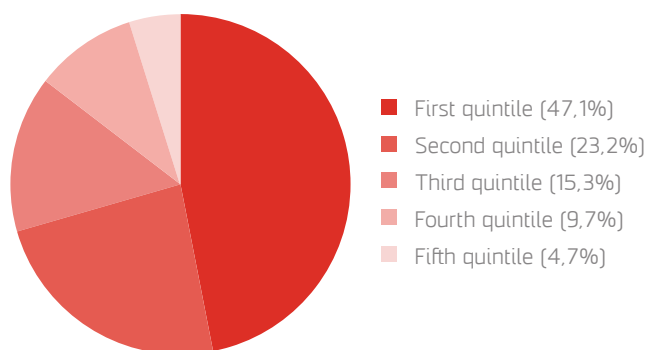
Income distribution in Russia (2009)



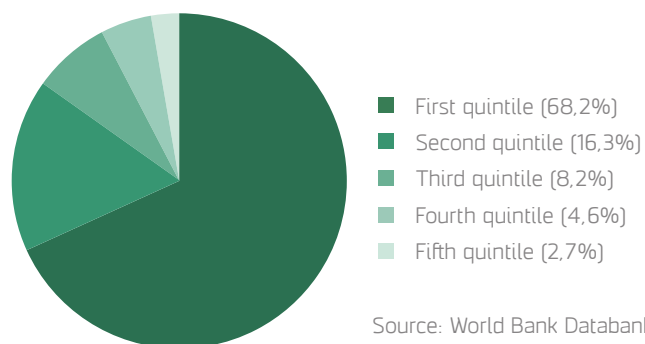
Income distribution in India (2010)



Income distribution in China (2009)



Income distribution in South Africa (2009)



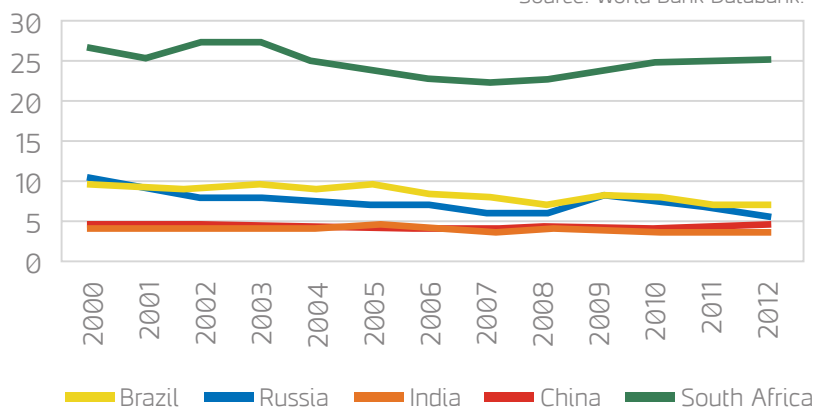
In statistics, a quintile is a segment representing a fifth of the sample being studied, ranked based on its correlation with a variable. For income distribution, the first quintile is the richest 20% of the total (the fifth with the richest individuals), the second quintile is the next 20% (the second-richest fifth) and so on, down to the fifth and last quintile, with the poorest 20% of the total.



## Employment

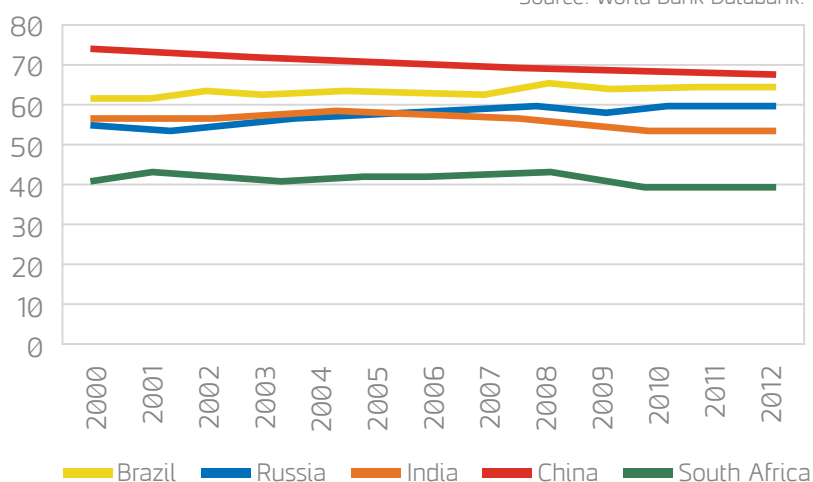
### Unemployment 2000-2012 (% of the labor force)

Source: World Bank Databank.



### Employed population (% of the total population)

Source: World Bank Databank.



### Summary of economically active population in BRICS countries- 2000/2013

Source: BRICS Joint Statistical Publication 2014.

	2000	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Share of number of economically active population to national population (%)												
Brazil	--	67.8	68.6	69.3	69.0	68.6	68.6	68.6	--	66.2	65.9	--
Russia	49.5	49.9	50.6	51.2	52.0	52.7	53.0	53.0	52.8	53.0	52.9	52.7
India	40.6	41.9	42.1	43.0	42.3	--	41.3	--	40.0	--	39.5	--
China	56.9	57.1	57.1	57.1	57.0	57.0	56.9	56.8	56.8	56.7	56.6	56.6
South Africa	36.8	34.9	34.3	35.8	36.6	36.2	36.9	35.8	34.8	34.9	35.4	--

Brazil's federal statistics institute (the IBGE) defines the economically active population as "the labor potential available to the production sector, that is, the employed population plus the unemployed population."

<http://www.ibge.gov.br/home/estatistica/indicadores/trabalhoerendimento/pme/pme-met2.shtm>

ILO Conventions ratified by BRICS countries							
ILO Convention	Description	Ratification					# of countries who have ratified
		Brazil	Russia	India	China	South Africa	
29	Forced labour convention.	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	177
87	Freedom of association and protection of the right to organise convention.	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	152
98	Right to organise and collective bargaining convention.	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	163
100	Equal remuneration convention.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	171
105	Abolition of forced labour convention.	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	174
111	Discrimination (employment and Occupation) convention.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	172
122	Employment policy convention.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	108
135	Workers' representatives convention.	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	85
138	Minimum age convention.	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	166
141	Rural workers' organisations convention.	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	40
148	Working environment (air pollution, noise and vibration) convention.	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	45
151	Labour relations (public service) convention.	Yes	No	No	No	No	50
154	Collective bargaining convention.	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	44
158	Termination of employment convention.	Yes	No	No	No	No	36
168	Employment promotion and protection against unemployment convention.	Yes	No	No	No	No	8

Source: Organização Internacional do Trabalho. Situação no dia 02 de dezembro de 2013. Elaboração: Subseção DIEESE/CUT-Nacional.

## Health

Health Indicators, HDI 2012/13				
Country	Public spending on public health* - % of GDP	Infant mortality (at 5 years), per 1.000 live births	Life expectancy at birth (general)	Health Index
Brazil	4,2	19	73,8	0,849
Russia	3,2	12	69,1	0,774
India	1,2	63	65,8	0,722
China	2,7	18	73,7	0,846
South Africa	3,9	57	53,4	0,526

In this topic we only compare the BRICS countries using quantitative (objective) data on health and education, with no comparisons or opinions on their quality, which would be subjective.

Source: International Human Development Indicators - UN; produced by DIEESE/CUT Nacional Subsection.

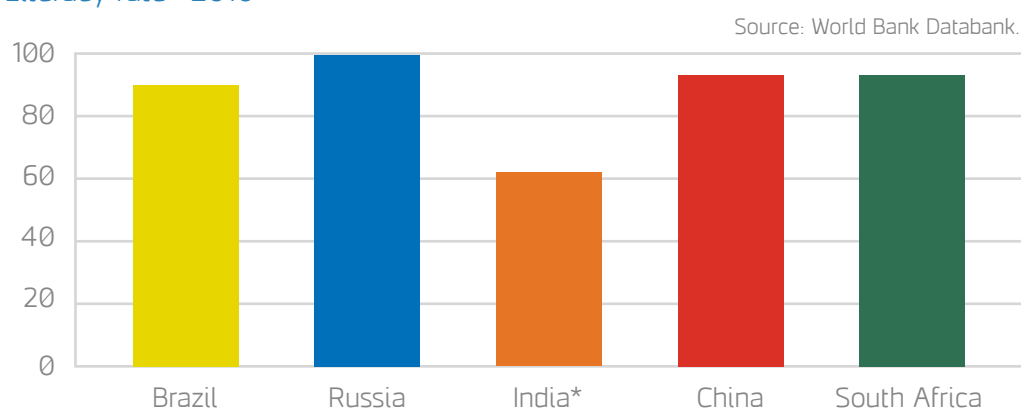
Total spending on health (public vs. private) as a percentage of the GDP in BRICS countries: 2000 and 2011/12 (or more recent)

Country	Private spending (% of GDP)		Public spending (% of GDP)		Total spending (% of GDP)	
	2000	2011/12	2000	2011/12	2000	2011/12
Brazil	2,9	3,1	4,3	5,8	7,2	8,9
Russia	3,2	3,3	2,2	2,9	5,4	6,2
India	1,1	1,1	3,2	2,8	4,3	3,9
China	1,8	1,6	2,9	3,5	4,6	5,2
South Africa	3,4	3,5	4,9	5,1	8,3	8,5

Source: Global Health Expenditure Database – UN; produced by DIEESE/CUT Nacional Subsection.

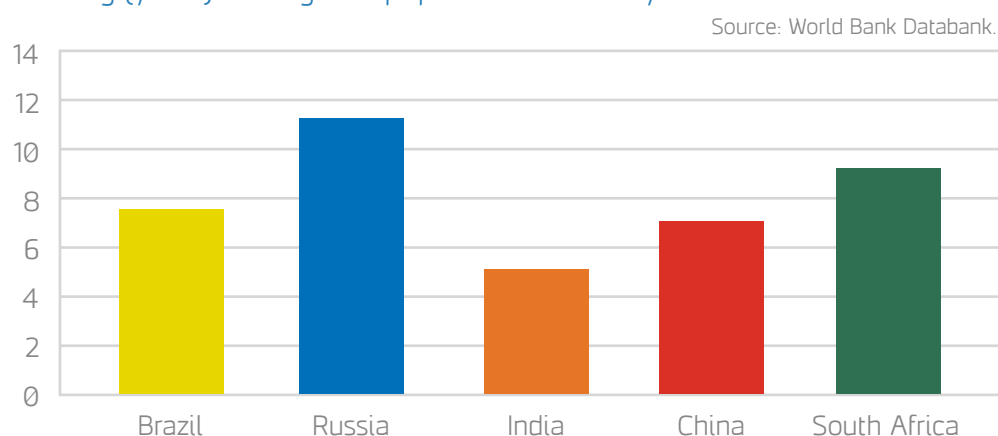
## Education

### Literacy rate - 2010



\* Data from India is for the year 2006.

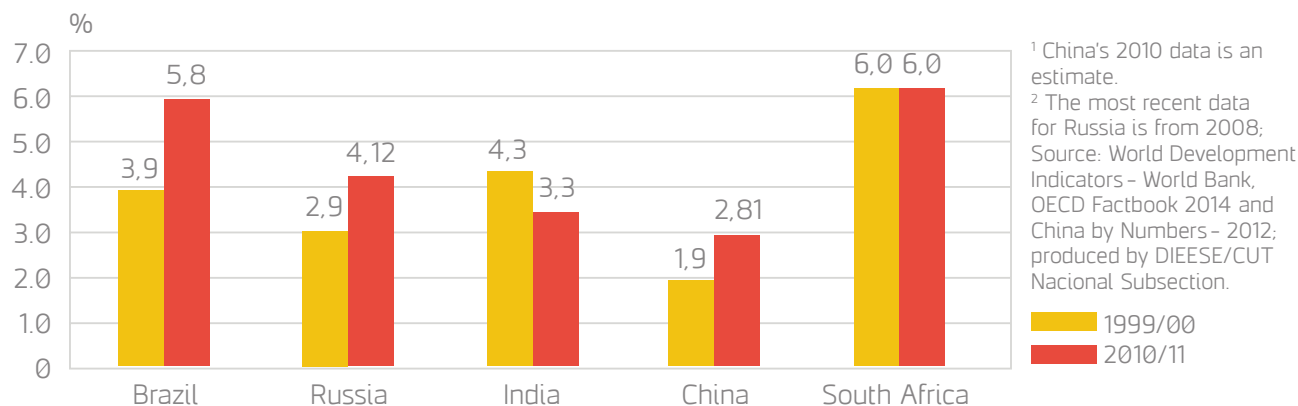
### Schooling (years): average for population over 25 years - 2010





## Public spending on education as % of GDP in BRICS countries, 1999/2000 and 2010/11 (more recent)

### Public spending on education - % of GDP

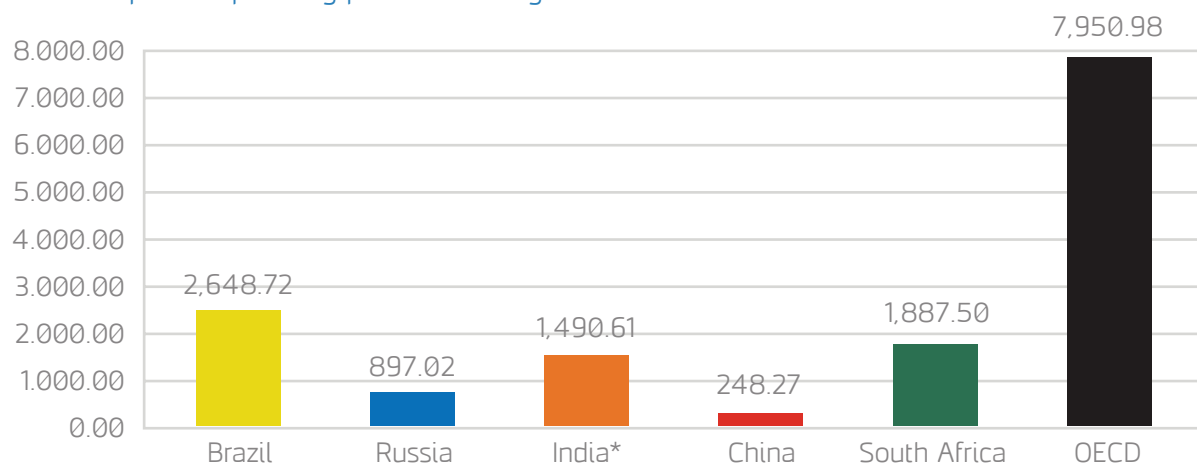


Education indicators in BRICS countries, HDI 2012/13				
Country	Public spending on education - % of GDP	Average years of schooling for adults*	Adults with schooling (15 years or more)	Education Index
Brazil	5,7	7,2	90,3	0,674
Russia	4,1	11,7	99,6	0,862
India	3,1	4,4	62,8	0,459
China	2,8*	7,5	94,3	0,627
South Africa	6,0	8,5	88,7	0,705

\* Estimated for 2010.  
Source: International Human Development Indicators - UN and China by Numbers (China Economic Review 2012); produced by DIEESE/CUT Nacional Subsection.

## Estimated public spending per person in school age for BRICS and OECD countries, 2011, in US\$/PPP

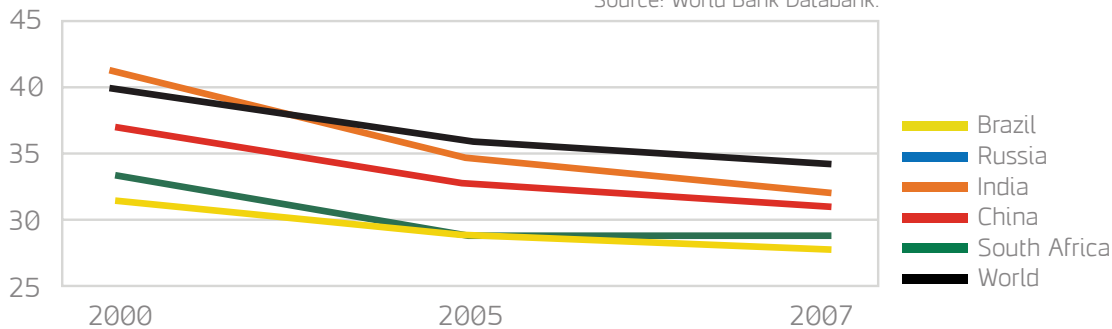
### Value of public spending per school - age student - in US\$/PPP



Source: Based on the article "A educação superior no Brasil: insumos, indicadores e comparações com os países da OCDE e do BRICS". Available for download at: <http://www.revistas.ufg.br/index.php/interacao/article/view/26104/15047>

## Percentage of the population living in slums

Source: World Bank Databank.

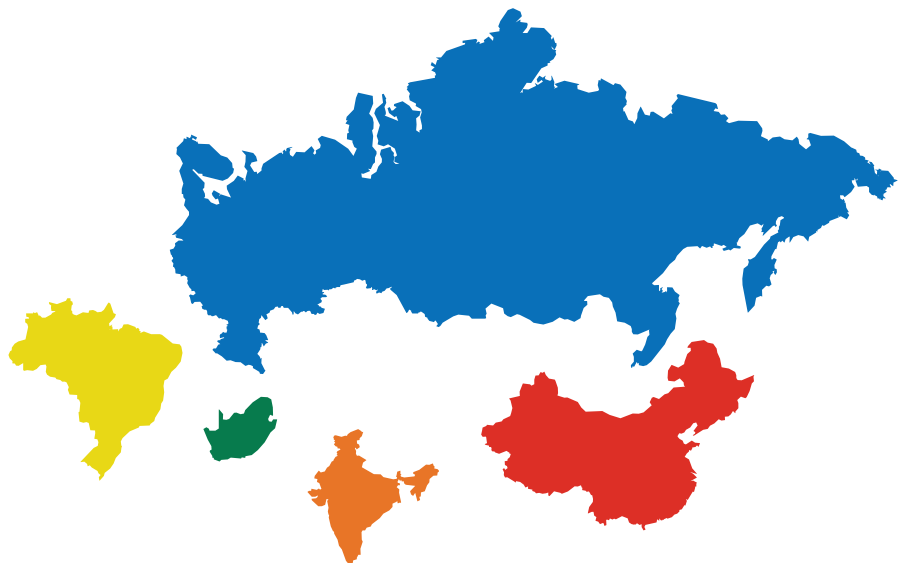


## Socio-environmental impacts of the development model on BRICS member countries

The most recent BRICS summit, held in Ceará, Brazil in July 2014, highlighted sustainable development. Despite this focus in the Fortaleza Declaration, however, the data below reveals that grave social inequalities and the intensive exploitation of natural resources are major obstacles to drawing up future plans for the bloc based on sustainable development, at least if that concept is taken to include social and environmental justice.

One of the challenges is the founding of the New Development Bank (NDB), with initial capital of US\$ 50 billion and plans to reach US\$ 100 billion. Its objective is to fund sustainable infrastructure and development projects, but with no definition of what that means. Even more contradictory is the fact that infrastructure projects actually built by members of the bloc in their own countries and/or in countries where they invest are marred by frequent violations of rights and by social and environmental abuses.

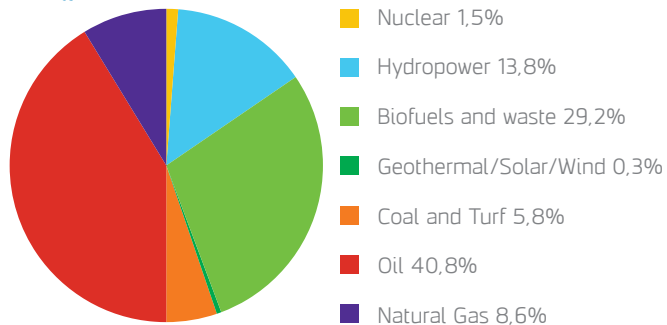
The BRICS countries possess vast natural resources, such as forests, minerals, land, water and a variety of energy sources. Their economies have increasingly come to depend on the intensive extraction and exploitation of those resources.



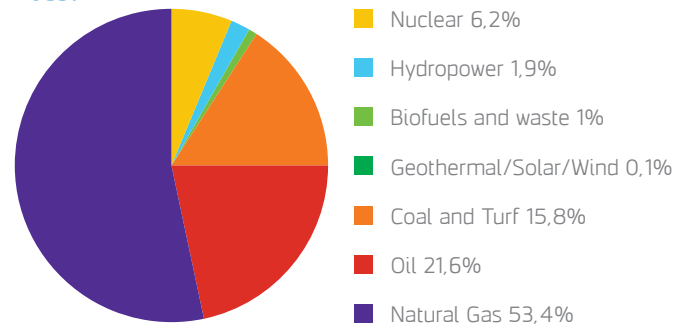
## Energy matrix

### Composition of the energy matrix in 2011

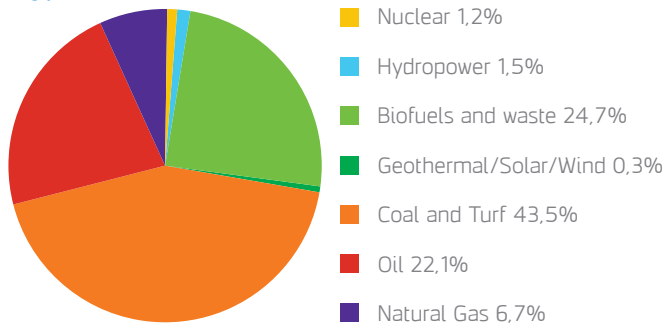
#### Brazil



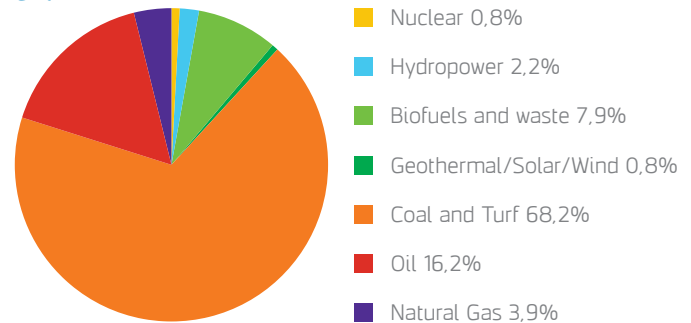
#### Russia



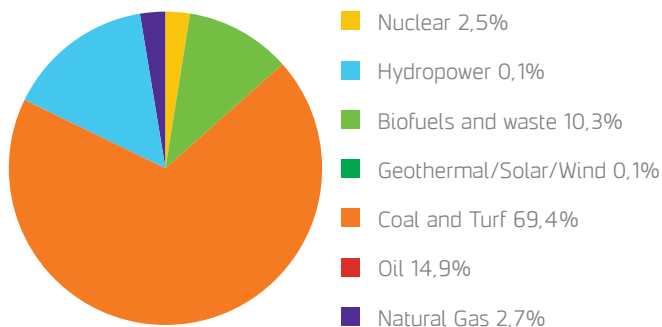
#### India



#### China



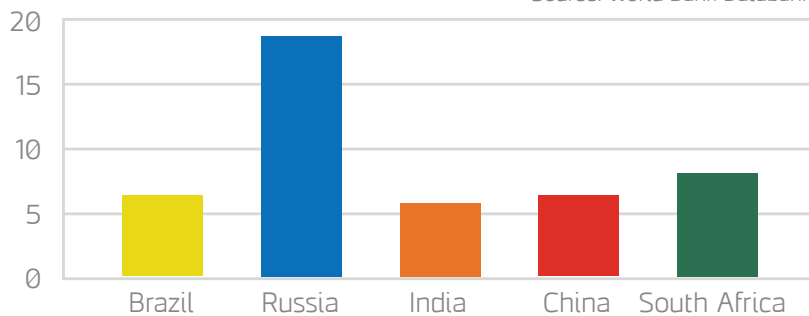
#### South Africa



Source: International Energy Agency.

### Revenue from extraction of natural products (% of GDP) - 2012

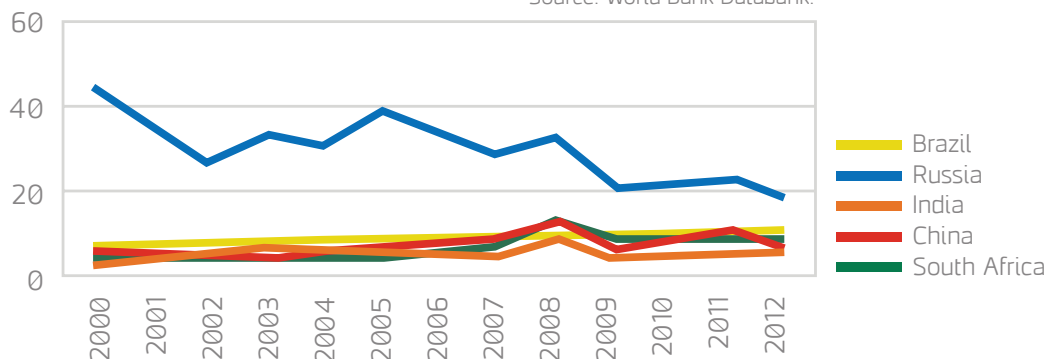
Source: World Bank Databank.





## Revenue from extraction of natural products (% of GDP) 2000-2012

Source: World Bank Databank.



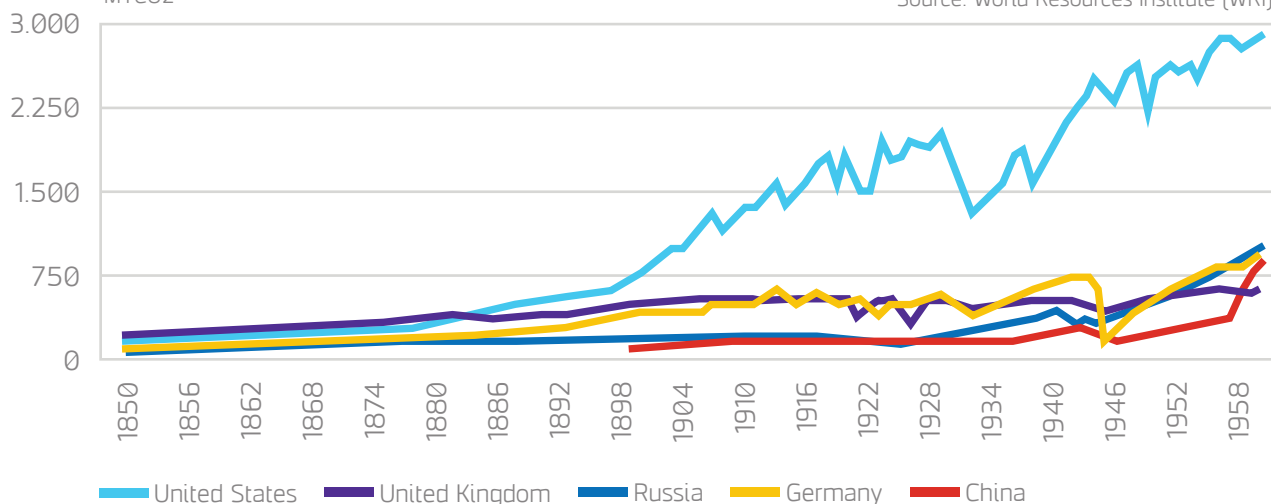
## Climate

This graph provides evidence of the overwhelming historic responsibility of Northern countries for high levels of greenhouse gas emissions (GGEs) and for today's climate crisis.

### 1850-1960: Industrializing countries domite emissions CO2 Emissions totals - Excluding land-use and forestry

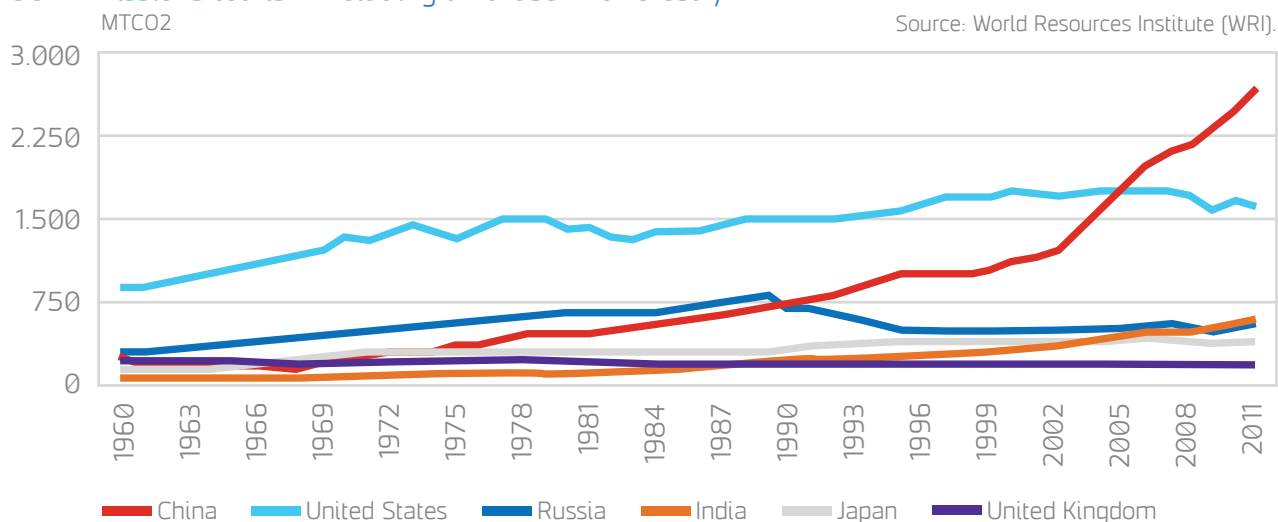
MTCO2

Source: World Resources Institute (WRI).

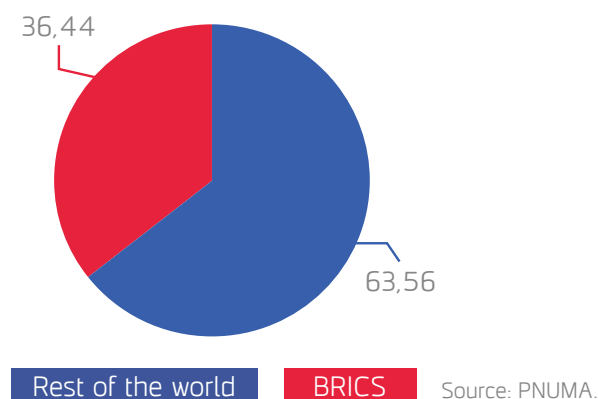


Over the past few decades, the BRICS countries' share of global emissions has grown. With globalization, this is where dirty industries and other production systems have preferred to relocate their activities, their high levels of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and their intensive exploitation of labor and natural resources, looking for the cheapest, most exploited and precariously contracted workforce, and for weak or non-existent environmental and social regulations. This is why China became a major contributor to GHG emissions and the BRICS as a bloc is now responsible for a third of the planet's emissions.

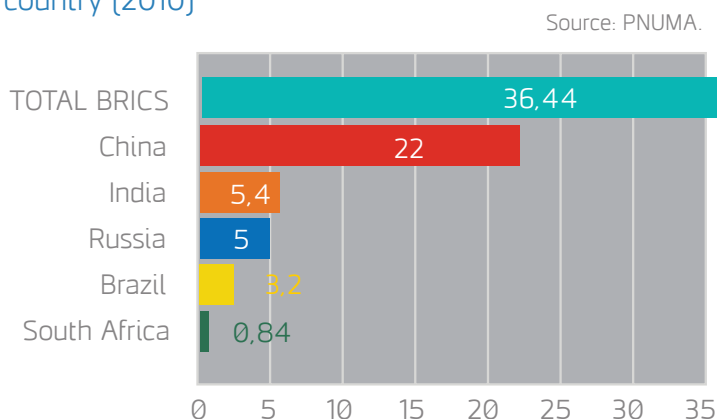
## 1960-2011: New top emitters emerge CO2 Emissions totals - Excluding land-use and forestry



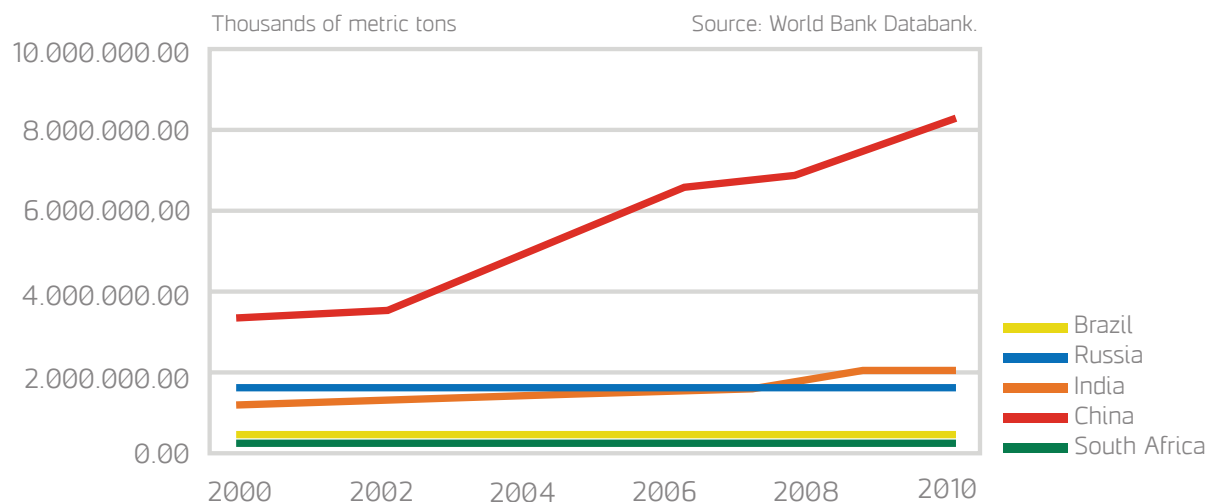
## Share of global emissions (2010)



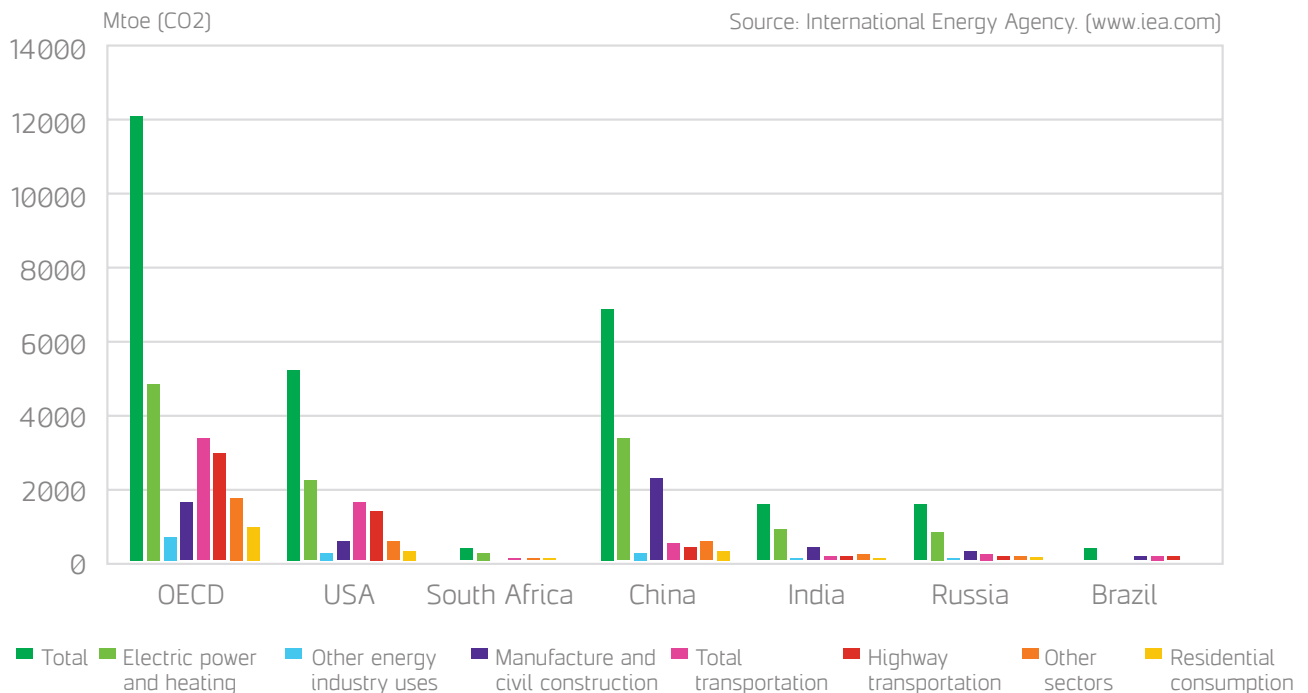
## Share of global emissions per BRICS country (2010)



## CO2 Emissions - BRICS (2000-2010)

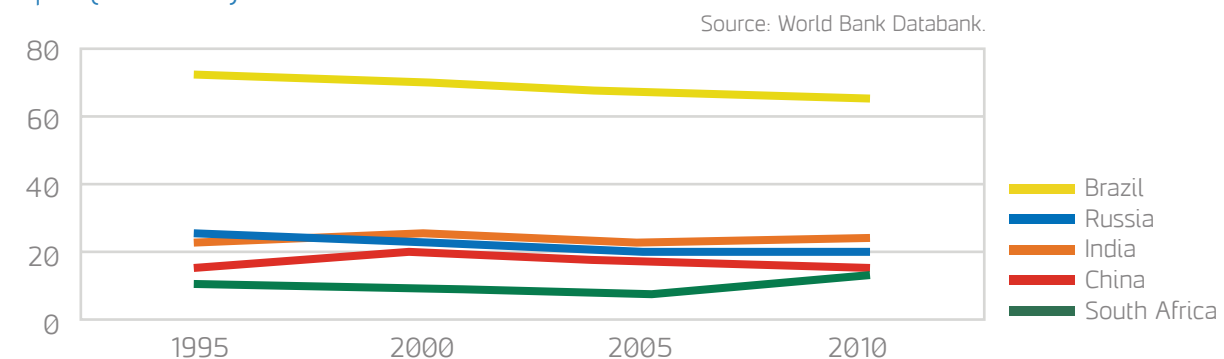


## CO2 Emissions per sector - BRICS (2010)



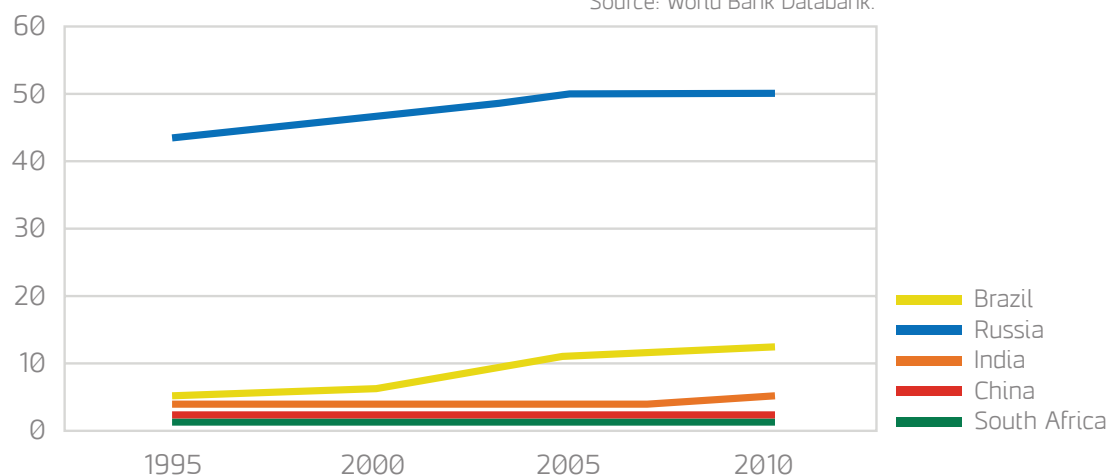
## CO2 Emissions by fuel type

liquid (% of total)



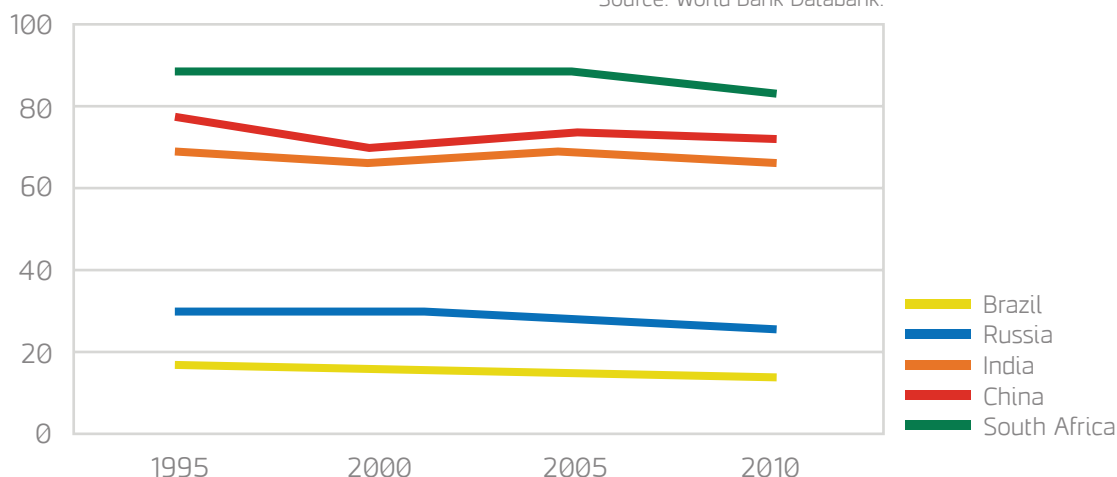
## Gases (% of total)

Source: World Bank Databank.



## Solid (% of total)

Source: World Bank Databank.

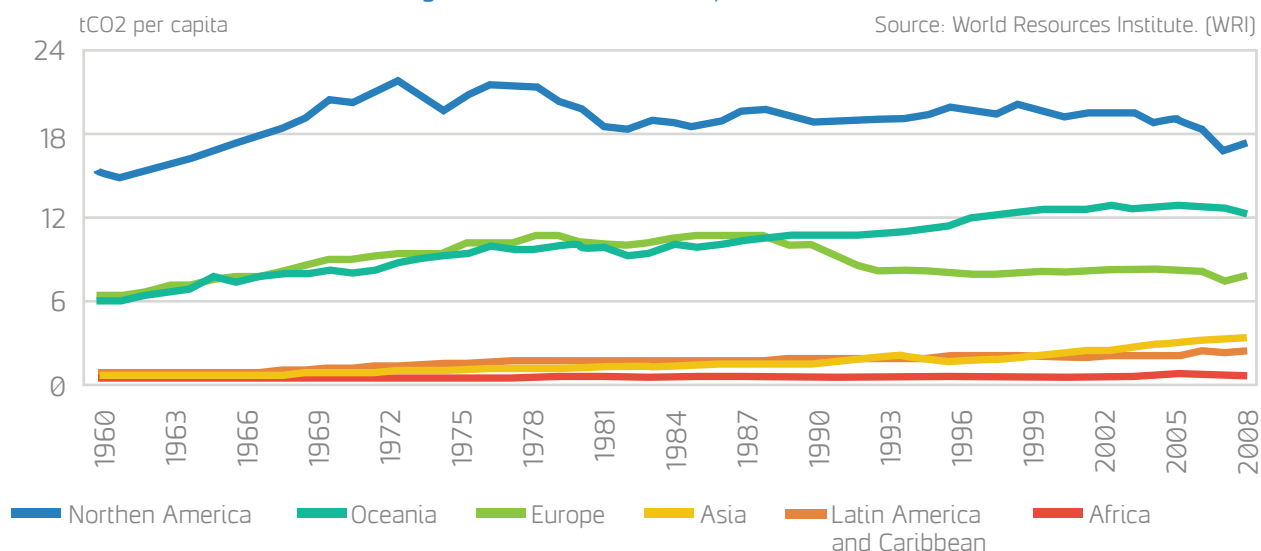


Although BRICS member countries have increased their shares in global GHG emissions and now rank among major emitters, the traditional powers have not reduced their own high levels of emissions.

In response to traditional powers' overwhelming historic responsibilities and ongoing high emissions, the "common but differentiated responsibilities" principle approved by the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, in order to assure a fair distribution of responsibilities among emitters, must be kept as a central pillar in negotiations to achieve a new global agreement at COP 21 in Paris (2015).

1960-2011: Per capita emissions in the west - stable, but high

## CO2 Emissions totals - Excluding land-use and forestry



## Intra-BRICS trade and investment

The following tables and graphs describe intra-BRICS trade patterns, in which Brazil, Russia, India and South Africa basically export to China growing volumes of raw materials produced with the intensive exploitation of natural resources, while they import from China growing volumes of manufactured goods.

### BRICS countries' main export and import products: 2012/2013

Country	Exports	Imports
<b>Brazil</b>	Soya, minerals, food, motor vehicles, car parts, mechanical and electrical products, fuels, aircraft, cereals, chemicals, grainfood, paper and pulp, footwear, tobacco.	Motor vehicles, fertilizers, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, fuels, grainfood, car parts, precision instruments, electrical and mechanical machines, plastics, aircraft and aircraft parts, textiles, rubber.
<b>China</b>	Mechanical and electrical products, garments, furniture, precision instruments, minerals, motor vehicles, footwear.	Mechanical and electrical products, precision instruments, minerals, seeds, grains, plastics, chemicals, fuel, copper.
<b>India</b>	Fuel, precious stones, chemicals, motor vehicles, mechanical and electrical products, cotton, cereals, minerals, pharmaceuticals.	Fuels, precision instruments, stones, chemicals, minerals, fertilizers.
<b>Russia</b>	Fuels, minerals, fertilizers, chemicals, mechanical products, wood, cereals, copper.	Mechanical and electrical products, motor vehicles, pharmaceuticals, plastics, precision instruments, minerals, fruit.
<b>South Africa</b>	Precious stones, minerals, fuels, mechanical products, fruit.	Fuels, mechanical and electrical products, motor vehicles, plastics, precision instruments, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, minerals.

Source: Brasil Global Net (<http://www.brasilglobalnet.gov.br>), estatísticas nacionais, MDIC, WTO e FMI. Elaboração: Subseção DIEESE/CUT-Nacional.

## Top 10 commodities imported from BRICS countries - China - 2013

Commodity	Brazil		Commodity	India	
	Value Million US\$	Var. %		Value Million US\$	Var. %
1. Agriculture products	22 505	20.4	1. Agriculture products	3 295	-19.8
2. Iron ores and concentrates	21 424	-5.6	2. Cotton	2 240	-26.1
3. Grainfood	19 122	34.0	3. Textile yarn, fabrics and made-up articles	2 132	92.2
4. Crude petroleum oil	3 803	-18.6	4. Unwrought copper and copper products	1 872	-13.7
5. Pulp	1 764	8.5	5. Diamonds	1 710	36.6
6. Sugarr	1 433	26.6	6. Iron ores and concentrates	1 469	-60.0
7. Mechanical and electrical products	755	-50.6	7. Mechanical and electrical products	1 316	9.0
8. Bovine or equine leather	698	19.4	8. Plastics in primary forms	540	-8.9
9. Edible vegetable oils	506	-56.1	9. Hi-tech products	454	-1.6
10. Cotton	326	-60.0	10. Xylenes	277	-17.2

Commodity	Russia		Commodity	South Africa	
	Value Million US\$	Var. %		Value Million US\$	Var. %
1. Crude petroleum oi	19 740	-3.6	1. Iron ores and concentrates	6 024	8.6
2. Refined petroleum products	4 098	-33.5	2. Diamonds	2 407	75.2
3. Coal an lignite	2 781	15.8	3. Chromium ore and concentrates	1 153	30.7
4. Agriculture products	1 570	0.9	4. Coal and lignite	1 097	-30.1
5. Iron ores abd concentrates	1 413	-20.4	5. Manganese ores and concentrates	916	61.4
6. Wood in the rough	1 408	-9.9	6. Agriculture products	498	17.1
7. Wood sawn lengh wise, sliced/peeled	1 362	6.1	7. Mechanical and electrical products	420	62.7
8. Frozen fish	1 303	1.6	8. Waste and scrap of metals	217	15.6
9. Fertilizer	1 206	-27.9	9. Wool	189	9.7
10. Pulp	589	-17.4	10. Motor Vehicles (incl. CDK and SDK)	185	87.2

Source: BRICS Joint Statistical Publication, 2014.

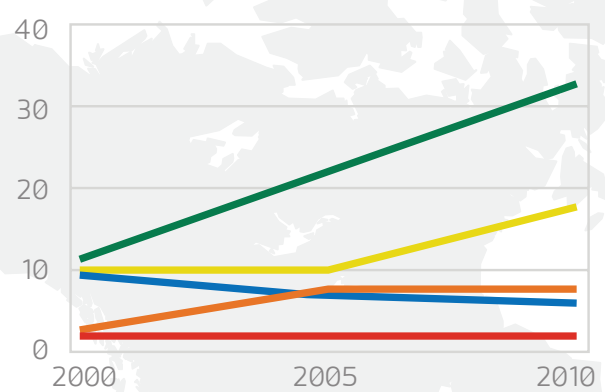
## Top 10 commodities exported to BRICS countries - China - 2013

Commodity	Brazil Value Million US\$	Var. %	Commodity	India Value Million US\$	Var. %
1. Mechanical and electrical products	21 497	6.4	1. Mechanical and electrical products	25 858	-1.4
2. Hi-tech products	8 605	6.4	2. Hi-tech products	12 177	9.7
3. Textile yarn, fabrics and made-up articles	2 370	7.6	3. Automatic data processing machines and units	3 250	13.6
4. Garments and clothing accessories	1 746	15.0	4. Textile yarn, fabrics and made-up articles	2 934	9.6
5. Liquid crystal display panel	1 412	-4.7	5. Fertilizer	1 907	-35.7
6. Products of steel or iron	1 291	26.0	6. Products of steel or iron	1 693	-25.4
7. Automatic data processing machines and units	893	-5.6	7. Telephone sets	1 450	38.4
8. Agriculture products	857	25.2	8. Medical and pharmaceutical products	1 268	4.3
9. Suit-case, hand bags and similar containers	660	5.7	9. Garments and clothing accessories	845	61.8
10. Parts for use with apparatus of TV sets, radio sets and wireless telecommunications equipments	650	3.6	10. Diodes and similar semiconductors	733	109.9

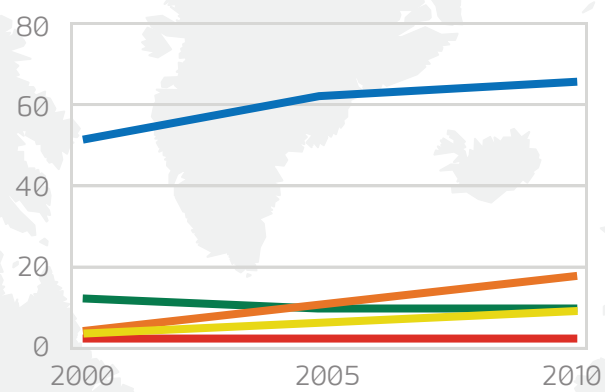
Commodity	Russia Value Million US\$	Var. %	Commodity	South Africa Value Million US\$	Var. %
1. Mechanical and electrical products	22 621	2.4	1. Mechanical and electrical products	7 782	17.6
2. Garments and clothing accessories	9 267	45.4	2. Hi-tech products	2 496	39.4
3. Hi-tech products	6 406	-4.7	3. Garments and clothing accessories	1 926	1.0
4. Textile yarn, fabrics and made-up articles	3 153	13.8	4. Textile yarn, fabrics and made-up articles	987	1.1
5. Footwear and parts thereof	3 131	20.4	5. Footwear and parts thereof	854	-17.7
6. Agriculture products	2 100	8.2	6. Furniture and parts	821	11.3
7. Automatic data processing machines and units	2 043	-22.6	7. Automatic data processing machines and units	662	4.3
8. Telephone sets	1 302	49.2	8. Products of steel or iron	493	30.4
9. Products of steel or iron	1 104	12.6	9. Diodes and similar semiconductors	486	1 045.4
10. Auto parts and accessories	1 098	5.0	10. Solar cells	456	1 101.0

Makeup of BRICS members' total exports, per type of merchandise

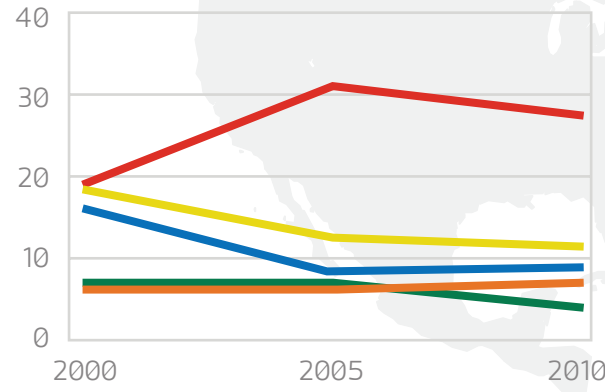
Minerals and metals (% of total)



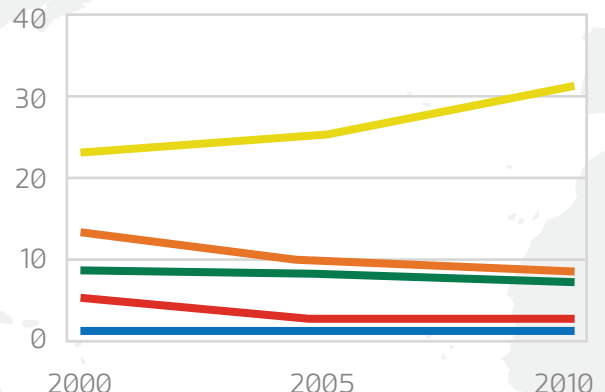
Fuels (% of total)



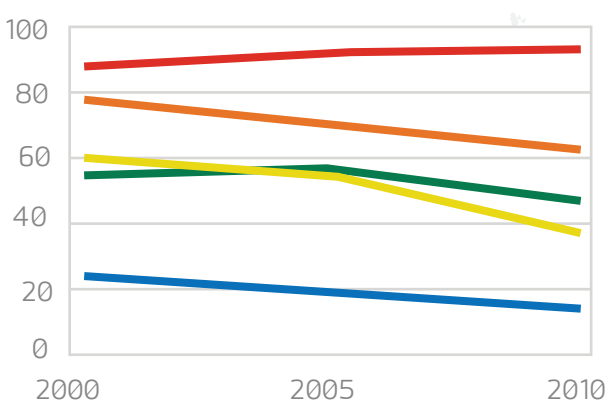
High-tech products (% of total manufactures)



Food products (% of total)



Manufactured products (% of total)



Source: World Bank Databank.

- Brazil
- Russia
- India
- China
- South Africa



## The BRICS in Latin America and Africa

Trade patterns among members of the bloc are similar to economic and trade relations between China and Latin America: "From 2001 to 2013, bilateral trade multiplied by 22. The product-by-product balance of trade records for the period leave no room for doubt: Latin America's positive balance in commodities jumped from US\$ 2.3 billion to US\$ 62.6 billion, while the region's deficit in industrialized goods spiked from US\$ 7.5 billion in 2001 to US\$ 130.7 billion in 2013. Chinese foreign direct investment is still relatively low (partly because the data is underestimated), but it has been growing quickly since 2010 in oil, energy, mining, infrastructure and even manufacturing. The most striking figure, however, is for loans made in 2010. Chinese credit outstanding in the region was greater than the sum total of the World Bank, IDB and US Eximbank portfolios for Latin American countries."<sup>1</sup>

During the 6th BRICS Summit in Fortaleza, China signed several agreements with key Latin American countries. It signed 38 agreements with Venezuela in energy, mining and transportation; 54 with Brazil including railways, telecommunications, information technology, hydropower, automobile industry and construction; 9 with Cuba in finance, biotechnology, agriculture, infrastructure and renewable energy; and 19 with Argentina in finance, energy, infrastructure, agriculture, trade and cooperation.<sup>2</sup>

More recently, during the Forum between China and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), held last January in Beijing, President Xi Jinping announced that China will invest US\$ 250 billion in the region over the next decade.

In Africa, the rapid expansion of trade, cooperation and investments by BRICS members has drawn significant attention. The volume of Chinese resources flowing into the region, compared to those from other bloc members, is truly impressive. One indicator of this is the data on trade flows, as we see in this figure.<sup>3</sup>

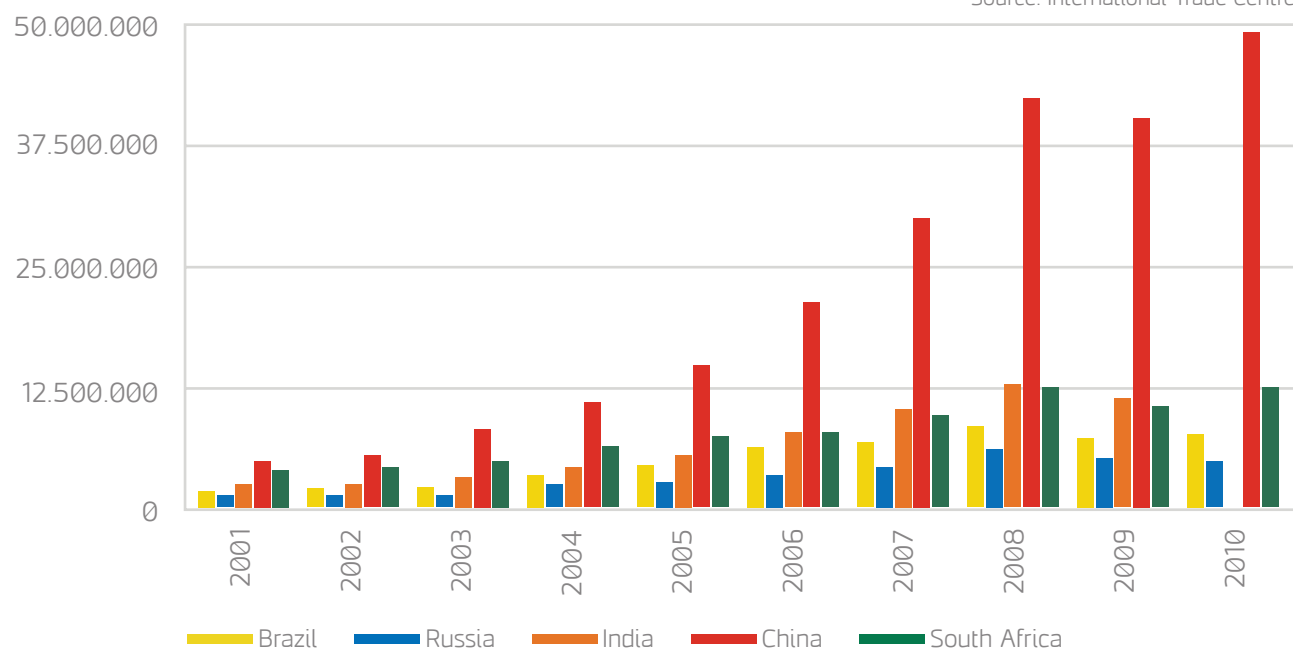
<sup>1</sup> Barbosa, Alexandre de Freitas - "China e América Latina: Parceria Sul-Sul?", [http://brasilnomundo.org.br/analises-e-opiniao/china-e-america-latina-parceria-sul-sul/#.VNUSN-bF\\_zM](http://brasilnomundo.org.br/analises-e-opiniao/china-e-america-latina-parceria-sul-sul/#.VNUSN-bF_zM), 26/07/2015

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.nivela.org/updates/will-china-become-latin-america-s-new-partner-for-infrastructure/en>

<sup>3</sup> <http://theafricanfile.com/public-diplomacy/international-relations/globalization-in-emerging-markets/united-how-south-africa%E2%80%99s-relationship-to-africa-serves-the-brics>

## BRICS exports to Africa (excluding SA)

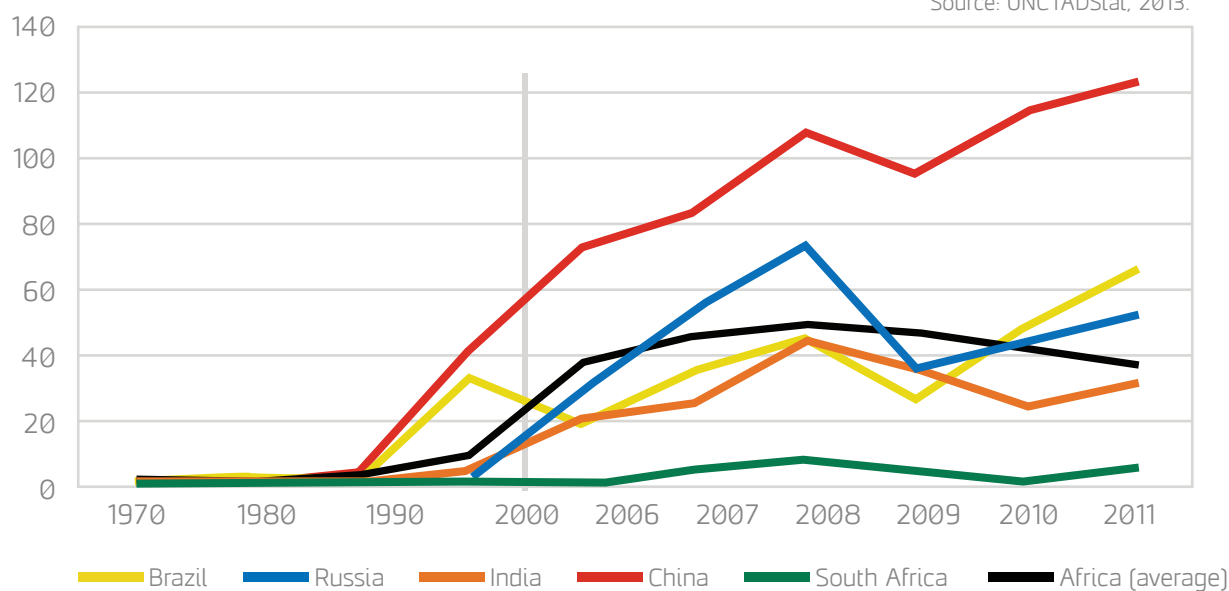
Source: International Trade Centre.



China also leads by far in terms of direct foreign investment.<sup>4</sup>

## FDI inflows to Africa and flows to the BRICS (\$ Billion)

Source: UNCTADStat, 2013.



<sup>4</sup> [http://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/publications/africa-brics\\_cooperation\\_eng.pdf](http://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/publications/africa-brics_cooperation_eng.pdf)

Of all the BRICS countries, China is also Africa's leading export destination.<sup>5</sup>

## Shares of african merchandise exports to the BRICS, 2011



Source: UNCTADStat, 2013.

While there is no doubt about China's supremacy in the volume of resources, the presence of all BRICS members in Africa calls for a more detailed understanding of the nature and motivations of each country, as they implement cooperation programs and promote trade and investment. We often observe contradictory motivations and conflicting objectives, which combine the rhetoric of horizontal, South-South exchanges with the interests of corporations that are internationalizing their operations to extract the continent's abundant natural resources.

## Challenges for social organizations and movements

The BRICS raise contradictory dimensions for struggles of social organizations and movements. On the one hand, it is with hope that we observe the great potential of a bloc from the South, to alter the balance of forces in the international system and to grant these countries their due place in global politics. Creating the BRICS was the most concrete step ever taken to democratize international institutions and global decision making, still dominated by traditional Northern powers.

On the other hand, the data presented here exposes how far that potential is from producing a just model for social and environmental development. In all these countries, frequent conflicts and social and environmental abuses are caused by the intensive exploitation of natural resources. In some of them, violations of rights and precarious, degrading working conditions are the rule. For that reason, there are intense resistance struggles underway in each of these countries, such as the struggles of South African mine workers, who participate in international resistance movements of people affected by the mining industry. Struggles of people affected by large energy projects, such

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/publications/africa-brics\\_cooperation\\_eng.pdf](http://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/publications/africa-brics_cooperation_eng.pdf)

as big dams, are also shared among the various countries in the bloc. Struggles for rights and against inequalities are present in all of the bloc's member countries.

Despite the strength and intensity of those struggles, they have not become part of dynamics to consolidate the BRICS. The bloc has made progress in its institutional architecture, including fora for academics and entrepreneurs, but no space or mechanisms have been set aside for the participation of social movements. There has been talk about creating a Trade Union Forum, which would be crucial for assuring respect for the rights of the huge number of workers in the bloc, and making those rights a basis for agreements signed among the member states. Beyond the Trade Union Forum, the challenge remains to create mechanisms for dialog with social groups and traditional populations affected by the bloc's large-scale projects, investments and ventures, including people in other countries receiving investments from bloc members, particularly in Africa.

It is also a challenge for social organizations' and movements' resistance struggles to build solutions different from those promoted by the BRICS development model. Their resistance against inequalities, violations of rights, the intensive exploitation of natural resources and the growing prominence of raw materials in our economies and exports can join into broader debates to achieve a different development model, based on social and environmental justice and integrated into the counter-hegemonic movement of Southern countries, firmly rooted in their respective regions. To that end, social organizations and movements, along with other people's forces in member countries, must fight for the BRICS' investments and trade practices to favor their own rights.



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