



Following the Yellow BRICS Road

BRICS Feminist Watch

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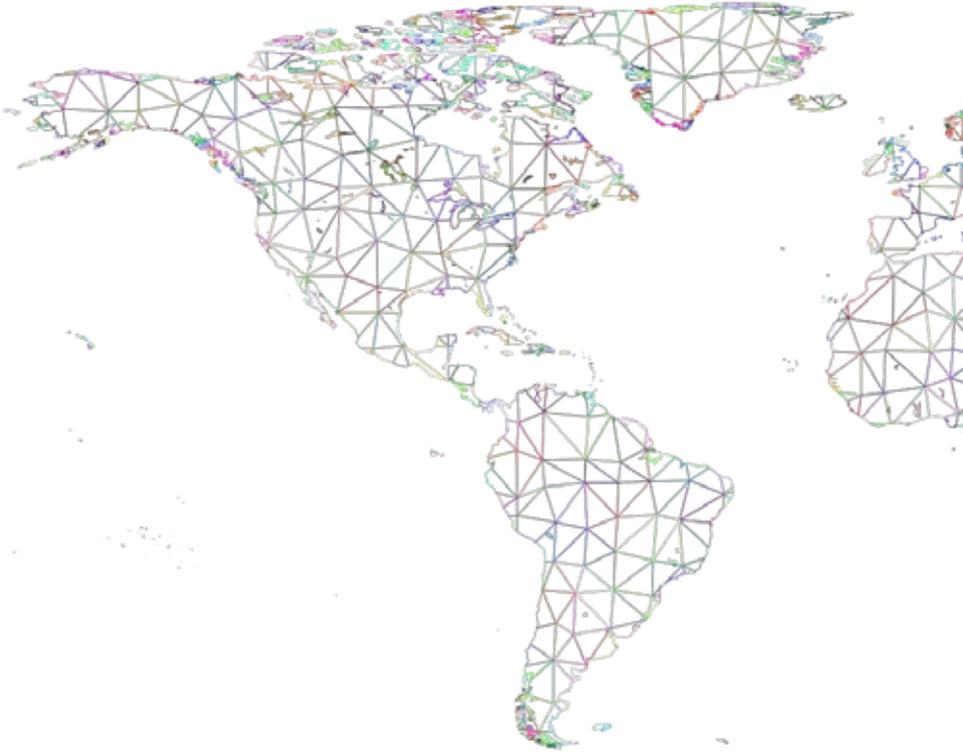
Following the Yellow BRICS Road

IN THE WIZARD OF OZ, FOLLOWING THE YELLOW BRICK ROAD LEADS TO SUCCESS AND ADVENTURES.

BRICS, the forum of emerging economies (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), has elicited considerable interest among observers of international relations, governments and civil society. BRICS has grown in terms of significance and power and the response from other governments, international forums and scholars has changed from skepticism to acknowledgement that BRICS has to be taken seriously. It has elicited criticism for being driven by the same market-oriented impulses as other multilateral bodies; even while others view it as a game-changer in the current geo-political scenario.

BRICS' focus areas of trade and investment, manufacturing and energy processing, energy, agricultural cooperation, science-technology and innovation, financial cooperation, connectivity, and ICT cooperation have important implications for the day-to-day lives of women and men in the BRICS countries and the absence of women in policy formulation only reinforces gender-blind policies. Given that all macroeconomic policy is gendered and neoliberal policy has distinct impacts depending on gender, (besides class, age, ethnicity etc.) an integrated gender analysis within all policy and project design is imperative to guaranteeing women's rights and ensuring that the most marginalized women benefit from development.

SIGNIFICANCE



BRICS countries have over 40% of the total world population and about 25% of the world's landmass. They collectively account for 21% of the global GDP. Goldman Sachs economists predicted that the BRIC economies (Brazil, Russia, India and China) would outperform the G7 countries (the richest countries) before the middle of the century¹. They boast of enormous political clout in their respective regions and in the international arena with all five countries being members of the G-20 group of countries. A crucial factor is that all BRICS countries hold important stocks of resources that can be offered to the global economy and this amounts to a positive spinoff for each individual country².

OF BRICS



BRICS is also significant in that it has developed despite pressure from the West and has worked out its own model – which is not merely a version of the Washington consensus model. BRICS has indeed operated as a “challenge function”³ in the international arena. The very existence of the BRICS presents an implicit challenge to the US-led world order but without a direct confrontation. BRICS, according to many scholars, portends a move towards a multipolar universe⁴.

¹(Rahman & Iqbal, 2016)

²(Madhavi, 2016)

³(Carey & Xiaoyun, 2014)

⁴(Ibid.)

**Some
headway
made by
BRICS**

The BRICS have used their enhanced capacity to successfully **negotiate and litigate in the WTO**. David Trubek⁵ has argued that the rise of the BRICS may contribute to a hybrid system and a redefinition of the WTO's values. Beyond their challenge to the rules of international economic law, the BRICS are also reshaping institutional structures of international economic governance and opening spaces for themselves in organisations that were traditionally not amiable to them. For instance, they have pushed for **increased voting power in the World Bank and IMF**. At the same time, they are also developing their own institutions. The BRICS have successfully increased their shares and votes in the World Bank and the IMF and have also challenged the legitimacy of the G8. They have also **increased their influence by participating in the G20**⁶.

BRICS has also substantively increased its share of development cooperation. Unlike aid from traditional donors, BRICS (excluding Russia) view their financing as primarily based on the principles of **South-South cooperation**. This positioning of development cooperation, by BRICS, has helped push for a new kind of international development cooperation, whereby development partners affirm that they respect state sovereignty and merely assist in building the capacity of countries to realize their own developmental path⁷.

While BRICS did not negotiate as a bloc while the **SDGs** were being carved out, the common principle that they pressed for were **Universality**. - that the SDGs, unlike the MDGs would have to all countries and not only on developing countries and **Common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR)** which allows for a contextualizing of responsibilities and roles, keeping in mind the countries contribution to, and ability to deal with a problem⁸.

⁵(Trubek, 2012)

⁷(Mwase & Yang, 2012)

⁶(Rolland, 2013)

⁸(Merlo, 2015)

Contradictions & Concerns

Given the low level of institutionalization of the group; there are serious concerns about how cohesive a bloc it actually is. BRICS are part of the G-20, but not a true power bloc or economic unit within or outside it. There are also no shortage of tensions within the group.

They are often competing for markets and investments with each other, and also involved in disputes against each other at the WTO and other forums. Sharp political differences exist among the five nations, making it difficult to envisage the BRICS as constituting a deeply integrated group based on shared norms that could encourage with much deeper cooperation in the future.

The other concerns are whether BRICS is truly an alternative or is only furthering the same global agenda of the “bigger” powers and formation of a transnational capitalist class. BRICS activities seem to be less aimed at challenging the prevailing international order than at opening up space in the global system for themselves. BRICS countries, therefore, are themselves opening up to become markets for commodities and consumer goods, alongside workers receiving low wages.

The high growth rates in these economies contrasts with the deprivation of large sections of their own citizens. Rights, including freedom of expression, association, and meaningfully engaging in policy formation and implementation are seriously compromised. Multilateralism, in this context, is viewed as a tool to get more favorable global agreements for a few, rather than a way to advance common concerns by establishing and upholding universal standards and a value-based approach.

Within BRICS for example, in its key document - the Strategy for Economic Cooperation - it underlines the purpose to be market enhancement, mutual trade investment, creation of business-friendly environment and inclusive economic growth among others⁹. It further reiterates that technological innovation will form the basis of economic development. This is again in keeping with the assumption that the goal of economic cooperation is increased profitability. Problems such as poverty, inequality, women’s empowerment, environmental concerns, to name a few, are conspicuously absent from this discourse.

⁹(The Strategy for BRICS Economic Partnership 2015)

Impact of the policies pursued by BRICS

Currently the model being followed by BRICS includes a run-away neoliberal globalization; a militarized and financialized political economy; the decline of the welfare nation-state and the reconfiguration of the geopolitical context. These policies that are driving the rapid modernization of many countries in the South are based on thinking that relies on androcentric and Eurocentric forms of knowledge. For the majority of people in the South (and indeed the North) this kind of thinking is seen as knowledge that oppresses.



This model that is being pursued has resulted in a series of crises that often interconnected and magnify each other. The crises include:

- Crisis of inequality, between classes, countries, gender, ethnic groups , and rural and urban populations. There is now recognized even by governments and the Bretton Woods Institutions.

- Crisis of poverty in which people are deprived of basic goods and services, even in the midst of rapid growth. Women experience different and deeper forms of poverty than men.

- Crisis of care, in which there is an increase in demands for care as a result of the increasing prevalence of disease, and of the aging population, while simultaneously there is a withdrawal of the welfare state. Women continue to be the primary caregivers and this burden of caregiving impacts them in terms of educational and employment opportunities as well as emotionally.

- Crisis in climate and other natural systems and a deepening food crisis; an energy crisis from fossil-fuel dependence arising from the unsustainable life styles of the North and increasingly, also of the South.

- Crisis in livelihoods owing to the increasing riskiness of economies and precariousness of work.

Crisis in migration. This includes refugees fleeing war and conflict as well as the new “climate refugees”. These are the involuntary migrants who face a range of barriers while they travel as well as at their destination. There



are also those migrating willingly but whose mobility is curtailed due to their gender and race. Most of the migrants are from the South and it is the South that absorbs most of the refugees.

- Crisis in culture – Where culture is used to oppress rather than liberate, and there is pressure towards marketization and homogenization of culture.
- Crisis in finance for development (inadequate taxation, inadequate international transfers, overly restrictive fiscal spaces (Ex: countries not allowed by IMF to spend additional aid)).
- Crisis in political systems that are increasing getting polarized and are being built on narrow identities; fear and insecurity leading to militarization, fundamentalisms and terrorism.

These crises have had a serious impact on the lives of common people substantiating the fact that the model of capitalistic economic development is indeed flawed and has resulted in the intensification of structural inequalities. Among the distinct groups of society upon whom globalisation's impact has been most telling, women clearly stand out. Feminist scholars and activists contend that neo-liberalism prioritizes economic growth, efficiency, and profit making over other values such as the promotion of economic justice and enhancing democracy and human rights.



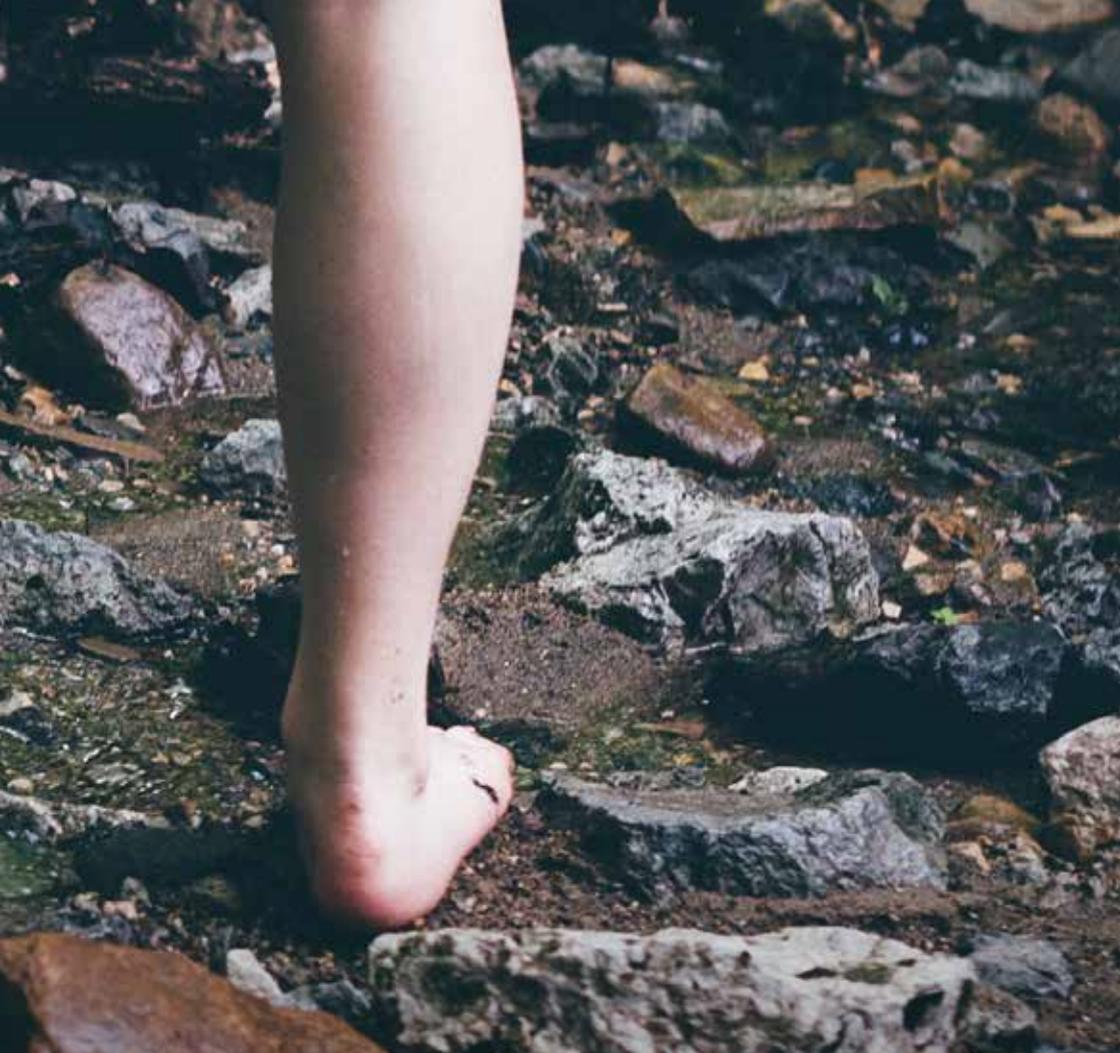
BRICS & Gender

Each country which is a part of the BRICS has had a history of strong feminist movements and all of these countries have also seen an unprecedented growing presence of the LGBT movement. These movements have had a local as well as a global impact. Despite this, the focus on gender in the BRICS summits has been minimal. The first and the fourth summit did not have a single mention on the issues of gender and women. Though the fifth summit celebrated the appointment of a woman chairperson of the African Union and saw it as a step towards women's empowerment, there was no other mention of issues around gender. The second and third summits had passing mentions of gender wherein it was clubbed together with social protection, decent work, employment, public health and other issues. The second summit mentioned the need for technical and financial cooperation to achieve 'sustainable social development, with social protection, full employment, and decent work policies and programs for vulnerable groups which includes women, migrants, youth and persons with disabilities'. The third summit also added public health and prevention of HIV to this list.

Gender equality seems to have been pushed into this laundry list of demands with no specific focus on how to go about it. BRICS **view of women as victims** to be cared for and not active development agents, harks back to an earlier time. It is largely in the context of terrorism as well as conflict, that gender makes a presence through **protectionist statements**. The **roles of women**, as contributors to society, the economy and knowledge and cultural base of the countries are **ignored**. The gendered impact of the policies being pursued by the BRICS countries individually and as a bloc is discounted. Women are missing from BRICS in its declarations, its forums and its programs. It is time to right this exclusion by bringing to fore a feminist analysis and engagement with BRICS.



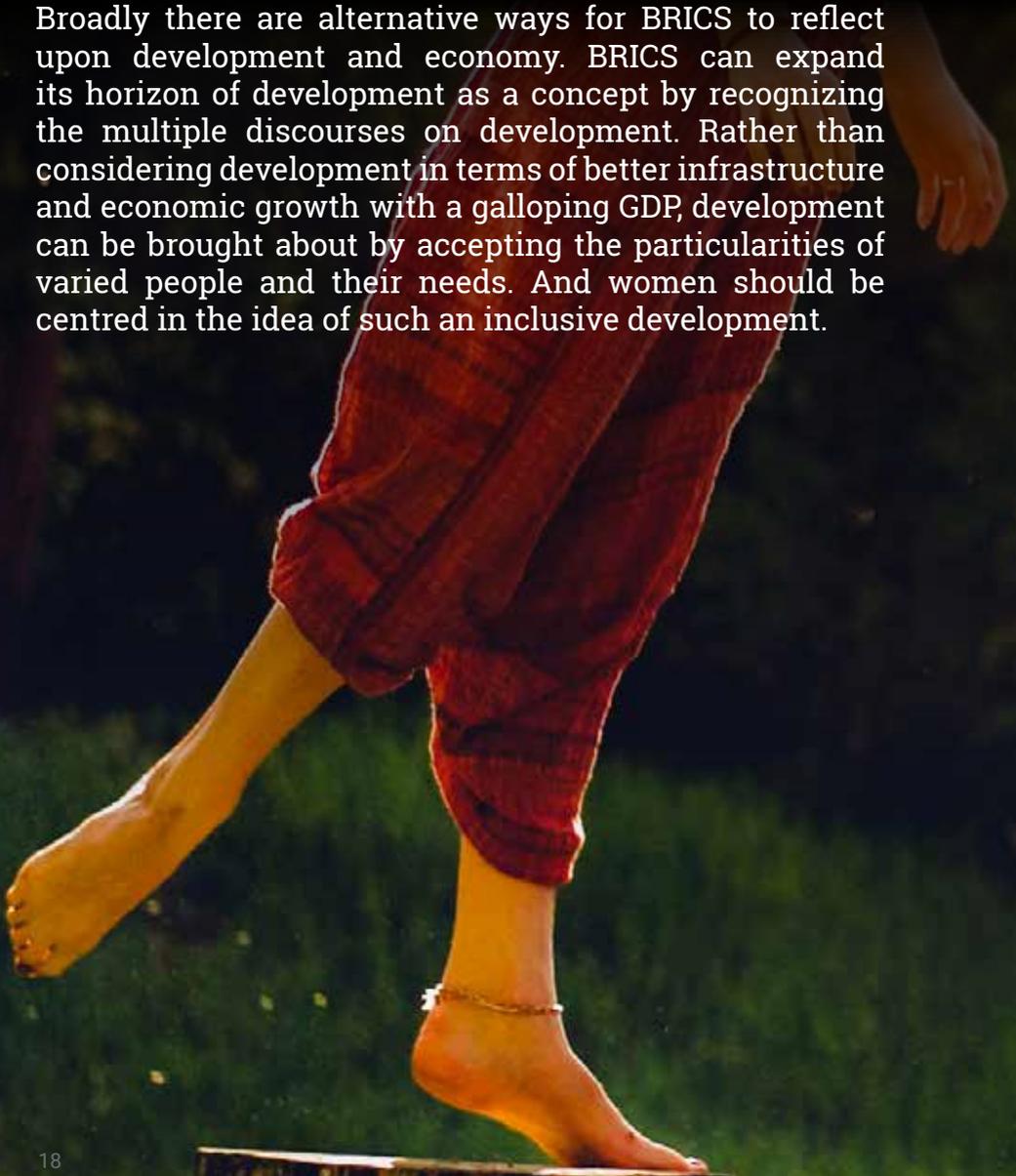
Progress women have made



The progress made with respect to women in the BRICS countries is not homogenous as different countries have ranked significantly differently with respect to the **standard indicators**. Some indicators remain worrisome but there has also been significant progress – especially in the field of education, labor force participation rates, legal protection and political and professional presence. There is a larger visibility of women leaders and achievers from a variety of fields including sports, films, art, literature and music. Women are beginning to be recognized as knowledge-creators who can change the world.

Recommendation for future action

Broadly there are alternative ways for BRICS to reflect upon development and economy. BRICS can expand its horizon of development as a concept by recognizing the multiple discourses on development. Rather than considering development in terms of better infrastructure and economic growth with a galloping GDP, development can be brought about by accepting the particularities of varied people and their needs. And women should be centred in the idea of such an inclusive development.



Some of the action points for BRICS to move towards this include:

1. **Ensure equal participation of women:** The architecture should be inclusive and just and thus also responsive and sensitive to women's rights and gender equality, with full participation of representatives of civil society organisations, women's groups, labour groups and other critical stakeholders. There should be 50% representation of women in all forums, committees and bodies initiated by BRICS.

2. As a first step BRICS should establish measures to **integrate a feminist approach** into all its work and structures. It should set up an inclusive multi-stakeholder taskforce, in partnership with feminist and women's rights advocates from civil society, to address gender equality and women's rights.

3. **Constituting a women's advisory:** BRICS and the NDB to institute a women's advisory check rather like the environmental clearance that is now mandatory for major projects. The women's check has to be very specifically from the point of view of women in deprivation. For BRICS to take note of include their advice and their concerns, their particular conditions in all efforts at south south cooperation such as:

- a. trade related protocols,
- b. financial arrangements including the NDB,
- c. political work that BRICS undertakes including settlement of disputes including violent conflicts, and around peace building.

4. Develop, promote and strengthen multiple **accountability systems** for women's rights, and gender equality. This

should include suo moto publishing of all relevant information in a timely manner and holding regular, open consultations with the most affected communities.

5. Have clear **feminist indicators** and make gender equality indicators mandatory part of all BRICS development partnerships.

6. All programmes should have **monitoring mechanisms** should assess human rights and environmental impacts and risks in a gender sensitive way.

7. **Meeting international commitments:** Ensure that BRICS, as a body supports each of its members to deliver on its international commitments. This includes its obligations under various international instruments and treaties such as UDHR, ICCPR, ICESCR, CEDAW, CRC, CERD, CAT and resolutions such as Resolution 1325. This is along with the commitments on SDGs. All development partners should be held accountable to all agreed commitments including human rights.

8. **Creating an enabling environment:** BRICS should promote and create an enabling environment for civil society to function, partner, support and challenge the government and to welcome feminist and women's organizations as legitimate actors in their country's civil society.

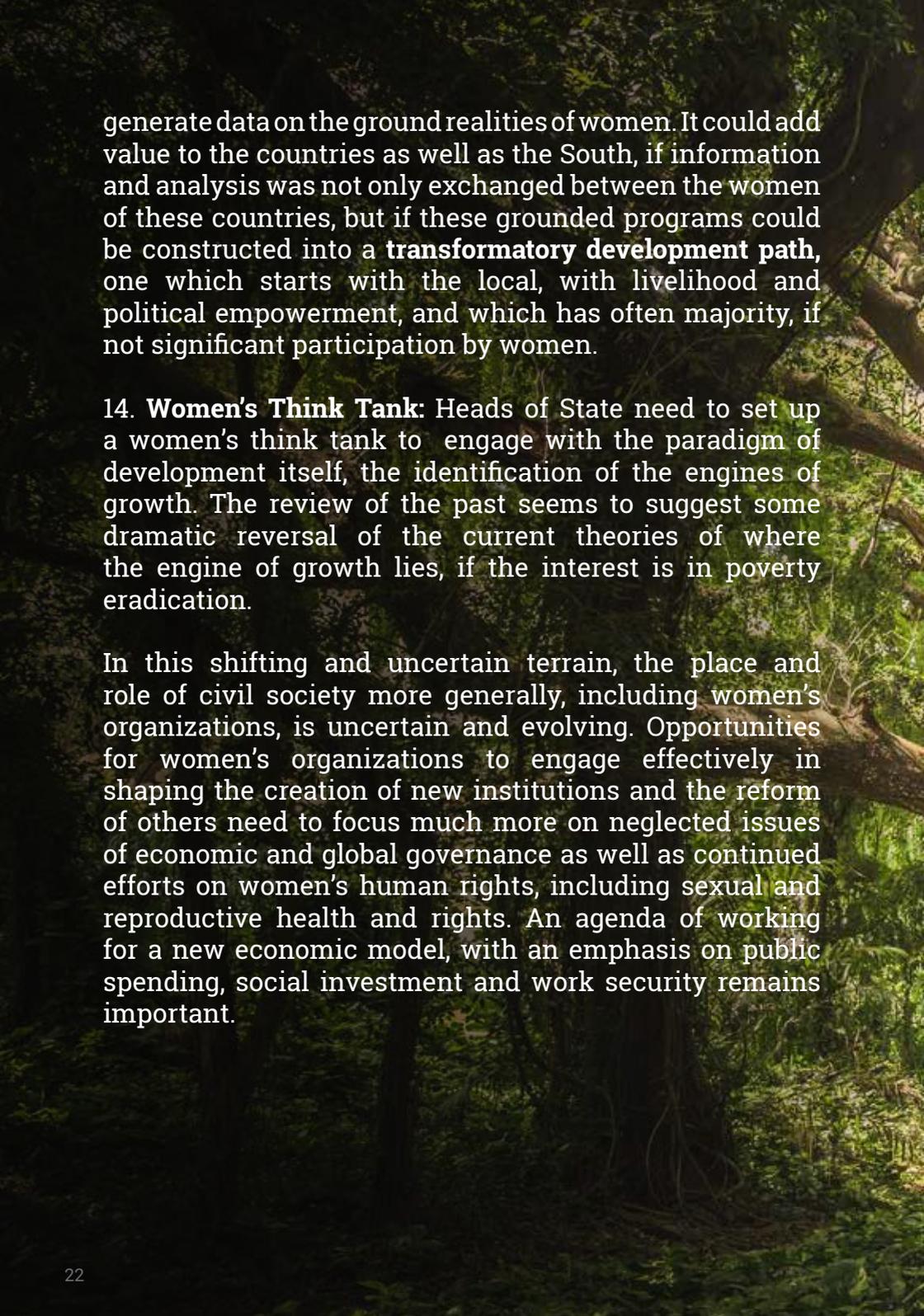
9. **Forming a consolidated front:** It is important for BRICS to create institutional mechanisms in place to help negotiate between women workers and the multinationals corporations; **form a consolidated front**, in dealing with MNCs –rather than that they deal with individual countries. A broad based front would prevent exploitation and enhance opportunities.

10. **Regulations:** Greater international commitment is necessary to promote public regulation of labor standards, adequate working conditions and support to workers' organisations. A key policy challenge is how to prevent individual countries from competing on the basis of cheap labor and lax labor standards. However, labor laws cannot be seen in isolation and the links between economic, social and environmental policy have to be better understood. Policy formulation in key sectors such as agriculture, trade, health and education need to be better integrated. The issues indicate the need for a more transformative agenda and a more radical rethinking of current priorities. Secure and sustainable livelihoods for less powerful groups, both women and men, who are in the majority, should become a more central concern as should the public regulation of the power and profits of the few.

11. **Focusing on macroeconomic policies:** Any macroeconomic policy that claims to remove poverty, needs to have strong thrusts of investment as well as programme design that gives women access, control and use of resources (natural and otherwise).

12. Relooking at Measures and indicators of progress that would be more inclusive. This includes valuing **women's non monetised work** and developing measures which would bring in women's "real" contribution. A full review of measures of progress using all the knowledge on indicators including the innovative Human development indicators being attempted by various countries around the world.

13. **Research:** BRICS should take steps to strengthen independent research and cross-countries studies to



generate data on the ground realities of women. It could add value to the countries as well as the South, if information and analysis was not only exchanged between the women of these countries, but if these grounded programs could be constructed into a **transformatory development path**, one which starts with the local, with livelihood and political empowerment, and which has often majority, if not significant participation by women.

14. Women's Think Tank: Heads of State need to set up a women's think tank to engage with the paradigm of development itself, the identification of the engines of growth. The review of the past seems to suggest some dramatic reversal of the current theories of where the engine of growth lies, if the interest is in poverty eradication.

In this shifting and uncertain terrain, the place and role of civil society more generally, including women's organizations, is uncertain and evolving. Opportunities for women's organizations to engage effectively in shaping the creation of new institutions and the reform of others need to focus much more on neglected issues of economic and global governance as well as continued efforts on women's human rights, including sexual and reproductive health and rights. An agenda of working for a new economic model, with an emphasis on public spending, social investment and work security remains important.



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