



School of Human and Community Development

Department of Social Work

MASTER OF ARTS IN THE FIELD OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Exploring the impact of BRICS collaboration on social development initiatives in South Africa.

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DECLARATION

I, Melisa Ngcobo, do declare that this report is my own work, and the work of others (from books, journals, and/or internet sources), has been appropriately acknowledged by way of referencing. I acknowledge the intellectual ownership of the thesis and do declare that I never resorted to any form of copying techniques to complete this thesis, apart from support from appropriately referenced extracts. I do declare that this work is submitted at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg for a Masters in Social Work, and has not been submitted before for any examination or degree in any other university.

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Ngcobo', written in a cursive style.

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Abstract

In recent years, the BRICS bloc comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa has become a key platform for South-South cooperation, shaping global governance and development discussions. This study seeks to examine the effects of BRICS collaboration on social development initiatives in South Africa, focusing on the nature, achievements, and challenges of projects supported by BRICS. Utilizing a developmental state theoretical framework, the research investigates how partnerships related to BRICS align with national development goals and foster broader social transformation. Employing a qualitative research approach and exploratory design, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders. Participants were chosen using purposive and snowball sampling techniques, including South African scholars specializing in BRICS relations and officials from the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO). The findings reveal that BRICS collaboration has significantly contributed to infrastructure development, education, and healthcare, mainly through the New Development Bank (NDB) and knowledge-sharing initiatives. Notable successes include improved funding mechanisms and technology transfer, particularly from China and India. However, challenges such as bureaucratic inefficiencies, coordination issues between South Africa and BRICS partners, and socio-political resistance were identified. While BRICS initiatives generally align with South Africa's National Development Plan (NDP) 2030, gaps persist in addressing structural social issues like unemployment and poverty. To enhance the effectiveness of BRICS collaboration, the study recommends better policy coordination, increased transparency in funding distribution, strengthened public-private partnerships, and improved integration of BRICS initiatives into local social frameworks. The findings suggest that with strategic enhancements, BRICS collaboration could significantly advance South Africa's social development agenda and contribute to long-term sustainability.

Keywords: BRICS, Social Development, South-South Cooperation, National Development Plan (NDP), New Development Bank (NDB), South Africa, Infrastructure Development, Knowledge Transfer

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ANC	African National Congress
BRIC	Brazil, Russia, India and China
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa
EU	European Union
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICT	Information Communications Technology
IMF	International Monetary Fund
NDB	New Development Bank
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
United States	United States of America
WHO	World Health Organisation

CHAPTER ONE GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This study explored the impact of BRICS collaboration on social development in South Africa, focusing on the intersection of economic growth, infrastructure investment, and pressing social issues. BRICS, comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, presents a unique platform for cooperation aimed at fostering economic integration and sustainable development among its member states. Given South Africa's strategic position within BRICS, understanding how these collaborative efforts translate into tangible benefits for its socio-economic landscape is paramount.

The National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 outlines South Africa's aspirations for inclusive growth, emphasizing the need for robust infrastructure, economic participation, and social transformation (Fourie, 2018). However, despite the significant investments flowing from BRICS initiatives, there remains a critical gap in addressing urgent social challenges such as youth unemployment, gender inequality, and poverty alleviation.

This study aims to explore the impact of BRICS collaboration on social development initiatives in South Africa. By engaging with stakeholders and analyzing existing projects, the research seeks to provide insights into how BRICS can better align its efforts with the needs of South African communities. Ultimately, this exploration aspires to contribute to the discourse on international cooperation and its role in advancing sustainable development within the BRICS framework.

This Chapter covers the introduction and background to the study, before a statement of the problem, aims, objectives and research questions to the study are provided. Thereafter the rationale of the study and key terms applicable to the study are used and a chapter outline is provided.

1.2 Background

BRICS is a coalition comprising five prominent developing countries, namely Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. These countries are widely recognized as the world's fastest-growing emerging economies, owing to factors such as their low labour costs, favourable demographics, and abundant natural resources (Chen & Boyar, 2020). Initially, South Africa was not part of the coalition, but it joined in late 2010 following the second Brasilia summit held in Brazil (Duggan et al., 2022). It is also important to note that since January 2025 BRICS is now BRICS plus and has 11 members that include Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. However, this study focused primarily on the original five BRICS members Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, given their long-standing collaboration and the historical context of their development within the bloc.

South Africa boasts one of the most diverse populations globally, with a majority of its population (80%) below the age of 45 years old (Stats SA, 2024).. This demographic characteristic plays a pivotal role in economic market research and policy development within the BRICS framework (Modi & Pinto, 2019). South Africa's demographic resources offer significant advantages to BRICS member states by providing access to a diverse consumer base and a robust economic pool. These factors are instrumental in fostering economic growth and development (BRICS, 2018).

Member states of BRICS prioritize social development as a crucial commitment (BRICS, 2018). This is particularly relevant for countries like South Africa within BRICS, as they face numerous challenges such as unemployment, poverty, healthcare, education, food security, human rights, gender equality, and social inclusion of elderly individuals and people with disabilities.

South Africa, in particular, experiences alarmingly high levels of unemployment, with over half of the youth population currently without work. The Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) by Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) indicates that the number of unemployed persons increased by 330 000 to 8.2 million during the first quarter of 2024 (Stats SA, 2024). According to Stats SA, the official unemployment rate stands at 32.9 %, an increase of 0.8 of a percentage point in first quarter of 2024 (Q1: 2024) compared to the fourth quarter of 2023 (Q4: 2023) (Stats SA, 2024). The results of the QLFS also indicate that the number of employed persons increased by 22 000 to 16.7 million in the first quarter of 2024 compared to the fourth quarter of 2023 (Stats SA, 2024).

The consequences of unemployment, such as poverty, are widespread in BRICS countries. Poverty indicates a lack of access to basic needs and inadequate economic resources to meet various requirements (Human Development Report, 2022). In South Africa, 6.3% of the population (equivalent to 3,549,000 individuals) are considered multidimensionally poor, while 12.2% are classified as vulnerable to multidimensional poverty (amounting to 6,902,000 people) (Human Development Report, 2022). The poverty level in South Africa is notably high, with more than half of the adult population (those over 18 years old) living in poverty.

BRICS places a strong emphasis on reducing poverty and unemployment while fostering economic progress within its member states (Chen & Boyar, 2020). Robust economic development plays a crucial role in advancing human development, which, in turn, fuels further economic growth. Thus, an effective strategy for alleviating poverty must include primary measures aimed at promoting rapid economic development.

According to the South African government, joining BRICS brings several economic advantages, including increased trade and investment opportunities, enhanced international influence on global issues and institutions, and representation for the sub-Saharan region (South African Government News Agency, 2019). South Africa's membership in BRICS allows the country to benefit from employment opportunities and infrastructure development. It also provides an international platform to promote foreign policy and achieve national objectives (South African Government News Agency, 2019). South Africa's participation in BRICS is driven by its pursuit of national interests and the opportunity to collaborate with significant actors in the South on global governance reforms.

Additionally, South Africa gains from concrete projects in various sectors such as science, agriculture, security, and justice, which contribute to economic development, unemployment reduction, and growth (South African Government News Agency, 2019). The inclusion of South Africa in BRICS has proven beneficial for both the country itself and the BRICS coalition as a whole. BRICS has made a significant impact on global economic markets, accounting for over a third of global GDP growth in the past decade (Kapoor, 2020).

As a coalition of the five major emerging economies, BRICS serves as a prominent example of a highly influential multilateral group that embodies the principles of liberal institutionalism. Over the past decade, the coalition has utilised various programs and approaches to promote

development, economic growth, and cooperation. Increased cooperation among BRICS member states, a focus on foreign policy, the utilization of foreign direct investment (FDI), open trade policies, bilateral trade agreements, and the advancement of human rights have been essential tools in advancing the interests of all five member states (World Bank, 2018).

Despite the aspirational narrative surrounding BRICS, there is increasing scholarly criticism regarding the bloc's internal dynamics and its actual impact on member states, particularly in social development. Analysts argue that while BRICS emphasizes equity and development, it often grapples with internal imbalances. China's economic dominance, for instance, tends to overshadow the influence of other members, raising concerns about equitable cooperation (Bond & Garcia, 2015). Additionally, the bloc's lack of a strong institutional framework has hindered its ability to achieve tangible social development outcomes (Kornegay & Bohler-Muller, 2013).

In the case of South Africa, challenges arise in translating high-level diplomatic commitments into practical, locally relevant social development initiatives. Although South Africa engages in BRICS discussions on poverty reduction, education, and public health, these efforts have not consistently resulted in transformative community-level changes. For example, the New Development Bank (NDB) a significant achievement of BRICS has primarily targeted infrastructure and energy projects, with limited direct investment in social welfare, health, or education sectors (Duggan et al., 2022).

Nonetheless, there are notable collaborative impacts in South Africa's engagement with BRICS. One key benefit has been in infrastructure development, especially through support from the NDB. The bank has financed major projects like the Eskom Medupi power station and a renewable energy transmission program, aligning with South Africa's broader developmental goals (Kirton & Larionova, 2022). These investments could enhance energy security, create jobs, and contribute to long-term socio-economic stability.

In public health, BRICS collaboration has enabled cooperative responses to urgent issues like HIV/AIDS and the COVID-19 pandemic. Joint initiatives have included discussions on vaccine development, research partnerships, and the sharing of medical knowledge and public health strategies among member states (Chen & Boyar, 2020). These efforts highlight the importance of South-South cooperation in strengthening national health systems and improving health outcomes.

Moreover, South Africa has actively engaged in academic and policy exchange platforms under the BRICS framework, such as the BRICS Think Tank Council and the BRICS Academic Forum. These forums have been crucial in fostering dialogue on social inequality, urban development, and inclusive economic growth, offering a space for intellectual collaboration and the co-creation of policy ideas sensitive to the unique socio-political contexts of BRICS countries (Duggan et al., 2022).

These developments present a complex landscape: while BRICS offers opportunities for alternative development partnerships, its impact on social development in South Africa remains uneven and contested. This study aims to investigate both the potential and limitations of BRICS collaboration in shaping effective social development initiatives within the South African context.

1.3 Problem statement

After more than three decades of democracy, South Africa is still battling with issues of poverty, inequality, unemployment and hunger (Stats SA, 2024). South Africa faces various social development issues that impact the well-being and progress of its population and the country has high levels of poverty and income inequality, with a significant portion of the population living in poverty (Iwara et al., 2020). The unequal distribution of wealth, resources, and opportunities exacerbates social disparities and hinders inclusive development. Moreover, the country struggles with high unemployment rates, particularly among youth. Limited job opportunities contribute to economic exclusion and hinder social mobility, leading to increased poverty and social unrest (Ngubane et al., 2023).

Furthermore, despite efforts to improve access to education, South Africa continues to face challenges in delivering quality education to all citizens. Disparities in educational outcomes persist, affecting employment prospects and perpetuating socio-economic inequalities (Plageron et al., 2019). Moreover, health and healthcare is another issue South Africa is battling with. South Africa faces significant health challenges, including a high burden of HIV/AIDS, other communicable diseases, and non-communicable diseases. Access to quality healthcare services remains unequal, particularly in rural areas (Ngubane et al., 2023).

Since South Africa joined BRICS in 2010, the group has undertaken various initiatives to promote social development. However, significant challenges persist in addressing social development issues across the BRICS nations despite these efforts (Iwara et al., 2020). One of the key initiatives undertaken by BRICS has been the establishment of the New Development Bank (NDB) in 2015 (Cooper, 2017). The NDB aims to finance infrastructure and sustainable development projects in BRICS and other emerging economies (Duggan et al., 2022). While the NDB has funded various projects, there are concerns about the equitable distribution of these funds and the overall impact on social development (Duggan et al., 2022).

Furthermore, BRICS has collaborated on other initiatives, such as the BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement, a framework for providing protection against global liquidity pressures, and the BRICS Business Council, which promotes economic, trade, and investment cooperation among the member countries (Kirton & Larionova, 2022). However, the tangible impact of these initiatives on social development remains limited.

Given this background, it is crucial to better understand the impact of BRICS on social development, and further research and exploration are needed to determine whether South Africa's involvement in BRICS is helping address these social development challenges.

1.4 Aim

To explore the impact of BRICS collaboration on social development initiatives in South Africa.

Objectives

- To examine the degree to which the collaboration among BRICS countries has shaped the implementation and efficacy of particular social development initiatives in South Africa.
- To gain insight into stakeholders' perspectives regarding the influence of the BRICS collaboration on social development initiatives in South Africa.
- To investigate the obstacles and hindrances faced during the implementation of social development initiatives under the framework of BRICS collaboration in South Africa.
- To comprehend how the BRICS collaboration in social development initiatives aligns with the national development priorities and strategies of South Africa.

Research questions

- How has the BRICS collaboration influenced the implementation and effectiveness of specific social development initiatives in South Africa?
- How do stakeholders perceive and evaluate the impact of the BRICS collaboration on social development initiatives in South Africa?
- What are the challenges and barriers encountered in implementing social development initiatives under the BRICS collaboration in South Africa?
- How does the BRICS collaboration in social development initiatives align with the national development priorities and strategies of South Africa?

1.5 Significance of study

While there is an increasing body of literature on the cooperation among BRICS countries and the role of BRICS in global politics around governance and military cooperation (Chen and Boyar, 2020), there is a limited amount of research specifically focused on examining its impact on social development initiatives in South Africa (Modi & Pinto, 2019; Penniston, 2021; Kirton & Larionova, 2022). Consequently, conducting research in this domain can bridge the existing knowledge gap and deepen our understanding of the outcomes and effectiveness of BRICS collaboration in driving social development within the country. Such research holds significant value as it can offer vital insights for policymakers and stakeholders involved in national and international development planning. It can inform the formulation and implementation of policies, strategies, and interventions that effectively address social challenges and promote sustainable development. Additionally, conducting this study can provide valuable lessons and best practices for fostering successful collaboration among member countries. By comprehending the factors that contribute to positive outcomes, as well as the obstacles and difficulties encountered, policymakers and practitioners can enhance the efficacy and efficiency of future collaboration efforts, both within the BRICS framework and other regional or international alliances.

Additionally, the motivation for conducting this study stemmed from the researcher's academic and professional interest in international development cooperation, specifically regarding how emerging alliances like BRICS impact domestic social policy in the Global South. As a South African social work academic involved in policy research and development, the researcher

identified a gap in understanding the practical effects of BRICS collaboration on social transformation within local contexts. This perspective served as both the impetus and critical framework for the study, aiming to enhance scholarship on South-South partnerships and their significance in tackling ongoing structural challenges in South Africa.

1.6 Definition of key terms

BRICS

BRICS is an acronym that refers to the countries of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. It represents an association of five major emerging national economies. In essence, BRICS is an influential bloc of large, fast-growing economies that have sought to increase their collective economic and political influence on the global stage (Kirton & Larionova, 2022). In this study BRICS will be used to refer to the political bloc consisting of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.

Social development

According to Midgley (2014), social development is a planned process of social and economic change aimed at enhancing the well-being of the entire population. This broader perspective recognizes that advancements in areas like education, health, housing, and social protection must be underpinned by inclusive economic growth, job creation, and fair resource distribution to achieve sustainable development outcomes. In the context of BRICS collaboration, this integrated approach is especially pertinent, as many of the bloc's initiatives seek to tackle infrastructure development, economic participation, and social inequality simultaneously.

RDP

In the South African context, RDP refers to the Reconstruction and Development Programme. The RDP was a socioeconomic policy framework introduced in 1994 by the African National Congress (ANC) government after the end of apartheid aimed at rebuilding and transforming the South

African society and economy, which had been severely damaged and skewed by the apartheid system (Nokulunga et al., 2018). In this study the term RDP will be used to understand how the government of South Africa aimed to provide access to housing, water, electricity, healthcare, and other basic services, especially in previously disadvantaged communities.

Sustainable Development Goals

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, are a collection of 17 interlinked global goals designed to be a "blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all" by the year 2030 (Haywood et al., 2019). The 17 SDGs cover a wide range of social and economic development issues, including poverty, hunger, health, education, gender equality, clean water, sanitation, energy, environment, and social justice (Haywood et al., 2019). SDGs that significantly focus on social development include those addressing poverty, hunger, health, education, gender equality, inequality, and inclusive societies will be the focus of this study.

1.7 Brief outline of research methodology

This study employed a qualitative research approach and an exploratory research design and utilised interviews to collect data from key informants on the impact BRICS on social development initiatives in South Africa. Before data collection, the researcher applied for and was granted ethical clearance certificate number SW24/08/04 from the Wits Non-medical ethics committee. Participants were purposively sampled and collected data was thematically analysed.

1.8 Structure of the Study

The format of this study will follow the outline below:

Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter will introduce the research topic and outlines the problem statement, aim and objectives of the study, research questions and the significance of the study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Chapter two will present the literature review of some of the studies that have been done on overview of BRICS collaborations and social development initiatives in South Africa.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

Chapter three of the dissertation will comprise the research methodology. This section will describe how the study was undertaken. A detailed outline of the methodology, study design, sampling strategy, data collection and data analysis, will be provided.

Chapter Four: Results, Discussion, and Interpretation of Findings

Chapter four will present, discuss and interpret the findings obtained from analysis of the study.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

Chapter five will outline the major conclusions drawn from the research findings and recommendations in relation to the study.

1.9 Conclusion

This introductory chapter has established a critical foundation for analyzing the impact of BRICS collaboration on social development initiatives in South Africa. By placing BRICS within the broader context of emerging economies, the chapter highlights the bloc's increasing influence and its potential to meaningfully contribute to social transformation. The discussion of South Africa's ongoing social challenges such as poverty, unemployment, and inequality provides a strong rationale for exploring the role that BRICS partnerships could play in addressing these complex issues.

Moreover, clearly defining the study's objectives and research questions creates a focused framework for inquiry, ensuring that the investigation maintains both academic rigor and practical relevance. The significance of this study goes beyond theoretical contributions; it aims to inform policy discourse and decision-making processes in South Africa, bridging the gap between international cooperation and local development needs.

In conclusion, this chapter not only introduces the key themes and scope of the research but also emphasizes the urgent need to explore how BRICS collaboration can be effectively leveraged to advance South Africa's social development agenda. It sets the stage for subsequent chapters to

further investigate empirical findings and theoretical analysis, ultimately contributing to a more nuanced understanding of South-South cooperation in today's development landscape.

CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

As a member of BRICS, South Africa's inclusion in the coalition has been of particular interest, given the country's unique social and economic challenges. One area of focus has been the potential impact of BRICS collaboration on social development initiatives within South Africa. This literature review aims to explore the existing research on how the BRICS partnership has influenced or supported social development efforts in South Africa. It will examine the various ways in which BRICS member countries have engaged with and contributed to initiatives addressing critical social issues in South Africa, such as poverty alleviation, healthcare, education, and infrastructure development.

2.2 History of BRICS

Yevgny Primakov, the former Prime Minister of Russia, established the BRICS group for the first time in 1998, which originally included Brazil, Russia, India, and China as emerging economies (BRICS Information Centre, 2012). South Africa joined the coalition later, in late 2010, after the second Brasilia summit held in Brazil (Petropoulos, 2013). With South Africa's membership, other BRICS nations gained better access to natural resources such as gold, coal, and platinum (Pinto, 2012). Its inclusion was also influenced by the diversity of its population, which allows BRICS countries to achieve their common goals and interests by tapping into a varied customer base and economic resources (Petropoulos, 2013). The coalition consists of countries recognized as emerging economies, characterized by rapid industrialization and development (Pedro et al., 2012).

The BRICS group's objectives include promoting a fair international order and providing a framework for South-South cooperation. It acts as a bridge between developed and developing nations, especially in relation to entities like the World Trade Organization and the United Nations (Kahn, 2011). BRICS was created as an alternative organization to offer financial support to developing countries. Additionally, it aims to foster self-governance among member states, enabling them to pursue developmental and economic goals independently of external organizations such as the World Bank (Kahn, 2011).

The core principles of the BRICS collaboration emphasize respect for the sovereignty of each member state, adherence to international law, and acknowledgment of the UN's role in promoting

peace, security, and prosperity. The World Trade Organization outlines that BRICS is founded on commitments to the norms of the multilateral trading system, the growth and development of each member, and mutually beneficial cooperation with other nations (The Strategy For BRICS Economic Partnership, 2015). Recognizing the various stakeholders in the global financial and economic landscape, BRICS prioritizes transparency, information sharing, and consensus-building among its members in decision-making processes (The Strategy For BRICS Economic Partnership, 2015).

Historically, BRICS has concentrated on enhancing trade, financial cooperation, and political coordination among its members. Significant institutional achievements include the establishment of the New Development Bank (NDB) and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA), both intended to reduce dependence on Western-dominated institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (Armijo & Roberts, 2014). Moreover, BRICS has progressively addressed broader development issues such as sustainable development, education, health, and global governance (Stuenkel, 2016).

In recent years, BRICS has undergone significant developments. A key milestone was the announcement of its expansion at the 15th BRICS Summit in Johannesburg in August 2023, where six countries, Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates were invited to join, although Argentina later declined the invitation (BRICS, 2023). This expansion reflects the bloc's increasing influence and attractiveness to Global South countries seeking more equitable and multipolar partnerships (Carvalho, 2023).

The addition of new members signifies a shift in BRICS's identity and strategic direction. It is no longer just a coalition of five major emerging economies; BRICS is now positioning itself as a more representative platform for global South-South cooperation. The expanded membership is expected to place greater emphasis on issues such as energy security, climate change, food systems, and regional integration (Lissovolik, 2023). These evolving dynamics have important implications for South Africa, particularly regarding its regional leadership role and its capacity to leverage BRICS partnerships to advance national social development goals.

While the BRICS grouping has expanded with the inclusion of additional members under the BRICS Plus framework, the primary focus of this study will remain on the five founding BRICS nations Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. These countries have spent nearly 15 years working together, shaping the bloc's economic and political cooperation. Their longstanding collaboration provides a strong foundation for analyzing the core dynamics of BRICS, even as the grouping continues to evolve with new members.

2.3 BRICS mandate

The BRICS alliance focuses on various areas of collaboration, including agriculture, research, technology and innovation, manufacturing and minerals processing, trade and investment promotion, and sustainable energy (The Strategy For BRICS Economic Partnership, 2015). Collectively, the member states account for 30% of the world's land, 45% of global agricultural output, and 43% of total global production. Over the past decade, BRICS has become a significant contributor to the world economy, representing 21% of global GDP and contributing 50% to economic development during this period (The Strategy For BRICS Economic Partnership, 2015).

The primary objective of BRICS is to foster economic growth, security, and peace in a globalized and interconnected environment. Its member states span Asia, Europe, Africa, and Latin America, providing a transnational dimension and expanded potential consumer markets (BRICS, 2018). According to BRICS (2018), the coalition aims to enhance and support existing bilateral and multilateral relations among its members, improve market access, facilitate market linkages, promote trade and investment, and create a business-friendly atmosphere for investors and entrepreneurs within the member nations.

Additionally, BRICS is dedicated to addressing high unemployment rates, alleviating poverty, and promoting social inclusion on a global scale. It seeks to enhance the coordination of macroeconomic policies (Strategy For BRICS Economic Partnership, 2015). The BRICS mandate aligns with several UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with both emphasizing the importance of addressing the needs and challenges faced by developing countries, particularly in reducing poverty and inequality (Chen & Boyar, 2020).

2.4 Overview of BRICS member states

Because of their diverse range of natural resources, affordable labour prices, and favourable demographics, the BRICS nations are thought to have the fastest-growing rising economies in the globe (Chen & Boyar, 2020). Before South Africa was added, in 2010, the gross domestic product (GDP) of the BRIC countries, Brazil, Russia, India, and China accounted for 11% of the world's GDP. Although we now have BRICS plus members but the focus of the study will mainly be the five BRICS members as they have spent nearly 15 years together.

2.4.1 Brazil

With the support of the coalition, BRICS member states have made substantial political and economic advancements in recent years. Brazil's participation in BRICS has enhanced its international standing by strengthening ties with other global players (BRICS, 2012). The three main objectives of BRICS include reaffirming Brazil's status as an emerging political and economic power, as well as promoting stronger commercial connections with developing countries, particularly Russia and India (Casaroes, 2018). The establishment of a regional headquarters in São Paulo by the New Development Bank in 2018 further underscores its significant commitment to Brazil (Xing, 2019).

2.4.2 Russia

Russia's involvement in BRICS has facilitated ongoing communication with Brazil and South Africa. In 2018, the New Development Bank approved loans totaling \$840 million, which were allocated for projects related to water, sanitation, urban infrastructure, environmental protection, and flood control in Russia (Kapoor, 2020). The sale and export of oil are vital to the Russian economy, with the country holding approximately 1,163 trillion cubic feet of natural gas and 87 billion barrels of oil reserves (World Bank, 2015). Oil accounts for 30% of the federal budget, 25% of GDP, and 70% of total export value (World Bank, 2015). Russia plays a crucial role in fostering cooperation among BRICS member states. Notable examples of these collaborations include the Russia-China energy dialogue and Brazil's initiatives to explore and develop hydrocarbons in licensed areas (BRICS Energy Report, 2020).

2.4.3 India

Similar to the other members of the BRICS, India has grown and developed. It is home to the world's second-biggest middle-class and overall populations. India and the other four members of BRICS now have more robust trade ties. Brazil, China, Russia, and South Africa accounted for 44% of India's total imports in the fourth quarter of 2019 (United Nations Comtrade Database, 2019). India's trade with the other BRICS members reached US \$95 billion between 2013 and 2014 (World Bank, 2015). The New Development Bank proposal, which was placed on the BRICS agenda of the fourth annual summit held in India in 2012, is one of India's contributions to BRICS (BRICS Information Centre, 2012).

2.4.4 China

China is steadily overtaking the United States of America to become the country with the second-largest economy in the world (Reidy, 2019). At the moment, China is the main investor in BRICS. Beijing's geopolitical and economic might is greatly enhanced by the coalition (Reidy, 2019). China is currently the world's top exporter and has invested around 41% of the BRICS funds. 31% of the country's exports in 2012 came from the manufacturing sector (Reidy, 2019). China has improved bilateral ties with Africa through BRICS. With a value of almost \$93 billion, it is the biggest importer in Africa (World Bank, 2018).

2.4.5 South Africa

South Africa became a member of the coalition only in late 2010, following the second Brasilia conference held in Brazil (Petropoulos, 2013, p. 39). With 80% of its population under the age of 45, South Africa boasts one of the most diverse populations globally, which is crucial for economic market research and policy development within the BRICS nations (Modi & Pinto, 2019). The demographic resources of South Africa provide BRICS members with access to a varied consumer base and economic pool, both essential for fostering growth and development (Petropoulos, 2013).

South Africa was invited to join BRICS due to its wealth of valuable minerals, including gold, platinum, and diamonds, along with its established corporate framework, stable macroeconomic environment, and sophisticated banking system, which have attracted significant foreign investments from countries like China and Germany (BRICS Information Centre, 2016). Its advanced banking and commercial infrastructure has also opened up investment opportunities for many other African and BRICS countries (Pinto, 2012).

The South African government asserts that joining BRICS brings economic benefits, including increased trade and investment opportunities and a stronger presence in international forums and institutions. According to Besada et al. (2013), BRICS serves as a representative body specifically for the sub-Saharan region. Through its BRICS membership, South Africa can capitalize on job creation and infrastructure development. The alliance offers South Africa a global platform to promote its foreign policy and achieve domestic objectives (BRICS Information Centre, 2012). Ultimately, South Africa's ability to advance its national interests through this alliance shapes its role as a BRICS member.

2.5 Social development issues facing South Africa

Social development issues refer to the range of challenges and conditions that affect the social well-being and quality of life of individuals and communities within a society (Pasara & Garidzirai, 2020). These issues encompass various dimensions such as poverty, unemployment, inequality, inadequate access to education and healthcare, housing shortages, social exclusion, and lack of social protection.

2.5.1 Poverty

Poverty and inequality represent complex, multidimensional challenges that pose significant difficulties for South Africa (Francis & Webster, 2019; Pretorius, 2020). Pretorius (2020) emphasizes that many South Africans, particularly in rural and isolated areas, live in persistent poverty and inequality. Poverty can be viewed as a violation of an individual's standard of living, forcing people to lead lives that do not align with their aspirations. When individuals cannot afford basic necessities such as clothing, food, and shelter, they fall into a state of poverty. Similar to unemployment, poverty is a widespread issue in many African countries (Dang & Dabalén, 2019).

The Sub-Saharan region of Africa is particularly affected. Azzarri and Signorelli (2020) highlight the importance of addressing poverty within a nation, arguing that such efforts can improve the living standards of its citizens. Currently, about 50% of South Africans live in poverty, reflecting the country's severe poverty issues (Francis & Webster, 2019; Mdluli & Dunga, 2022). During the apartheid era, the black population in South Africa was systematically denied fair participation in the country's economic activities, although conditions improved somewhat after independence. Since 1994, the South African government has launched several initiatives to combat poverty,

including the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), the Growth, Employment and Redistribution strategy (GEAR), the Medium-Term Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS) (2000-2015), the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the current National Development Plan (NDP). However, it is important to note that these macro interventions have had limited success in alleviating poverty in South Africa (Mdluli & Dunga, 2022).

These programs have primarily focused on providing free essential services such as water, healthcare, and education. The government has also implemented social security programs aimed at assisting vulnerable and financially disadvantaged groups by offering financial support, including grants for children, the elderly, and individuals with disabilities (Francis & Webster, 2019). According to data released by South African Statistics in 2023, approximately 18.2 million people live in extreme poverty, defined as living on less than \$1.90 per day. This represents an increase of 162,859 individuals pushed into poverty compared to 2022 (Stats SA, 2023). Economic inequality is considered one of the primary drivers of poverty in South Africa. Francis and Webster (2019) argue that the persistence of poverty and inequality is due to the failure to address the country's existing economic structures and political reforms that perpetuate these issues. Addressing poverty in South Africa requires improving living and health conditions, particularly in rural areas, as well as developing new and effective approaches to analyzing total household income.

2.5.2 Unemployment

South Africa continues to grapple with stagnant economic growth, declining investment, and high unemployment rates (Pasara & Garidzirai, 2020). Nkhumeleni et al. (2022) note that the government views the unemployment rate as a significant concern, identifying it as one of the primary drivers of poverty. The rising unemployment rate in South Africa is largely attributed to a lack of knowledge and skills required for the labor market (Maisiri et al., 2019; Maijama'a et al., 2019). Over time, the unemployment rate has been increasing, with a sharp rise during the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2021, South Africa was reported to have the highest unemployment rate in the world. When considering only individuals actively seeking employment, the unemployment rate was 34.4 percent; however, when including those who have stopped looking for work, this figure escalated to 44.4 percent (Naidoo, 2021).

This high rate is driven by poor job prospects, high inflation, and sluggish economic growth. Sekwati and Dagume (2023) support this observation, emphasizing that the government must develop well-thought-out strategies to tackle South Africa's high unemployment rates in the absence of quick solutions. In numerical terms, approximately 7.9 million South Africans are unemployed, while 3.3 million have become discouraged from searching for work due to prolonged unemployment. This issue, affecting many ordinary citizens, is also highlighted by Kwenda et al. (2023).

2.5.3 Poor education systems

The foundation of a democratic developmental state is rooted in education and training. It has been argued that without a robust framework ensuring access to sustainable living and productive employment for all, achieving essential national social development goals is unlikely (Akoojee, 2016). The National Development Plan (NDP) explicitly acknowledges the unique characteristics of the challenges it aims to address. One of the key tasks in "rectifying past injustices" is to improve the inadequate education received by the majority of Black Africans (Fourie, 2018). The options for modern industrial policy to reduce unemployment are shaped by the systematic efforts during apartheid to limit educational opportunities for Black individuals, as well as the ineffective initiatives that followed to enhance Black education and training (Altieri et al., 2016).

Inequality is prevalent not only in post-secondary education but also in primary education and vocational training within South Africa. This situation is exacerbated by the exceptionally high returns on post-secondary education, creating a cycle of privilege that perpetuates inequality. Research indicates that the poor and extremely poor are largely excluded from post-secondary education, with over 80% of students eligible to apply for degree programs coming from the top two income deciles (Francis & Webster, 2019).

The state of education in South Africa is a significant concern for many (Bayat et al., 2014), with these worries intensifying since the establishment of democracy in 1994 (Bayat et al., 2014). The government committed to addressing the legacies of apartheid in three critical areas: housing, education, and health (Bayat et al., 2014). Historically, poorer students tend to perform poorly academically, a situation rooted in apartheid's legacy and the ongoing association between education and poverty (Bayat et al., 2014).

South Africa faces a multitude of complex social and developmental challenges. These issues particularly affect the welfare of children but also impact the social conditions and well-being of the entire population (Pretorius, 2020). There is a widespread perception that South Africa's educational system is inadequate. It is troubling that numerous interconnected socioeconomic issues such as substance abuse, poverty, violence, HIV/AIDS, and subpar education hinder many South African youth from reaching their full potential as capable, independent adults (Pretorius, 2020).

2.5.4 Poor health systems

After apartheid ended in 1994, health care reform became South Africa's top priority. Over the past 20 years, the centralized, hospital-based public health care system has undergone significant changes due to substantial fiscal developments and progressive policies aimed at promoting affordable primary health care. The government expanded the network of health care facilities and eliminated basic health care user fees to enhance access for the underprivileged and marginalized. Despite these efforts, disparities, inequities, and polarized health outcomes remain prevalent (Burger & Christian, 2020).

Barriers to providing high-quality health care persist, despite South Africa's well-regarded progressive constitution, which strongly upholds human rights and the right to adequate medical treatment for all (Maphumulo & Bhengu, 2019). This is evident in South Africa, where the national government continues to grapple with outdated geographic manipulation systems that have resulted in disparities in health care access, even more than 20 years after the establishment of democratic elections. While the country has made significant progress, government organizations have adopted global standards for health care decentralization and have prioritized local primary care delivery to improve access (Winchester & King, 2018). The health system and the manner in which people access it serve as clear indicators of the country's inequality.

Over the past two decades, the health care system has been heavily strained by HIV/AIDS, a disease deeply rooted in inequality. The consequences include insufficient staffing, inadequate funding, poor facilities, and medication shortages. Additionally, there are barriers preventing South Africans from accessing treatment beyond the limitations of the health care system (Neely & Ponshunmugam, 2019). According to Gordon et al. (2020), socioeconomically disadvantaged individuals experience discrimination throughout the South African health system. Both positive

and negative health needs are disproportionately concentrated among the affluent and impoverished, with the wealthy experiencing a higher demand for care compared to the poorer population.

However, those with lower socioeconomic status are more likely to delay seeking medical attention, have unmet health needs, and struggle with affordability. There remains a clear socioeconomic divide in the utilization of private and public health services, with low-income individuals expressing lower satisfaction with the quality of care. Financial capability and affordability are key factors contributing to disparities in health care utilization. Kelly et al. (2019) found that while individuals in high-income areas had little trouble accessing support services or quality care, those in low-income areas found services to be less responsive and expressed a lack of confidence in the health care system due to unmet needs.

Importantly, the National Health Insurance system is being implemented in South Africa with the aim of providing universal health coverage for all citizens. However, it is still too early to assess the impact of this initiative.

2.5.6 Poor infrastructure development

In the 1960s and 1970s, South Africa made substantial investments in various infrastructure sectors to develop sufficient and effective infrastructure. However, the recent lack of adequate infrastructure in many parts of the country has been identified as a barrier to socioeconomic development (Aiyetan & Das, 2021). Many believe that infrastructure development is crucial for South Africa's economic recovery and future growth prospects. Despite this, infrastructure spending has declined at all levels of government in recent years, coinciding with a rising national debt and the need to bail out state-owned enterprises (SOEs) (Ramokgopa, 2021; Thusi et al., 2023). In his 2019 budget, Finance Minister Tito Mboweni highlighted that SOEs presented a "very serious hazard" to the economy, significantly hindering infrastructure development (Makhathini et al., 2020).

Bailouts for SOEs have negatively impacted local economic development, as financial mismanagement and corruption hinder their ability to support infrastructure initiatives. Much of South Africa's infrastructure is in disrepair, particularly in secondary and tertiary roads, water and sanitation, health services, as well as in reports such as the NDP, the Diagnostic Report, and the Infrastructure Report Cards from 2006, 2011, and 2017 (Maphumulo & Bengu, 2019). Several

factors contribute to these issues, including inadequate funding for managing, planning, and maintaining infrastructure assets; a shortage of qualified personnel affecting institutional capacity; and a lack of suitable technical solutions for planning, developing, maintaining, and utilizing infrastructure (Rust et al., 2021).

Townships, originally created during the apartheid era, have become integral to South Africa's economic landscape. They still bear the scars of apartheid, characterized by neglect, insufficient investment, overcrowding, isolation from urban areas, and a critical shortage of essential supplies and infrastructure. Approximately sixty percent of the unemployed population resides in townships and informal settlements (Rust et al., 2021). These areas are complex environments where middle-class and disadvantaged neighborhoods coexist. The government has been working to stimulate employment and support small businesses in townships to revitalize the economy (Emily & Muyengwa, 2021). However, several challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, hinder this effort (Cant, 2017).

Proper maintenance of local infrastructure can help reduce poverty and accelerate economic development when combined with functional national assets. Adequate infrastructure is fundamental to creating an environment conducive to investment and livelihoods, promoting economic growth, alleviating poverty, and improving access to healthcare and other services. The majority of the population lives and works in rural areas, which suffer from a lack of infrastructure (Emily & Muyengwa, 2021).

2.6 The role of BRICS in addressing the socioeconomic challenges facing member states.

Initiatives

BRICS countries have implemented a variety of initiatives and programs specifically aimed at their youth populations. In the past ten years, demographic changes in BRICS nations have included declining fertility rates and an increase in the prevalence of diseases such as HIV, tuberculosis, diabetes, and malaria (Chen & Bohar, 2020). To effectively achieve economic development amidst these demographic shifts, BRICS has prioritized addressing the socio-economic challenges faced by its member states.

The BRICS coalition has launched numerous initiatives and programs designed to promote employment, skills development, and access to education for citizens. This strategic focus on the

youth within BRICS member states aims to foster sustainable growth (Preet, 2014). The coalition has shown its commitment to combating youth unemployment through targeted programs, which can be classified into three main categories: workforce development, technical or professional training, and access to funding for self-employment and entrepreneurship (de Arruda & Slingsby, 2014).

As one of the most influential multilateral groups, BRICS embodies the principles of liberal institutionalism. Liberal institutionalism is a theory in international relations that emphasizes the role of international institutions, norms, and cooperation in promoting global stability and economic prosperity (Chen & Bohar, 2020). Over the past decade, the coalition has employed various tools and strategies to promote development, economic growth, and collaboration among its member states. These efforts include enhanced cooperation in foreign policy, the utilization of foreign direct investment, the promotion of open and bilateral trade, and the advancement of human rights (BRICS Information Centre, 2016). Collectively, these initiatives have been vital in driving progress and development across all five BRICS member countries.

2.6.1 FDI

Foreign direct investment (FDI) is one of the most important sources of private external financing for developing countries. FDI refers to the flow of capital from one country to another, where the foreign investor acquires a significant ownership stake in domestic companies and assets (Boyle & Chen, 2020). FDI offers several advantages to recipient countries, as it provides incentive structures that lead to productive investment.

Some of the key benefits of FDI include increased tax revenue, the transfer of technology and skills, expansion of export markets, higher incomes, and reduced poverty levels (Modi & Pinto, 2019). FDI from BRICS member states has been particularly impactful, as it has helped to reduce unemployment rates and increase revenue in recipient countries. In 2023, South Africa received FDI inflows totaling approximately R96.5 billion, equivalent to 0.9% of its GDP (South Africa Economic Outlook, 2024).

2.6.2 Education

One of the key initiatives launched by the BRICS bloc (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) to address unemployment in South Africa is in the field of education. BRICS aims to create

incentives for student exchange programs between its member states by facilitating visa processes and establishing university and school exchange programs (BRICS, 2018).

To support these educational initiatives, BRICS has also launched related scholarship programs. These programs are designed to secure funding, build literacy standards between the BRICS countries, and develop a digital platform for BRICS youth to access education and training resources (BRICS, 2018). This focus on education is particularly crucial for South Africa, as the country has long struggled with a lack of emphasis on mathematics and science education, especially in historically disadvantaged black schools - a legacy of the apartheid era. South Africa lags behind other countries in terms of mathematics and science standards (Carmody, 2018).

NIHSS-SAHUDA Master's Scholarship Programme is one scholarship initiative. South African Humanities and Social Sciences Dialogue Association (NIHSS-SAHUDA) is a research institution in South Africa that promotes dialogue, collaboration, and scholarship within the humanities and social sciences disciplines. This program supports full-time Master's students in the humanities and social sciences at South African public universities. In 2022, 50 Master's students were awarded scholarships under this initiative (National Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences, 2024).

2.6.3 Science and Technology innovation

South Africa recognizes the vital importance of science and technology as key tools for driving social development, economic growth, and poverty reduction within the country (Diko & Sempijja, 2021). By engaging in global cooperation in science and technology, local researchers in South Africa can access additional resources to conduct national projects. One example of the benefits of this global cooperation is the Droogfontein solar power plant project in Kimberly, South Africa. This project was able to attract R1.5 billion in investment and generate over 1 million work hours during construction. The number of on-site construction jobs increased to more than 800, with an additional 50 permanent operational positions created (Ricceri, 2019).

The BRICS bloc has also opened up opportunities to enhance energy cooperation among its member states, allowing for the substitution of national energy security concerns. Clean and renewable energy investors, such as China, have committed over R25 billion towards these efforts in South Africa (Nach & Nwadi, 2024). Science, technology, and innovation are recognized as among the most vital components of South Africa's National Development Plan. These elements

are seen as a means to encourage economic growth, improve competitiveness, and advance social development within the country (5th BRICS Youth Forum, 2019).

The BRICS bloc comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa has emerged as a notable counterweight to traditional Western-led groups such as the G7 and G20. In 2020, the combined GDP of BRICS nations surpassed that of the G7 when evaluated by purchasing power parity, indicating a shift in global economic power (Kochhar & Ulman, 2020). This rise has raised concerns among established economic powers, prompting attempts to limit BRICS' influence. For example, the United States has contemplated revoking South Africa's eligibility for the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) due to its growing ties with Russia and Iran. Furthermore, President Donald Trump has criticized BRICS' efforts to create an independent payment system designed to decrease dependence on the U.S. dollar, perceiving it as a direct challenge to American financial dominance (Shakil, 2025). These geopolitical tensions bring into question the sustainability and unity of the BRICS alliance amid external pressures.

2.6.4 A Critical Review of BRICS and South Africa's Position

The BRICS grouping has attracted considerable scholarly attention, with discussions ranging from its geopolitical significance to its internal coherence and developmental impact. While early literature celebrated BRICS as a powerful symbol of emerging multipolarity in global governance, more recent analyses have taken a critical approach, examining the bloc's strategic contradictions, uneven benefits among member states, and its reception by Western institutions.

Initial scholarly enthusiasm centered on BRICS's potential to challenge the dominance of Western institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. Armijo and Roberts (2014) argue that BRICS serves as an important counterbalance in the global economic system, providing developing nations with greater voice and participation. The establishment of the New Development Bank (NDB) and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) were particularly praised as effective mechanisms for promoting financial independence and addressing development needs without the conditionalities typically associated with Western aid. In South Africa, authors such as Kornegay and Bohler-Muller (2013) emphasize that BRICS engagement offers enhanced diplomatic leverage and broader access to development finance.

However, critical scholars have raised questions about both the political coherence and developmental efficacy of BRICS. Bond and Garcia (2015) argue that BRICS countries often act contrary to their stated values of solidarity and equality. For instance, the bloc's development financing is often driven by commercial interests and tends to lack transparency and participatory mechanisms. Bond (2016) further critiques BRICS as rhetorically anti-imperialist while aligning with neoliberal economic agendas, particularly in supporting extractive projects and infrastructure investments that mimic traditional North-South economic relations.

Another aspect highlighted in critical literature is how Western geopolitical actors perceive BRICS as a strategic rival. The bloc's increasing advocacy for multipolarity, de-dollarisation of trade, and reform of global institutions has drawn attention. Analysts suggest that BRICS's growing influence, especially following its 2023 expansion, has caused unease within NATO and G7 circles (Carvalho, 2023; Lissovlik, 2023). NATO, in particular, regards the bloc's alignment especially between China and Russia as potentially destabilizing to the existing security architecture, particularly concerning energy, cyber governance, and global security protocols. The inclusion of countries like Iran and Saudi Arabia into BRICS+ further amplifies this perception, positioning the bloc as a broader geopolitical alternative that challenges Western-centric alignments.

Within the bloc, South Africa's role has come under scrutiny. Scholars argue that while South Africa provides geographic legitimacy and represents the African continent, its actual influence within BRICS is limited due to its smaller economy and constrained global reach (Qobo & Soko, 2015). Motsamai (2018) highlights that South Africa's trade relations within BRICS, especially with China, are structurally imbalanced, primarily exporting raw materials while importing value-added goods, thus reproducing a classic center-periphery dynamic. This situation raises concerns about whether BRICS engagement is reinforcing historical patterns of dependency rather than reversing them.

In terms of social development, the benefits to South Africa are also debated. Although the country participates in BRICS academic forums, health partnerships, and knowledge exchanges, the translation of these engagements into meaningful improvements in local health systems, education, and employment remains limited (Sidiropoulos, 2020). Critics argue that BRICS has focused heavily on macroeconomic cooperation and large-scale infrastructure projects, with insufficient attention to grassroots development and inclusive policy reform.

Furthermore, some analysts have noted a lack of ideological and developmental cohesion among BRICS members. With divergent political systems, economic models, and foreign policy objectives, the alliance faces structural challenges in presenting a unified front on global issues. For instance, while China and Russia often advocate for state sovereignty and non-intervention, Brazil and South Africa have sometimes aligned with more liberal-democratic norms in multilateral forums (Stuenkel, 2016). This internal fragmentation poses challenges to the effectiveness and credibility of BRICS as a cohesive geopolitical bloc.

In summary, while BRICS remains a significant platform for South-South cooperation and alternative development financing, the literature reveals considerable tensions and critiques. The bloc is viewed by some as a strategic challenger to Western hegemony, yet internally, it is characterized by power imbalances and competing interests. For South Africa, the promise of BRICS lies in its potential, but whether this potential is being realized in ways that address its social development priorities remains a topic of ongoing debate.

2.7 Theoretical framework

The current study utilised the Developmental State Theory as it provides a relevant and comprehensive theoretical framework for the study. The Developmental State Theory, which emerged in the context of the rapid economic growth of East Asian countries in the latter half of the 20th century, emphasizes the pivotal role of the state in guiding and facilitating economic and social development (de Wee, 2016).

At the core of the Developmental State Theory is the notion that the state should actively intervene and shape the development process, rather than relying solely on market forces (Gumede, 2019). This aligns with the aspirations of the BRICS countries, including South Africa, to become developmental states that leverage their institutional capacity and policy tools to drive economic transformation and social progress (Chen & Bohar, 2020).

In the context of this study, the Developmental State Theory serves as a guiding framework by exploring the extent to which the BRICS collaboration has enabled or reinforced the application of Developmental State principles in South Africa's social development initiatives (Ukwandu,

2019). This includes examining how BRICS-led initiatives, investments, or policy coordination have supported the state's active role in designing and implementing social welfare programs, infrastructure development, and human capital formation.

Moreover, the Developmental State Theory emphasizes the importance of social development as a critical component of the state's development agenda, alongside economic growth (Gumede, 2019). The research analyzed how BRICS collaboration has influenced South Africa's efforts to align its social development initiatives with the Developmental State model, such as investments in education, healthcare, and social protection programs.

Additionally, the Developmental State Theory underscores the importance of a capable and autonomous bureaucracy, as well as effective institutional arrangements, in driving development (Ukwandu, 2019). Thus, the research explored how BRICS collaboration has contributed to strengthening South Africa's state capacity and institutional frameworks to deliver on its social development goals.

Quite importantly, the research also identified the potential tensions or synergies between BRICS collaboration and the Developmental State approach in the context of South Africa's social development initiatives. This included examining the alignment or divergence between BRICS-influenced policies and the Developmental State's emphasis on state-led development.

One of the main criticisms of the developmental state theory is that many countries adopting this approach often become repressive and undemocratic, typically characterized by a dominant-party system with limited political diversity (Gumede, 2019). However, South Africa stands out as a unique example. Although the African National Congress (ANC) has historically held a dominant position in politics, the 2024 elections resulted in the establishment of a Multiparty Government of National Unity, demonstrating the country's commitment to democratic governance and political inclusivity. Despite this change, the principles of the developmental state remain pertinent in South Africa. The government continues to play a vital role in economic planning, industrial policy, and infrastructure development, highlighting the relevance of the developmental state model in tackling national socio-economic challenges.

By firmly grounding the research within the Developmental State Theory, the study generated insights into the complex interplay between BRICS collaboration, South Africa's social

development initiatives, and the state's role as a developmental actor. This theoretical framework provided a robust analytical lens for understanding the dynamics, challenges, and opportunities in leveraging BRICS collaboration to advance social development in the context of South Africa's aspirations to become a developmental state.

2.8 Conclusion

In conclusion, this literature review has provided a comprehensive examination of the theoretical frameworks, historical context, and current discourse surrounding BRICS collaboration and social development initiatives in South Africa. The review highlighted the evolution of BRICS as a coalition that faces similar socio-economic challenges, such as poverty and unemployment, thus reinforcing the potential for joint initiatives. Furthermore, it addressed the existing social development landscape in South Africa, revealing both the challenges and the ongoing efforts to improve social welfare through various programs. Additionally, the review of international collaboration in social development demonstrated the importance of sharing best practices and resources among nations. Despite BRICS doing well in areas of economic, political and military support, there is a dearth of literature on the impact of its social development initiatives in SA hence the rationale behind undertaking this study.

CHAPTER THREE METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methodology employed in the study. It describes the qualitative paradigm utilised to gain a deeper understanding of the topic. The chapter further elaborates on the exploratory research design, purposive and snowballing sampling strategies that guided the non-probability sampling approach used in this research. Additionally, it justifies the choice of semi-structured interviews as the data collection method, along with the application of thematic content analysis for data analysis. Finally, the chapter concludes by addressing trustworthiness and ethical considerations, detailing the measures taken to ensure these aspects were upheld.

3.2 Research approach

There are generally three approaches used in social research namely quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods research approaches (Cresswell, 2014). This study employed a qualitative research approach to explore the impact of BRICS collaboration on social development initiatives in South Africa. Qualitative research is a method that focuses on data collection, analysis, and interpretation to understand the values, feelings, perceptions, and motivations of the study participants (Neuman, 2014).

This study utilized a qualitative research approach to investigate the impact of BRICS collaboration on social development initiatives in South Africa. This method was considered most appropriate for the exploratory nature of the study, allowing the researcher to delve into complex social phenomena that cannot be fully captured through quantitative data (Cresswell, 2014).. A qualitative design facilitated a more nuanced and contextually informed understanding of how international partnerships, particularly those under the BRICS framework, translate into tangible development outcomes in local communities.

By focusing on the lived experiences and perspectives of individuals directly or indirectly engaged in BRICS-related programs, the study uncovered the subjective meanings and interpretations participants associate with these initiatives (Grey, 2014). This focus was particularly significant given the multifaceted and often contested nature of BRICS collaboration in South Africa, where perceptions of benefits, influence, and inclusion vary widely among different sectors and stakeholders.

The approach also allowed the researcher to explore the socio-political and institutional contexts in which BRICS policies are executed, illuminating how these global alliances interact with national development priorities, policy frameworks, and social realities. Through open-ended and flexible engagement with participants, the study gathered rich, descriptive data that highlighted both the intended impacts and unintended consequences of BRICS cooperation on social development. Therefore, the qualitative methodology was not only suitable but essential for achieving the study's goal of understanding the depth and complexity of BRICS's influence on South Africa's development landscape.

However, qualitative research also has disadvantages such as the findings can be influenced by the researcher's biases and interpretations, which may affect the validity and reliability of the results (Neuman, 2014). Moreover, due to small, non-random samples, the results may not be generalizable to larger populations or different contexts (Carey, 2009). Despite this, qualitative research approach advantages outweighs its disadvantages as it provides in-depth insights, thus the research chose this approach.

3.3 Research paradigm

The qualitative approach is based on the interpretivist paradigm, which emphasizes the participatory and intersubjective nature of understanding people's experiences (Miminoshvelli, 2016). The interpretivist paradigm encourages participants to actively engage in the exploration and understanding of phenomena, enabling the researcher to comprehend their thoughts, feelings, responses, and attitudes, and then connect them to their behavior and conduct (Neuman, 2014; Given, 2016). Moreover, the interpretivist paradigm highlights the importance of context and individual subjective experiences in producing a rich and detailed depiction of events (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

The interpretivist paradigm was particularly relevant for this study, as it aims to understand the real-world impact of BRICS collaboration on social development initiatives in South Africa, taking into account the participants' unique perspectives and experiences (Creswell, 2014). By employing the qualitative interpretivist paradigm, the study provided a deep and nuanced understanding of the complex relationships between BRICS collaboration and social development initiatives in the South African context.

3.4 Research design

There are various research designs associated with the qualitative research approach. This study employed an exploratory research design. A research design refers to the researcher's strategy for achieving the research goals or providing responses to the research questions (Fetters et al., 2013). A research design should be defined by four main components namely the research's purpose, the context in which it is being conducted, the research approach and procedures for gathering and analysing data, and the theoretical framework that guides the study (Neuman, 2014).

The exploratory research design was suitable for this study as it assisted the researcher gain new insights and assess the research phenomenon from a different perspective (Miminoshvili, 2016). Cresswell (2014) supports the use of an exploratory design when there is limited understanding of the topic under investigation. Neuman (2014) describes the exploratory design as a study undertaken to get new insights, find new ideas, and gain a better understanding of a topic. However, it is important to highlight some of the disadvantages of the exploratory research design. Explorative design often lacks a structured approach, which can lead to ambiguous findings that are difficult to interpret and additionally, its reliance on small, non-representative samples may limit the generalizability of results to broader populations (Cresswell, 2014).

Specifically for this study, there is limited information and knowledge on the impact of BRICS collaboration on social development initiatives in South Africa. Therefore, the exploratory design was the ideal research design to help generate new ideas, views, and opinions about the research object (Bless et al., 2013). This design allowed the researcher to explore the topic from different perspectives and provide a deeper understanding of the complex relationships between BRICS collaboration and social development initiatives in the South African context.

3.5 Population

Neuman (2014) defines population as the entire group that a researcher intends to draw conclusions from. To ensure reliable results, the study selected a suitable sample before collecting primary data. The target population refers to the total number of units that meet the necessary criteria and are qualified to participate in the study (Bless et al., 2013). In other words, the target population satisfies all the requirements for the research phenomenon's selection criteria. For this study, the

target population consisted of scholars from South African universities with expertise on BRICS relations and officials from the Department of International Relations (DIRCO).

By targeting this specific group, the researcher gathered insights and perspectives from individuals and organizations directly involved in or knowledgeable about the impact of BRICS collaboration on social development initiatives in South Africa. This targeted approach helped the researcher obtain more reliable and relevant data to address the research objectives.

3.6 Sampling and sampling strategy

A sample is a subset or a smaller representation of a larger population. It is a group of individuals, items, or data points selected from the entire population for the purpose of research, analysis, or study (Neuman, 2014). Whereas, sampling is the process of selecting a representative group from the target population to participate in a study or research project and it involves choosing a subset of the population that will be observed and analyzed to make conclusions about the entire population (Bless et al., 2013). This study employed a non-probability sampling strategy, which was appropriate for the qualitative research approach. According to Rubin and Babbie (2013), sampling refers to the selection of research participants from the representative population. The non-probability sampling method does not provide equal opportunities for all elements to be chosen, as the principle of this method relies on human judgment (Nowell et al., 2017). Instead, the sample is selected based on the researchers' desired characteristics. It is important to note the advantages and disadvantages of non-probability sampling techniques. The advantages of using the purposive sampling technique include the fact that it allows the researcher to select participants who possess specific characteristics or expertise and also it is useful for in-depth understanding of a phenomenon (Neuman, 2014). Whereas the disadvantages of using such a sampling technique include its reliance on the researcher's judgment and personal biases which can ultimately lead selection bias (Rubin & Babbie, 2013).

The study employed both purposive and snowball sampling strategies to select 8 participants comprising of 6 university lecturers with expertise in BRICS relations to South Africa and 1 official from the Department of International Relations (DIRCO) and 1 official from BRICS to gain insights on the social development initiatives.. Neuman (2014) notes that qualitative research often utilises purposive sampling to select individuals or groups with specialised knowledge.

Given that BRICS is a relatively new area of study, experts were scarce, which made the snowball sampling technique appropriate for recruiting further participants. In this approach, the researcher asked participants to refer others in similar positions (De Vos et al., 2002). Those referred will then be asked to identify additional potential participants. In essence, two participants from a South African university who have published extensively on BRICS were identified. These participants helped identify additional lecturers from other universities relevant to the study's objectives. This strategy is particularly useful for reaching individuals who are hard to locate, often termed "hard-to-reach" or part of a "hidden population" (Peek and Fothergill, 2009). Miller (2003, p.278) points out that members of such populations are inherently challenging to find.

Ultimately, the study recruited 2 officials from DIRCO and BRICS and 6 lecturers aged 18-65 with knowledge of BRICS from the universities in South Africa. For participant recruitment, the researcher emailed a participant information sheet, and upon agreement, provided an informed consent form. Interviews were conducted via Zoom and MS Teams and were recorded after gaining consent from the participants.

In this study, data collection was completed after interviewing the eighth participant, as data saturation had been achieved. Data saturation refers to the point at which no new themes, insights, or variations arise from further data collection, suggesting that additional interviews would not add significant value to the study's findings (Nayak & Narayan, 2019). At this stage, responses became repetitive, with no new perspectives being introduced, confirming that the gathered data was adequate for thorough analysis.

3.7 Data Collection

The study used semi-structured interviews to gain a comprehensive understanding of the participants' beliefs, perceptions, and accounts regarding the impact of BRICS collaboration on social development initiatives in South Africa. The semi-structured interview method provides greater flexibility compared to a structured approach (Igwenugu, 2016). The flexible nature of semi-structured interviews allows for an interactive dialogue between the researcher and the study participants. With the participants' agreement and consent, all interviews were audio-recorded. The interviews were recorded on Ms Teams after obtaining the participants' consent.

Due to the fact that the interviews were done online, it is important to highlight the advantages and disadvantages of online data collection. The advantages of including online data collection include the fact that it allows researchers to reach a wider and more diverse population, as it is not limited by geographical boundaries (Nayak & Narayan, 2019). Moreover, it provides access to hard-to-reach or niche populations that may be difficult to engage through traditional data collection methods, thus making it cost effective (Latkovikj & Popovska, 2019). On the other hand, the disadvantages of using online data collection include the fact that participants may face technical difficulties, such as internet connectivity issues or browser compatibility problems, which can affect their ability to participate and provide reliable data (Nayak & Narayan, 2019). In addition, online data collection lacks the direct observation and control that researchers have in traditional in-person data collection methods (Latkovikj & Popovska, 2019).

These interviews were digitally recorded with participants' consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Transcription was carried out within one week of each interview to ensure that the data remained fresh and contextually grounded. The interviews were approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour in duration.

3.8 Pretesting the research instrument

The interview guide enabled the researcher to gather in-depth and nuanced information from the participants, while also allowing for flexibility to explore emerging topics and gain new insights. The interactive nature of the interviews and the ability to capture the participants' own words contributed to a comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

Pretesting is a small-scale version of a full-scale research study. It can be used to test a research instrument, such as a questionnaire or interview guide, before implementing the main study (Neuman, 2014). Pretesting can serve four main purposes: 1) to identify issues and challenges in recruiting participants, 2) to familiarize the researcher with qualitative research methods, 3) to determine the appropriateness of the observation or interview process, and 4) to inform the research epistemology and methodology (Janghorban et al., 2014).

For this study, pretesting of the research instrument was conducted by initially interviewing one official from DIRCO and one South African university lecturer with expert knowledge on BRICS. These interviews were not used for final data presentation and analysis. The aim of this pretesting

was to orient the researcher to the study context and to test the trustworthiness of the research methods that will be used in the main study. The pilot study allowed the researcher to refine the research procedures and instruments before launching the full-scale study, helping to enhance the feasibility and validity of the research.

3.9 Data Analysis

This study employed Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2012) six-phase thematic analysis method to analyse qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews. Below is a detailed account of how each phase was practically carried out in this research.

1. Familiarising with the Data

To begin, all interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent. The recordings were then transcribed verbatim by the researcher to ensure an accurate and thorough capture of the participants' narratives. The process of transcription served as the initial step toward familiarisation, enabling the researcher to begin engaging deeply with the data.

Following transcription, the researcher read and re-read each transcript multiple times, making initial notes and highlighting significant statements. This active reading helped the researcher to internalise the content and begin to identify preliminary patterns of meaning. At this stage, the researcher also kept a reflective journal to note emerging ideas and potential links to the research questions.

2. Generating Initial Codes

After familiarisation, the researcher conducted manual coding using Microsoft Word and Excel, systematically highlighting segments of text that appeared significant. Each data item (transcript) was reviewed line by line to ensure a comprehensive coding process.

Initial codes were semantic and descriptive, aimed at summarising explicit content in the data. For example, codes such as "resource sharing," "skills transfer," and "community empowerment"

emerged repeatedly. A codebook was developed to record code definitions and ensure consistency throughout the process.

3. Searching for Themes

With a complete set of codes, the researcher began the process of identifying patterns and connections between codes. Related codes were grouped together under potential themes. This was facilitated through the use of visual mapping techniques, including mind maps and thematic tables, which helped to cluster codes into meaningful categories.

4. Reviewing Themes

The initial themes were reviewed for coherence, relevance, and distinction. This involved two levels of checking:

- Level 1: Reviewing the coded extracts for each theme to ensure that they formed a coherent pattern.
- Level 2: Comparing the themes against the full data set to confirm they accurately reflected the participants' experiences and responses.

Some themes were collapsed or redefined during this stage.

5. Defining and Naming Themes

Each theme was then refined to capture the core essence of what it represented. The researcher wrote a detailed analytical narrative for each theme, explaining how it addressed the research questions and linked back to the broader context of BRICS collaboration and social development.

6. Producing the Report

The final write-up included illustrative quotes from participants to support each theme, ensuring that the voices of the participants remained central. The analysis section highlighted not only what participants said but also offered an interpretation of how these insights contributed to understanding the impact of BRICS on social development initiatives in South Africa.

3.10 Trustworthiness of the study

The validity and rigor of this research study was achieved by ensuring the trustworthiness of the research. According to Neuman (2014), in qualitative studies, the focus should be on establishing the trustworthiness of the research, which involves persuading the researcher themselves and others that the research methods and findings are meaningful and auditable.

Guba (1981) has proposed four key factors to increase the trustworthiness of qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These four elements are interconnected and must all be addressed in order for the study to be considered trustworthy.

The researcher focused on addressing these four components of trustworthiness - credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in order to enhance the overall validity and rigor of the research study.

Credibility

A qualitative study is considered credible when it provides an accurate representation or interpretation of human experience that is recognizable to those who have had the same experience (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). To ensure the credibility of this study, the researcher conducted member checking. This involved contacting the participants whose data was collected and obtained and asking them to review the researcher's findings to verify that the researcher's interpretations accurately reflect their experiences.

By engaging in member checking, the researcher confirmed that the study's findings align with the participants' actual experiences and perspectives. This process helped establish the credibility of the qualitative research by ensuring the researcher's understanding and representation of the phenomenon under study is valid from the participants' point of view.

Credibility is a key aspect of trustworthiness in qualitative research, and the use of member checking is an important technique the researcher employed to demonstrate the credibility of this study's findings.

Transferability

Transferability in research refers to the ability to apply or transfer the research findings or methodologies from one group or context to another (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). To ensure the transferability of this study, the researcher provided a detailed description of the sample and the

characteristics of the participants. Additionally, the geographical limitations of the study was clearly stated.

By offering a rich, contextual description of the sample and setting, the researcher aimed to enable others to evaluate the applicability or transferability of the research findings or methods to different groups or contexts. The detailed information about the sample and setting allowed readers to assess the similarities and differences between the study context and their own, and to determine whether the research outcomes could be meaningfully transferred or adapted for use in other situations.

Establishing transferability is an important component of demonstrating the trustworthiness of qualitative research findings. The researcher focused on providing the necessary contextual details to facilitate the potential transfer of this study's results or approaches to other relevant settings.

Dependability

The dependability of this study was demonstrated by the researcher providing a detailed outline of the following; the purpose of the study, the rationale and process for selecting the study participants, the methods used for data collection, including how the data were gathered and over what timeframe and the procedures used to analyse the collected data

By documenting and describing these key aspects of the research process, the researcher aimed to establish the dependability of the study. Dependability refers to the stability and consistency of the research findings over time and across researchers (Thomas & Malgvy, 2011). Outlining the research purpose, participant selection, data collection, and analysis methods allowed others to assess whether the study's procedures were logical, traceable, and well-documented. This transparency enhances the dependability of the research by enabling the replication or auditing of the study.

Confirmability

According to Thomas and Malgvy (2011) confirmability occurs once credibility, transferability, and dependability have been established. Through the reflexivity process, the researcher achieved confirmability by reflecting on her own prejudices and assumptions. This study was biased-free since the researcher kept a reflective journal to document personal thoughts and prejudices. The

researcher also ensured that the interviews were flexible and transparent, allowing participants to express themselves freely.

3.11 Ethical considerations

This study involved human participants and was therefore guided by ethical principles relevant to social science research. Ethical approval was obtained from the university's ethics committee, and the researcher adhered to the Non-Medical Ethics Guidelines. The ethical clearance certificate reference number is **SW/24/08/04**.

Do No Harm

The principle of non-maleficence *do no harm* was central to the research design and implementation (Neuman, 2014). Recognising that participants may experience emotional discomfort when discussing certain topics, the researcher took proactive steps to minimise harm. These included:

- Conducting interviews in a safe and private environment of the participants' choosing.
- Allowing participants to pause or stop the interview at any time without consequence.
- Providing contact details of counselling services in the event of emotional distress.

Informed Consent

Before data collection commenced, each participant was provided with a detailed information sheet outlining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, their rights (including the right to withdraw), and any potential risks or benefits (Creswell, 2014). Participants were given adequate time to consider participation and ask questions. Written informed consent was obtained prior to the interviews.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

To protect participants' identities, strict confidentiality protocols were followed. The participants' real names were not used in any notes, transcripts, or reports. Pseudonyms such as "Participant 1"

to “Participant 8” were assigned by the researcher during data analysis for consistency and clarity. This clarification addresses any confusion regarding the pseudonym process.

All electronic files were stored on a password-protected device, and physical documents (such as consent forms) were kept in a locked cabinet. Access to all data was restricted to the researcher only. Data will be securely destroyed after the mandatory retention period.

Privacy and Data Protection

The researcher ensured that participants’ privacy was respected throughout the research process. No identifiable information was collected beyond what was necessary for the study. During transcription, any indirect identifiers (such as names of organisations or third parties) were redacted.

3.12 Limitations and Delimitations

Some BRICS countries exhibit differing levels of transparency in their economic and political data reporting, which can influence the accuracy and comparability of findings. Additionally, the changing geopolitical landscape, economic transitions, and policy adjustments within BRICS nations can affect the study's conclusions. Since BRICS members operate in various linguistic contexts, accessing and interpreting primary sources from non-English-speaking countries presented certain challenges. Another limitation is that the study concentrated on the five founding BRICS members, potentially neglecting the influence of newly admitted BRICS+ nations.

Delimitations

Although BRICS has expanded, this study concentrates on Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa because of their 15-year collaboration and established institutional frameworks. The focus is primarily on economic cooperation, investment flows, and energy collaboration within BRICS, rather than on broader political or military alliances. Moreover, the research specifically analyses South Africa’s role within BRICS, rather than evaluating each member state equally. Additionally, the study examines BRICS developments mainly from 2010 to 2024, corresponding to South Africa’s membership period and significant policy changes.

3.13 Conclusion

This chapter presented the methodology of the study, outlining and justifying the chosen research philosophy, research design, data collection techniques, and data analysis methods. The final section addressed issues of trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and the limitations of the study. The subsequent chapter will present the research findings from this study.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the key research findings that align with the research questions. The themes that emerged from the in-depth interviews are formulated and analyzed in relation to the study's theoretical framework and relevant literature.

4.2 Demographic Characteristics of Participants

The demographic characteristics of the participants is shown in table 4.1.

Table 4. 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Codes	Age	Gender	Education Level	Job Category	Work Experience
Participant 1	28	Male	PhD	Doctorate /Lecturer	7 years
Participant 2	29	Male	PhD	Doctorate / Lecturer	7 years

Participant 3	53	Male	PhD	Professor / Lecturer	25 years
Participant 4	54	Female	PhD	Professor / Lecturer	20 years
Participant 5	54	Female	PhD	Professor / Lecturer	20 years
Participant 6	38	Male	PhD	Doctorate/ Lecturer	13 years
Participant 7	32	Female	Masters	Doctorate/ BRICS official	5 years
Participant 8	59	Male	Masters	DIRCO official Acting Chief Director	37 years

The codes used in the study, such as Participant 1 and Participant 2, were implemented to protect the identities of the participants, ensuring confidentiality while still enabling the inclusion of relevant data in the analysis. These codes are particularly vital in qualitative research, where individual responses and personal experiences are examined.

Age emerged as an important demographic characteristic, offering insights into the participants' generational perspectives, professional maturity, and their duration of engagement with BRICS-related issues. For instance, younger participants (ages 28, 29, 32 and 38) provided a fresh viewpoint, emphasizing a global perspective on emerging trends in BRICS relations. In contrast, older participants (ages 53, 54, and 59) contributed their experience and historical context, enriching the understanding of BRICS's long-term evolution and its impact on social development.

The gender diversity among participants ensured a range of perspectives was represented in the study and highlighted how gender dynamics influence professional experiences and opinions within the BRICS context. The study included both male and female participants comprising 5 males and 3 females.

Additionally, the educational level of participants was significant, as it indicated the depth of their expertise and qualifications. PhD holders (Participants 1–6) were highly educated and provided critical, well-informed insights, especially on complex topics related to BRICS cooperation, international relations, and economic strategies. Conversely, Master's level participants (Participants 7 and 8) contributed valuable, though slightly less advanced, knowledge and expertise, reflecting more practical and policy-oriented perspectives on BRICS operations.

Finally, work experience indicated the participants' tenure in their respective fields, highlighting their depth of knowledge. Participants with less experience (5 to 13 years) offered contemporary views on BRICS, focusing on recent developments and shifts in the bloc's approach. In contrast, those with more extensive work experience (20–37 years) provided a long-term perspective, aiding in the understanding of the connection between BRICS and social development in South Africa.

These demographic characteristics created a well-rounded sample of participants with diverse professional backgrounds, academic expertise, and varied perspectives on the subject. This diversity facilitated a rich, nuanced analysis of BRICS cooperation on themes related to social development, capturing both the scholarly and governmental dimensions of the study.

4.3 Presentation of themes

Table 4.2 Themes and sub-themes

Themes	Sub-themes
1. Influence of BRICS Collaboration on Social Development Initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature of BRICS-supported social development projects in South Africa • Success stories and key achievements • Funding and resource allocation from BRICS countries • Knowledge and technology transfer within BRICS initiatives
2. Stakeholders' Perspectives on BRICS Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceived benefits of BRICS involvement in social development

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concerns and criticisms
3.Challenges in Implementing BRICS Social Development Initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Media representation, transparency and public awareness of BRICS Coordination challenges between South Africa and BRICS partners Policy and governance gaps
4.Alignment with South Africa’s National Development Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compatibility with South Africa’s National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 Integration of BRICS programs with local policies and social structures Gaps between BRICS initiatives and South African developmental needs
5.Future Prospects and Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunities for enhancing BRICS collaboration in social development Strategies for overcoming implementation challenges

Through a rigorous thematic analysis, five overarching themes and their associated sub-themes emerged from the participants’ responses. These themes encapsulate the multifaceted impact of BRICS collaboration on social development initiatives in South Africa. They reflect diverse perspectives, encompassing the tangible effects of BRICS-supported projects, alignment with national priorities, and the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

The first theme examines the nature and scope of social development projects influenced by BRICS, highlighting both success stories and resource allocation. The second theme captures stakeholders’ perceptions both positive and critical of BRICS involvement. The third theme addresses operational and systemic challenges that impede the effective implementation of BRICS initiatives. The fourth theme assesses how BRICS activities align with South Africa’s development agenda, particularly the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030. Lastly, the fifth theme outlines recommendations and opportunities for enhancing BRICS collaboration in social development. These themes are summarized in Table 4.2 above.

4.3.1 Nature of BRICS supported Social Development projects in South Africa

South Africa's involvement in BRICS is framed as both an opportunity for domestic advancement and a means of influencing global economic and social governance. The participants in the current study emphasised that:

BRICS is a voice for the global south and a platform for SA to project its foreign policy priorities (Participant 5).

This statement highlights the geopolitical importance of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) as a coalition representing the interests of developing nations. The phrase "voice for the Global South" emphasises BRICS' role in challenging Western-dominated global economic and political systems, offering an alternative platform where emerging economies can shape global governance structures.

For South Africa, BRICS functions as a strategic diplomatic platform to advance its foreign policy priorities, which often focus on economic development, multilateralism, and addressing historical inequalities rooted in colonialism and apartheid (Nach & Ncwadi, 2024). This aligns with South Africa's broader foreign policy goals, which prioritize African development, regional integration, and the reform of global institutions like the United Nations Security Council and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

This view is consistent with Hopewell (2017), who describes BRICS as a significant force in promoting South-South cooperation and challenging the traditional global economic order led by the Global North. South Africa's involvement enables it to utilize collective bargaining power, ensuring that the concerns of Africa and the broader Global South, such as equitable trade policies and sustainable development, are highlighted in international discussions.

Another participant also mentions that:

There are basically 3 pillars of cooperation in BRICS, and the 3rd pillar speaks towards social development (Participant 2)

The participant above emphasizes that BRICS cooperation is built on three key pillars, with the third pillar specifically addressing social development. This aligns with the research conducted by Kornegay and Bohler-Müller (2013), who identify three main areas of cooperation within BRICS:

political/security, economic/financial, and social/cultural cooperation. The third pillar, which focuses on social development, includes initiatives related to education, health, and poverty reduction (Tandon & Slobodchikoff, 2024). This aspect is particularly significant for countries like South Africa, where economic disparities and social challenges are urgent issues. Tandon and Slobodchikoff (2024) point out that BRICS has made education, healthcare, and poverty alleviation priorities, acknowledging that sustainable economic growth should be supported by robust social policies. Through its involvement in BRICS, South Africa can share best practices, attract investment in social sectors, and collaborate on research initiatives aimed at enhancing living standards.

Additional key point is raised by another participant's assertion that:

BRICS focuses on issues of fighting hunger, fighting unemployment, fighting inequality, improving the lives of people in their relationship with their environment (Participant 6)

The participant's assertion that BRICS focuses on combating hunger, unemployment, and inequality, as well as improving the lives of people in relation to their environment, aligns closely with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This specifically resonates with Goal 1 (No Poverty) and Goal 10 (Reduced Inequality), which BRICS has integrated into its framework (BRICS Academic Review, 2021). According to the BRICS Academic Review (2021), the member nations have incorporated the SDGs into their cooperation agenda through initiatives like the BRICS Agriculture Research Platform (BARP), designed to enhance food security; the BRICS Labor and Employment Ministers' Meetings, which focus on job creation and equitable working conditions; and investments by the New Development Bank (NDB) in renewable energy to promote environmental sustainability. Consequently, South Africa, as a member of BRICS, benefits from these initiatives, utilizing them to advance its national development goals while also contributing to global efforts for poverty reduction, inclusive economic growth, and climate resilience.

4.3.2 Success stories and key achievements

The participants highlights several key achievements of BRICS, emphasizing its role in development finance, infrastructure, and health cooperation. These achievements illustrate BRICS' commitment to reducing dependency on Western institutions and fostering self-reliance among member states. Some of the participants highlighted that:

The origins of ideas like a development bank for BRICS is mainly one of the most significant achievements and that the idea was formalized in 2014 in Brazil (Participant 1).

The creation of the New Development Bank (NDB) was a strategic response to the limitations of existing multilateral financial institutions, which often fail to adequately cater to the developmental needs of BRICS nations. The NDB's establishment marked a significant shift in global financial governance, allowing BRICS countries to take greater control of their economic futures and provide funding for infrastructure projects that align with their national and regional priorities (Participant 5)

These statements underscores the importance of the New Development Bank (NDB), which was officially established in 2014 at the BRICS Summit in Fortaleza, Brazil. The creation of the NDB was a strategic initiative aimed at reducing dependence on Western-dominated financial institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The bank offers loans and financial support for infrastructure and sustainable development projects across BRICS member states and beyond (Biziwick et al., 2015).

The establishment of the NDB is often seen as a pivotal moment in global financial governance. Before its creation, developing countries had limited influence over decision-making in international financial institutions. The NDB signifies a shift towards multilateralism and financial autonomy, particularly for the Global South (Ricceri, 2019). Its emphasis on sustainable infrastructure projects aligns with global development priorities, including investments in renewable energy to support climate action, transportation and connectivity projects to enhance trade and economic integration, and urban development initiatives aimed at improving housing and infrastructure in rapidly growing cities (Thompson & De Wet, 2020). By financing projects tailored to developing economies, the NDB reinforces BRICS' position as a leader in South-South cooperation and helps mitigate the structural inequalities associated with traditional financial systems.

One practical application of developmental state theory within BRICS is the establishment of the New Development Bank (NDB) to finance infrastructure and social projects. This aligns with the concept of "New Developmentalism," whereby developing nations prioritize state-driven investments, industrial policy, and financial autonomy (Bresser-Pereira, 2010). Unlike traditional financial institutions such as the IMF and World Bank, which impose conditions on loans, the NDB enables developing countries to finance their priorities independently (Hopewell, 2017).

China's economic transformation was partly fueled by state-controlled banks financing strategic industries and social development (Gu et al., 2018). South Africa's involvement in the NDB presents an opportunity to adopt similar models, emphasizing long-term investment in social development, education, and healthcare infrastructure.

Another significant achievement mentioned is the:

Lesotho Highlands Project Phase 2 that contributes to water in South Africa (Participant 3).

This project is part of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project (LHWP), a collaborative initiative between Lesotho and South Africa aimed at ensuring long-term water security for the Gauteng region, South Africa's economic center. The second phase of the project includes the construction of the Polihali Dam, water transfer infrastructure, and hydroelectric power development (Braun, 2020).

The strategic importance of this project is twofold. South Africa is experiencing increasing water scarcity, worsened by climate change, urbanization, and population growth. The LHWP guarantees a reliable water supply to Gauteng, which is essential for economic sustainability and public health. Additionally, the project offers economic advantages to both South Africa and Lesotho, including job creation, infrastructure investment, and energy generation, highlighting BRICS' commitment to mutual development rather than exploitative partnerships (Alden, 2017). This approach aligns with BRICS' broader strategy of fostering infrastructure development across Africa. By facilitating projects like the LHWP, BRICS promotes regional cooperation and reinforces South Africa's leadership role on the continent.

Another participant also cites the:

BRICS Vaccine Research and Development Facility and BRICS health ministers' dedicated work streams (Participant 4)

This highlights BRICS' growing emphasis on global health governance, particularly in response to health crises like COVID-19. The BRICS Vaccine Research and Development Center, established in 2021, aims to facilitate collaborative research on vaccines and treatments, enhance manufacturing capabilities in member states, and promote equitable access to vaccines, especially in the Global South. This initiative aligns with findings by Nach and Newadi (2024), which indicate that BRICS played a vital role in global health responses during the COVID-19 pandemic, collaborating on vaccine distribution, medical supplies, and knowledge-sharing to strengthen public health systems.

Additionally, the BRICS Health Ministers' Work Streams address long-term health challenges, including non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as diabetes and cardiovascular diseases, universal health coverage (UHC) to improve access to essential health services, and pandemic preparedness to bolster global resilience against future health crises (Mujumdar & Shadrin, 2021).

The establishment of the BRICS New Development Bank (NDB), formalised at the Brazil summit in 2014, stands out as one of the bloc's most notable accomplishments. The NDB was strategically designed to fill infrastructure financing gaps in emerging economies, providing an alternative to conventional financial institutions. This initiative is in line with the social development objectives of South Africa, especially in promoting sustainable growth and addressing developmental needs that contribute to long-term socio-economic advancement.

However, this positive narrative is met with skepticism from several scholars and policy analysts. Critics argue that while the NDB positions itself as a progressive alternative, it is still rooted in a model of large-scale, capital-intensive development that may not always prioritize the social and environmental needs of local communities (Bond, 2020; Mawdsley, 2018). Some have pointed out that its lending patterns have not significantly diverged from those of existing multilateral development banks, and that its governance structure tends to favor the larger BRICS members, particularly China and India, raising concerns about equity and influence within the institution.

Moreover, the NDB has faced criticism regarding transparency and accountability, particularly concerning the social and environmental impact assessments of its funded projects. Civil society

organizations in BRICS countries have voiced concerns that the NDB may replicate development models that often exclude marginalized groups, exacerbate inequality, and contribute to environmental degradation. For instance, while the NDB has approved several renewable energy and transport projects in South Africa, critics contend that the actual developmental impact—especially in terms of job creation, local capacity building, and community participation—remains unclear (Taylor, 2022).

4.3.3 Funding and resource allocation from BRICS countries

Funding and resource allocation are critical aspects of BRICS cooperation, particularly through the New Development Bank (NDB). The participants' statements highlight both the successes and challenges associated with BRICS funding, including issues of investment priorities, transparency, and voluntary cooperation.

One of the participants stated that:

The New Development Bank channeled \$1 billion USD for transport infrastructure”
(Participant 8).

This statement emphasizes the significant financial contributions of the NDB toward infrastructure development, particularly in transport. The NDB Annual Report (2022) confirms that the bank has invested heavily in transport, energy, and sustainable development projects, reflecting BRICS’ commitment to economic growth and modernisation.

However, while these investments are substantial, concerns arise about how these funds are allocated across different sectors, particularly regarding social development. This is supported by one participant who highlighted that:

I haven't seen money spent on South Africa's social development (Participant 6)

This statement highlights a critical issue regarding funding priorities within BRICS and the NDB. While significant investments are directed toward large-scale infrastructure projects, there is a perceived shortfall in direct funding for social development initiatives in South Africa (Isheloke, 2020). This concern aligns with broader criticisms of development banks, which often prioritize

economic infrastructure over social welfare programs, such as education and skills development, healthcare infrastructure, and poverty alleviation efforts (Bond, 2020).

Although the NDB has financed some social projects, including investments in renewable energy and sanitation initiatives, the direct impact on poverty reduction, education, and public healthcare in South Africa remains unclear (Diko & Sempijja, 2021). The perception that BRICS funding primarily supports economic projects rather than social welfare highlights ongoing debates about developmental priorities and the accessibility of funds for marginalized communities.

Another participant raised an important point by stating that:

There is no obligation on BRICS to assist any country (Participant 3)

This statement emphasizes a key aspect of BRICS cooperation, particularly its voluntary nature. Unlike traditional development aid models used by institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), BRICS does not impose policy conditions on its financial assistance. This perspective aligns with the views of Abdenur & Folly (2015), who contend that BRICS adopts a cooperative development model that prioritizes mutual benefit over conditional aid, although it may offer fewer guarantees for social investment.

However, this perspective is not without its critics. Some scholars argue that while BRICS may present itself as an alternative to Western institutions, it often replicates similar hierarchies and market-driven approaches in practice. For example, Bond (2016) critiques BRICS financing as being commercially oriented and primarily focused on large infrastructure projects that do not always lead to improved social outcomes for vulnerable populations. In this context, the lack of formal conditions does not necessarily ensure progressive or inclusive development impacts.

Additionally, the voluntary and non-binding nature of BRICS cooperation can be a double-edged sword. While it respects national sovereignty, it may also lead to weak accountability mechanisms, limited transparency, and minimal enforcement of social or environmental safeguards. This has raised concerns among civil society actors and development scholars, who warn that BRICS-backed projects may neglect local communities or reinforce extractive development patterns, particularly in contexts with weak governance structures.

4.3.4 Knowledge and technology transfer within BRICS initiatives

Knowledge and technology transfer play a critical role in South-South cooperation within BRICS, fostering skills development, industrialization, and economic self-reliance among member states. The participants' verbatim quotes emphasize BRICS as a platform for learning, collaboration, and resource optimization, aligning with key economic and development theories.

One of the participants' emphasised that:

BRICS brings these countries together as they share skills, ideas and they observe from each other and learn from each other (Participant 1)

This quote underscores the cooperative nature of knowledge exchange within BRICS, reflecting the concept of knowledge diplomacy (Knight, 2021). Unlike traditional knowledge transfer models, where Western countries set the terms, BRICS promotes mutual learning without imposing external conditions. By enabling cross-country learning, BRICS enhances capacity-building and self-reliance, thereby decreasing dependency on Western technological frameworks. This approach is in line with the principles of South-South cooperation, where development is defined by and for the Global South rather than dictated by external powers (Lobato, 2018).

A key area of technological transfer is resource utilization, as noted in the underneath quote:

South Africa should fully utilize the natural resources it has in abundance... There is platinum, there is uranium, there is a whole lot of others that are highly priced natural resources (Participant 3)

This statement highlights the significance of resource beneficiation, a strategy focused on processing raw materials domestically instead of exporting them in their unrefined state. Despite its wealth in natural resources, South Africa has historically exported raw minerals with minimal processing, thereby missing out on higher-value economic opportunities. This situation illustrates the resource curse paradox, in which resource-rich countries struggle to diversify their economies (Kgoale & Odeku, 2019). By fully harnessing its resources, South Africa could strengthen its industrial capacity, decrease reliance on imported goods, and promote job creation in high-value industries. This perspective aligns with Soko (2023), who argues that South Africa's BRICS

strategy should prioritize industrialization and mineral beneficiation to maximize economic returns.

Additionally, another participant highlighted that:

BRICS wants to promote industrialization and promote the processing of mineral resources at home, to build home skills and home economy so as to be self-reliant (Participant 5).

This supports findings from economic development research suggesting that resource-exporting countries can benefit from transitioning to value-added production (Rodrik, 2018). This statement reinforces BRICS' commitment to domestic value addition, a fundamental principle in economic development theory (Soko, 2023). Rather than exporting raw materials, BRICS countries aim to cultivate domestic industries that refine and process resources, enhance skills development in manufacturing, engineering, and high-tech sectors, and reduce reliance on Western-controlled supply chains.

The emphasis on industrialization within BRICS aligns with global trends, where resource-rich countries strive to capture greater economic benefits through local processing and high-value exports. By prioritizing homegrown industrial capabilities, BRICS nations mitigate their vulnerability to commodity price fluctuations and global economic shocks.

Technology transfer within BRICS is a widely discussed topic in the literature. Some scholars argue that while technology-sharing agreements are in place, their effects are inconsistent (Lemoine & Ünal, 2017). For instance, China and India have made significant strides in technology diffusion, particularly in renewable energy and digital transformation (Mukherjee, 2022). However, concerns persist regarding whether South Africa is fully capitalizing on these opportunities (Andreoni & Tregenna, 2020).

However, while the value addition narrative is promising in theory, it has faced criticism in practice. Some scholars contend that the industrial policies pursued under the BRICS framework often lack the necessary institutional coordination and investment in research and development to genuinely transform these economies (Andreasson, 2019). In South Africa's case, despite verbal commitments to beneficiation and industrialization, implementation has been inconsistent, and the

country continues to rely heavily on exporting unprocessed raw materials like platinum, coal, and iron ore.

Moreover, critics argue that the geopolitical and economic asymmetries within BRICS can lead to uneven gains, with more industrialized members like China and India capturing a greater share of value from downstream processing, while less industrialized members struggle to keep up. In this context, South Africa risks remaining in a subordinate position within both global and intra-BRICS value chains (Bond, 2020). This raises critical questions about whether BRICS can genuinely act as a platform for equitable industrial transformation or if it may inadvertently reinforce patterns of dependent development under a different guise.

4.4 Stakeholders' perspectives on BRICS collaboration

4.4.1 Perceived benefits of BRICS involvement in Social Development

South Africa's involvement in BRICS is framed as a strategic opportunity for economic and social advancement. The participants' insights highlight key benefits, including economic partnerships, knowledge exchange, infrastructure investment, diplomatic cooperation, and the need for effective policy implementation.

In support, one of the participant highlighted that:

China and India have become significant economic and development partners for South Africa (Participant 2).

This statement highlights the role of BRICS as a strategic alliance for South-South cooperation. As major emerging economies, China and India have provided investment, trade opportunities, and technological exchanges that could significantly benefit South Africa's social development. China is South Africa's largest trading partner within BRICS, with trade surpassing \$54 billion USD in 2022 (BRICS Trade Report, 2023). Additionally, Chinese firms have invested in sectors such as manufacturing, energy, and infrastructure, contributing to job creation. Meanwhile, India is a crucial partner for South Africa in pharmaceuticals, IT services, and skills development. South Africa gains from India's expertise in affordable healthcare, which includes cooperation within BRICS on generic drug production and vaccine research. This economic collaboration aligns with

the principles of South-South cooperation, where developing nations work together for mutual benefit without external conditions (Hopewell, 2017).

Another participant highlighted that:

BRICS provides a platform for South Africa to learn from the experiences of other developing countries (Participant 4)

This statement emphasises BRICS as a platform for knowledge sharing, enabling member states to adopt best practices from effective development models. Countries such as China and Brazil have successfully implemented large-scale poverty reduction programs, providing South Africa with valuable insights into their policies on social grants, job creation, and industrialization (Tandon & Slobodchikoff, 2024). This horizontal learning approach, where developing nations exchange solutions without Western-imposed policy conditions, strengthens BRICS' position as a collaborative developmental bloc.

In addition, another participant also mentioned that:

BRICS investment in infrastructure can stimulate economic growth in South Africa, which will also create jobs (Participant 7)

The participant links infrastructure development to job creation, a well-documented economic phenomenon. Investments in infrastructure boost economic productivity, attract foreign direct investment (FDI), and create employment opportunities (Alden, 2017). This aligns with research indicating that infrastructure projects, such as roads, railways, and energy initiatives, have a direct connection to economic growth and social mobility (Anuoluwapo et al., 2018). For instance, China has funded railway and port projects in Africa through the Belt and Road Initiative, which aligns with BRICS' development objectives.

Another key point is the participant's belief that BRICS should establish embassies to facilitate deeper cooperation:

To have embassies is long overdue... in order for all of the countries to benefit from each other's knowledge, business expertise, and so forth (Participant 5)

This statement emphasizes the necessity for stronger institutional frameworks within BRICS. Unlike the European Union (EU) or ASEAN, BRICS does not have a permanent headquarters, embassies, or a structured diplomatic system, which complicates long-term coordination (Shubin, 2018). In the absence of a permanent structure, BRICS agreements may remain symbolic rather than actionable. Creating embassies and formal institutions could strengthen BRICS as a sustainable economic and development alliance.

4.4.2 Concerns and criticisms

The participants' concerns about the limited benefits South Africa has received from BRICS cooperation reflect broader debates on economic asymmetry, unequal access to opportunities, lack of reciprocity, and concerns over the nature of jobs created. These criticisms highlight the power dynamics within BRICS, particularly China's dominant economic role, and question whether South Africa is benefiting equitably from the partnership.

In support, one of the participants expresses dissatisfaction with BRICS by stating that:

We haven't really benefited much from the collaboration with BRICS (Participant 6).

This statement reflects a broader sentiment that South Africa's economic and social development benefits from BRICS have been limited compared to expectations. Although BRICS has facilitated increased trade, investment, and diplomatic engagement, the tangible benefits in areas like poverty reduction, industrialization, and employment growth are unclear or minimal. Research by Hopewell (2017) points out similar criticisms, noting that while BRICS has prioritized economic cooperation, its social development agenda lags behind institutions like the African Union or the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). In contrast, BRICS primarily emphasizes economic and political cooperation, relegating social development to a secondary priority (Nach & Nwadi, 2024). This has raised concerns about the underdeveloped social impact of BRICS membership. Furthermore, this issue highlights the disparity between BRICS' potential and its actual influence on South Africa's development priorities.

A major criticism that emanated from one of the participants is that the benefits are not equally distributed:

South Africans are disadvantaged in their own way because Chinese are able to come to South Africa and benefit from it, but we were not really equipped. There are no channels how we can go there and do the same. You could never go to China and hear that a South African owns a firm there. It seems like a one-way strategic relationship where they benefit more than us (Participant 8)

This finding highlights a power asymmetry within BRICS, where China is perceived as the dominant economic player. While China has made significant investments in Africa, South African firms do not enjoy the same level of market access in China. This is a common concern in global trade, where developing countries often find themselves as recipients of investment rather than equal partners (Carmody, 2013).

China has broadened its economic presence in South Africa, investing in sectors such as mining, telecommunications, infrastructure, and manufacturing. Chinese firms operate in South Africa with relative ease, accessing resources, labor, and markets. In contrast, South African businesses face challenges in entering the Chinese market due to stringent trade regulations, competition from domestic Chinese firms, and a lack of government support for outbound investment (Maiorano & Manor, 2017). Additionally, South Africa maintains a negative trade balance with China, importing more than it exports, which limits the economic benefits derived from this partnership (Asuelime, 2018). This dynamic reinforces economic dependency rather than fostering mutual benefits, raising concerns that BRICS reflects traditional North-South trade relationships rather than a genuine South-South partnership.

Another participant further highlights a lack of transparency and reciprocity:

There is a need for the South African government to approach BRICS and then demand a clear scope of work, outline a clear scope in terms of how we are going to benefit (Participant 2).

This suggests that South Africa's negotiating power within BRICS is weak, and there is an urgent need for clear agreements to ensure fair cooperation. South Africa, as the smallest economy in BRICS, has less negotiating leverage compared to China, India, Brazil, and Russia (Thompson & De Wet, 2017). Unlike China or India, South Africa does not dictate BRICS' economic policies or trade agreements, making it difficult to shape the agenda to its advantage. Moreover, no clear

implementation strategy exists to ensure South Africa's economic and social priorities are met. In essence, without structured negotiations, South Africa risks being a passive participant rather than an active beneficiary of BRICS cooperation.

Finally, another participant highlighted that low-paying jobs are being created rather than major investments:

It's more like these skills and jobs are low-paying but do not make billions and billions as they are doing in South Africa (Participant 2)

This statement highlights concerns regarding the quality of jobs generated by BRICS investments and suggests that these investments may not substantially reduce inequality in South Africa. If foreign firms primarily reap the benefits of these investments while local workers remain in low-wage positions, it could exacerbate economic disparities rather than alleviate them.

Although BRICS-related projects have created job opportunities, many of these positions are in low-paying sectors such as construction, mining, and retail and services. There are limited opportunities for high-paying, skilled employment in areas like technology, engineering, and industrial manufacturing (Diko & Sempijja, 2021).

4.5 Challenges in implementing BRICS Social Development initiatives

4.5.1 Media Representation, Transparency, and Public Awareness of BRICS

One of the significant challenges in implementing BRICS-supported social development initiatives in South Africa is the lack of awareness about BRICS in South Africa. One of the participant in the interview noted that:

Lack of awareness caused by less media support, the SA media are not advocates of BRICS especially mainstream media. Information about BRICS is shared on social media mainly unregulated mediums, this disadvantages the person who relies on mainstream media (Participant 3)

Likewise, another participant also highlighted that:

There is lack of knowledge which goes back to lack of information. We need to prioritize media platforms that reach wider audience (Participant 6)

These excerpts raise concerns about the media's role in shaping public awareness and understanding of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) in South Africa. Both participants emphasize a gap in public knowledge about BRICS due to inadequate media coverage, especially in mainstream outlets (Ali et al., 2015). They note that while social media is a significant information source, it is often unregulated, leading to misinformation and limited reach. They advocate for more inclusive and accessible media platforms to better inform the public about BRICS-related issues.

The media's influence on public awareness and knowledge is well-documented in communication and media studies. Media serves as a crucial source of information dissemination, shaping public perception and engagement with socio-political and economic matters (Okechukwu, 2023). The participants' remarks underscore concerns about the limited awareness and understanding of BRICS in South Africa, largely due to the lack of coverage from mainstream media.

If mainstream South African media does not prioritise BRICS-related content, it restricts public discourse and comprehension. Participant 3's comment that “the SA media are not advocates of BRICS, especially mainstream media” indicates that BRICS is not prominently featured in mainstream news, which may result in low public engagement. This aligns with research suggesting that media ownership, political interests, and editorial biases shape the topics covered in mainstream media (Rodny-Gumede, 2017).

Participant 3 also pointed out that information about BRICS is predominantly shared on social media through unregulated channels, disadvantaging those who depend on mainstream media. This raises concerns about the credibility and regulation of digital platforms. While social media increases access to information, it often lacks editorial oversight, making it susceptible to misinformation (Tandoc, Lim, & Ling, 2018). Studies on digital journalism indicate that although social media broadens information access, it does not consistently provide reliable, in-depth, or fact-checked content (Newman et al., 2021).

Participant 6 highlighted that “there is a lack of knowledge which goes back to lack of information,” suggesting the need to prioritize media platforms that reach broader audiences. This

aligns with knowledge gap theory (Okechukwu, 2023), which posits that disparities in information access create knowledge gaps among different societal segments. If BRICS-related content is not widely disseminated through mainstream and accessible platforms, public awareness will remain limited.

Research indicates that in many developing nations, media accessibility and literacy significantly influence public understanding of international economic and political alliances (Ricceri, 2019). In South Africa, where media consumption varies across socioeconomic groups, prioritizing inclusive media platforms, such as public broadcasters and community media, could enhance awareness of BRICS-related issues (Wasserman, 2018).

The participants highlighted the role of media bias, lack of transparency, and limited public awareness in shaping perceptions of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa). These concerns align with broader discussions in media studies, political communication, and international relations literature, which explore how media framing influences public opinion and policy engagement.

To support this one of the participant indicated that:

The issue of Western-aligned journalism reporting badly on BRICS is also another challenge
(Participant 4)

This statement raises concerns about media bias and the portrayal of BRICS in international news outlets, especially those aligned with Western viewpoints. The media plays a significant role in shaping global narratives, and the representation of BRICS can affect public perception, foreign policy, and international relations. Western media often employs framing theory (Entman, 1993), which posits that the way news is presented influences audience interpretation of events.

Research indicates that Western media frequently depicts BRICS as an economic threat or as a disjointed bloc (Stuenkel, 2016). Coverage typically focuses on internal conflicts, governance issues, and economic instability within BRICS nations, rather than showcasing their achievements (Okechukwu, 2023). Additionally, there is a notable absence of neutral or positive reporting on BRICS-related initiatives, fostering skepticism and negative perceptions, particularly among African audiences (Wasserman, 2018).

The Western media landscape is dominated by a few major corporations (Noam, 2016), such as CNN, BBC, and The New York Times, which tend to reflect the foreign policy interests of Western nations. This results in coverage that critiques BRICS as an alternative power bloc that challenges Western hegemony (Bond, 2020). Furthermore, this coverage often downplays BRICS' accomplishments, such as the establishment of the New Development Bank (NDB), in favor of narratives emphasizing internal political tensions or economic vulnerabilities. For instance, research by Stuenkel (2016) on media coverage of BRICS summits found that Western media disproportionately focused on political disagreements and economic uncertainties rather than the bloc's long-term development objectives. This observation aligns with Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model, which argues that news media serves elite interests and sidelines alternative perspectives, especially those that contest Western economic dominance (Mullen & Klaehn, 2010).

Another participant highlighted that:

I also feel like there is a lack of awareness and transparency on the BRICS partnerships. For example, there was no media coverage on the 2023 Johannesburg summit. And unfortunately, not much information was shared on what BRICS means to the citizens of the countries represented (Participant 7)

This statement underscores two significant issues: the limited media coverage of BRICS-related activities and the communication gap between BRICS leadership and the general public. Despite BRICS' increasing influence, research indicates that its summits and initiatives receive considerably less media attention in South Africa compared to Western-dominated forums like the G7 or NATO meetings (Madrid-Morales & Wasserman, 2018). According to Chakrabarty (2020), African media's dependence on Western news agencies creates an information gap, resulting in minimal coverage of global South partnerships like BRICS and diminishing public engagement.

For example, the New Development Bank (NDB) has funded major infrastructure projects in South Africa, yet many citizens remain unaware of its contributions due to ineffective communication strategies (Alden & Schoeman, 2015). Consequently, without effective communication and public engagement, BRICS continues to be perceived as an elite-driven initiative with limited grassroots support, as noted by Stuenkel (2016).

4.5.2 Coordination challenges between South Africa and BRICS partners

There is a disconnect between policy initiatives and public awareness. Even when BRICS-related opportunities exist, their impact is diminished due to poor coordination and information dissemination. The lack of awareness and coordination limits participation, preventing young South Africans from benefiting from international opportunities. One of the participants highlighted that:

Russia is offering bursaries for young South Africans to study, specifically in nuclear energy and engineering courses. Russia opened work opportunities for young South Africans as well. But this has been halted by lack of awareness on BRICS in South Africa (Participant 4)

Another participant also stated that:

There is lack of clear communication and we need to do more awareness so that people will become aware, so that they fully understand the benefits of BRICS (Participant 8)

The participants' remarks underscore Russia's role in providing educational and employment opportunities for young South Africans within the BRICS framework. However, they also highlight a significant communication gap that limits the ability to fully leverage these opportunities. Russia's investments in South African education, especially in specialized fields like nuclear energy and engineering, represent a strategic effort to build capacity in critical sectors. Research indicates that higher education collaborations within BRICS can help address skills shortages in developing economies (Hou, Montgomery, & McDowell, 2014). Despite these initiatives, the participant notes that a lack of awareness has hindered South Africans from fully accessing these opportunities.

If information about scholarships and job openings is not effectively communicated, only a small segment of the population will benefit, perpetuating socioeconomic inequalities. Studies show that many South Africans, particularly those in rural and disadvantaged communities, struggle to access international education programs due to insufficient information dissemination (Wasserman, 2018).

Researchers have explored the complexities of South-South cooperation, especially within the BRICS framework (Andreoni & Sial, 2022). One of the primary coordination challenges arises from the diverse political and economic structures of the member states. For instance, South Africa has a relatively smaller economy and a weaker industrial base compared to China, India, and Russia, making it challenging to negotiate and establish equitable partnerships (Naudé, 2019).

Moreover, variations in governance styles among BRICS nations impact the effectiveness of collaboration. While China and Russia tend to adopt a more state-driven development approach, South Africa, being a democratic state, must conduct extensive stakeholder consultations before implementing BRICS-related policies. This can slow down processes and lead to inconsistencies in collaboration (Maiorano & Manr, 2017). This is in line with the weaknesses of the developmental state that countries that are democratic struggle to attain quicker socioeconomic development returns.

4.5.3. Policy and governance gaps

The concerns raised by the participants align with governance and policy issues, highlighting that bureaucratic inefficiencies, weak policy frameworks, and leadership gaps hinder South Africa's effective participation in BRICS social development initiatives. In support, one of the participants highlighted that:

Another challenge is we have ministers who do not understand what BRICS is. You know it's easier to write a document, but it's difficult to execute that document (Participant 3)

This quote highlights a deficiency in institutional capacity and expertise among government officials, which impedes the effective implementation of BRICS-related initiatives. While South Africa is a member of BRICS, the participant suggests that some policymakers do not fully grasp the bloc's objectives and strategic advantages (Isheloke, 2020). When government officials lack sufficient knowledge or political commitment, policy execution tends to falter. Research by Borat et al. (2017) indicates that South Africa's bureaucratic inefficiencies and leadership gaps contribute

to inadequate policy execution in developmental programs, including international collaborations like BRICS.

Similarly, Lobato (2018) contends that policy failures in many developing nations arise from a mix of bureaucratic inefficiencies, insufficient technical expertise, and political inertia. In the context of BRICS, even with existing agreements and frameworks, a knowledge gap among officials hinders their effective implementation.

Another participant reflected that:

I think there is no enough legislation and policies put in place to take forward the vision put forward by BRICS, we need to see action translating policies to actionable programs
(Participant 7)

This statement emphasises a gap between policy and practice, indicating that the South African government has not established adequate legal and institutional mechanisms to turn BRICS commitments into effective development programs. Policies often falter due to a disconnect between formulation and execution, especially when legislative support or regulatory frameworks are lacking.

According to Cloete and De Coning (2011), the success of policies relies on clear legislative frameworks that specify how international agreements should be implemented, coordination among various government departments to align with national development priorities, and institutional mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation to assess progress and impact. In the context of BRICS, the absence of legal and policy frameworks restricts South Africa's ability to utilize BRICS agreements for social and economic development. Without well-defined policies, commitments remain largely rhetorical rather than actionable, as noted by Mbeki (2016) in his analysis of South Africa's role in global partnerships. Consequently, in South Africa, despite BRICS-related initiatives such as the New Development Bank (NDB) and educational exchange programs, their impact is limited due to inadequate coordination, weak policy enforcement, and a lack of strategic vision (Bond, 2020).

4.6. Alignment with South Africa's National Development priorities

4.6.1 Compatibility with South Africa's National Development Plan (NDP) 2030

South Africa's National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 aims to eliminate poverty and reduce inequality by ensuring sustainable and inclusive economic growth (Nach & Ncwadi, 2024). BRICS collaboration presents an opportunity to support this vision, particularly in sectors such as education, health, infrastructure, and trade.

Several participants acknowledged this alignment:

I think it aligns very nicely with the SDGs and our national development plan vision 2030... But I think it is nice to put all these documents into collective action to reach desired change (Participant 1)

It aligns well, the vision 2030 of South Africa is inclusive growth, well-structured health centers, poverty eradication, and equality, and I think BRICS covers all those. And Agenda 2063 covers all these (Participant 5)

The verbatim quotes emphasise the connection between BRICS collaboration and South Africa's long-term development goals, specifically the SDGs, the National Development Plan (NDP) Vision 2030, and the African Union's Agenda 2063. Participants view BRICS as a strategic platform for advancing South Africa's socio-economic development, particularly in areas such as education, health, infrastructure, and trade. These views align with existing literature on international cooperation, economic development, and policy alignment.

The SDGs, adopted by the United Nations in 2015, aim to eliminate poverty, promote inclusive growth, ensure quality education, and enhance healthcare (United Nations, 2015). As a bloc of emerging economies, BRICS has positioned itself as a key driver of South-South cooperation, providing alternative development pathways beyond traditional Western-led models (Andreoni & Sial, 2022). BRICS' contributions to the SDGs in South Africa include economic growth (SDG 8): China, India, and Brazil have increased trade and investment in South Africa, fostering economic diversification (Bond, 2020). In terms of education and skills development (SDG 4): initiatives like the BRICS Network University and scholarship programs in Russia and China enhance higher education and skills transfer (Chakrabarty, 2020). Regarding healthcare (SDG 3): the BRICS Vaccine Initiative and pharmaceutical collaborations with India have improved access to medicines and medical technology (Alden & Schoeman, 2015).

The National Development Plan (NDP) Vision 2030 serves as South Africa's long-term strategic framework for inclusive development (National Planning Commission, 2012). It emphasizes economic growth, job creation, health and education improvements, and infrastructure development and trade expansion. BRICS aligns with the NDP Vision 2030 through infrastructure development, as the New Development Bank (NDB) has financed essential South African infrastructure projects, including renewable energy and urban transport (Mbeki, 2016). Additionally, in terms of trade and industrialization, China and India have increased their investments in South Africa's manufacturing and technology sectors, contributing to industrial growth (Andreoni & Tregenna, 2020). Furthermore, health collaboration has benefited South Africa, particularly from India's pharmaceutical expertise during the COVID-19 pandemic, underscoring BRICS' role in global health security (Bond, 2020). Despite these alignments, studies indicate challenges in policy execution, particularly in ensuring that BRICS investments directly benefit local economies (Cloete & De Coning, 2011).

4.6.2 Integration of BRICS programs with local policies and social structures

A major challenge in integrating BRICS programs with South Africa's local policies is the lack of legislative and institutional frameworks that effectively implement BRICS initiatives within national and local governance structures.

Participants highlighted these issues:

There is no enough legislation and policies put in place to take forward the vision put forward by BRICS, we need to see action translating policies to actionable programs (Participant 2)

But I don't think a lot is being done in BRICS countries to ensure a nexus between BRICS countries. I also feel like there is lack of awareness and transparency on the BRICS partnerships (Participant 8)

These challenges align with the findings of Andreoni and Sial (2022), who contend that although BRICS offers various policy frameworks and investment opportunities, greater institutional

capacity-building is necessary for their effective integration into national policies. Additionally, Bond (2020) points out that political inefficiencies, misaligned bureaucratic structures, and corruption obstruct South Africa's capacity to fully capitalize on the advantages of BRICS cooperation. Furthermore, Isheloke (2020) highlights a frequent lack of public engagement and awareness concerning BRICS-led initiatives, resulting in public skepticism and lost opportunities for citizen participation in these programs.

4.6.3 Gaps between BRICS initiatives and South African developmental needs

Despite the alignment of BRICS collaboration with South Africa's development vision, there are significant gaps between what BRICS offers and what South Africa needs for economic transformation and poverty alleviation.

Participants acknowledged these gaps and one of the participant highlighted that:

So like I said, on the ground, I am not aware of too many poverty-related programs and interventions that are being implemented in partnership with BRICS countries (Participant 3)

This statement underscores a perceived gap in the visibility and effectiveness of poverty alleviation initiatives involving BRICS nations. Although BRICS countries have participated in various cooperative efforts, such as health collaboration during the COVID-19 pandemic, the impact on poverty alleviation may not be adequately recognized or communicated at the grassroots level.. The absence of BRICS-led poverty reduction programs in South Africa, as noted by the participant, aligns with research by Thompson and De Wet (2020), who argues that while BRICS contributes to macroeconomic growth, its direct impact on poverty reduction and social welfare programs remains limited. South Africa continues to grapple with high unemployment, inequality, and a fragile social welfare system, issues that BRICS initiatives have not sufficiently addressed.

Additionally another participant indicated that:

For example, during COVID, what we did—we failed to take advantage of that as China did to boost their medical industry. We were on the receiving end, unfortunately (Participant 6)

This quote expresses a sentiment regarding missed opportunities in utilizing the COVID-19 crisis to strengthen local medical industries, particularly in contrast to China's proactive approach. During the pandemic, China not only advanced its medical sector but also engaged in extensive cooperation with other BRICS nations, supplying medical resources and expertise (Diko & Sempijja, 2021). The inability to take advantage of similar opportunities may suggest a lack of strategic planning or investment in local health infrastructure, which could have lessened the pandemic's impact and promoted economic resilience. Rather than developing domestic manufacturing capacity, South Africa has frequently assumed a consumer role within BRICS partnerships, which contradicts its development objectives of self-sufficiency (Shubin, 2018).

Moreover in support another participant stated that:

The renewable energy now, is it sustainable? I don't think so. Solar systems were always there, so my question is: are we regressing or moving forward? (Participant 8)

This statement poses important questions regarding the sustainability and effectiveness of renewable energy initiatives, especially solar energy. Although there has been a concerted effort to promote renewable energy adoption in BRICS countries, the shift from fossil fuels to sustainable energy sources has been uneven. Research shows that, while BRICS nations are striving to decrease fossil fuel consumption, investments in green technology are still inadequate to make a significant impact on emissions reduction (Petropoulos, 2015). The concern about regression versus progress in renewable energy points to skepticism about whether current initiatives are genuinely sustainable or simply a continuation of existing practices without meaningful improvement.

4.7 Future prospects and recommendations

4.7.1 Opportunities for enhancing BRICS collaboration in social development

The participants in the current study reflect a positive outlook on the potential for enhanced collaboration among BRICS countries in the realm of social development. This perspective aligns with the broader discourse on the opportunities that BRICS presents for addressing common social challenges such as poverty and unemployment. In support of this, some of the participants highlighted the following:

I think the future looks good, I think there is a lot of opportunities, I think there is scope for more collaboration in this field of social development (Participant 3)

This statement highlights an optimistic perspective on the potential for BRICS nations to strengthen their collaborative efforts in social development. The BRICS framework serves as a platform for member countries to exchange best practices, resources, and strategies aimed at enhancing social outcomes. The creation of the NDB marks a significant advancement in this regard, as it prioritizes funding for projects that promote sustainable development, including social infrastructure and poverty alleviation initiatives (Tandon & Slobodchikoff, 2024). Additionally, the growing recognition of the importance of social development within the BRICS agenda indicates an increasing commitment to collectively addressing these issues.

Likewise, another participant highlighted that:

BRICS is a collection of countries that face similar issues such as poverty and unemployment and they can work together to address these issues (Participant 7)

This quote emphasizes the shared challenges faced by BRICS countries, such as poverty and unemployment, which underscore the need for collaborative action. Comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, the BRICS nations represent a diverse group of emerging economies that experience similar socio-economic difficulties. By collaborating, these countries can harness their collective strengths to devise innovative solutions for these urgent issues. For example, joint initiatives in fields like education, healthcare, and job creation can result in more effective strategies for alleviating poverty and improving social welfare (Nach & Ncwadi, 2024).

4.7.2 Strategies for overcoming implementation challenges

The quotes provided express critical views on the challenges facing BRICS collaboration, particularly in South Africa, regarding corporate support, communication, and cooperation in social development initiatives such as hunger and food security.

One of the participant highlighted that:

For BRICS to reach its full potential, there needs to be greater engagement from the private sector. Corporations play a crucial role in driving investment and fostering innovation within the bloc. Without strong corporate backing, BRICS countries may struggle to fully leverage the economic opportunities the organization presents. Corporate support could significantly contribute to infrastructure development, job creation, and technological advancements, helping align BRICS initiatives with national development goals (Participant 4).

This statement underscores the vital role of corporate involvement in enhancing the effectiveness of BRICS initiatives. Without substantial corporate support, social development programs may struggle to obtain the necessary funding, expertise, and resources. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives can be pivotal in tackling social issues, offering both financial backing and innovative solutions to challenges such as poverty and hunger (Ricceri, 2019).

Research shows that countries with robust public-private partnerships (PPPs) can achieve greater social impact through collaborative efforts. For example, initiatives in Brazil and India have demonstrated how private sector participation can drive innovation in social programs, resulting in better outcomes in areas like education and health (Andreoni & Sial, 2022). Thus, cultivating a supportive corporate environment in South Africa and other BRICS nations is crucial for the success of collaborative social development initiatives.

Another participant indicated that:

Transparency and public engagement are crucial for the success of BRICS initiatives. Without clear communication and accountability, the public may lose trust in the policies being implemented. It's essential that BRICS members engage their citizens in discussions about the long-term impacts of these initiatives, ensuring that the benefits are widely understood and that there is a sense of ownership and participation. This transparency will

not only foster greater support but also enhance the legitimacy of BRICS projects within each country (Participant 6).

This quote emphasizes the importance of transparency and public involvement in ensuring that BRICS initiatives are seen as legitimate and effective. Literature indicates that transparency and public engagement foster greater trust and collaboration among governments, civil society, and the private sector (Diko & Sempijja, 2021). In the context of BRICS, enhancing communication strategies could help bridge the divide between policymakers and the communities they serve, ensuring that the needs and perspectives of the population are adequately considered in social development efforts (Mujumdar & Shadrin, 2021).

Despite the shared challenges faced by member nations, collaboration to address these issues has not been fully realized. Food insecurity remains a pressing concern in many BRICS countries, and coordinated action could yield more effective solutions. Research shows that regional cooperation can significantly improve food security by promoting best practices, sharing technology, and coordinating response strategies (Isheloke, 2020; Knight, 2021). For example, initiatives focused on agricultural innovation and sustainable practices have demonstrated potential in enhancing food security outcomes. Strengthening collaboration among BRICS nations in these areas could foster a more resilient approach to food security challenges.

Lastly, another participant added that:

I think the next point is to make sure that there is a greater cohesion in terms of joint programs and things of that nature (Participant 8)

The term "greater cohesion" highlights the need for a more unified approach among BRICS nations in tackling shared challenges. This implies that, although there are existing programs, they may lack integration or alignment, resulting in inefficiencies or missed opportunities (Bond, 2020). Greater cohesion can lead to more effective collaboration, enabling member states to pool resources, share best practices, and create synergies in their efforts. Additionally, the mention of "joint programs" emphasizes collaborative initiatives where multiple BRICS countries work together toward common objectives, such as poverty alleviation, healthcare improvement, or sustainable development (Nach & Ncwadi, 2024). These programs can harness the unique strengths and resources of each member country, enhancing the overall impact. For instance,

coordinated efforts in areas like renewable energy or food security can foster innovative solutions that might not be achievable if countries operate in isolation.

4.8 Conclusion

In conclusion, Chapter 4 has presented and discussed the results of our analysis regarding the impact of BRICS collaboration on South Africa's development. The findings reveal both the strengths and limitations of BRICS initiatives in addressing critical social issues. While the investments in infrastructure and economic growth are notable, they do not sufficiently tackle pressing challenges such as youth unemployment, gender inequality, and poverty alleviation.

The discussion highlighted key themes, including the importance of effective governance, the need for transparent and accountable processes, and the role of community engagement in enhancing the impact of BRICS-funded projects. Participants voiced concerns about bureaucratic inefficiencies and the dominance of certain member states, which can hinder South Africa's ability to fully leverage the resources available through BRICS.

Moreover, the results indicate that while there is potential for significant socio-economic benefits, a more integrated approach that aligns economic initiatives with social development goals is crucial. Future efforts should focus on fostering collaboration among stakeholders, enhancing awareness of BRICS initiatives, and prioritizing grassroots-level programs that directly benefit marginalized communities.

Overall, this chapter underscores the necessity for a strategic realignment of BRICS collaboration in South Africa, ensuring that investments translate into meaningful improvements in the lives of citizens. By addressing these issues, South Africa can better harness the opportunities presented by BRICS to achieve sustainable and inclusive development.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the key findings, conclusions, and recommendations from the study examining the impact of BRICS collaboration on social development initiatives in South Africa. The research explored the nature of projects supported by BRICS, the successes and challenges associated with these initiatives, stakeholder perspectives, and their alignment with South Africa's national development priorities. Drawing on these findings, this chapter also offers recommendations for improving the effectiveness of BRICS social development initiatives.

5.2 Summary of key findings and conclusions

5.2.1 Influence of BRICS collaboration on Social Development initiatives

Nature of BRICS-supported social development projects in South Africa

BRICS collaboration in South Africa has primarily focused on projects in infrastructure development, education, healthcare, and poverty alleviation. Key initiatives include the BRICS

Vaccine Research and Development Centre, which aims to enhance vaccine accessibility and research capabilities, and various projects funded by the NDB that target critical areas such as water infrastructure and renewable energy. These efforts align with South Africa's social development priorities, addressing pressing needs in these sectors.

However, while these initiatives have made significant contributions to large-scale infrastructure improvements, they often prioritize structural projects over grassroots social programs that directly engage communities. This emphasis on large-scale development can sometimes overlook the importance of local-level interventions that empower individuals and foster sustainable community growth. To maximize the social impact of BRICS collaboration, there is a need for a more balanced approach that incorporates both infrastructure investments and grassroots initiatives, ensuring that the benefits of development reach all segments of the population (Mujumdar & Shadrin, 2021).

Success stories and key achievements

The study identified numerous success stories, including the financing of sustainable energy projects and transportation infrastructure through the NDB. These initiatives not only contribute to economic growth but also support South Africa's transition to a more sustainable energy future. Furthermore, South Africa has actively participated in BRICS education and knowledge-sharing programs, enhancing its capacity in various sectors.

China and India have made substantial contributions to healthcare initiatives, with projects aimed at improving access to medical services and advancing healthcare technology (Ricceri, 2019). Their expertise in public health has been particularly beneficial in addressing challenges such as disease prevention and health system strengthening in South Africa. Additionally, Brazil's social development models have significantly influenced South Africa's approach to social security, providing valuable insights into effective strategies for reducing inequality and enhancing social welfare (Thompson & De Wet, 2020).

These collaborative efforts demonstrate the potential for BRICS nations to share resources and expertise, ultimately leading to improved outcomes in various sectors. By continuing to leverage these partnerships, South Africa can further enhance its development agenda and address pressing social issues more effectively.

Funding and resource allocation from BRICS countries

The BRICS nations have made substantial contributions to South Africa's development through financial investments, particularly facilitated by the NDB (Diko & Sempijja, 2021). While these investments have bolstered infrastructure development, direct funding for social welfare projects has been relatively limited. The study indicates that financial support is frequently associated with large-scale initiatives, which, although impactful, do not directly tackle urgent social development issues such as poverty alleviation and unemployment.

Furthermore, this trend suggests that while infrastructure is crucial for economic growth, there is a pressing need for a more balanced approach that prioritizes social welfare initiatives. By expanding financial support to include targeted programs aimed at improving education, healthcare, and job creation, BRICS nations can help address the root causes of social challenges in South Africa. This shift in focus would not only enhance the overall effectiveness of BRICS investments but also promote sustainable development and social equity across the nation. Increasing collaboration on grassroots initiatives could lead to a more comprehensive strategy that benefits all segments of South African society.

Knowledge and technology transfer within BRICS initiatives

BRICS collaboration has significantly enhanced knowledge-sharing across multiple sectors, particularly in higher education, technical skills training, and digital transformation (Nach & Ncwadi, 204). South Africa has particularly benefited from China's expertise in renewable energy technologies and India's advancements in technology-driven healthcare solutions. These contributions have the potential to drive innovation and improve service delivery in South Africa.

However, the transfer of technology has been inconsistent, with disparities in access and implementation across different regions and sectors (Isheloke, 2020). South Africa continues to

encounter challenges in fully capitalizing on BRICS resources for skills development, including insufficient infrastructure, gaps in training programs, and a lack of alignment between educational outcomes and industry needs.

To maximize the benefits of BRICS collaboration, it is essential for South Africa to establish stronger frameworks for technology transfer and capacity building. This could involve creating partnerships that facilitate direct engagement between educational institutions, industry stakeholders, and BRICS member states. By fostering a more inclusive approach to skills development and ensuring that training programs are tailored to the current and future job market, South Africa can enhance its ability to leverage BRICS resources effectively and drive sustainable economic growth.

5.2.2 Stakeholders' perspectives on BRICS collaboration

Perceived benefits of BRICS involvement in social development

Stakeholders view BRICS as a vital platform for South-South cooperation, fostering economic self-reliance and diminishing reliance on Western-dominated financial institutions. This collaborative framework allows member countries to support each other in achieving development goals that align with their unique contexts and priorities.

One significant advantage of BRICS funding mechanisms is their flexibility, which contrasts with the often rigid conditions imposed by traditional international donors. This adaptability enables South Africa to pursue long-term development objectives more effectively, allowing for tailored solutions that address specific challenges faced by the nation (Bond, 2020).

Moreover, BRICS promotes knowledge exchange and capacity building, empowering South Africa to innovate and implement sustainable practices in various sectors. By leveraging the strengths of its BRICS partners, South Africa can enhance its economic resilience and foster a more equitable growth trajectory. As the global economic landscape continues to evolve, the role of BRICS in facilitating alternative financing options and collaborative development strategies is likely to become increasingly crucial for South Africa and other emerging economies.

Concerns and criticisms

Despite its advantages, BRICS collaboration has faced criticism for several reasons, including concerns about transparency, the dominance of certain member states—especially China—and the limited direct impact of BRICS investments on marginalized communities. Critics argue that the emphasis on large-scale infrastructure projects often overlooks urgent social issues such as inequality and unemployment, which continue to affect vulnerable populations (Maiorano & Mnor, 2017).

Many stakeholders believe that while infrastructure development is essential for economic growth, it should not come at the expense of social welfare initiatives. There are calls for a more balanced approach that prioritizes investments in education, healthcare, and community development to ensure that marginalized groups benefit from BRICS initiatives.

Furthermore, enhancing transparency in decision-making processes and funding allocations could help build trust among member states and communities. By promoting inclusive dialogue and actively involving local stakeholders in project planning and implementation, BRICS can better address the needs of disadvantaged populations. Strengthening accountability mechanisms and ensuring equitable distribution of resources will be crucial for maximizing the positive impact of BRICS collaboration on social development.

5.2.3 Challenges in Implementing BRICS Social Development initiatives

Coordination challenges between South Africa and BRICS partners

The absence of a centralized coordination mechanism within BRICS has resulted in inconsistent collaboration among member states. Each BRICS nation has its own set of priorities and developmental agendas, which complicates efforts to maintain long-term commitments to social development in South Africa. This divergence can lead to fragmented initiatives that fail to create a cohesive impact (Isheloke, 2020).

Moreover, without a unified strategy, opportunities for synergy and resource sharing are often missed. Different member states may implement parallel projects with overlapping objectives, wasting valuable resources and undermining the potential for greater collective impact.

To enhance collaboration, it is essential for BRICS to establish a more structured coordination framework that aligns the diverse priorities of its member countries while focusing on shared goals, particularly in social development. This framework could facilitate better communication, streamline project implementation, and foster joint initiatives that address regional challenges more effectively. By doing so, BRICS can strengthen its role as a transformative force in South Africa's development landscape and ensure that social development initiatives are sustainable and impactful.

Media representation, transparency and public awareness of BRICS

One of the major challenges in executing BRICS-supported social development initiatives in South Africa is the limited awareness and understanding of BRICS among the South African populace and stakeholders. Many individuals and organizations are not fully informed about the potential benefits and opportunities that BRICS collaboration can offer, which hinders effective engagement and participation in these initiatives (Asuelime, 2018).

This lack of awareness can result in missed opportunities for local communities to access resources, training, and support that BRICS partnerships might provide. Furthermore, without comprehensive knowledge of BRICS activities, stakeholders may struggle to align their projects with the goals and resources available through this collaboration.

To address this challenge, it is crucial to implement awareness campaigns and educational programs that highlight the purpose and value of BRICS initiatives. Engaging local communities, civil society organizations, and governmental bodies in discussions about BRICS can foster greater understanding and interest.

Additionally, creating platforms for dialogue such as workshops, seminars, and online forums—can facilitate the sharing of information and experiences related to BRICS activities. By increasing awareness and understanding, South Africa can enhance its ability to leverage BRICS resources effectively, ensuring that social development initiatives reach those who need them most and contribute to sustainable progress across the country.

Governance and policy gaps

The concerns expressed by participants are closely linked to governance and policy challenges, underscoring that bureaucratic inefficiencies, inadequate policy frameworks, and gaps in leadership significantly impede South Africa's effective engagement in BRICS social development initiatives. These issues can lead to delays in project implementation, misallocation of resources, and a lack of accountability.

Bureaucratic inefficiencies, such as slow decision-making processes and excessive red tape, can frustrate efforts to mobilize resources and initiate programs quickly. Additionally, weak policy frameworks may lack the necessary provisions to support innovative approaches to social development, limiting the scope and impact of initiatives (Anuoluwapo et al., 2018).

Leadership gaps further exacerbate these challenges, as inconsistent direction and strategic vision can lead to fragmented efforts and a lack of coherence in addressing social issues. To overcome these barriers, it is essential for South Africa to strengthen its governance structures and enhance coordination among various stakeholders involved in BRICS initiatives.

Investing in capacity-building programs for public officials and fostering a culture of collaboration can improve overall effectiveness (Andreoni & Sial, 2022). By addressing these governance and policy issues, South Africa can enhance its active participation in BRICS social development initiatives, ensuring that they are more impactful and aligned with the needs of its communities. This strategic approach can ultimately contribute to sustainable development and social equity across the nation.

5.2.4 Alignment with South Africa's National Development Priorities

Compatibility with South Africa's National Development Plan (NDP) 2030

BRICS collaboration is closely aligned with several key pillars of South Africa's National Development Plan (NDP) 2030, including infrastructure development, economic growth, and social transformation. These areas are crucial for achieving the country's long-term development objectives. However, a significant gap exists in the direct impact of BRICS initiatives on grassroots-level social programs, which are essential for addressing the needs of vulnerable communities.

While BRICS investments often focus on large-scale infrastructure projects that boost economic activity, there is insufficient attention given to smaller, community-driven initiatives that directly improve the lives of individuals (Gu et al., 2015). This disconnect can lead to a situation where the benefits of BRICS collaboration are not felt equitably across different segments of society, particularly among marginalized groups.

To bridge this gap, it is vital for BRICS to prioritise grassroots engagement and invest in social programs that target education, healthcare, and job creation at the community level. Strengthening partnerships with local organizations and civil society can ensure that initiatives are tailored to the specific needs of communities, fostering greater inclusivity and participation.

Additionally, integrating feedback mechanisms that allow communities to voice their concerns and suggestions can enhance the effectiveness of BRICS initiatives. By focusing on grassroots-level social programs, BRICS can play a more transformative role in supporting South Africa's NDP 2030 goals, ultimately contributing to a more equitable and sustainable future for all citizens.

Gaps between BRICS initiatives and South African developmental needs

The study revealed that although BRICS investments in infrastructure and economic development provide significant benefits, they fall short of adequately addressing pressing social issues such as youth unemployment, gender equality, and poverty alleviation. While infrastructure projects can stimulate economic growth and create jobs, they do not always translate into meaningful improvements for marginalized communities.

Youth unemployment remains a critical challenge in South Africa, with a significant portion of the population lacking access to quality education and job training programs. Similarly, gender inequality continues to persist, limiting opportunities for women in the workforce and hindering their economic empowerment (Nach & Newadi, 2024). Poverty alleviation efforts also require targeted interventions that go beyond economic growth to provide social safety nets and support services for vulnerable populations.

To better align BRICS initiatives with these urgent social issues, it is essential to adopt a more holistic approach that integrates social development goals into economic planning. This could involve prioritizing investments in education and skills development, creating targeted programs that promote gender equality, and implementing comprehensive poverty reduction strategies.

Additionally, fostering collaboration between BRICS countries and local stakeholders can lead to innovative solutions that address these social challenges more effectively. By focusing on a broader range of social issues, BRICS can enhance its overall impact and contribute to a more inclusive and equitable future for South Africa.

5.3 Recommendations

5.3.1 Enhancing BRICS Collaboration in Social Development

Targeted Stakeholders: BRICS Secretariat, Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), Department of Social Development (DSD)

- **Establish a BRICS Social Development Task Force:** The BRICS Secretariat, in collaboration with DIRCO and DSD, should establish a task force to coordinate social development efforts, monitor progress, and ensure alignment with South Africa's development priorities.
- **Encourage joint implementation of social projects:** BRICS member states should collaborate directly in co-designing and implementing projects that combine financial, technical, and social expertise for sustained impact.
- **Strengthen knowledge-sharing platforms:** The BRICS Education and Health Ministries, with support from South Africa's Departments of Higher Education and Health, should facilitate regular exchanges, workshops, and virtual platforms to enhance skills transfer in priority sectors.

5.3.2 Policy Recommendations for Better Alignment with National Priorities

Targeted Stakeholders: National Treasury, Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME), BRICS Policy Planners

- **Align BRICS-funded projects with the NDP 2030:** South Africa's DPME and Treasury should work with BRICS policy planners to ensure that future projects are explicitly linked to South Africa's national goals in areas such as poverty reduction, education, and healthcare.

- **Improve transparency and accountability:** The BRICS New Development Bank (NDB), in partnership with South Africa's National Treasury, should institute transparent reporting mechanisms and public accountability frameworks for all funded projects.
- **Develop localised social development programs:** Municipalities and provincial departments, in collaboration with BRICS planners, should adapt broader BRICS initiatives to suit the unique needs of local communities.

5.3.3 Strategies for Overcoming Implementation Challenges

Targeted Stakeholders: Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA), National Treasury, Local Government Authorities

- **Streamline bureaucratic procedures:** The DPSA should conduct a review of administrative processes that delay BRICS project implementation and propose reforms that reduce red tape and inefficiency.
- **Establish public-private partnerships (PPPs):** The National Treasury and Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (DTIC) should facilitate PPPs to leverage private sector innovation and financing for BRICS-aligned social programs.
- **Strengthen stakeholder engagement:** Civil society organisations, academic institutions, and local government structures should be included in consultations to foster inclusive participation and reduce resistance to BRICS initiatives.

5.4 Future studies

Future studies could look at comparative analysis comparing BRICS initiatives with those of other international organizations, such as the African Union or the United Nations, to identify best practices and lessons learned in promoting social development.

There could be need to examine existing policy frameworks related to BRICS investments and propose new policies that better align economic initiatives with social development goals. This could include recommendations for enhancing transparency and accountability.

Other research could investigate the mechanisms of technology transfer within BRICS cooperation and its implications for South Africa's innovation landscape. This could focus on sectors such as renewable energy, healthcare, and digital transformation.

Finally other studies could explore the cultural and knowledge-sharing aspects of BRICS collaboration, examining how these elements contribute to social cohesion and mutual understanding among member states.

5.5 Final remarks and conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the multifaceted role of BRICS collaboration in shaping South Africa's development landscape. While BRICS investments in infrastructure and economic growth present significant opportunities for advancement, there remains a critical gap in addressing urgent social issues such as youth unemployment, gender inequality, and poverty alleviation. The findings underscore the importance of a more integrated approach that aligns economic initiatives with social development goals.

Despite the advantages of BRICS, including flexible funding mechanisms and knowledge-sharing opportunities, challenges such as bureaucratic inefficiencies, leadership gaps, and limited grassroots engagement hinder the effective implementation of social programs. The study emphasizes that without a concerted effort to enhance awareness and participation among local communities, the full potential of BRICS collaboration may not be realized.

To maximize the positive impact of BRICS initiatives, it is essential for South Africa to strengthen its governance structures, foster collaboration among stakeholders, and prioritize investments that directly benefit marginalized populations. Future research should focus on assessing the effectiveness of specific BRICS projects, exploring comparative frameworks, and developing policies that promote inclusivity and social equity.

Ultimately, by bridging the gap between economic development and social welfare, South Africa can leverage BRICS collaboration to create a more equitable and sustainable future for all its citizens. This approach not only aligns with the objectives of the National Development Plan 2030 but also reinforces the potential of BRICS as a transformative force in addressing the pressing challenges faced by the nation.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A : Participant Information Sheet (PIS)



University of the Witwatersrand,
School of Human and Community Development, Department of Social Work
1 Jan Smuts Avenue,
Braamfontein 2000,
Johannesburg,
South Africa

Dear Sir / Madam

My name is Melisa Ngcobo I am a Masters student at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. My supervisor is Dr Muleya. I am conducting a research study about the impact of BRICS on social development in South Africa. The study title is Exploring the impact of BRICS collaboration on social development initiatives in South Africa.

I am inviting you to take part in an interview. If you decide to take part, your participation in this research study will last about one hour. The interview will take place online after working hours or based on your availability.

With your permission, I would like to audio record the interview. This data will be stored in a lockable cabin in my office for 5 years and will be deleted thereafter. Only the researcher will have access to the data.

The interview will be confidential and anonymous. When I share the results of the research study, I will not include your name or anything else that could identify you. With your permission, other researchers may use the data collected from this research study, but your name and any personal information will not be used or passed on.

If you decide to take part in the research study, it should be because you want to volunteer. You do not have to take part. You can stop being in the study at any time. You do not have to answer any questions if you do not want to. You will not get any direct benefits if you choose to join the research study. You will not lose any services, benefits or rights you would normally have if you decide not to join. Taking part in the research study will not cost you anything. You will not be paid for being in this research study.

The risks for this research study are no more than what happens in everyday life. This research study will be written up as a research report and publications. The report will be available on the university library website. If you would like to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research study, feel free to contact me or my supervisor on the details listed below. If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical procedures of this research study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Yours sincerely,

Melisa Ngcobo

2897814@students.wits.ac.za

+27 67 769 7682

Supervisor:

Dr Emmison Muleya

emmi.muleya@wits.ac.za

0117174480

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form for Participants

Title of project

Exploring the impact of BRICS collaboration on social development initiatives in South Africa.

Name of researcher: Melisa Ngcobo

I,, agree to participate in this research project.

I agree to the following:

(Please tick the relevant options below)

The research study was explained to me. I understand what this study is about.	YES	NO
I understand that I can volunteer to take part in the study	YES	NO
I agree that the interview may be audio recorded	YES	NO

I agree that direct quotations from my interview may be used by the researcher in their research report	YES	NO
I agree that my participation will remain anonymous (my name or other identifying data will not be used by the researcher in their research report)	YES	NO
I agree that other researchers may use the information I provide in my interview but my name and any personal information will not be used or passed on	YES	NO

..... (signature)
..... (name of participant)
..... (date)

..... (signature)
..... (name of researcher)
..... (date)

Appendix C: Semi-structured interview guide

Demographic characteristics

Sex:

Age:

Education level:

Job title:

Work experience:

Interview questions

What is your basic understanding of BRICS?

What is your understanding of social development in South Africa?

What do you think is the link between BRICS and social development initiatives in South Africa?

How would you describe the current state of collaboration between South Africa and other BRICS countries in the realm of social development initiatives?

From your perspective, what are the key social development initiatives that have been influenced or supported by BRICS collaboration in South Africa?

What are the major challenges faced in implementing BRICS-supported social development initiatives in South Africa?

In your opinion, are there any opportunities that have arisen from these collaborations that might not have been possible otherwise?

In your opinion, what indicators or metrics can be used to assess the effectiveness of BRICS collaborations in promoting social development in South Africa?

How does the BRICS collaboration in social development initiatives align with the national development priorities and strategies of South Africa?

Looking ahead, what do you see as the future prospects for BRICS collaboration in advancing social development initiatives in South Africa?



international relations & cooperation

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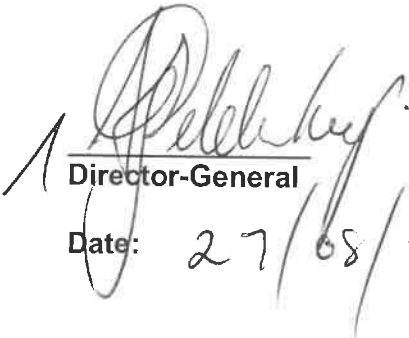
Ms. Melisa Ngcobo
Master of Arts in Social Development
University of Witwatersrand
mellisa.ngcobo@gmail.com
Gauteng
South Africa

Dear Ms M Ngcobo,

Research study: Master of Arts in Social Development at the University of Witwatersrand

The Director-General of the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) approved your request to utilise DIRCO whilst conducting research for the fulfilment of Master of Arts in Social Development Degree at the University of Witwatersrand.

Yours sincerely


Director-General
Date: 27/08/2024.

Appendix E

Ethics Training Certificate

CERTIFICATE OF COMPETENCE IN RESEARCH ETHICS

Name: **Melisa Ngcobo**
Student/Staff No: **2897814**

Date of Certification: 23 January 2024- 22 January 2027 (This certificate is valid for a period of three years)

TRAINED BY:
PROF. JASPER KNIGHT
(RESEARCH ETHICS)
SIGNATURE: 


UNIVERSITY OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG

ISSUED BY:
DR. ROBIN DRENNAN
(DIRECTOR: RESEARCH
OFFICE)
SIGNATURE: 

This certificate is confirmation of successful completion of a training course in Research Ethics for Non-Medical human research, based upon achieving a minimum level of competence in different assessment tasks.

Appendix F Ethical Clearance Certificate



SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ETHICS COMMITTEE
CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

PROTOCOL NUMBER: SW24/08/04

PROJECT TITLE

Exploring the impact of BRICS collaboration on social development initiatives in South Africa

INVESTIGATOR

NGCOBO M

SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR

SOCIAL WORK

DATE CONSIDERED

16 OCTOBER 2024

DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE

APPROVED UNCONDITIONALLY

RISK LEVEL

MINIMAL RISK

EXPIRY DATE

22 OCTOBER 2027

ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE

22 OCTOBER 2024

CHAIRPERSON

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "L. Petersen".

(DR L PETERSEN)

cc: Supervisor: DR E MULEYA

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Chairperson of the School/Department ethics committee.

I fully understand the conditions under which I am authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee.



22 / 10 / 2024 /

Signature

Date