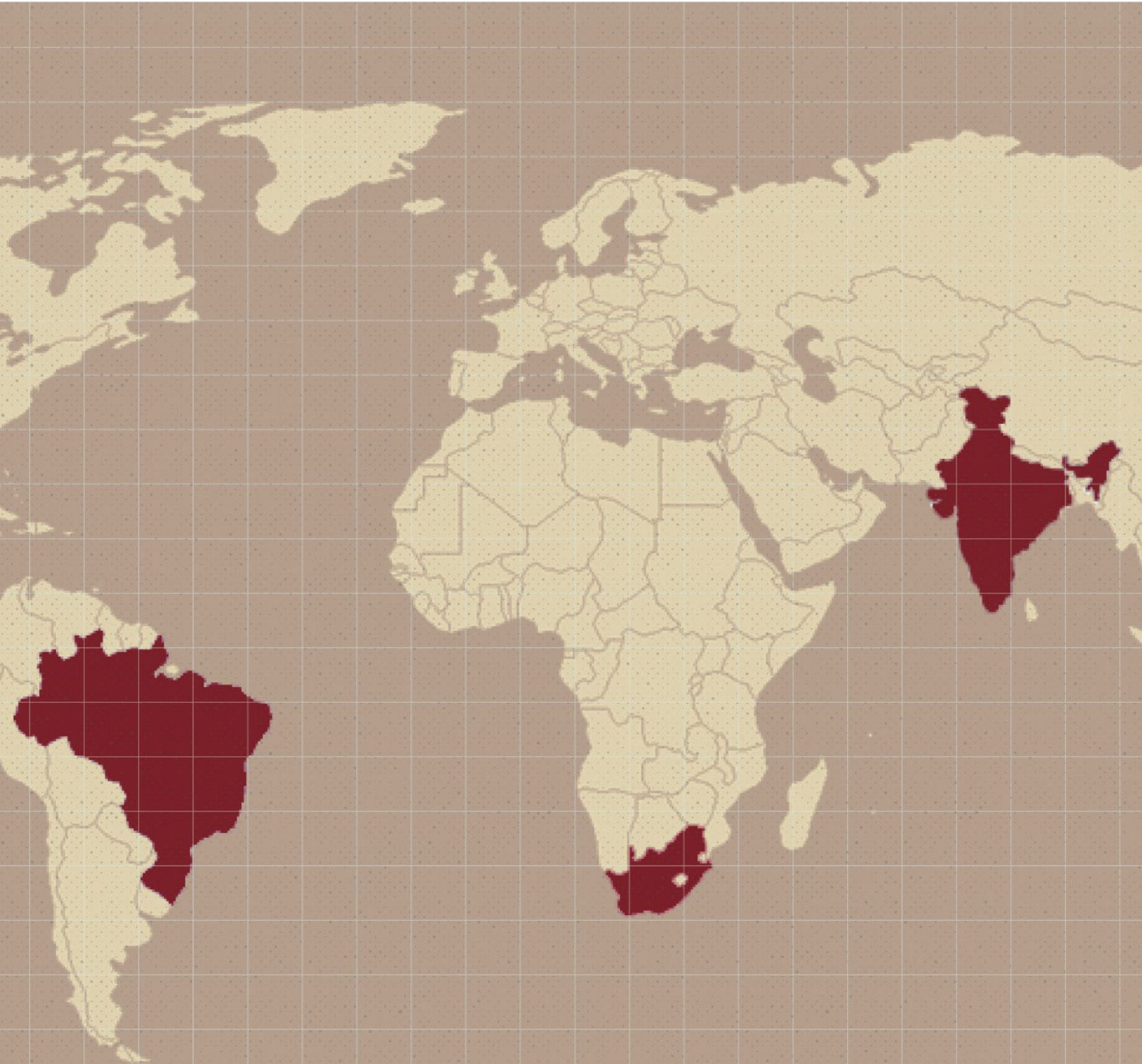


Leveraging IBSA for the G20 Troika Presidencies

by **Rajiv Bhatia**, Distinguished Fellow, Foreign Policy Studies Programme
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November 2023 | Paper No.33





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Printed in India by Airolite Printers

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Acknowledgements

This project was funded by the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. The views and opinions expressed in this paper are solely those of the authors. The Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, has not reviewed this paper. The views expressed within do not reflect the position or opinions of the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India.



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1. Introduction

India's concerted national effort delivered a successful and effective G20 presidency year. On 1 December, 2023, the baton of the Presidency will be handed over to Brazil, and thereafter to South Africa.

India's G20 year success was defined by the presidency's four-fold ability to:

- Address global challenges meaningfully
- Promote the nation's vital interests
- Play its part as the voice, advocate, and leader of the developing world or Global South
- Enhance the centrality of G20 as the premier forum for international economic cooperation and global governance

In the quest for wholesome success, an oft-overlooked but historic coincidence is that the G20 presidency will stay with the three IBSA countries - India, Brazil, and South Africa - till 30 November 2025. This is of relevance and utmost significance.

The principal thesis of this paper is that the IBSA Dialogue Forum is still relevant to its three member-states even though it witnessed its heyday during the century's first decade, followed by a relative slowdown of its activism in subsequent years. India, Brazil and South Africa should use the Forum's past working experience, its principles and philosophy, tools and mechanisms, and above all, its natural solidarity to shape the future trajectory of the G20. This has the potential to shift the G20 away from the dominant G7 agenda and tilt it decidedly towards advancing the interests of developing and emerging economies, more appropriate for the diverse G20 grouping – now made more so by the inclusion of the African Union. The central proposition of this paper is validated by the deliberations and the outcomes of the Voice of the Global South Summits, hosted by India on 12–13 January 2023 and 17 November 2023.

The time is right for India, in consultation with the other two IBSA members to act seriously on this grouping's triple role – policy consultation and coordination, trilateral cooperation, and tangible assistance to the Least Developed Countries (LDCs). This can be achieved by recalling the past gains of IBSA and building upon them in a practical manner as a powerful, co-ordinated G20 troika in 2024. This will ensure that New Delhi, Brasilia and Pretoria will be in a position of strength when dealing with the G7 as well as the P-5 (of the UN Security Council), which have long led global economic agendas.

2. The IBSA imperative

Formation, Evolution of IBSA

At the beginning of the 21st century, the world passed through a 'unipolar moment', but the U.S. dominance on the world stage soon came under question. China's rise and assertiveness were yet to appear.

During this phase of transition, in 2003, three leading and vibrant democracies in their respective continents – India (Asia), Brazil (South America) and South Africa (Africa) – decided to form a new and well-knit multilateral grouping – IBSA – for a clear, common purpose. (Table 1 and 2)

Table 1: IBSA country indicators for 2022

	India	Brazil	South Africa
Land area (thousands sq. km)	2,973	8,358	1,213
Population, total (millions)	1,417	215	59
GDP (constant 2015 billion \$)	2,954	1,901	360
GDP per capita (constant 2015 \$)	2,085	8,831	6,018
GDP growth (annual %)	7	2.9	2.04
Exports of goods and services (constant 2015 billion \$)	648.15	272.31	99.5
Imports of goods and services (constant 2015 billion \$)	768.77	270.47	104.87

Source - World Development Indicators, 2023

Table 2: Intra trade between IBSA countries

EXPORTS IN 2022				
Reporting Country	Partner Country	Exports in billion \$	Total exports with IBSA countries in billion \$	Total exports with IBSA countries as a % of total exports
India	Brazil	9.7	17.9	3.9%
	South Africa	8.2		
Brazil	India	6.3	8	2.3%
	South Africa	1.7		
South Africa	Brazil	0.5	5.7	4.7%
	India	5.2		

IMPORTS IN 2022				
Reporting Country	Partner Country	Imports in billion \$	Total imports with IBSA countries in billion \$	Total imports with IBSA countries as a % of total exports
India	Brazil	7.1	17.2	2.3%
	South Africa	11.1		
Brazil	India	9.6	10.5	3.5%
	South Africa	0.9		
South Africa	Brazil	1.5	9.5	8.5%
	India	8.3		

Source – UN Comtrade database, 2023

The “pioneering” meeting of their foreign ministers resulted in the signing of the Brasilia Declaration on 6 June 2003. The crisp 20-paragraph document spelt out an ambitious agenda delineating common positions on: reform of the United Nations (UN); security and terrorism; need for effective plans and implementation to fight hunger and poverty; promote food security; bridge “a vast digital divide” between developed and developing countries; and work for sustainable development. In addition, they underlined the imperative to ensure that globalisation worked as “a positive force for change for all peoples” and called for a rules-based and transparent international trading system that enables developing countries to maximize their development.

Two decades later, all these issues retain their relevance to the Global South. The foreign ministers’ decision to recommend a summit of their leaders was foresightful.¹

Five Summits

The Forum developed rapidly through five summits held during 2006–2011 (Table 3) and through numerous meetings at the foreign ministers’ level from 2003 to 2023. The next foreign ministers’ meeting is planned for the first quarter of 2024 in Brazil.²

Table 3: Past IBSA summits

Year	Date	Host Country	Host leader	Location
2006	13 September, 2006	Brazil	Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva	Brasília
2007	17 October 2007	South Africa	Thabo Mbeki	Pretoria
2008	15 October 2008	India	Manmohan Singh	New Delhi
2010	15 April 2010	Brazil	Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva	Brasília
2011	18 October 2011	South Africa	Jacob Zuma	Pretoria

Source – IBSA website

IBSA created new, unprecedented solidarity among three democracies, which led them to formulate, and project coordinated positions on key foreign policy issues. And it created new institutional mechanisms and habits of trilateral cooperation in over a dozen domains.

The first summit was held in Brasilia in 2006, a seminal gathering of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, and President Thabo Mbeki. IBSA not only played an important role in the foreign policies of the three countries, but it also provided “a framework that will give additional impetus to further contacts between Asian, South American and African developing countries, thus contributing to strengthening South-South cooperation.”³

At the top of that meeting’s priority was UN reforms. They articulated clearly, a common position⁴ that as developing countries, the UN’s actions or inactions impact all three at many levels and the central theme was the expansion of the Security Council “without which no reform of the UN will be complete.” On other international issues, there were shared perspectives but as in the case of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) declarations, this displayed the same weakness of holding forth on a multiplicity of topics without implementation of actionable points.

On trilateral cooperation, they showed an inclination towards practical orientation forged through periodic dialogue, signing of MoUs, conceiving and implementing projects in 14 areas of common interest.

The fifth and the last leaders’ summit in Tshwane, South Africa had a unique conjunction, with all three countries serving as non-permanent members of the UNSC. The harder the three pressed for UNSC reform, the more resistance they encountered.^{5,6}

In subsequent years, while attempts were made, the sixth summit was not convened. However, considerable action took place through the meetings of Foreign Ministers, especially in the past two years.

Revival of IBSA: Foreign Ministers’ Meetings

In contrast, the foreign ministers of IBSA have been more persistent and resilient in continuing their dialogue either through the formal IBSA Trilateral Ministerial Commission or other meetings held on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly sessions in New York. (Tables 4 and 5.)

Table 4: Trilateral ministerial commission meetings

Meeting	Year	City	Country
1st Meeting	June 6, 2003	Brasilia	Brazil
2nd Meeting	March 11, 2005	Cape Town	South Africa
3rd Meeting	March 30, 2006	Rio de Janeiro	Brazil
4th Meeting	July 17, 2007	New Delhi	India
5th Meeting	May 11, 2008	Somerset West	South Africa
6th Meeting	September 1, 2009	Brasilia	Brazil
7th Meeting	March 8, 2011	New Delhi	India
8th Meeting	October 17, 2017	Durban	South Africa
9th Meeting	September 27, 2018	New York	U.S.
10th Meeting	September 21, 2022	New York	U.S.
11th Meeting	September 22, 2023	New York	U.S.

Source – IBSA website

Table 5: Foreign ministers' meetings

Date	City	Country
September 23, 2004	New York	U.S.
September 26, 2007	New York	U.S.
September 27, 2010	New York	U.S.
February 11, 2011	New York	U.S.
September 23, 2011	New York	U.S.
September 26, 2014	New York	U.S.
September 21, 2017	New York	U.S.
June 4, 2018	Pretoria	South Africa
September 27, 2019	New York	U.S.
September 16, 2020	New Delhi	India

Source – IBSA website

It is here that G20 issues were brought up. The meeting in October 2017 called for “full implementation of previous G20 summits outcomes and development commitments, including that of the Hamburg Summit and Hangzhou Summit.”⁷ With the German G20 goals aligning with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), IBSA too found alignment. On sectoral cooperation, it cleared the proposal to streamline and cluster IBSA working groups in conjunction with the Agenda 2030, along with social, economic, and environmental pillars. The foreign ministers' meeting in New York in September 2020 again reiterated IBSA's common position on UNSC reform.⁸

The G20 summits hosted by South Korea, Germany, China, and Indonesia did have a varying degree of focus on the development agenda of the developing countries. IBSA foreign ministers had to recognize and encourage this positive trend. But so far it has proved to be of nominal value, without much real impact. The recent meeting of the foreign ministers, on 21 September 2022, held in the backdrop of the Ukraine war, energy and food crisis especially for developing countries, found resonance and revived the *raison d'être* of IBSA within its own membership.⁹

The latest meeting on 22 September 2023, which marked 20 years of the creation of IBSA, was substantive and a curtain-raiser for what IBSA can achieve as the G20 troika. The discussions were broad, focusing on multilateral organizations, South-South cooperation, UNSC and WTO reform, Agenda 2030, climate change, countering terrorism, international trade and investment, food security and financing for developmental activities. In the context of the troika, the ministers also agreed to coordinate on issues of common interest, such as international trade and investment, environment and climate change, counterterrorism, social inclusion and food security, development issues, health and education. Geopolitical tensions and regional issues like the aftermath of COVID-19 pandemic, debt vulnerability in developing countries and new and emerging technologies, were also analysed.¹⁰ A singular IBSA goal, of bringing the African Union into the G20, was achieved under the Indian presidency.

Maritime Exercises

A significant success has been the seven maritime exercises between IBSA nations. The first IBSAMAR was held in 2008, with a goal to achieve training and operational compatibility among the participating navies.

Six IBSAMARs have been held since and intensified, now including aircraft and special forces. They enhance the shared democratic values, economic interests and maritime cooperation of the three countries. In particular, sharing of best practices in interoperability and security cooperation has helped the safety of shipping in key areas of maritime movement in the Indian Ocean and beyond.

IBSAMAR naturally promotes South-South cooperation, as it is one of the very few trilateral exercises that does not involve the Global North.

Table 6: IBSAMAR Exercises

Edition	Date	Location
I	May 2-6, 2008	South Africa
II	September 13-17, 2010	South Africa
III	October 10-26, 2012	South Africa
IV	October 20-November 7, 2014	Simons Town, South Africa
V	February 19-29, 2016	Goa, India
VI	October 1-13, 2018	Simons Town, South Africa
VII	October 10-12, 2022	Port Elizabeth, South Africa

Source – Ministry of Defence, Government of India

3. IBSA in the G20: Building on Gains, filling the gaps

The G20 today is divided within itself. The G7 is preoccupied with its geopolitical issues, and the rest are focused on restoring a global governance reform agenda which has changed since 2008 when the G20 first came together. Technology, wars in West Asia, migration, decline of UN's capacity, rise of China and lately the attempts of the G7 to isolate Russia and China have altered global compulsions. It has narrowed the gap between developing and developed nations and changed the priorities of developed nations like the U.S. and Europe.

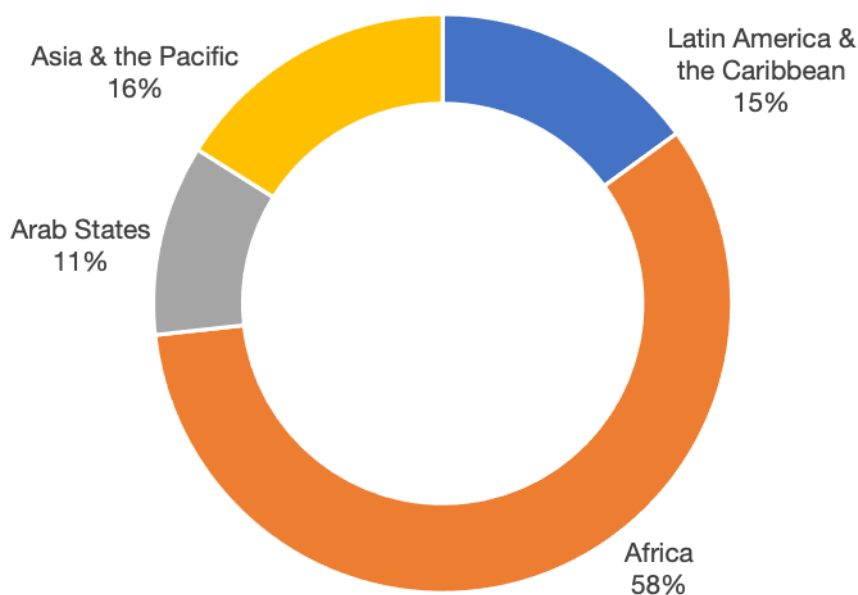
This, therefore, is an opportune time for IBSA to find ways to collaborate within the G20, which has now become a central assembly of world affairs and more important than ever.

This is possible because IBSA has **legitimacy**. Extensive consultations and pro-active coordination of positions on global and regional issues by the foreign ministers has provided IBSA a profile on the international stage. It is now viewed as an authentic representation of the major players in the developing world, at a time when other developing country platforms such as the NAM and G77 have lost appeal and influence. This is of considerable value in the context of the successive G20 presidencies of the three member-states.

Second, through the many wordy joint declarations of IBSA, there was a solid implementing endeavor, for instance, the **IBSA Fund** (Figures 1, 2 and 3), set up in 2004 for poverty alleviation and economic improvement through small scale development projects.

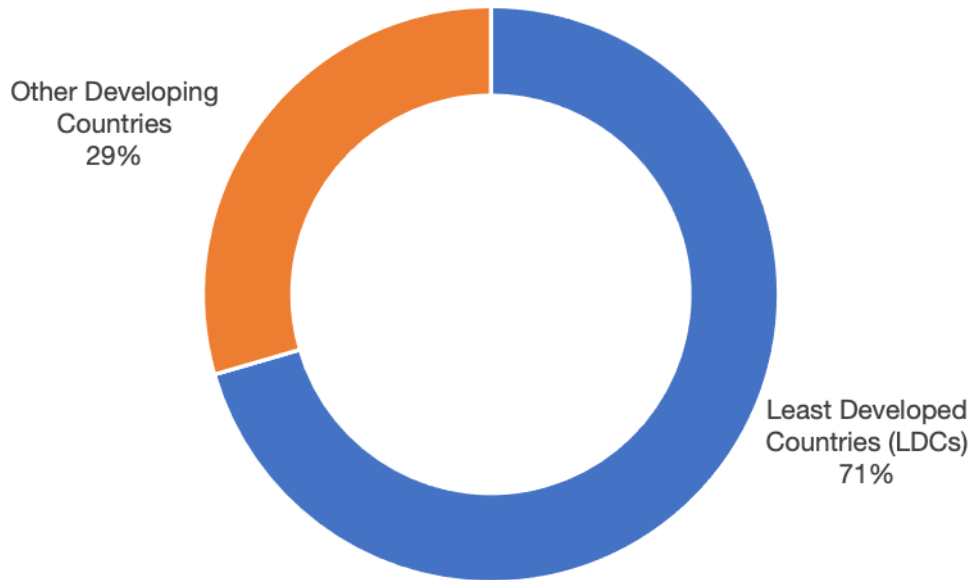
Figure 1

(a) Budget Allocation by region, 2004-2022



Source - IBSA Fund annual report 2022

(b) Budget allocations, by development classification of countries, 2004-2022



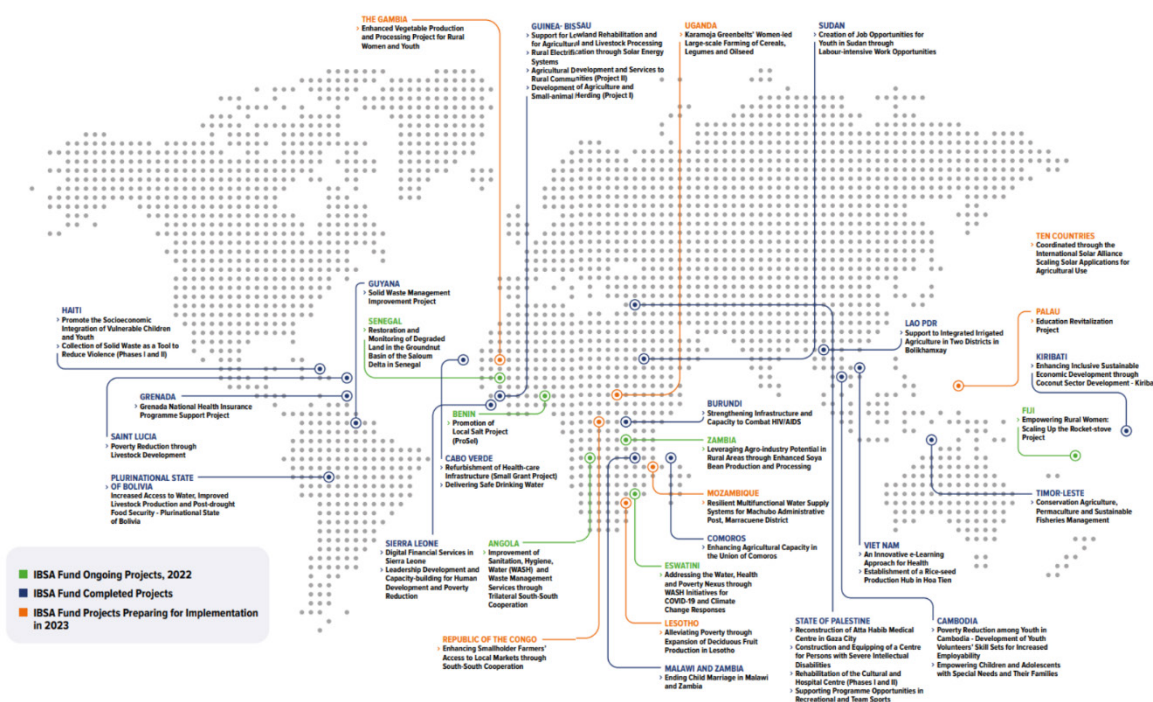
Source - IBSA Fund annual report 2022

Figure 2: IBSA fund cumulative revenue and delivery



Source: IBSA Fund annual report 2022

Figure 3: Development impact of the IBSA Fund across the world



Source:- IBSA Fund annual report 2022

Though small,¹¹ it has been implemented. According to the latest available information, the Fund disbursed \$46 million, supporting 42 development projects in 36 countries. As of 2022, six projects are on-going, 29 are completed and seven are under preparation for implementation.¹² India has been a regular contributor, having contributed over \$15 million since the Fund's inception. The Fund has supported communities outside the trilateral, be it farmers, youth, indigenous populations, and women from Bolivia and Cambodia to Comoros and Fiji.

But the fund size is not enough to make a significant impact and must now be expanded. This should be on the agenda for the next leaders' summit.¹³

Third is **China's economic rise** and attitude towards IBSA. As China's economic strength and political ambition grew, it first saw IBSA as a potentially useful platform to advance its strategic interests and attempted to join the Forum. South Africa approved China's entry into IBSA around 2007-08, but Brazil and India opposed it on the ground that it was a grouping for vibrant democracies only. This made Beijing change track. It offered help to South Africa in entering BRIC – formally established in 2009 – and then succeeded in persuading Brazil, Russia, and India to do so similarly. The rise of BRICS overwhelmed IBSA and sent it into a decline.

BRICS benefitted greatly from IBSA, adopting and replicating many of its parts including the working methods and mechanisms. For example, the former held regular summits, followed by ministerial meetings which propelled the implementation of various decisions by the leaders and ministers.

Now, with China's growing assertiveness and practical domination of BRICS, the diminishing of Russia as a major power due to the protracted war in Ukraine and the need to balance the domineering role of G7 within G20, stakeholders in IBSA are convinced of the trilateral's rejuvenation, for its own interests and to introduce a better and more workable balance within BRICS as well as the G20.

India's Presidency has placed the principal concerns of the Global South on the G20 agenda – the same as those of IBSA.¹² Some shared concerns relate to reform of multilateral institutions, requisite measures to counter climate change and assistance to developing countries for economic recovery and development.

4. The G20 Troika: a three-year Presidency

IBSA now comprises the G20 troika.. On its agenda are the fulfillment of the many promises made to the Global South by the G20, and IBSA's own ambitions for what it wants to lead and achieve. This advantage was recognised by the IBSA secretariat in September 2022 and 2023, planning for the presidencies to “steer the G20 Agenda and work with a developmental perspective,” coordinating on areas of “common interest, including health, international trade and investments, environment and climate change, counterterrorism, transnational crime and development issues.”¹⁵

Some of this was already initiated under India's G20 Presidency. The Voice of the Global South Summit¹⁶ was held virtually on 12-13 January, 2023, and again on 17 November 2023. The goal was to ensure that developing countries feel better engaged with the G20 process¹⁷ and, in turn, the G20 can produce better results to promote “human-centric-development.” This theme of equity was continued through the year and reiterated by the admission of the African Union as a permanent member of the G20 and across all the Sherpa Tracks, Finance Tracks and Engagement Group meetings held from Kashmir¹⁸ to Kerala.

The G20 has made commitments to the developing world since 2013. There is a clear overlap with IBSA's own agenda, visible in several areas from health to energy, digital inclusion, sustainable development, and reformed multilateralism. Ready for inclusion by IBSA, are the rule-making agendas of trade and investment and international financial architecture. Brazil and South Africa are trading nations, and India, with its new trading agreements, now will be an active partner.

For now, IBSA as a G20 troika can focus on five areas of immediate importance and agreement: finance, digitalisation, health, energy transitions and multilateral reforms.

RECOMMENDATIONS

• Finance

The IBSA Fund must expand in resources as well as its mandate. Its scope should grow to enable and empower entrepreneurs who can transform their home countries. India's tech start-up sector, which now boasts over 100 unicorns worth over \$300 billion¹⁹, shows how new ideas can drive the economy. Brazil has a similarly vibrant tech start-up sector with 19 unicorns.²⁰ These have been enabled by easy access to funds via venture capital and private equity, not easily available in smaller emerging market economies. The IBSA Fund can play a key role by co-investing in promising ideas, enabling bottom-up innovation in the Global South.

This means the IBSA Fund, which has so far disbursed \$46 million, must be upsized to at least \$250 million. At that level, the fund can invest in multiple promising ideas, while remaining at a manageable size. Successful and credible tech entrepreneurs such as Sanjeev Bikhchandani (founder of Naukri.com) and Cristina Junqueira (founder of Brazil's Nubank) can be advisors to this fund.

There is a need for financing appropriate infrastructure at an affordable cost and without geopolitical agendas, for the Global South countries. The existing global financial institutions base their lending decisions on criteria driven by values and priorities of the Global North, locking out the smaller emerging economies. For example, Multilateral Development Banks such as the ADB and the World Bank provide low-cost loans, but won't fund technologies such as coal, which are still needed in the emerging world. China's Belt and Road Initiative has a different model of building infrastructure in the emerging world, but at an unaffordable cost.

An IBSA Bank can serve this purpose. It can operate like the Asian Development Bank or the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, providing low-cost loans for infrastructure, with proper oversight, but without excluding technologies such as coal. Like the NDB (formerly BRICS Bank), the IBSA Bank can invite non-IBSA countries to become shareholders and members, while ensuring there is no dilution of the bank's focus. The IBSA Fund can be made a part of the IBSA Bank, where it can play a funding role similar to that which the International Finance Corporation does within the World Bank Group.

• Digitalisation

Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) was India's offering to the G20. DPI encourages and accelerates private and public innovation and provides digital access and equity to the very poorest - a G20 goal.

The three elements of India's DPI²¹ are the foundational ID (Aadhar), the UPI (Unified Payments Interface), and DEPA (Data Empowerment and Protection Architecture). This is enabled by the India Stack, an open-source framework established over ten years. It is a joint effort by citizens, enabled by the government and has brought India to seamless, reliable, replicable and low-cost digital inclusion, tested at scale. It lowers the cost of transactions for individuals, businesses and governments and permits for the safe sharing of personal data without compromising privacy, a top G7 concern. India's direct benefit transfers scheme, built using foundational DPIs, has so far saved \$29 billion²² by preventing leakages in subsidy transfers – funds which have been reinvested for improvement in health, education, sanitation.

This is a replicable model and there is work to be done. Brazil and South Africa have varying degrees of digital inclusion. Brazil through Pix, a fast-payment system, and South Africa through the use of digital wallets. Both are growing exponentially. In 2021, while Pix saw 1.2 million transactions per month, a fourth of India's UPI, the value of the transactions of both were an estimated \$100 million each.²³

Brazil's system is closest to India's. Pix was established by Brazil's central Bank in 2020²⁴, and now provides 85% of its population access to financial services. Pix is also used to pay for social programmes like CadUnico and Bolsa Familia.²⁵

South Africa is the continent's most advanced country for digital payments, but it lags behind India and Brazil considerably. The potential for e-payments in South Africa is estimated at \$5 billion per year by 2025. However, these are mostly wallets, or mobile money. None have been mandated or developed by the country's central bank.

India has already progressed in making available the framework, open networks and details of its DPI to other countries including two in Africa – Rwanda and Morocco. The foundational ID, or Aadhar, is available for adoption through the Modular Open-Source Identity Platform (MOSIP)²⁶, which operates out of the Indian Institute of Information Technology in Bengaluru and has among its supporters and funders, the World Bank. The Unified Payments Interface (UPI) has not yet been made open source, but with Brazil having a similar system, it too can be adapted. Countries like Singapore, the UAE and Nepal already accept it. India and Brazil can help South Africa develop a similar system. The final and third fit comes from the Data Empowerment and Protection Architecture or DEPA, the consent layer that enables a user to control their data and how it can be used, whether for commercial, healthcare or other socio-economic services. Brazil does not yet have this, and South Africa is some distance away. This is now available for adoption by other countries through India's offerings.

How can IBSA benefit? Through the sharing and exchange of systems and best practices. This can be institutionalized within IBSA and will have a powerful demonstration effect across Latin America and the African continent.

It will also reduce the overweening presence and pressure of the private western players in technology in all three countries and scale up and share the benefits of this open source and affordable system with developing countries, through the IBSA partnership.

• Healthcare

Two of the three IBSA countries have specific strengths in healthcare: India and Brazil.

1. India's pharma sector is a model. Its vaccine diplomacy in Brazil and South Africa has already been appreciated. Indian companies are looking for greater market access in these two countries. But to truly establish trust, Indian pharma must also build facilities in those countries so that they may attain self-sufficiency. This will require cooperation of the private sector, and incentives from all three governments, especially from India.

At the geopolitical level, there has already been joint traction on a critical healthcare-related issue. India and South Africa's joint advocacy for TRIPS flexibilities in trade, Covid and the broader health context, has provided global benefits but now, with Brazil's support, both countries can seek to extend the TRIPS patent waiver to cover therapeutics and diagnostics. This will make IBSA a powerful alliance at the WTO.²⁷

2. Brazil can offer much to an IBSA healthcare partnership. Its 100-year-old healthcare system began with protection for the private sector.²⁸ It was socialized in the 1970s to cover the informal sector. Sistema Único de Saúde (SUS) is now a right for all, with national health identification cards facilitating its operation. Quality of care and proper monitoring of activities has lowered infant mortality rates, increased immunization, improved life expectancy and lowered hospitalisation. The Bolsa Familia is an admired public sector programme, a conditional cash transfer system which links education and health.

There are challenges of course, as noted by a 2021 OECD report.²⁹

However, these are being overcome by a digital transformation of Brazil's health³⁰ system through a National Digital Health Strategy 2020-2028.³¹ The goal is to have an open ecosystem of health care data sharing. Brazil's Electronic Health Records systems can be shared across the system. It integrates multiple software platforms used by various healthcare providers, with the country's National Health Data Network. This gives users the choice of sharing their records – or not; it encourages transparency, provides speedy and focused care, and aims to stimulate competition in the health insurance sector.

India too is developing a Health Stack, with the Ayushman Bharat Yojana³², similar to Brazil's Bolsa Familia³³ and is studying Brazil's National Digital Health Strategy. Sharing of best practices will benefit both.

Brazil and India can bring their technology and systems to South Africa – offering a use case for the global South. It is also adaptable across the G20 countries.

• Energy Transitions

Brazil is a major producer of biofuel, and India also has an ambitious program on use of biofuels in transport. Joint research in this field, including on conversion of agricultural waste to ethanol and biofuel refineries relating to second generation (2G) technologies, which use non-food biomass, can be undertaken by the IBSA. This will have the dual benefit of increasing agricultural incomes and reducing the vulnerability to global energy price fluctuations. India launched the Global Biofuel Alliance on the sidelines of the G20 Leaders' Summit, to promote use of sustainable biofuels, including in the transport sector³⁴. Biomass to energy conversion will benefit emerging economies with a large agricultural base.

The IBSA countries can collaborate to promote promising new renewable technologies via new business models utilizing local entrepreneurial innovations. India has seen a large number of tech startups come up in the past decade, powered by a venture-capital and private equity ecosystem. IBSA countries can seed a venture fund with a focus of investing in green technologies and business models being developed locally. Successful ideas can be expanded to other IBSA members and the larger community of emerging economies. This dovetails with G20's priority of improving energy financing worldwide; however, insufficient resources for energy transition are an issue for the emerging economies. Setting up a venture capital fund to increase the risk capital available to entrepreneurs in these countries can help offset this imbalance partially.

IBSA remains a representative forum, reflecting the interests, concerns, and views of developing countries from Asia, Africa and Latin America. Through greater solidarity and heightened activism, IBSA members can empower the Global South and help to tilt the balance in favour of developing countries in their interaction with advanced economies (G7).

• Reformed Multilateralism/UNSC reforms

Two of the three IBSA countries have an established interest in being permanent members of the UN Security Council – India and Brazil. The third, South Africa, supports this. This will be a test for the IBSA G20 Presidencies. The G20 has been advocating for “reinvigorated multilateralism” which does not include new permanent members in the UNSC. Reformed multilateralism does.

A sea of differences divides the two concepts. “Reinvigorated multilateralism” is content with putting some extra energy into the current web of multilateral institutions which have been in existence since 1945 but refuses to recognize their fundamental shortcomings. “Reformed multilateralism” entails and demands a substantive reform of key institutions so that they become more representative, more democratic, and better designed to help humankind confront present challenges. The need for a “New Orientation for a Multilateral System” (NORMS) proposed by India in December 2022, arises from a widely-shared recognition that the global order should reflect “contemporary realities.”³⁵

The Inter-Governmental Negotiations (IGN) on the UNSC reform were unanimously launched by the UNGA in 2007. This has borne no fruit. The IGN suffers from serious flaws: no negotiations take place, it works without a text, an agreed procedure or an accepted deadline.³⁶

The G20 has a special responsibility, and IBSA as the G20 troika offers a runway for take-off. Despite the current polarization in the G20, multilateral reform particularly in the UNSC, is achievable and should receive priority attention.. The goal: to agree on the inclusion of a substantive paragraph on UNSC reform in the communique for the Leaders' Summit under Brazil's G20 Presidency. A para similar to the balanced formulation agreed upon recently by the Quad foreign ministers represents a solid way forward.³⁷

The proposal: a clear commitment to the concept of “reformed multilateralism”, for creating a truly representative, democratic, and expanded UNSC (in both permanent and non-permanent categories), call for intensification of the IGN negotiations based on a written text, adhering to agreed procedures, and working towards a one-year deadline of December 2025, before the end of the South African G20 presidency and the beginning of the U.S one.

To negotiate the proposed paragraph, IBSA, as the G20 troika should convene, as soon as possible, a special meeting of the Sherpas, Foreign Secretaries and Permanent Representatives to the UN of all G20 countries and the Guest countries. Through candid, constructive, and closed-door discussions, a meaningful formulation should be drafted that is acceptable to most, if not all participants. Differences, if any, can be resolved later through the top leaders' engagement at the summit.

5. Ways & Means

IBSA as the G20 troika can work on finance, digitalisation, energy transitions, healthcare and reformed multilateralism: all five already led during India's presidency, three (digitalization, energy transition and reformed multilateralism) during Brazil's and two (digitalization and reformed multilateralism) during South Africa's. The countries all bring strengths: India in digital and pharma, a vibrant financial market with start-up capacity and G20 Presidency heft. Brazil is resource-rich and a trading nation with negotiating skills. So is South Africa, with its privileged access to all 55 countries in its continent. All three have human and diplomatic talent but lack adequate capital and investment.

Within the G20 grouping, IBSA must also deftly manage and leverage other relationships.

IBSA AND THE G7 (GLOBAL NORTH):

Within the western developed world, there is growing recognition about IBSA's uniqueness to promote democracy and development.

The three presidencies, working together, can hold the advanced economies of the G20 to their specific promises for the South such as climate finance, healthcare, UN reform and SDG goals, especially in light of a global economic slowdown, an unabated pandemic, and the war in Ukraine.

IBSA AND THE GLOBAL SOUTH:

1. IBSA must fulfill and expand its own commitments to South-South cooperation, knowledge-sharing, and capacity-building as the Global South is gaining more visibility and influence;³⁸
2. Develop working cooperation and a stable, focused continuation of the G20 agenda of their preference through 2025.

IBSA AND BRICS:

The BRICS agenda, focusing on global trade, reforms of multilaterals and Bretton Woods institutions converge with IBSA. However democratic development is where both the groupings do not see eye to eye, as China differs on development being linked to democracy. In addition, the wars in Ukraine and West Asia have put China and Russia in a bloc against the West. A stronger and more visible IBSA will create better balance within BRICS, thus curbing China's growing dominance in the grouping.

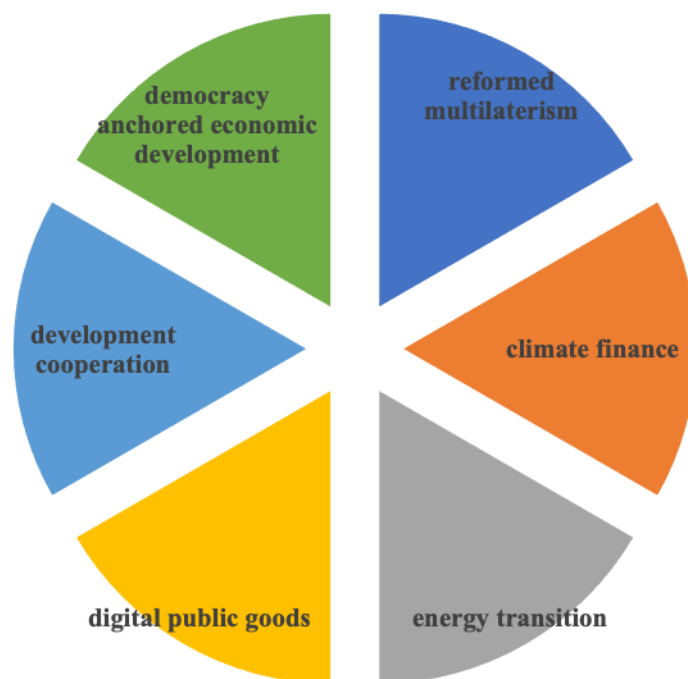
IBSA can therefore be a formal caucus within BRICS and push for global democracy, country equality and ecologically sustainable development.³⁹

INDIA IN IBSA

There are several ways to achieve these goals under the G20 Troika:

1. Expand the IBSA Fund to a \$250 million, to enable significant and scaleable investments.
2. Work together to integrate the African Union into the G20 so that by 2025, under the South African presidency, it can be a full contributor.
3. Ensure that recommendations by the Indian side are taken forward with relevant senior officials in Brazil and South Africa, so that the three foreign ministers are fully on board for the IBSA Summit in early 2024.

Figure 1 : Common focus areas for IBSA in G20 presidencies



Source – IBSA website

Appendix I: IBSA Appraisal

Experts broadly agree that in its two decades of existence (2003–2023), the IBSA Dialogue Forum secured several tangible gains, some ephemeral, and others longer-lasting.

In the first category appears a long series of energetic efforts to forge trilateral cooperation between the member-states, driven by the fundamental calculation that closer cooperation in specific areas would create greater synergy and a stronger grouping. At the first summit, only six areas were selected for this purpose: energy, agriculture, transportation, trade, science, technology and information security, and public administration. This list was eventually expanded to as many as 14 sectors, each piloted by a working group. These working groups were reinforced by six people-to-people forums. A complete list of areas of trilateral cooperation was presented at the third summit in 2008.

Through frequent meetings at officials and ministerial levels, the signing of MOUs and Agreements (Appendix II), the undertaking of a few projects, and the growing engagement with business leaders, civil society, and parliamentarians, the quantum of trilateral cooperation was indeed expanded during the first decade.

In subsequent years, however, once the non-engagement of the highest political leaders with the Forum became apparent, endeavours in this field slowly petered out.

Appendix II: List of agreements/ MOUs signed by IBSA countries

1. Memorandum of Understanding on Trilateral Co-operation in Agriculture and Allied Fields under the IBSA Dialogue Forum Initiative.
2. Memorandum of Understanding on Cultural Cooperation
3. Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the Field of Higher Education.
4. Memorandum of Understanding on Establishing a Trilateral Task Team on Biofuels.
5. Memorandum of Understanding among the Government of the Republic of South Africa, the Government of the Republic of India and the Government of the Federative Republic of Brazil on Cooperation in Wind Resources
6. Memorandum of Understanding among the Government of the Republic of South Africa, the Government of the Federative Republic of Brazil and the Government of the Republic of India on Cooperation in the Area of Solar Energy
7. Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the field of Environment under the India Brazil South Africa Dialogue Forum.
8. Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the Field of Health and Medicine
9. Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the field of Human Settlements Development.
10. Framework for Co-operation on the Information Society.
11. Memorandum of Understanding on Co-operation in the Field of Public Administration and Governance
12. Agreement on Customs and Tax Administration Co-operation
13. Memorandum of Understanding on Trilateral Cooperation in Science, Technology and Innovation among the Government of the Republic of South Africa , the Government of the Republic of India and the Government of the Federative Republic of Brazil
14. Memorandum of Understanding on Co-operation in the Field of Social Issues
15. Tripartite Agreement on Co-operation in the Field of Tourism under the IBSA Dialogue Forum
16. Action Plan on Trade Facilitation for Standards, Technical Regulations and Conformity Assessment
17. Memorandum of Understanding on Trade Facilitation for Standards, Technical Regulations and Conformity Assessment
18. Trilateral Agreement concerning Merchant Shipping and other Maritime Transport Related Matters
19. Five year Action Plan on IBSA Civil Aviation Projects
20. Five year Action Plan on IBSA Maritime Projects
21. Memorandum of Understanding on Co-operation in the Field of Women's Development and Gender Equality Programmes
22. Agreement on the IBSA Fund for the Alleviation of Poverty and Hunger.
23. MoU for the Creation of IBSA CETI

Source – IBSA website

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