

## **RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE BRICS LEADERS CIVIL BRICS FORUM 2020**

### ***Advancing BRICS People-to-People Cooperation for Sustainable Future***

September 25, 2020

Moscow, Russia

#### **PREAMBLE**

We the participants to the BRICS Civil Forum highly appreciate the decision of the BRICS leaders to maintain a permanent consultative process with representatives of civil society of the BRICS member states and to continue holding the annual BRICS Civil Forum as an event included in the official calendar of the BRICS chairmanship.

We the representatives of the civil society of the BRICS countries stand for the peaceful progressive development of our countries, for the recognition of the central role of the UN in international development, and for the consolidation of BRICS positions on key issues on the international agenda.

The BRICS civil format allows for consistent and constructive interaction between civil society representatives within the group of «five» as well as guarantees a constant constructive dialogue between the authorities and citizens within BRICS on current issues, prospects and development paths of the member states and the entire group. The participation of a large number of representatives of the non-profit sector, civil society activists, scientists, representatives of socially responsible business and the media in solving these tasks ensures that the positions of civil society are communicated to the BRICS governments and increases the degree of confidence in decisions made within the group of «five». Such interaction contributes to opening the foreign policy of the countries to public control, democratizes access to the public international discussion on socially significant issues, helps to unite the practices of civil society and develop common approaches of the BRICS member states in response to modern challenges.

The COVID-19 pandemic has proved that civil society participation becomes critically important in enabling states to quickly and effectively address new challenges. In the BRICS countries, CSOs, NGOs and individual activists have been highly engaged in programmes to help the most vulnerable groups, in assisting medical volunteers to support patients and health workers in hospitals, in research and testing of vaccines and in supporting citizens in other countries who remained abroad during the border closure. Non-profit organisations, media and scientists participated in information and prevention campaigns and timely information notification. Under the most challenging conditions, these combined efforts of the civil society helped to slow down the spread of the virus in the BRICS countries and significantly consolidate government measures to combat the pandemic and its consequences.

The pandemic changed many approaches, practices and mechanisms in institutions and the society, and its consequences will continue to affect the lives of people and states for a long time to come.

In 2020, we dedicated the work of the Civil Forum to the key topics of BRICS development in the light of the new challenges of the post-COVID era. These topics include food security, healthcare, education and science, human capital development, labour legislation during digital transformation, sustainable development, climate change, agriculture, women's agenda, and the struggle to ensure the quality of information in the era of fake news and post-truth.

Our work resulted in a compendium of recommendations that we developed as part of working groups following online meetings and seminars as well as during discussions on the sidelines of the BRICS Civil Forum on September 23-25, 2020 in Moscow. Below we list our proposals and call upon the leaders of the BRICS countries to pay special attention to them.

We hope that our voice will be heard, and the Civil BRICS will remain a significant BRICS mechanism and will take place routinely as part of the regular chairmanships of the five member states.

## **I. FOOD SECURITY AS AN ELEMENT OF NATIONAL SECURITY IN THE CONTEXT OF OVERCOMING THE IMPACT OF COVID-19**

### ***Food and Healthcare Civil BRICS Working group***

Food security is an indispensable element of national security in the BRICS community, as well as international security, and is especially important in the context of overcoming the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ensuring food security is a systemic challenge to reach every country and every human being with the solution starting at the global level. The BRICS community can become a stabilizing force for the global food market and a source of food security support for countries where climatic conditions are unfavorable for agricultural production.

The BRICS community addresses food security challenges at the three levels: global, regional, and national. While the issues and tasks at the global level remain the same, the priorities of states on regional and national levels vary. In China and India, special attention is paid to modernizing agricultural policies to bring hunger rates closer to zero. In Brazil, the focus is on fighting hunger, improving food systems, and adapting to climate change. In South Africa, the role of youth in the agriculture and food sector of the economy has become a priority, and small-scale farming is also developing. The priority task for Russia is accelerating development of the agro-industrial complex and import substitution.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a global crisis that has already affected the food and agriculture sector. Urgent response is needed to keep food supply chains functioning both within

the BRICS community and internationally in order to mitigate the risk of major shocks that could significantly impact everyone, especially the poor and most vulnerable communities.

Members of the Food and Health Working Group are proposing the following measures to BRICS leaders to avoid the worst consequences in the current global economic situation:

1. Famine relief has been recognized as the priority task of international economic cooperation among the states. It has been included in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development under the second Sustainable Development Goal (SDG). Eradication of hunger requires political action with a multilateral approach. Depending on the specific conditions in a particular BRICS country, requirements may vary from greater agricultural productivity and secured market access to investing in family farming, small-scale fisheries, and forestry. It is crucial to promote proper land use and natural resource management in order to address the issues of nutrition using social security mechanisms, to eliminate gender inequalities, improve monitoring and coordination mechanisms in the area of food security and nutrition, and invest in education, health, water supply, and sanitation. As country-level social systems become more efficient, sustainable, and nutritionally responsive, government promises to eradicate hunger within the lifetime of this generation can be fulfilled.
2. The governments of the BRICS need to adapt and expand social security programs for those at risk of food insecurity. This also implies the need to support children who do not have access to organized school meals.
3. The governments of the BRICS countries must abandon inappropriate subsidies for food consumers and use those funds to support the incomes of the most vulnerable groups and ensure their access to food. It is also possible to reduce import tariffs and other restrictions (temporary reduction of VAT and other taxes), which for many countries is an important regulation tool affecting food pricing.
4. The spread of the COVID-19 may have an extremely negative impact on the operations of small and medium-sized farms, as they may be cut off from markets where they sell their products or purchase consumables and technical resources. The governments of the BRICS community shall support the livelihoods of small food producers, in particular to maintain their liquidity and ensure access to resources.
5. The BRICS community needs to increase support for the food processing sector, transport sector, and local food markets. It also needs to keep trade corridors open to ensure continuity in the functioning of food systems.
6. The governments of the BRICS and the financial mechanisms created within the framework of the “five” partnership, both should provide financial and technological support in the food manufacturing sector. Using the shared technological developments and the cooperation of the “five” to introduce advanced technologies in national agricultural production will significantly increase agricultural productivity and strengthen national agro-industrial complexes. At the same time, securing intellectual property rights in the agricultural sector must strike a balance between the common good of humankind and stimulating innovation.
7. The general demand for food and other agricultural products continues to grow, reflecting dietary changes driven by population and income growth, as well as accelerated urbanization. That leads to an unstable dietary structure in the BRICS community with an increasing incidence of food-related diseases. In this regard, the governments of the BRICS community need to develop programs for communicating the nutritional value of foods being consumed, and the diseases associated with malnutrition, in order to educate consumers in BRICS

countries. That is also important for mitigating the effects of poor nutrition, which includes malnutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, excess weight, and obesity.

8. Prospects for solving these food security challenges and increasing food security fall within the scope of interaction between BRICS member states. Since all BRICS countries are actively involved in tackling food security issues at the global level and, moreover, are actively involved in relevant regional processes and with their own national programs, they need to build a multi-level cooperation system. In addition to joint BRICS initiatives, bilateral projects are also needed, especially in regard to local measures for responding to short-term deterioration in the food supply.

## **II. HEALTHCARE SYSTEMS' RESPONSE TO EPIDEMIOLOGICAL THREATS**

### ***Food and Healthcare Civil BRICS Working group***

Cooperation in Healthcare among the BRICS countries represents a prospective mechanism for strengthening healthcare systems, as evidenced by the annual meetings of BRICS Health Ministers. This mechanism provides a valuable platform for countries to share experiences and work together to address key public health challenges. Inter-BRICS health cooperation has the potential to bring about global changes and make a positive contribution to global Public Healthcare. Nevertheless, the dimensions of the impact on global health will depend on the ability of «five» to strengthen the coherence of their strategic actions for development. This will depend on the degree of cooperation between BRICS governments as well.

An outbreak of COVID-19 caused by the 2019 novel coronavirus began in China in December 2019, and has spread to all over the world. The pandemic reveals that global strengthening of capacities and public health emergency preparedness is needed to ensure coordinated and effective response when faced with cross-border health threats.

BRICS countries are ready to resist not only the current national crises, but also to enhance the global healthcare system and to prevent a situation from being repeated in the future. Russia has launched an aid mission «From Russia with Love», in which medicines and necessary equipment were delivered to the most affected countries. India provides pharmaceutical support to more than 85 countries to help them overcome the effects of the pandemic. China has used its production facilities to provide those in need with personal protective equipment as part of «Health Silk Road» humanitarian aid program. South Africa initiated a «Pan-African Response» to COVID-19.

Members of the Working Group «Food and Healthcare» propose the following measures to the leaders of the BRICS countries to address the impact of the pandemic and strengthen prevention systems for global infectious threats:

1. Governments of the BRICS countries should consolidate their efforts and provide intensive political and financial support to WHO to effectively resist the new coronavirus pandemic. The BRICS Nations should contribute to strengthening the role of WHO and ensure that it makes an important contribution to the fight against the pandemic;
2. Considering the COVID-19 pandemic, the BRICS leaders should take all the necessary measures to ensure universal, equal, affordable and timely access to all effective medicines, diagnostics, vaccines and health technologies needed to address the COVID-19 pandemic,

including IP-related measures, fast-track registration mechanisms, cooperation on clinical trials, etc.;

3. In particular, the BRICS governments should use all the necessary flexibilities of the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (the TRIPS agreement), such as compulsory licenses, in the interests of public health as stipulated in the TRIPS Agreement, in the Doha Declaration and in all BRICS health ministers' declarations;
4. If necessary, the BRICS countries should also revise the existing regulatory framework in the field of intellectual property and access to treatment to provide for faster, more flexible and transparent mechanisms of facilitating access to treatment and care, broadening the mandate of ministries of healthcare and other relevant authorities in this field; including by creating abbreviated pathways for compulsory licenses;
5. The BRICS governments should cooperate more closely in the field of clinical trials for vaccines and medicines to leverage their mutual potential and create conditions for faster approval and better availability of vaccines and therapeutics. One of the areas of such cooperation could be the development of a BRICS Vaccines Research Centre. The Centre was initiated during previous South African Chairmanship in BRICS in 2018. It is necessary to use the joint potential of scientists and BRICS civil society for the rapid launch of this center. The BRICS must also strengthen the BRICS TB research Network by increasing funding and coordination on collaborative projects, including joint clinical trials;
6. The BRICS countries should increase their public R&D investments into major public health needs and impose public interest conditions to these funds such as transparency requirements, accessibility and affordability clauses and non-exclusive licenses for exploitation of end-result products, stipulating that there should be no monopolies or exclusivities attached to them;
7. The BRICS countries should continue focusing on providing universal access to treatment and care for infectious diseases such as HIV, viral hepatitis, TB and Malaria, by using an integrated human rights-based approach free of discrimination and stigma towards vulnerable populations;
8. An analysis of the experience of the BRICS countries in combating the spread of coronavirus infection shows that early warning and rapid response to threats related not only to COVID-19, but also to any other emerging infectious diseases is an important factor in preserving the health and life of the population. To achieve this, it is important to strengthen international cooperation, which should include transparent and prompt exchange of information;
9. Using existing BRICS financial infrastructure, the governments should support development aid programs that function to strengthen national, regional, and global systems of response to the threat of infectious diseases such as COVID-19, HIV/AIDS, viral hepatitis, TB, Malaria other emerging infections;
10. The BRICS leaders should encourage young people to participate in public health development projects. We welcome the Russian initiative «BRICS Young epidemiologists in the fight against COVID-19». Despite the fact that the BRICS countries do not have a common epidemiological space, the initiative is extremely important. It will allow students from the five countries to directly participate in public health projects, study responses to the COVID-19 outbreak in real time, and share experience through remote communication.
11. Governments of the BRICS countries should develop complementary programs of the BRICS countries to develop new system solutions, technologies and equipment for digital health and medicine, including telemedicine, artificial intelligence and big data analysis.

### **III. HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC. ROLE OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE**

#### *Education and Science Civil BRICS Working group*

The global challenge of the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020 has cast new shades to discover in the sphere of education and science within BRICS countries. The communities have concentrated and mobilized all forces in distance modes of human activities. The changes have affected primarily education, emphasizing the need to strengthen digitalization and development of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the area. Online platforms and e-learning have come to the fore setting a new vector for the creation of safe and inclusive environment for life-long education along with teaching intercultural competences. The latter has gained a new power as crisis economic trends are followed by the reconfiguration of needs and demand in human resources.

Education and science have now ceased to be the sphere of interest exclusively for young people, today's global world is the accelerated pace of breakthrough development in all areas of human life, the erasure of boundaries and the rapid scaling of ideas and innovations. Therefore, the issue of obtaining key competencies of a modern person is one of the most important and relevant on the agenda of the entire world community. Today, taking into account the global experience in combating the pandemic, the thesis about the importance of IT education and the need to universalize the forms of its receipt at any age, anywhere in the world, has been strengthened. One of the priority areas of interaction between the BRICS countries should be the formation of an international community of technological youth, which is already capable of designing modern solutions for existing global threats. This trajectory can be based on the experience of the Kruzhok Movement of the National Technology Initiative in Russia, a community that has been successfully building teams of technology enthusiasts for five years, designed to become the base layer of a generation of technological breakthroughs by 2035.

BRICS is intended to become an example of a unique platform for the development of international cooperation in the field of digital education, taking into account the existing experience, scientific groundwork, and proven tools during the fight against COVID-19. Taking into consideration the prospect of strengthening the international interaction of the BRICS countries in the field of education and science, another important factor contributing to the development of civil society is the need to eliminate the so-called "skills gap" that exists in priority areas of the economies of most countries of the modern world, including BRICS countries.

Today, the grouping especially sharply notes that the global labor market needs a new training system in line with the challenges and opportunities of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and one of the key problems in 2020 remains an acute shortage of personnel for digital transformation. It will be possible to grow trained specialists in the required number only by restructuring the vocational educational system. A particularly promising project for the BRICS collaboration could be the development of tools for comparing national open-source systems. The contribution of civil society to the formation of the modern stage of digital development, as well as a vision of the future of information technologies in science and education, communication, economic development in the era of digitalization and human development is of great importance for the BRICS countries.

The Working Group members urges BRICS Leaders to implement the following:

1. To continue the collaboration in extending transparency, comparability and portability of qualifications between BRICS countries;
2. To reaffirm the commitment to the UN SDG 4 “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all” that was set within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDG 4 - Education 2030 Framework for Action;
3. To share the experiences and practices in achieving the SDG4-Education 2030 targets in order to adopt effective practices and advance progress on the SDG4 indicators;
4. To adopt an extensive Roadmap for boosting the BRICS cooperation in education to facilitate the education systems transformation to meet the needs of the digitalization and the fourth industrial revolution and foster productivity, innovation, economic growth and well-being;
5. To create a platform with online courses and other educational and training opportunities including short-term programs, summer/winter schools, internships etc. developed by leading BRICS universities, including BRICS Network University and BRICS University League members. The access to the platform can be unrestricted for all educational institutions in BRICS countries;
6. To increase enrollment into online education by adapting to national languages within BRICS;
7. To expand the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular those from Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Global South, for enrollment at the BRICS educational institutions for higher education or vocational training;
8. To consider the opportunity of establishing a scholarship scheme for the BRICS Network University students to expand academic mobility drawing on existing funding mechanisms within the BRICS states;
9. To support partnering countries, especially least developed countries of the Global South, by substantially increasing the supply of qualified teachers, including through cooperation for teacher training, and build education facilities for inclusive and effective learning and teaching;
10. To encourage leading BRICS universities, including the BRICS Network University and the BRICS University League members to develop and implement programs for training teachers from developing countries;
11. To work on mutual recognition of credits and double degree programs in the relevant fields such as International Relations, BRICS Studies, General Medicine, Computer Science and Information Security, Energy, Ecology and Climate Change, Water Resources and Pollution Treatment, and Economics with a strong emphasis on comparative studies in these fields;
12. To introduce dual-degree diploma system within the leading BRICS universities, including BRICS University League;
13. To expand and diversify the networking mechanisms of BRICS University League for further encouragement of new research and educational projects within BRICS priorities;
14. To promote leading BRICS universities, including BRICS Network University research collaboration on digitalization and off-line education modalities of the future;
15. To expand the range of youth exchanges programs (schoolchildren, undergraduates, graduate students, and young researchers) in the form of internships, themed summer camps, olympiads, competitions and conferences. It can be facilitated by developing virtual mobility

- programs that are expected to be a catalyst for academic exchange for lower cost for a wider scale of students and young professionals;
16. To develop new kinds of engagement with students for science and research based on the experience of remote education during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is important to increase the teaching and learning quality by adapting digital and remote technologies, new teaching methods, etc. Combination of on-site classes and virtual engagement with students and academia in other universities is worth further implementation;
  17. To promote enrollment into online education by Simulators, Digital Monography, 3D visuals and print and Robotic instruments and sharing in form of recorded videos and lectures within BRICS. The same can be recorded and stored on cloud storage and can be accessed from anywhere as a part of BRICS collaboration.
  18. To unite alumni from BRICS youth projects in a multidimensional community with an aim to gather young people interested in BRICS development together and give them a platform for developing joint initiatives. The alumni community can have a variety of subdivisions: research and development, business, cultural exchange, etc. The goal of the given proposal is to increase the youth involvement into BRICS agenda;
  19. To set up a BRICS HR Platform jointly with educational institutions, think tanks, commercial and non-commercial organizations. The Platform is to be a source of volunteer calls, internships, job offerings, and other opportunities for BRICS nations as well as a service for facilitation of receiving the documents needed for business and volunteer travel within BRICS states;
  20. To strive for harmonization of universal international standards development, international practices in the field of new professions, competencies, qualifications on the platform of BRICS FUTURE SKILLS;
  21. To cooperate with BRICS Business Council and BRICS Labour and Employment Ministers Meetings for the expansion of opportunities for market-based learning;
  22. To connect fragmented finance support initiatives, using existing BRICS financial infrastructure to establish NDB-based BRICS Research and Development Fund with the main aim to support applied innovative research. The Fund is to become an organizer of grant competition for research projects as well as startups in the natural sciences, medicine and healthcare, ecology, sustainable development, financial security, digitalization, etc.;
  23. To launch BRICS Sci-Ed Award as an annual honorary prize for the advanced researchers in several categories grouped in scientific strands (natural science, humanitarian studies, ICT);
  24. To support BRICS Grain initiative as a focal point of people-to-people connection in applied research areas;
  25. To provide open access to the research of scholars from BRICS countries and promote the knowledge produced by BRICS scientists. It is possible in a form of BRICS journal, web-library, online courses, etc.;
  26. To promote harmonization of the educational quality standards for joint maximization of the competitive positions of leading BRICS universities in the global research and education market;
  27. To facilitate collaboration among research institutes, educational institutions, and enterprises of the BRICS countries in order to generate and implement joint projects directed at innovative development and knowledge economy;

28. To include studying research methods and fundamental research in university curriculums to improve the expertise of BRICS scholars as well as to facilitate research and development;
29. To hold international scientific and methodological conferences, workshops, and other activities for the promotion of science, technology and innovation within BRICS members;
30. To facilitate the collaboration in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) among BRICS member states by sharing information about TVET educator development, TVET qualifications and TVET curricula;
31. To propose BRICS Educational Internship Program, one-semester academic exchange program with students from BRICS countries studying together in the prioritized for BRICS majors becoming an annual exchange program organized by the presiding BRICS state. The initial program was successfully conducted by Far Eastern Federal University (Russia) in a spring semester 2020;
32. To look into the potential of Industrial Internships organized by BRICS nations universities in tandem with local industries to embrace students during vacation periods to undertake project activities based on practical issues of economy. Each country may declare a set of openings per domain for undergraduate and post graduate students at the beginning of the semester each year to be undertaken during the vacation period. Standard final modalities to be worked out for commencing this initiative from 2021.

#### **IV. BRICS ECONOMIES: DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND LABOUR ISSUES IN THE POST-COVID ERA**

##### ***Economic Development in the Digital Era Civil BRICS Working group***

Digital technology is increasingly affecting the economy. The introduction of 5G networks and the Internet of things will make the «digital» almost pervasive. Global product and service markets are shifting to the digital realm already. This process has only accelerated due to the coronavirus pandemic. A digital presence has become a necessity for the survival and development of a business.

To help the economy reap the benefits of digital technology and at the same time protect intellectual property and ensure cybersecurity in BRICS countries, we propose: to initiate the harmonization of digital platforms created in the member countries and begin to work on a common approach to cybersecurity – «The Great BRICS Firewall».

Members of the Working Group «Economic Development in the Digital Era» propose the following:

1. **Digital Monopoly and Competition.** Digital technology has created unprecedented opportunities for information exchange. At the same time, information transmission channels are excessively monopolized and commercialized. This leads to the violation of the rights of citizens to the access to information and to the interference of foreign providers in national political lives. It is proposed to develop a common position of the BRICS countries on cybersecurity - on the admission of foreign digital service providers to national markets and on the protection of national information providers in international markets. It would be advisable to create a pool of information resources of the BRICS countries, exchanging messages about interesting projects and opportunities arising in each participating country and the BRICS as a whole. It also would be important to establish a widely available public

channel for the exchange of information on the fight against the coronavirus pandemic and other natural and technological disasters.

2. **Impact of the digital revolution on traditional sectors of the economy.** Many traditional sectors of the economy are undergoing major changes as a result of the digital revolution, such as online ordering of hotels and vehicles, the retail delivery industry, the provision of digital government services, etc. Mobile communications and geolocation play an ever-increasing role in ordinary traditional business. Telemedicine is actively developing. The Internet is beginning to penetrate into everyday household appliances and household management. The competitiveness of the BRICS countries will be facilitated by the strengthening of cooperation in the creation and implementation of startups in the fields of IT, high technologies and the development of digital applications and solutions for traditional sectors of the economy. In the BRICS countries there are a large number of interesting, competent and active people who could and would like to implement various projects not only in the field of business and commerce, but also in the development of digital government, and civil, social initiatives.
3. **International tourism crisis.** The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has reported that international tourism in 2020 could decline by 60-80 percent due to the effects of the coronavirus pandemic. This will deal a heavy blow to the entire territories, a significant share of whose income was formed by the receipts from tourism. The BRICS countries could jointly develop the principles of safe tourism and contribute to the reorientation of world tourist flows to the benefit of their countries.
4. **Inclusiveness and exclusivity in the digital economy.** Within the BRICS, it is necessary to organize the mutual protection of intellectual property inside and outside the BRICS. It is necessary to work out a unified position on intellectual property rights in order to increase the availability of technology and intellectual resources, and to reduce the monopoly of Western patent systems and Western law. Each of the BRICS countries has innovation centers. It is necessary to promote the creation of a network of international innovation platforms. Such a network would facilitate the development of relations within the BRICS and provide consulting and financial support to the joint projects.
5. **Digital financing technologies in the BRICS countries: grant programs, crowdfunding, online sales.** It is necessary to exchange experience in the use of various digital financing technologies by non-profit organizations of the BRICS countries. It is proposed to start work on the creation of a joint grant fund for the development of joint civic initiatives. Expand the activities of national crowdfunding platforms to all BRICS countries. It would be useful to summarize the experience of the BRICS countries and to develop recommendations on standards for informing consumers on the websites of national online stores and aggregators, including those engaged in cross-border trade.
6. **Social dialogue in the economy.** The liberal economic model has contributed to the development of world trade and the general growth of the world economy. However, the time has come to adapt the economic model of recent decades to new social realities. Not only and not so much transnational corporations, but also national states and regional and local communities, as well as various social groups, should have their own voice in determining the directions of investment and employment prospects.
7. **Exchange of information and experience among the BRICS countries.** In terms of providing assistance to the economy during a pandemic, all eyes, as a rule, are turned towards the Western countries. However, the BRICS countries have accumulated their effective

experience in dealing with the pandemic and its social and economic consequences. It is proposed to create a channel for the exchange of information on social and economic measures of the BRICS countries.

## V. POST-TRUTH POLITICS IN THE BRICS MEDIA LANDSCAPE

### *Information Strategies and Society Civil BRICS Working group*

In the age of unprecedented information flow and connectivity the world has experienced a new challenge. Our societies have largely been influenced by the blossoming of the culture of confusion. At the centre of this issue lies the post-truth. It's not an entirely new phenomenon, but in the current digital era the volume, speed and reach of information flows have created the perfect conditions for fake news to thrive.

With the explosion of social media and online services, fake news spread like wildfire. People seem more likely to be engaged by the news which appeals to emotions, rather than actual facts. Today fake news affect public opinion, politics and economics. The post-truth has also impacted processes of multilateralism, international cooperation, economic and social integrations.

The motives for spreading disinformation are many, and include political or commercial aims, self-promotion, and attracting attention as part of a business model. Those who orchestrate campaigns, play on emotions, fears, prejudices and ignorance, and claim to bring meaning and certainty to a reality that is complex, challenging and fast-changing.

The post-truth mindset is like a bacteria that has mutated to become immune to antibiotics. Truth and logic seem powerless to arrest post-truth infectiousness that can infect everyone, and no area is immune. The narrative around the COVID-19 outbreak, accompanied by hysteria in social media, manipulation of facts, information stuffing, pseudo-experimental conclusions, and fakes, has clearly demonstrated the dominant approach in information policy in many countries.

Unreliable and false information has been spreading around the world to such an extent, that it is fair to refer to the avalanche of misinformation that has accompanied COVID-19 pandemic as disinfodemic. The disinfodemic has revealed that fake news spread faster and more easily than the virus, and is equally as dangerous. A successful response to outbreaks such as COVID-19 depends on broad dissemination and widespread acceptance of accurate information.

Representatives of civil societies of the BRICS countries call on international community to consolidate efforts in the fight against fake news and dangers of post-truth. The BRICS community must consider it an emergency security challenge, in need to stern response and collective efforts, as well as devise collaborative process and means of exchange of information. BRICS civil society representatives suggest considering the following joint initiatives aimed at strengthening the role of BRICS States in shaping a more just, fair and representative global media landscape:

1. We insist on freedom of human thought and speech as a priority, and on the importance of pluralism in the information age. We believe that these fundamental rights must be strictly observed by all global actors while developing and implementing their information policies. We stand ready to engage a broad dialogue understanding that nobody can pretend to keep a monopoly on the truth.

## **Principles of Information Transparency**

2. We consider it necessary to consolidate the efforts and intensified interaction of the BRICS community to provide unimpeded public access to information, the omnipresence of the Internet, and guaranteed public access to government information resources.
3. Transparency of state-run structures determines their relations with civil society. This applies to readiness for public dialogue as well as to readiness to present full factual information concerning both current problems and historic events. Thus, disinformation practices fueling modern forms of racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia leading to the lack of tolerance give rise to particular concern. In addition, we consider state support to be the important factor for uniting the efforts of historians from the BRICS countries in order to conduct joint research, exchange data, and establish international scientific and exhibition projects dedicated to the national and common history of our countries. From this perspective, we welcome the proposal of Russia to host the World Congress of History Teachers to be held in autumn 2021. The Congress will discuss common approaches to study the World War II.

## **Stronger government action**

4. Tackling the serious global challenge of fake news requires stronger action by BRICS governments and civil society alike, but staying mindful of not fringing upon civil liberties.
5. To fully implement a system of monitoring disputed information we propose to set up a unit within Parliament or Government to accumulate complaints and reports from the media with the ability to take down fake news on a range of platforms and submit cases for the investigation and prosecution.
6. States should consider other measures to promote equality, non-discrimination, intercultural understanding and other democratic values with a view to addressing the negative effects of disinformation.

## **Science and Education Fighting Against Post-Truth**

7. Strong science is the key to the superiority of reliable information over value judgments in the public sphere and lawmaking. We consider it necessary to create reliable mechanisms for the constant participation of scientists and researchers in the national legislation process. In order to do this, scientific expert councils can be created under government departments, and the scientists representing leading scientific centers should have the right to speak at parliamentary hearings to discuss legislative initiatives. Supporting the development of research centers and expanding multilateral scientific cooperation among BRICS member states must remain a priority task for the community.
8. States should take measures to promote media and digital literacy, including by covering these topics as part of the educational systems and by engaging civil society and other stakeholders to raise awareness about these issues.
9. In the post-truth era, education plays significant role in overcoming the information barriers and sustainable development of civil societies in the BRICS member states. Critical thinking courses, modules, and extra curricular classes should be integrated into the joint educational projects, as well as in national school educational programs. It is crucial to teach teenagers and students – young members of society – not only to distinguish between facts and personal views, high- and low-quality sources of information, educate to question information that comes intensively from various media. Students should be

trained hard skills in using relevant fact-checking tools to promptly verify the truth in a rapidly changing information space. The development of critical thinking is extremely important in the context of civil responsibility in the modern digitalized world, where everyone can equally become a distributor, recipient or debunker of fakenews.

### **Developing Quality Journalism**

10. The BRICS community should work together to develop quality journalism. With today's high-quality media as the basis, international programs should be created for exchanging and retraining reporters, and new technologies for obtaining information should be taught. To maintain their non-affiliation with the state, NGOs and non-government foundations may serve as both organizers and platforms for such projects. It is also necessary to facilitate free travel for specialists and information within the BRICS community.
11. In today's global environment, one can hardly talk about the absolute independence of the media and scientific institutions from their sponsors, whether they be private or public investors. At the same time, the role of quality press and scientific centers in the post-truth era is more important than ever. The transparency in the business models of information sources (grants, direct advertising revenues, budget funding) forms the basis for trusting them. We invite the BRICS countries to exchange their experiences and work out uniform legislative norms obliging the media and research centers to have a certain level of audience coverage and to make information about their funding sources publicly available.

### **Internet Environment**

12. We call on the authorities of the BRICS community to consolidate their own experience, and international experience, in the field of law enforcement and to work with social media in order to combat the spread of false information. We propose developing a common approach for social media interaction in terms of improving software algorithms for filtering fake news.
13. We suggest that it is high time for BRICS to improve the coordination mechanisms work to provide sponsorship for fact-checking organisations. Further, a good option is to introduce a platform for collaborative verification of content on digital media, included through automated processes, such as algorithms or digital-based content systems. The platform is a fake news filtering tool to analyse content in real time and determine how accurate the claims made in it are (for example a build-in a real-time lie detector for social media).
14. The public and international corporations of the BRICS community and big business should develop a more responsible approach to online advertising. Corporate policies to prevent financing of those media advertising campaigns that disseminate false or offensive information should be developed. In turn, NGOs can unite consumer activist movements on their sites in order to encourage big companies to reject advertising on fake news sources, thereby discouraging funding for those sources.
15. The development and widespread dissemination of effective and publicly available information handling and fact-checking technologies could be an effective remedy to overcome chaos in public news and political agendas. We propose acting via state and international funds within BRICS to invest in startups and companies developing information verification technologies and textual analysis using artificial intelligence, for example, in the subfield of natural language processing.
16. Within BRICS member states, an integrating effort is needed to combat cyber-bullying which is especially prevalent among children and adolescents. To protect them, it is

necessary to develop a proper legal framework to define the cyber-bullying concept and the scope of liability for it. Based on state support measures, it will be possible to stimulate civil initiatives and encourage NGOs to develop counseling centers to psychologically support children and parents. Hotlines should be created at state educational institutions and social security agencies in order to provide victims of bullying with a way to seek help. A transparent procedure must be developed for supervisory authorities to handle such appeals. General psychological education programs for children and parents need to be developed, as well as highly dedicated modules for teaching the rules of communication on social media and responding to cyber-bullying. Introducing the position of a special commissioner in charge of counteracting cyber-bullying should be considered.

## **VI. SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

### *Sustainable cities and rural development Civil BRICS Working group*

The principles, policies, practices on sustainable development, in the triple economic, environmental and social dimension, are the common platform that all United Nations member states have approved and built since 2015, with the 2030 Agenda, to promote the transition to a new world economic order, more just, balanced and valid also in the medium and long-term perspective.

The problems of balanced urban and rural development, which have a position of great importance within this common platform, pose a challenge both for the member states of the BRIC coordination and for the states external to this coordination. The central point of orientation in solving these problems concerns the quality of territorial development, a key element also for building strengthened international collaborations. The following proposals are selected as a contribution to a coherent action in this direction: a) organizing a system of widespread and shared knowledge of the policies that the states implement to achieve in particular Goal no. 11 and the 7 Targets of "2030 Agenda" ("Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable") as well as the Goals of the UN "New Urban Agenda- NUA"; b) verify how the new "right to the city" approved in 2016 by the United Nations is applied in practice, with particular reference to the governance system in the development of the territories; c) to spread knowledge of the main policies and projects decided by the BRICS in the context of the "Urbanization Forums"; d) define in the territorial development plans the conditions for a balanced and integrated progress in the three dimensions of sustainable progress: economic, social, environmental, with particular reference to the objectives concerning the life quality of people and the cohesion of the local communities; f) promote and intensify the collaboration relationship in the urban and rural development plans between states and local communities and the main Multilateral Development Banks MDB, first of all the BRICS bank NDB, to which the international community recognizes the role of "development engines" ( UN-GSRD, 2019).

In relation to these proposals, the shared selection of programs, projects, performance and result indicators is an action that can contribute greatly to strengthening cooperation between states and its partners in a period of great difficulties and global tensions.

Actually, we call on BRICS leaders to consolidate efforts in supporting following preferable measures, such as:

### **Knowledge Sharing and Capacity Building Platform**

1. Identify cities in the five BRICS with clear aspirations for/successful experiences in mainstreaming sustainable and integrated urban planning. From these experiences, derive principles for sustainable and integrated urban planning to inspire other cities willing to follow the lead;
2. Launch a BRICS sustainable city campaign/network to promote these principles and offer regular support to the implementation of these principles through the issuance of guidelines, promotion of knowledge exchanges with cities in more advanced stages of implementation, and support to the design of bankable projects to transform cities. This could be the bedrock of the Partnership on Urban Environmental Sustainability Initiative, signed in 2019.

### **Technology Exchange Facility, backed by Sustainable Cities and Rural Advisory Group (SCRA) creation**

3. Enhance technical and financial support for urban and rural territories, willing to develop projects, build capacity, generate businesses, and pass regulation/legislation on sustainable urban and rural planning, spatially integrated solutions, and intelligent manufacturing. For example, by working with mayors in the BRICS countries on a pipeline of projects to support local sustainability strategies;
4. These projects could be considered for funding by the New Development Bank as part of a technology transfer facility to be created by the bank. This facility could be the bedrock of the BRICS Environmentally Sound Technology Cooperation Platform for Innovation, signed in 2019

In this respect it is important to commission BRICS Sustainable Urban and Rural Advisory Group of researchers to map the commitments made/initiatives proposed in former BRICS Working groups, ministerial meetings and Summit declarations that support the development of sustainable cities and rural development in the five member countries (e.g. Partnership on Urban Environmental Sustainability Initiative, BRICS Environmentally Sound Technology Cooperation Platform for Innovations).

5. This group would then be tasked to review progress on these commitments and initiatives by liaising with relevant national and local stakeholders as well as identifying bottlenecks, gaps, success stories, and champions;
6. This group would have a permanent advisory role to the BRICS leaders on how to promote sustainable cities in the five members. To achieve this goal, the group would be tasked to regularly monitor the implementation of the different commitments and initiatives, highlight potential risks/issues, propose correction measures as well as new initiatives, and ensure success stories are mainstreamed into the policy discourse and BRICS narrative;
7. This group could be nested in the BRICS Think Tank Council.

## **VII. THE COVID-19 CRISIS AS A CHALLENGE AND UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY FOR HUMANITY TO SAVE THE CLIMATE**

*Environment, Climate and Energy Civil BRICS Working group*

The COVID-19 crisis showed what the global cut of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions can look like regarding its social and economic consequences. According to the International Energy Agency, the expected decline in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the global energy sector in 2020 will be almost 2.6 gigatonnes or around 4.7% of Global Greenhouse gas emissions. At the same time, according to the United Nations Environment Programme, to get in line with the Paris Agreement, emissions must drop 7.6 % per year from 2020 to 2030 for the 1.5 C goal, and 2.7 % per year for the 2 C goal.

The global crisis caused by the pandemic, followed by a lockdown, not only demonstrated the possible consequences of large-scale changes in connection with potential catastrophic climate change, but also provided national governments, including the BRICS countries, with a unique opportunity to achieve a fundamental turning point in solving the problem of climate change and other environmental problems arising from the burning of fossil fuels.

Members of the Working Group «Environment, Climate and Energy» propose the following measures to the leaders of the BRICS countries to create conditions for an early technological transit to a new climate and environmentally friendly economic model:

### **Climate policy:**

1. At the national level, to enhance the NDC targets with a view to entering the trajectory of reducing greenhouse emissions in accordance with the goals of the Paris Agreement, incl. achieving carbon neutrality by 2050 and taking into account the consequences of the global economic crisis and technological transformation, which is possible in the framework of a post-pandemic economic recovery. To reach the political consensus that we are in the state of climate emergency on top of the pandemic crisis, among the BRICs countries we need to speed up the domestic transition pace from the fossil fuel-driven economy to a green and low carbon one to avoid major economic risks (both in terms of severity and probability).
2. At the international level, to highlight the importance of cooperation of BRICS countries with the European Union and the other regional economic integration organizations in pursuing their shared objectives in the fields of climate policy, environmental protection, and energy future, via a synchronization of their recovery policies.

### **Economic stimulation of the technological transition to green energy**

3. To conduct research within the BRICS Energy Research Platform with the subsequent dissemination of research results to the general public:
  - Current and in-development global plans, nationally and internationally, for overcoming the global crisis caused by COVID-19, including those taxonomy (catalogue of green technologies) technologies that require government support;
  - Prospects for global fossil fuel markets, taking into account the consequences of the global crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic;
  - Market mechanisms of climate policy - especially fiscal incentives in the BRICS countries - and the prospects for the development of national systems for trading in rights to greenhouse gas emissions.
4. To develop a BRICS program to stimulate green investments, including through:
  - a common taxonomy of technologies and industrial activities compatible with sustainable development in BRICS countries and a shift to “green economy”, taking into account that Sustainable Development and Green Growth are incompatible with such

technologies as large dam-based hydroelectric power plants, nuclear energy (including the entire nuclear fuel cycle), and the incineration of municipal waste 1;

- the creation of an international system for the implementation of joint projects to reduce greenhouse emissions and increase absorption of greenhouse gases, including for the purposes of land and forest management;
- maintaining and increasing government spending and investments on green infrastructures to stimulate a green recovery, especially in decentralized Renewable Energy;
- defining plans for the transition to the green economy based on collaboration between the state and the business world, with reference to small-medium-large companies
- in which the incentive and disincentive systems in favour of new investment and production policies are defined by mutual agreement;
- spreading the practices of "integrated report" among companies, being an adequate tool to highlight, alongside profit values, the environmental and social values promoted with company activities.

### **Regulatory policy in the field of energy**

5. At the national level, to revise plans and state programs for expanding infrastructure in order to develop fossil energy, to abandon the expansion of energy and pollution-intensive infrastructure, including in vulnerable regions (Arctic, Amazon forests, etc).
6. Under the BRICS Energy Research Platform and the BRICS Environmentally Sound Technology Platform (BEST), to conduct the following studies:
  - Scenarios for the complete phaseout of fossil fuels in the energy sector in the BRICS countries, including the rejection of fossil fuel for hydrogen production;
  - Comparisons and identification of the best technologies in terms of energy efficiency in energy-intensive industries and in the BRICS countries;
  - According to the best practices and technologies for using the biogas cycle.
7. Under the Cities Partnership for Environmentally Sustainable Development, to conduct research on best practices and to develop recommendations for transport infrastructure development, including charging infrastructure for electric vehicles.
8. At the national level, to develop roadmaps for the phaseout of internal combustion engines in transport and to reflect the roadmap activities for the phaseout of fuel assemblies in the developed matrix of BEST activities.
9. To initiate a dialogue with a view to eliminating subsidies for nuclear power, the construction of dam-based hydropower plants or increasing the storage capacity of existing hydropower plants, or subsidies for biofuels (including mandatory consumption and production quotas) that a) compete with food for raw materials and / or b) have a negative impact on such resources as agricultural areas, water, soil, and c) have a negative impact on the environment.

### **Policy towards BRICS financial institutions**

10. To encourage banks to create carbon footprint mechanisms and climate risk evaluation metrics when developing new investment projects and making investment decisions, taking

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<sup>1</sup> Here and further, the recommendations related to nuclear and large dam-based hydroelectric power plant technologies and industrial activities reflect the position of only the NGOs who campaign or/and have particular positions on nuclear and big hydro technologies and industrial activities.

into account the carbon footprint, climate risks and existing taxonomies of technologies that imply a transition to a green economy, which include:

- promoting the dissemination and application in the national and local banking system of the models for assessing economic, social and environmental sustainability (integrated report system), also with reference to the models used by the main Multilateral Development Banks;
  - rejection of projects related to clear cut and deforestation;
  - rejection of projects related to fossil energy development, municipal waste incineration;
  - focusing energy policy on decentralized and flexible energy systems and infrastructure based on renewable energy;
  - prioritizing energy efficiency projects versus new primary energy projects.
11. Investment decisions should be made taking into account the rejection of projects related to large dam hydroelectric power plants, nuclear energy, and fossil energy as well as taking into account the rejections of projects affecting protected and valuable natural areas, including World Heritage Sites and UNESCO Biosphere Reserves, wetlands of international importance.
12. To provide feedback of BRICS financial institutions with local communities living in countries and territories of project implementation, BRICS financial institutions, as well as a full consideration of the views of local communities on projects being planned and implemented. All project information should be made available to the local communities in the local language (if possible) or in the national language, including a detailed social and economic impact assessment report. The community consultation processes should be strengthened, ensuring that women and other marginalised communities are included and provided with adequate time and information to meaningfully engage with the process.
13. New development bank of BRICS:
- to define sustainable development as it pertains to the bank's objectives and evolve criteria which can be used to measure the sustainability of projects, including clearer and stronger climate-related requirements for project selection and implementation;
  - to ensure that the NDB's next General Strategy (2022- 2027) priorities enhance implementation of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Addis Ababa Action Agenda (Financing for Development), and the Paris Agreement, ensuring compliance of BRICS respective NDCs (Nationally Determined Contributions) as reflected in the NDB's policies and investments;
  - to introduce International Labour Organisation, a human-centric approach to the future of work and Green Jobs as a measure of New Development Bank development;
  - to increase investment in decent and sustainable work, particularly for women;
  - to increase investment in women's capabilities, paying particular attention to building/strengthening women's capabilities, knowledge, participation in formal economic work and decision making;
  - to develop and realise projects to phase out cooking with biomass and fossil fuel in Asia and Africa, leading to a large amount of carbon emissions, and to substitute biomass and fossil fuel with clean energy;
  - to ensure that bank's policies are complemented and enhanced by country systems, and not diluted by weak laws or processes at the country level.

## **Climate change adaptation**

14. In order to protect vulnerable populations (especially women and children), who in some countries are most affected by the effects of climate change, to implement programs to help and protect vulnerable groups of citizens, including through programs that would expand the use of renewable (solar) energy for cooking.
15. Within the framework of the Cities Partnership for Environmentally Sustainable Development, to organize a regular exchange mechanism on adaptation to climate change and good environmental practices especially on city levels including in the form of twinning.
16. To further develop agricultural cooperation, in particular related to agricultural technologies and innovations, provision of food for the most vulnerable communities, mitigation of the negative impact of climate change on food security and the adaptation of agriculture to climate change, to develop practical steps to implement this commitment.
17. At the international level, to initiate the creation of an international force for rapid response to the consequences of climate change (fires, floods, etc.) under the auspices of the UN in order to provide humanitarian assistance, localize the consequences and restore infrastructure damaged by natural disasters. The rapid response force should evolve a sustainable recovery plan for BRICS countries in the event of natural disasters, including prioritising small businesses, self-employed workers, daily wage labour and others in the informal economy. It should also be bolstered by funding commitment through the BRICS bank and other mechanisms.

## **Biodiversity conservation, protection and conservation of natural ecosystems**

18. To prepare and propose an international initiative on behalf of the BRICS countries to crack down illegal wild animal trade within and among BRICS countries, through introducing national bans, effectively implementing existing national and international laws, and organizing joint actions to combat illegal wildlife trade, primarily mammals and birds, taking into account the risks of transmission of zoonotic (animal-specific) diseases, in order to conserve biodiversity and reduce the risk of pandemics.
19. To respond to global climate change, environmental protection, disaster prevention and relief and other challenges faced by humankind:
  - to adopt national plans for the protection and restoration of forest ecosystems in order to stop deforestation and degradation of the BRICS countries, prompt forest health and contribute to increasing the global forest area, taking into account interests of local communities in increasing the forest area, and to ensure access and control of forest-dependent communities to forest ecosystems along with their (local communities) involvement in programs for the protection and restoration of forest ecosystems;
  - to significantly increase the resources allocated to fight forest fires. First of all, this must be done: a) in the arctic, subarctic and mountainous regions, where the negative impact of these fires on the climate is greatly enhanced by the degradation of permafrost, as well as the release of large amounts of soot, part of which settles on the surface of snow and ice and contributes to their faster melting; b) in tropical regions, where large areas of undeveloped forests (intact forest areas) have been preserved, and where the degradation of these forests leads to the irreversible loss of ecosystems with large reserves of fixed carbon;

- to significantly increase the resources allocated to combat desertification with promoting rural and indigenous women's roles, knowledge in addressing desertification and reversing land degradation and to ensure the access and control of women to land, including commons, as it is vital to the protection and restoration of these ecosystems.;
- to introduce digital technologies, GIS and RS monitoring technologies to assess the state of degrading lands in order to assess and effectively protect and restore these territories;
- to introduce national legislation to prevent illegally sourced timber and wooden products from entering BRICS countries' supply chain. To effectively implement existing international legislation, such as CITES, and organize joint action to combat illegal timber (especially tropical wood) and wooden product trade.

### **Developing a circular economy**

20. In furtherance of the Johannesburg Declaration of the Tenth BRICS Summit (July 26, 2018) in terms of reducing waste, creating more environmentally sustainable processes and diversifying economies, as well as developing the Clean Rivers of BRICS umbrella program:
- to develop national programs to phase out single-use plastic products, while promoting economic growth and job creation;
  - to reorient the economy from its linear endless growth development model towards the production of resource-efficient durable consumer goods that leave an insignificant carbon footprint;
  - to stimulate the production and sale of goods with the minimum necessary packaging, suitable for reuse or subsequent processing via collateral mechanism etc.;
  - at the national level, to provide an infrastructure for the separate collection and processing of solid household municipal waste;
  - to support a new model of consumption based on a longer product cycle, the repair and reuse of products, sharing economy and fostering the creation of jobs in these new sectors of the economy;
  - to scale-up the circular economy on recycled metals in electronic waste and Li-ion batteries in order to reduce the dependence on mining;
  - Regarding the formation of climatically and environmentally responsible consumer behaviour by citizens.
21. At the national level, to ensure the transition to sustainable / rational consumption patterns by informing the population of the BRICS countries about:
- how their consumption behaviour might contribute to the risks and threats associated with climate change;
  - principles of rational / sustainable consumption.

## **VIII. WOMEN AND COVID-19 PANDEMIC RECOVERY PLANNING**

### ***Women and Girls Civil BRICS Working group***

Women must be in the centre of development. This has been the call of women's forums in the BRICS countries. We reiterate that particularly in the context of the efforts of the BRICS leaders for strengthening economic partnership and facing the challenges of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus (hereafter, COVID-19).

For months now, the COVID-19 pandemic and governmental responses continue to affect lives and livelihoods around the world. However, it is also important to note that the pandemic and the lockdown impacts women and girls differently and disproportionately. While most people's lives and work have been negatively affected by the crisis, analysis shows that, overall, women's jobs and livelihoods are more vulnerable with added burden of unpaid care work and increased domestic violence. Women and girls are at a higher risk, not due to any inherent vulnerability, but rather due to the pre-existing structural discriminations and inequalities. Undeniably, COVID-19 has magnified the many negative impacts of gender inequalities, and women continue to bear the maximum brunt of this.

The current health calamity brings with it a host of healthcare and socio-economic challenges. However, it also provides an opportunity to rebuild our communities and countries. Now is the time for governments and businesses to lay the foundation for long-term changes that could help economies bounce back. We call upon the BRICS member countries (i.e., Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) to ensure a robust, humane, and gender-responsive coordinated response to the COVID-19. Increasing inclusion and breaking down of structural barriers to gender equality is the need of the hour.

Gender equality, active participation, and contribution of women to the development of the economy and social sphere of countries are one of the most relevant and burning topics for discussion at all world platforms. There is ample evidence to the fact that women take a more holistic approach to leading at work and home. Considering all the activities that are currently outside their core economic domain, viz., social and civil society, humanitarian programs, environmental protection and, inter alia, international security, there lies a vast unharnessed reservoir of talent, which if tapped, can change the way the economy works. Many political and industry leaders understand now the importance of women's contribution to the communities and businesses in which they work.

The presence of women in parliaments and governments brings to the fore the issue of women's lives across continents, for example, intensifying efforts to counter domestic violence and ensure equal rights and opportunities, which are critical moments for several countries. Finance ministers and senior government officials agree that the empowerment of women is essential for inclusive and sustainable development. It is the imperative of human capital to invest more effectively in our people, to create the human capital that will enable people, families and countries to thrive. It is a strategic investment in its society, and there can be no sustainable economic growth without the empowerment of women.

The world's largest companies, which support gender equality only in letter and not in spirit, demonstrate how hard it is for the society to part way with its archaic remnants. Meanwhile, numerous contemporary reports and studies show gender diversity improves business profitability and productivity, makes it easier to attract and retain talent, enhances firm's creativity, innovation and reputation, and the ability to better gauge consumer demand. The higher the level of involvement of women in business, the better are the outcomes at the micro- and macro-level.

Every challenge is an opportunity to make a new beginning. This is just the beginning of a new diverse and equitable world. Nonetheless, we need to introspect and examine what prevents us from achieving more concrete weighty results? Are our goals right and achievable? Have we

taken the right approach and action steps towards the goal attainment? What about assessing and measuring the outcomes correctly? What are the follow-up actions taken to correct aberrations?

To be in line with the main new global political approaches that leaders of the BRICS member countries are going to consider and discuss, we propose the ensuing recommendations. The underlying spirit behind these recommendations is not to push women's agenda as a separate gender issue but to dovetail the participation of women into the global processes both on an international and local arena. Women's participation will considerably help to improve and develop the economic, political, and social fabric of the largest diaspora.

### **Women in Decision Making**

1. Guarantee equal representation of women in national and international political and economic decision-making bodies at all levels, including in the public and private sectors, national and regional development banks etc. To this end, gather and share data with gender breakdowns and statistics on women's economic situation during and after the COVID-19 pandemic;
2. Create an international (BRICS) «Crises Management Group» which will include not less than 50% of women and will coordinate the actions of the government bodies addressing the crisis;
3. Create councils of women observers (or advisors) within the BRICS countries' defence institutions or include women into national security council meetings;
4. Recognize women's role in all climate justice discourse, policies and interventions as workers and producers and as guardians of environment and ensure women are at the center of all discussions and solutions as key stakeholders;
5. Make sure women from the global South are the primary beneficiaries of the BRICS countries' development policies, especially those concerning access to education and healthcare;
6. Introduce mandatory review of laws for gender equity, especially as regards labour, employment, and power dynamics.

### **Economy and Business**

7. Take gender into account and assess the extent of the pandemic's impact on gender issues when planning domestic spending on the post-pandemic recovery of the labour market;
8. Promote economic empowerment of women through their ownership of land and related productive assets;
9. Increase investment in welfare infrastructure to create jobs and improve sustainability, primarily through providing welfare payments for children, the elderly, and the destitute. Equal access to high-quality healthcare should be provided to all. Investment should be immediately made in digital infrastructure to allow women and girls to access education, including online education, with emphasis on technical and vocational training as well as digital technology. Efforts should be made to provide support for the employees working in the healthcare industry, most of which are women (70%);
10. Work with public and private financial institutions and banks to develop innovative and accessible digital finance products to expand women's access to financial services and credit policies. Work out the training programs to build knowledge on business management and financial education at large;

11. Promote business sustainability for female owners of micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises through access to training, technology, markets, and innovative institutional financing, and by developing government business incentive programmes. Access to the market should be extended through models and platforms for sales, considering global digital transformation. The criteria for support to small and medium-sized enterprises should be expanded, especially for companies with disrupted operations in the face of the pandemic;
12. Actively include women representatives in energy sector for reviewing the policy of national energy monopolies, especially electricity and gas providers. Consider women recommendations regarding the necessary measures that would help to redirect the revenues from the energy sector of the countries to stimulate, develop and improve the social sphere, re-evaluate natural gas, electricity, and public transport prices in rural areas etc.;
13. Expand the range of public programmes at various levels which impart entrepreneurship and effective management skills to create successful entrepreneurs, i.e., professionals who have expertise in product or service delivery, can exploit modern technology for business management, sales and liaising with other economic actors, and have leadership skills. In this manner, extend the groundwork for achieving the national goal of decent, productive work, and successful entrepreneurship, as captured in the slogan '*No more portraying entrepreneurs as crooks – entrepreneurs are the basis of sustainable economic growth*'.

### **Digitalization and Technology**

14. Build digital infrastructure and encourage digitalization in core sectors that adds value to the aggregate economy in terms of innovation and production of real goods and services to create employment for women;
15. Strengthen rural digital infrastructure. Publicly funded e-commerce market places can be a viable alternative for women traders, entrepreneurs and artisans. Public goods and standards are vital for the local economy and small businesses that women dominate;
16. Women's participation in the digital economy is predicated on an ecosystem approach. Access to high-quality connectivity and programs for digital skills are a starting point. A whole host of public policy interventions are needed to provide an impetus to women's participation in the digital economy. This includes reskilling of women who lose their jobs to automation, enterprise development, bank credit that is linked to the digitization of small businesses, grants for social intermediaries supporting women platform workers, preferential procurement policies to encourage women's collectives, producer organizations and cooperatives, and open data policies to benefit women's tech start-ups;
17. Develop new regulatory mechanisms to compensate for workers' digital education. The costs must be shared between the employee and the state;
18. Establish within the New Development Bank (NDB) a digital empowerment fund with innovative schemes. One such example is of national tech-accelerators to catalyze linkages between women producers/farmers and women-led tech start-ups;
19. Create the BRICS Women's Alliance in the STEAM fields. The alliance will allow women scientists to build international interdisciplinary connections, conduct joint research, and have access to grant funding based on the BRICS financial architecture.

### **Women's Rights**

20. Include Women Right Organizations (WROs) in developing national mechanisms to monitor women's rights violations and guarantee efficient judicial and pre-judicial procedures to protect women from violence and violations of their rights;
21. Work out policies against domestic violence and provide support for women suffering from such violence;
22. Remove the persistent gender discrimination in the labour market as well as in access to economic assets through various measures, such as enforcing norms and legal framework that punish sex-segregation and gender-based discrimination at work;
23. Address poverty and structural inequalities, including patriarchy. To adopt and enforce legal processes to tackle violence and discriminatory norms, including workplace and intimate partner violence;
24. Remove obstacles and bring attitudinal change through positive campaigns. Address social norms and cultural practices that discriminate and promote violence against women. Cues should be taken from some countries that have responded proactively to contain gender-based violence. The BRICS member states should have a zero-tolerance policy to all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls both in public and private spaces and improve access to justice. Introduce and enshrine in legislation the mechanisms to guarantee equal pay for equal work, provide incentives for employers to expand female jobs, providing training for women, etc.

### **Social Sphere**

25. Guarantee universal social protection floors and the right to social security for women;
26. Create the mechanisms of saving incomes of vulnerable groups, including single mothers, racial and ethnic minorities, migrant workers, and domestic violence survivors;
27. Introduce the term the «Family Entrepreneurship» as a gender-equitable model and basis for an innovative demographic and policy strategy aimed at both tackling demographic issues and promoting economic activity. Make it as a national project in each BRICS country, legally define the concept of a 'family business', regulate labour relations for 'self-employed' citizens in family businesses, offer tax incentives, and simplify the process of bank loans;
28. Extend tax holidays to young single mothers and mothers of large families. Specialised finance and credit products for businesses headed by women should be created;
29. Bring civil society, non-government and volunteer organisations together to form a national council for addressing the consequences of the pandemic. This national council would be the 'statistics office' that gathers, analyses, and shares information with government agencies;
30. Create a global web platform 'Social Women Adjust Networking' (SWAN) for the BRICS member countries, financed by the NDB, for international employment;
31. Facilitate international knowledge sharing among the members of the BRICS countries the psycho-socio techniques both modern and traditional to deal with mental stress of the Pandemic; develop educational and training courses by the professional from these countries;
32. Implement specialised educational mentorship programmes for the current and early women entrepreneurs;

33. Develop unified quality standards for distance school education. To provide technical support for remote teaching (e.g., set up locations, subsidise equipment purchases, and pay for Internet access);
34. Support work and life balance by developing infrastructural mechanisms for social care (children, elderly, sick and disable care) and in particular provide free supplementary education for children;
35. Develop a new public communications policy and cultivate media interest in running integrated campaigns on social issues featuring leading media channels. To create community-based public communications boards within these outlets to promote a positive image of women as entrepreneurs active in the economy and public service; raise awareness of change leaders in rural and remote areas and root out gender stereotypes.

## **IX. PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE EXCHANGES TO STRENGTHEN THE UNITY OF THE BRICS**

### *People-to-people Exchanges Civil BRICS Working group*

Public diplomacy is a civil society mouthpiece, protecting the interests of every citizen and the entire civil track of the BRICS, whereas non-governmental organizations (NGOs) carry out practical activities to implement initiatives, projects and programs within the countries.

We, as representatives of public organizations of the «five», operating in the field of culture and education, express the desire to be united by a single Non-governmental structure, reiterate our willingness to find new rapprochement points for people, emphasize the initiative to create and implement multilateral projects in the cultural sphere that might enable to move to a qualitatively new stage of relations.

The formation of the Alliance institutional environment for the public diplomacy development intends to mobilize the potential of civil society, reveal the intellectual and organizational capabilities of public associations. In this regard, participants of the «People-to-people Exchanges» Working group ready to call upon the BRICS leaders to implement the following practical actions:

#### **Institutionalization of cultural ties**

1. Creation of the «BRICS Non-Governmental Organizations Union (Association)» to unite the NGOs within the Alliance, acquire new opportunities for providing effective cooperation, organize and coordinate multilateral activities, create a unified base of BRICS NGOs. The «BRICS Peoples' Message» affirming the citizens' desire for rapprochement based on moral values might become the starting document of the BRICS Union of NGOs;
2. Establishment of the BRICS Center for Advanced Mindset and Research to develop and promote researches at an advanced level, particularly focusing on topics relevant to BRICS initiatives;
3. Creation of the BRICS centralized Website, which would contain all researches, BRICS-related events and ones around the world. Hereby, it is of big relevance to establish the BRICS Languages Institute for promoting and teaching the languages of all five countries, which can also become the Department of the BRICS School;

4. Creation of a permanent expert community in the field of culture and civic initiatives among government bodies of different levels, non-governmental organizations and expert communities of the BRICS countries;
5. Establishment of the joint Fund for Grant Support for Cultural Projects and Civil Initiatives within BRICS aimed at promoting multilateral cooperation between the Alliance member states as well as scientific humanitarian researches in the frameworks of BRICS;
6. Creation of the BRICS Cultural Center, which would expand the access of BRICS citizens to each other's cultures and establish horizontal ties between the cultural institutions within the Alliance.
7. Establishment of a Fund for promoting joint projects in the audiovisual market, mass media, television and Internet, promoting exhibitions of cinematic and audiovisual content with the participation of well-known representatives of BRICS countries' cultural industry, such as Bollywood in India.

### **Involvement of the Youth in the culture of the BRICS countries**

8. Establishment of the Internship Program for young professionals from the Alliance countries in order to strengthen the interaction of young professionals - representatives of BRICS with industries and companies of the «five» at early stages in different areas of activity;
9. Creation of the international association of BRICS public youth organizations in the format of «Model BRICS», which would become a prototype of the world famous and widely popular among youngsters interested in the field of international relations «Model UN»;
10. Creation of interest clubs for children and progressive youth of BRICS in social networks. Conduct BRICS open shifts on the basis of «Sirius» or «Artek» with the special program in the field of culture, science and technology to acquaint schoolchildren with the activities of the «five» and find potential gifted students from the Alliance and include them in research or applied projects for scientists and experts;
11. Establishment of the Forum for start-upers young academicians, young industry people, youth artists of the BRICS major cities;
12. Establishment of the Program for Professionals and Leaders targeting BRICS professionals of leadership or mid-level positions, who can take leadership roles and thereby influence the development outcomes couples with social and economic policy reforms both in their citizenship countries and in the rest states of the Alliance.

### **Development of cultural exchange through literature and art**

13. Hosting of the «BRICS Literature Fair», annually held in one of the BRICS countries, with wide cultural and business program;
14. Implementation of the Projects for the national literary works translation resulting in their further publication in all BRICS countries;
15. Establishment of the «BRICS Literary Prize» to reward talented modern writers and publicists from the five countries in order to expand and promote knowledge about literary creativities within the Alliance;
16. Organization of the «BRICS Traditional Literary Forum» with the participation of specialists and professionals of a wide range of knowledge from the five countries, including writers, thinkers, historians, sociologists, and philosophers;

17. Establishment of the «Library Dialogue of BRICS Countries» on the basis of the Library for Foreign Literature named after M.I. Rudomino, which is to create new unique opportunities for the exchange of experiences and culture in the library sphere within BRICS;
18. Creation of a common platform for interlibrary loans in paper and electronic form enabling users and readers to order any literature from the BRICS countries National libraries.
19. Synchronization of laws on legal deposit in electronic form across the BRICS countries. On the basis of legal deposit in electronic form common platform it is necessary to organize access to information about the novelties on the BRICS countries book market;
20. Popularization of classics and modern literature in the BRICS countries and provision of the free equal access through a special application that can be implemented on the platform of the National Electronic Library for free access to citizens / readers of national libraries to a specially selected «golden list» of world literature works in a convenient electronic format;
21. Access to the dissertations and scientific periodicals database through the Virtual Reading rooms of the Russian State Library to be opened in National libraries with the possible further inclusion of dissertations or dissertation records of scientists from the BRICS countries in the General Catalogue of dissertations for international experience exchange among researchers.

#### **Protection of cultural heritage as a basis for international cooperation**

22. Recognition of the leading role of UNESCO in the protection and preservation of cultural and natural heritage in BRICS and in the world, which is considered to be of outstanding value to humanity;
23. Establishment of a general Register of cultural, architectural and landscape monuments of the BRICS member states and the inclusion of the given cultural heritage sites in the World Heritage List, which would allow to launch the Web Project «BRICS Countries Digital Culture» in future;
24. Development of cooperation and mutual assistance between the BRICS countries in World Heritage sites preservation, management and protection, cultural property restoration, attribution and examination, as well as by creating a single portal for the experience exchange in the field of education and advanced training for specialists from BRICS countries;
25. Development of a unified approach to the legal protection of temporarily abroad cultural property for cultural, educational and research purposes by strengthening the efficiency of the system of State guarantees for the safety and integrity of cultural and historical values transferred between the BRICS state cultural institutions for exposition, scientific or restoration purposes.

#### **Tourism, projects and events in the cultural track**

26. The launch of the «BRICS Cultural Tourism» project shall consider the possibility to provide direct communication between the countries, to simplify visa procedures for the BRICS citizens, to open the School of guides providing BRICS languages courses as well as elaborate touristic routes in the Alliance countries;
27. Organization of annual five-sided Culture Festivals «BRICS - our common home», which would include concerts of a combined interethnic orchestra, performances of famous classical ballets and operas with participation of musicians and dancers from the BRICS countries on the leading venues of the member states;

28. Implementation of the «Great Cities of BRICS» Project under the patronage of the «Great Teachers of BRICS» Project to get acquainted with the places, where the great representatives of the «five» lived and worked, expand and deepen knowledge about the Teachers themselves, which may also become a research project in the field of cultural tourism;
29. Organization of a traditional universal exhibition of the BRICS countries (every few years) to demonstrate the future vision of the countries in social, cultural, scientific, industrial, technical areas;
30. Organization of BRICS Championships, for instance, on chess, martial arts sports, such as Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, Chinese Sanda, Russian Sambo, etc.

### **Peoples of BRICS – approaching to the 75th Anniversary of the Great Victory**

31. Initiate the establishment the «World Day of War Veterans» under the guidance of the UN Resolution;
32. Participation in the international Project «Libraries -Victory Witnesses» based on materials from National libraries and archives of the BRICS countries;
33. Participation in the Five-sided Literary and Historical Project «Peoples of BRICS: Dedicated to the War Heroes» that is aimed to truthfully highlight the occasions and participants of the World War II and the great Patriotic War basing on historical books, archival materials and documents left by authors from the BRICS countries.