

BRICS and Africa's renaissance: Socio-economic and political implications for the contemporary international system

Abang Moses Okangbe

Department of Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution, Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Calabar, Calabar

Abstract

This paper examines the evolving relationship between the BRICS bloc - Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa- and Africa within the broader context of Africa's quest for an African Renaissance. Using a qualitative research design based on content analysis and secondary data review, the study analyzes the socio-economic and political implications of BRICS engagement for Africa's development and positioning within the international system. Focusing on selected African countries—South Africa, Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Kenya—the study finds that BRICS engagement, particularly through China and India, has significantly contributed to infrastructure development, energy expansion, and industrial capacity building across the continent. However, the partnership remains asymmetrical, shaped by unequal bargaining power, fragmented African representation, and predominantly bilateral engagements. Africa's limited strategic coordination within BRICS constrains its ability to fully leverage the bloc for transformative development. The study argues that while BRICS presents an alternative to Western-dominated global governance structures, its potential to advance the African Renaissance depends largely on Africa's agency, institutional capacity, and continental unity. The paper concludes by recommending stronger African Union coordination, effective implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), increased investment in African-led research, and a shift from resource-based engagement toward industrialization and technological development.

Key Words: BRICS; African Renaissance, South-South Cooperation; Multi-polarity, Development, Finance, Africa BRICS Relations, International System; Global Governance

Introduction and background of the study

The emergence of alternative power blocs such as BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) has significantly altered global power relations in the twenty-first century, challenging the long-standing dominance of Western-led institutions (Stuenkel, 2015; Nolte, 2016). Simultaneously, Africa's pursuit of the African Renaissance- centered on political renewal, socio-economic transformation, and cultural revitalization- has intensified debates about the continent's role in the evolving international system (Sesanti, 2016; Mazrui & Wondji, 2017). BRICS positions itself as a coalition of emerging economies advocating multi-polarity, South-South cooperation, and reforms of global governance institutions such as the IMF and the United Nations Security Council (Cooper, 2017; Alden & Alves, 2019). Africa's growing engagement with BRICS has occurred through trade, infrastructure development, and political dialogue, particularly following South Africa's admission into the bloc in 2010 (South African Government, 2023). While proponents argue that BRICS offers Africa alternatives to Western dependency, critics caution that these engagements may reproduce unequal power relations under a new global configuration (Taylor, 2017; Brautigam, 2020).

The post-Cold War era has seen persistent global governance imbalances, with decision-making dominated by Western-led institutions like the IMF, World Bank, and UN Security Council. In response, BRICS—Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa—has promoted a multipolar world and increased engagement with Africa, offering alternatives that emphasize sovereignty, South-South cooperation, and infrastructure development. While this offers Africa opportunities for diversified partnerships and development finance, it also risks reproducing old patterns of dependency—marked by debt, weak negotiation capacity, and marginal roles in global value chains. Despite the rhetoric of solidarity, BRICS-Africa relations often lack transparency, reciprocity, and sustainability. Moreover, the African Renaissance—focused on political renewal, economic autonomy, and cultural revival—remains weakly aligned with these external engagements. Empirical evidence of BRICS' support for this vision is limited, and South Africa's claim as Africa's voice in BRICS is contested by other states. Africa's lack of a unified strategy further weakens its bargaining power, as most BRICS relations remain bilateral and fragmented. This study examines whether BRICS engagement truly supports Africa's transformation or simply repackages dependency within a new global power framework. It also explores Africa's strategic agency in shaping these partnerships.

Objective

To examine the socio-economic and political implications of BRICS engagement with Africa in relation to the African Renaissance and international system.

Specific objectives

- i. To analyze the development model proposed by BRICS in Africa.
- ii. To evaluate Africa's agency in BRICS-Africa relations.

- iii. To assess the political implications for global power reconfiguration.
- iv. To investigate whether BRICS supports the principles of the African Renaissance.

Conceptual clarifications

Understanding BRICS

Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa are the five main emerging economies that make up the term BRICS. The term "BRIC" was first used in 2001, and in 2010, South Africa was added to the group to highlight the economies' increasing sway over world events (Moch, 2024). With over 40% of the world's population and 25% of its GDP, the BRICS nations provide substantial economic development potential (Valdai Club, 2025). In order to counter traditional Western domination in international organizations, BRICS functions as a cooperative platform that promotes economic, political, and cultural cooperation among its member states. Kaba, 2024. Its objective includes financial cooperation, trade facilitation, infrastructure development, and reforming international governance organizations like the United Nations and International Monetary Fund (IMF) to better represent the interests of emerging nations (Bawa & Singh, 2024). Further institutionalizing BRICS' attempts to fund sustainable development initiatives in member and other developing nations is the creation of the New Development Bank (NDB) (Bradlow & Masamba, 2024).

In general, the BRICS initiative represents a vision of South-South collaboration and multipolarity, aiming to change the global order through collective political and economic power (Nanwani, 2024). The African Renaissance is a political and cultural movement aimed at revitalizing Africa's social, economic, and political landscape by reclaiming African identity, heritage, and agency. Popularized by former South African President Thabo Mbeki in the early 2000s, the concept envisions Africa's transformation into a continent of peace, prosperity, and self-determination (Sesanti, 2016). At its core, the African Renaissance promotes a departure from the legacy of colonialism and underdevelopment towards sustainable growth through African-led initiatives. This includes emphasizing education, science and technology, good governance, and economic integration (Fassi, 2022). The African Union's Agenda 2063 is a contemporary manifestation of the African Renaissance philosophy, outlining a strategic framework for Africa's socio-economic transformation (Mulilo, Laassiri & Boye, 2022). The African Renaissance also underlines the importance of continental unity, cultural pride, and reclaiming Africa's voice in global affairs, aligning closely with principles of South-South cooperation and multipolar international relations (Moch, 2024). It is a rallying call for Africans to harness their resources and talents for the continent's renaissance in the 21st century.

Empirical literature review

This section presents a synthesis of empirical studies on BRICS-Africa engagement, particularly focusing on economic outcomes, foreign policy responses, and the critical gaps in existing scholarship that necessitate further inquiry. Yiblet (2024), investigated the ways in which the BRICS alliance-which stands for Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa-supports the economic growth of African nations. The study demonstrated how BRICS helps Africa through initiatives like the New Development Bank and technology transfer using case studies and previously published material. According to the study, BRICS has facilitated cooperation in sectors like energy and transportation, increased economic growth, and improved infrastructure. However, challenges such as unequal development, political tensions, and governance issues still limit the full benefits of this cooperation. Case studies provided real examples of how BRICS-Africa projects work and what lessons can be learned. The study also gave useful policy suggestions to improve future cooperation, such as promoting fair development, better diplomatic relations, and stronger economic policies. In summary, the study shows that BRICS offers real opportunities for Africa's development, but more effort is needed to overcome challenges and make the most of the partnership.

Ekor, Adeniyi, and Saka (2014), used descriptive and econometric techniques to examine Nigeria's trade relations with each of the BRICS nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa). The results showed that Nigeria has the strongest trade intensity with Brazil, followed by India and South Africa. Using vector autoregressive analysis, the study found that Nigeria's GDP adjusts more quickly to changes in trade with Brazil compared to the other BRICS countries. This suggests that trade shocks involving Brazil have a faster impact on Nigeria's economy. A key policy takeaway from the study is that Brazil holds the greatest potential to improve Nigeria's trade position among the BRICS nations. This highlights the importance of focusing trade and economic cooperation efforts more on Brazil for better outcomes. Jamel, Derbali, Lamouchi, and Elnagar (2021), examined trade openness and competitiveness between Sub-Saharan African countries and BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) countries between 1995 and 2018. Using panel data econometrics with the Blundell and Bond GMM estimator, the study found that trade policies, natural resource availability, and growth in GDP per capita help promote trade between these regions. The research also highlights the need for African countries to develop their industrial sectors to increase exports of higher-value manufactured goods. This development would improve their trade competitiveness with BRICS countries.

Aboulezz (2016) used the Gravity model and panel data from 2000 to 2013 to examine the primary determinants impacting trade between South Africa and the BRIC nations (Brazil, Russia, India, and China). The study examined export flows and found several key influences. The results showed that South Africa's exports to BRIC countries are positively affected by the GDP of both South Africa and the BRIC nations, South Africa's population, trade openness, shared language, and geographic distance. However, the population size of the BRIC countries and the real exchange rate had a negative impact on export flows.

Gaps in the literature and the need for current study

While the reviewed studies provide valuable insights, several critical gaps persist. First, much of the empirical literature has focused disproportionately on China, with limited attention to the collective influence of BRICS as a bloc. Studies often isolate China's bilateral relations, overlooking the broader multilateral institutional engagements, such as the BRICS-Africa Dialogue Forum and the New Development Bank. Second, existing studies often assess economic outcomes in isolation, neglecting the socio-political and strategic dimensions of BRICS-Africa relations -such as diplomatic cooperation, educational exchange, and ideological alignment on global governance reforms. Third, despite growing interest in Africa's agency, few studies empirically examine how African states shape or respond to BRICS strategies within the context of multi-polarity. Most treat African countries as passive actors rather than as strategic players with foreign policy goals. Moreover, the dynamic and evolving nature of BRICS-Africa engagement, particularly post-COVID-19 and amid global geopolitical shifts (e.g., US-China rivalry, Russia's resurgence), calls for updated empirical analyses that reflect current realities. This study, therefore, fills these gaps by providing a holistic assessment of BRICS-Africa relations across economic, political, and strategic domains, using both qualitative and quantitative

The international system: A brief overview

The intricate web of states, non-state entities, and international organizations engaging within a formal framework regulated by laws, conventions, and power dynamics makes up the international system. The system has been founded on the ideas of territorial integrity and state sovereignty since the Peace of Westphalia (1648) (Pandey, 2025). Globalization, technical advancements, and the rise of new powers have all contributed to the complexity of the modern international system. In contrast to the post-World War II era, when the United States dominated a unipolar system, recent decades have seen a shift towards multipolarity, with regional organizations and emerging countries like China and India affecting global dynamics (Singh, 2022). Multilateralism remains a foundational feature, enabling cooperation through institutions like the United Nations, World Trade Organization (WTO), and International Monetary Fund (IMF). However, challenges such as geopolitical rivalries, nationalism, and uneven development have tested the efficacy of the international system (Ungar, 2024). Understanding this evolving landscape is critical to analyzing the roles of emerging actors such as BRICS and Africa in shaping global governance.

i. South-South cooperation and multilateralism

A framework for cooperation among developing nations in the Global South, South-South cooperation (SSC) aims to accomplish common development objectives by means of resource sharing, knowledge sharing, and mutual assistance. In contrast to conventional North-South aid paradigms, this strategy places a strong emphasis on equality, respect for sovereignty, and unconditional help (UN, 2023). The Non-Aligned Movement and the Bandung Conference (1955) are the origins of SSC, which has gained new traction recently as developing nations look for more control over the international system (South Centre, 2024). Through a variety of strategies, such as trade facilitation, technology transfer, capacity building, and financial collaborations, SSC is frequently institutionalized through regional organizations and international platforms like the African Union and the BRICS New Development Bank (OECD, 2023). By offering organized forums for discussion, cooperation, and group action on global concerns like public health, climate change, and sustainable development, multilateralism enhances SSC (UNDP, 2021). This convergence is embodied in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which encourage inclusive international collaboration that incorporates SSC ideals into multilateral frameworks (UNDP, 2021).

Despite having similar objectives, SSC and multilateralism can occasionally clash over power imbalances and governance standards. In contrast to well-established global institutions, critics contend that the SSC's adaptable, informal structures occasionally lack accountability and transparency (OECD, 2023). However, a tendency toward a more inclusive and balanced international system is indicated by the growing involvement of Southern nations in multilateral forums (UN, 2024). Recent global challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change, have highlighted the critical importance of SSC and multilateralism working in tandem to mobilize resources, share expertise, and foster resilience among developing countries (UNDP, 2021). As such, South-South cooperation and multilateralism are not mutually exclusive but are evolving as complementary pillars for global governance in the 21st century.

ii. Historical context of BRICS-Africa relations and its engagement since 2009

The BRICS grouping-comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa-has progressively strengthened its engagement with Africa since South Africa's admission in 2010. This relationship has evolved over more than a decade, characterized by growing diplomatic, economic, and strategic interactions that highlight Africa's increasing importance within the BRICS framework. South Africa's inclusion into BRICS in 2010 marked a significant milestone for the group's global outreach, effectively positioning Africa within this influential multilateral bloc. As the continent's most industrialized economy and a regional power, South Africa acts as the primary representative voice for Africa in BRICS. Its participation facilitates a platform for African interests and perspectives in global economic governance and development discussions. South Africa advocates for increased South-South cooperation, technology transfer, and infrastructure development across the continent, leveraging BRICS' collective economic clout. Moreover, South Africa serves as a bridge linking Africa's diverse economies with the emerging global powers of BRICS, thereby enhancing continental integration into global trade and investment flows (South African Government, 2023; EFE Noticias, 2023; South African Business, 2023).

Since South Africa's inclusion in BRICS in 2010, Africa has become increasingly visible within the bloc's diplomatic and economic outreach (EFSAS, 2024). The establishment of the New Development Bank (NDB) in 2014 marked a major institutional mechanism for financing infrastructure and sustainable development projects across Africa (Armijo & Roberts, 2022; New Development Bank, 2023). China and India have emerged as the most active BRICS actors in Africa, particularly in infrastructure, energy, telecommunications, and manufacturing (Chen & Jiménez, 2021; Oqubay & Lin, 2023). While these investments have improved connectivity and productive capacity, they have also raised concerns about debt sustainability, limited local value addition, and uneven development outcomes (Brautigam, 2020; Morris, 2020).

iii. Strategic forums and summits linking BRICS and Africa

Strategic forums and summits have been critical in institutionalizing and advancing BRICS-Africa relations. The annual BRICS summits regularly feature African issues on their agenda, enabling dialogue on trade, investment, and political cooperation. Additionally, the BRICS Business Council and the New Development Bank have hosted dedicated sessions focusing on African projects and opportunities. These platforms facilitate multilateral cooperation, promote joint ventures, and provide avenues for African countries to engage directly with BRICS economies. Notably, South Africa's hosting of the 2018 BRICS Summit in Johannesburg underscored the importance of Africa within the group's strategic outlook, spotlighting issues such as industrialization, youth empowerment, and sustainable development on the African continent. These forums have enhanced visibility for Africa's development priorities within the global governance framework championed by BRICS (Stuenkel, 2018; Humphrey & Michaelowa, 2020; New Development Bank, 2018).

iv. Economic engagement: Trade, investment, and infrastructure

Economic ties between BRICS and Africa have intensified significantly over the past decade, driven by growing trade volumes, investment flows, and infrastructure development projects. China, India, and South Africa are key players in Africa's trade landscape, with China alone accounting for over \$254 billion in trade with Africa in 2023, making it the continent's largest trading partner (World Bank, 2024; UNCTAD, 2023). Investments focus heavily on sectors such as mining, energy, manufacturing, and telecommunications. For instance, India's investments in pharmaceuticals and information technology have expanded African access to affordable medicines and digital services (Moyo & de Vries, 2023; Kumar & Wesson, 2022). Infrastructure remains a critical area, with BRICS-led projects including railway expansions, port developments, and energy grids aiming to improve connectivity and economic productivity across Africa (African Development Bank, 2023; UNCTAD, 2024). These engagements have contributed to Africa's industrialization and integration into global value chains, albeit challenges remain regarding sustainability and equitable benefits (Morris, 2020; Oqubay & Lin, 2023).

v. Political and diplomatic alliances

Politically, BRICS advocates reforms in global governance institutions to better reflect the interests of emerging and developing countries, including Africa (Stuenkel, 2023; Power & Mohan, 2021). Through diplomatic coordination, BRICS members often align with African states on issues such as sovereignty, non-interference, and global economic justice (Southall, 2021). Nonetheless, Africa's collective influence within BRICS remains constrained by fragmented representation and weak continental coordination, with most engagements occurring bilaterally rather than multilaterally (Kamoche & Ramasodi, 2022; Obi, 2021). Beyond economics and diplomacy, BRICS countries have increasingly invested in socio-cultural and educational collaborations with Africa to build people-to-people connections. Educational exchanges and scholarship programs, especially from China and India, have enabled thousands of African students to study abroad, enhancing skills and fostering cross-cultural understanding (UNESCO, 2023). Cultural cooperation initiatives include joint festivals, language training, and media collaborations aimed at promoting intercultural dialogue and soft power influence (Nhamo et al., 2022). These socio-cultural dimensions help build trust and long-term partnerships beyond transactional economic or political interests, contributing to sustainable and inclusive development.

vi. Development finance and the new development bank (NDB)

The New Development Bank (NDB), which was founded in 2014 to raise funds for infrastructure and sustainable development projects, is one of the most tangible pillars of BRICS involvement in Africa (New

Development Bank, 2023). The bank has approved several projects in African countries, including renewable energy plants, transport networks, and water management systems, reflecting its commitment to addressing Africa's developmental deficits (Armijo & Roberts, 2022). The NDB complements existing financial institutions by providing alternatives to traditional Western-dominated development banks, offering concessional loans and technical expertise with fewer conditionalities (Li & Gallagher, 2020). This has enabled African nations to pursue infrastructure-led growth strategies aligned with their national development plans. However, scaling up these efforts remains crucial to meeting the continent's vast financing needs (World Bank, 2023).

vii. Critical perspectives on BRICS-Africa engagement

While BRICS engagement in Africa has been widely welcomed as a diversification of the continent's international partnerships, it has also attracted critical scrutiny. Debates continue over whether BRICS truly offers a transformative alternative to Western-dominated relations or merely replicates existing patterns of exploitation, albeit under a different guise. The idea that BRICS provides an alternative to the unipolar global order that has historically been dominated by Western countries is one of the primary themes surrounding BRICS-Africa ties. A narrative of South-South solidarity, non-intervention, and respect for sovereignty is frequently promoted by the BRICS nations, especially China and Russia. Without the political restrictions imposed on loans from the World Bank or IMF, development funding can be provided through organizations such as the New Development Bank (NDB). BRICS challenges Western financial orthodoxy. Moreover, BRICS support for reforms of global institutions such as the UN Security Council and WTO is seen as an effort to rebalance global governance in favor of emerging and developing countries. However, critics argue that despite this rhetoric, BRICS members often pursue national interests, and their policies do not always reflect a cohesive or transformative global vision (Alden & Large, 2019; Brautigam, 2020; Power & Mohan, 2010).

viii. Neo-colonialism or genuine partnership

A contentious aspect of BRICS-Africa engagement concerns whether it fosters genuine partnership or continues patterns of neo-colonialism. Critics argue that some BRICS members, particularly China, replicate exploitative resource extraction and labor practices without sufficiently supporting local development (Brautigam, 2020). Infrastructure projects linked to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) have improved logistics but are also criticized for creating debt dependency and undermining local industries (Brautigam, 2020; Brautigam & Hwang, 2020). On the other hand, proponents highlight that BRICS countries generally do not impose ideological conditions on aid and respect the sovereignty of African states, providing governments more control over their development paths (Kragelund, 2021). The reality likely lies between these views, reflecting a pragmatic blend of interests and solidarity. Despite the rhetoric of partnership, large disparities in economic size and technology create concerns about unequal bargaining power. China's dominant economic role can disadvantage African countries during negotiations, resulting in unbalanced agreements (Alden & Large, 2019). Furthermore, African states often engage BRICS members individually rather than as a unified group, weakening their collective negotiation strength (Kamoche & Ramasodi, 2022). This asymmetry is also visible in trade patterns, where Africa mainly exports raw materials and imports finished goods, perpetuating colonial economic structures. This underscores the urgent need for African countries to build internal capacity and negotiate better terms.

Nevertheless, African states are active agents, not passive recipients. They increasingly use BRICS partnerships to diversify foreign relations, access alternative finance, and benefit from global geopolitical competition (Obi, 2021). The African Union's Agenda 2063 and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) reflect efforts to promote continental integration and a shared development vision. African leaders have also taken part in BRICS summits and proposed joint action plans emphasizing African priorities like industrialization, climate resilience, and youth employment (African Union & BRICS, 2023). Achieving true strategic autonomy, however, requires stronger governance, regional coordination, and negotiation skills to maximize external partnerships.

ix. The African renaissance agenda in contemporary discourse

The African Renaissance encompasses a practical agenda and a philosophical vision centered on the political, economic, and cultural revitalization of the continent. The idea, which was first made popular by former South African President Thabo Mbeki in the late 1990s, has since grown to be crucial to Africa's transformation in the twenty-first century. It highlights the necessity of overcoming colonial legacies, encouraging self-reliance, and regaining a significant role in international affairs (Ajakaiye & Jerome, 2019; Maphosa & Bonga, 2021). The regeneration of political systems through democratization, improved governance, and respect to the rule of law is a key element of the African Renaissance. The African Union promotes political accountability, transparency, and peaceful handovers of power through frameworks such as the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance (ACDEG) (AU, 2017).

While many African countries have made progress with peaceful elections and constitutional reforms, ongoing challenges such as military coups and authoritarian setbacks in nations like Sudan, Mali, and Guinea reveal the fragile nature of these democratic advances (Freedom House, 2024). Strengthening institutions and increasing civic participation remain vital to building lasting democratic cultures. Economically, the African Renaissance stresses self-sufficiency via industrialization, value addition, and structural transformation. The

African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), launched in 2021, aims to establish a unified market that boosts intra-African trade, industrial growth, and employment opportunities (UNECA, 2022). Countries like Ethiopia and Rwanda exemplify economic renewal through focused industrial policies and infrastructure development (World Bank, 2023). Nonetheless, many African economies still depend heavily on exporting raw commodities, which makes them vulnerable to external shocks. Sustainable economic transformation requires greater investment in education, technology, and integration of value chains to reduce reliance on primary resources (UNDP, 2024). Together, these political and economic goals embody the African Renaissance's drive to build a self-reliant, democratic, and prosperous continent poised to play a stronger role on the global stage.

x. Pan-Africanism and Regional Integration

The core ideology of the African Renaissance, Pan-Africanism, promotes solidarity, unity, and collective self-determination on the continent. This objective is embodied by the African Union (AU), which replaced the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and has been instrumental in fostering regional collaboration and peacebuilding (Murithi, 2018). The African Renaissance envisions a continent free from externally imposed divisions, where African states collaborate on security, migration, trade, and climate change. However, ongoing conflicts, border disputes, and differing national interests still challenge integration efforts. Nonetheless, initiatives like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the AU's Agenda 2063 illustrate increasing dedication to Pan-African principles (UNECA, 2021).

Cultural revival is central to the African Renaissance, focusing on reclaiming African identity, languages, and heritage suppressed during colonial times. Movements to decolonize education, promote indigenous languages, and protect cultural artifacts have been gaining traction continent-wide (Mazrui, 2020). Efforts such as returning looted artifacts from European museums and integrating African history and knowledge systems into education aim to strengthen cultural pride (Smith, 2023). Education remains vital in this renaissance, with policies prioritizing STEM, entrepreneurship, and vocational training to foster a knowledge-driven economy. Addressing the digital divide and improving access to quality education are critical for empowering future generations (World Bank, 2022).

Finding, conclusion and recommendation

Finding:

The study reveals key dimensions of the BRICS-Africa relationship, particularly in economic development, political engagement, and strategic diplomacy. A major finding is the significant increase in infrastructure financing by China and India, especially in transport, energy, and telecommunications. Projects such as roads, railways, and power plants have improved connectivity and energy access. However, the relationship is asymmetrical, with China and India far outpacing Brazil, Russia, and even South Africa in influence and economic presence.

Benefits from BRICS partnerships vary across African countries, depending on governance quality, negotiation capacity, and policy coherence. Countries with strong institutions secure better deals, while those with weak systems face exploitative arrangements. Despite South Africa's BRICS membership, Africa lacks a coordinated strategy within the bloc, limiting its influence and alignment with its development goals.

Conclusion

This study has examined the socio-economic and political implications of BRICS engagement with Africa within the broader framework of the African Renaissance and the evolving international system. It demonstrates that BRICS has emerged as a significant actor in Africa's external relations, offering alternatives to Western-dominated development finance, global governance structures, and partnership models. Through infrastructure financing, trade expansion, diplomatic coordination, and development cooperation—particularly led by China and India—BRICS engagement has contributed to improved connectivity, energy access, and industrial capacity in several African countries. However, the study also reveals that these gains remain uneven and structurally constrained. BRICS -Africa relations are largely shaped by asymmetrical power relations, fragmented African representation, and a predominance of bilateral rather than continental engagements. While BRICS rhetorically promotes South-South cooperation, sovereignty, and mutual benefit, practical outcomes often reflect Africa's limited bargaining power, weak institutional coordination, and continued dependence on primary commodity exports. These dynamics raise critical concerns about whether BRICS engagement represents a genuine departure from historical dependency or a reconfiguration of existing inequalities within a multipolar global order.

The findings further suggest that Africa's ability to harness BRICS for transformative development is less dependent on the intentions of BRICS members and more on Africa's own strategic agency. Countries with stronger governance structures, clearer development priorities, and greater negotiation capacity tend to secure more favorable outcomes from BRICS partnerships. Conversely, states with weak institutions risk debt accumulation, limited technology transfer, and marginal participation in global value chains. This underscores the centrality of African leadership, policy coherence, and continental coordination in shaping the direction and

impact of BRICS engagement. Within the context of the African Renaissance, BRICS presents both opportunity and risk. On one hand, the bloc aligns with key renaissance principles such as multi-polarity, reform of global governance, and South–South solidarity. On the other hand, without deliberate alignment to Africa's long-term agenda- particularly Agenda 2063 and the AfCFTA-BRICS engagement may fall short of supporting structural transformation, industrialization, and self-reliant development. The African Renaissance therefore cannot be externally delivered; it must be internally driven, with external partnerships such as BRICS strategically leveraged rather than passively received.

In conclusion, BRICS engagement with Africa should be understood neither as a panacea for Africa's developmental challenges nor as an inherently exploitative relationship. Rather, it constitutes a contested space within the contemporary international system, where outcomes are shaped by power relations, negotiation capacity, and strategic vision. For BRICS to meaningfully contribute to Africa's renaissance, African states must act collectively, assert agency, and embed these partnerships within a coherent continental development strategy.

Recommendation:

Based on the Finding, the following recommendation were made

1. The African Union should create a BRICS-Africa Policy Monitoring and Evaluation Framework to track progress and shape Africa-focused proposals.
2. African states should fully implement the AfCFTA to strengthen regional trade and reduce BRICS dependency.
3. Investment in African-led research is vital to shape the continent's development agenda and improve negotiation.
4. BRICS cooperation should support structural transformation through industrialization, value addition, and technology transfer, rather than raw material exports.

References:

- Alden, C., & Alves, A. C. (2019). South Africa and the BRICS: A practical guide. *International Affairs*, 95(3), 575–591. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiz040>
- Alden, C., & Schoeman, M. (2013). South Africa in the company of giants: The search for leadership in a transforming global order. *International Affairs*, 89(1), 111–129.
- Armijo, L. E., & Roberts, D. (2022). The New Development Bank and South–South development finance: Implications for Africa's infrastructure. *Third World Quarterly*, 43(1), 145–164. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2021.1962358>
- Besada, H., Tok, E., & Winters, M. S. (2015). *South–South cooperation: Africa on the rise*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bond, P. (2016). *BRICS banking and the debate over sub-imperialism*. Pluto Press.
- Brautigam, D. (2020). *The dragon's gift: The real story of China in Africa* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Brautigam, D., & Hwang, J. (2020). *China's lending in Africa: Debt relief and restructuring*. China Africa Research Initiative Working Paper.
- BRICS Council. (2024). History of the BRICS. Retrieved from <https://www.bricscouncil.ru/en/history>
- BRICS Council. (2024). New Development Bank: African Regional Centre. Retrieved from <https://www.bricscouncil.ru/en/projects/ndb-africa-centre>
- Chen, W., & Jiménez, A. (2021). BRICS' development financing: The New Development Bank and Africa's infrastructure. *Journal of International Development*, 33(2), 247–261.
- Dos Santos, T. (1970). The structure of dependence. *American Economic Review*, 60(2), 231–236.
- EFSAS. (2024). The BRICS: Origins, Evolution, and Expansion. European Foundation for South Asian Studies. Retrieved from <https://www.efsas.org/publications/study-papers/the-brics-origins-evolution-and-expansion/>
- Ekor, M., Adeniyi, O., & Saka, J. (2014). The BRICS and Nigeria's economic performance: A trade intensity analysis. *Economy*, 1(2), 37–53.
- Frank, A. G. (1967). *Capitalism and underdevelopment in Latin America*. Monthly Review Press.
- Humphrey, C., & Michaelowa, K. (2020). The BRICS and Africa: Cooperation for development or competition? *Journal of International Development*, 32(2), 158–177. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.3460>
- Jamel, L., Derbali, A., Lamouchi, A., & Elnagar, A. (2021). Trade openness and competitiveness: BRICS and Sub-Saharan Africa countries. *International Organisations Research Journal*, 16(1), 64–84.
- Kupchan, C. A. (2012). *No one's world: The West, the rising rest, and the coming global turn*. Oxford University Press.
- Mazrui, A. A., & Wondji, C. (2017). *Africa since 1935*. University of California Press.
- Mbeki, T. (1998). *The African Renaissance*. South African Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- Moch, E. (2024). The economic and geopolitical significance of the BRICS nations. *East African Journal of Business and Economics*, 7(2), 86–100.
- New Development Bank. (2023). Projects portfolio and impact report. <https://www.ndb.int>
- Nolte, D. (2016). How to compare regional powers. *Review of International Studies*, 42(4), 881–901. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210516000050>
- Oqubay, A., & Lin, J. Y. (2023). *The role of BRICS in Africa's industrialization and development*. Oxford University Press.
- Reuters. (2023). BRICS expands with Egypt and Ethiopia as members at 15th Summit. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/brics-expands-egypt-ethiopia-members-2023-08-23/>

- Sesanti, S. (2016). Thabo Mbeki's African developmental agenda through Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance. *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies*, 11(2), 24–37. <https://doi.org/10.1080/18186874.2016.1245954>
- Stuenkel, O. (2015). *The BRICS and the future of global order*. Lexington Books.
- Taylor, I. (2017). Africa rising? BRICS–Africa relations in a changing global order. *Third World Quarterly*, 38(7), 1416–1430.
- The Geoeconomics. (2024). Timeline: How Has BRICS Evolved Over the Years? Retrieved from <https://thegeoeconomics.com/timeline-how-has-brics-evolved-over-the-years/>
- TV BRICS. (2024). 15 Years Since the First BRICS Summit: History of Cooperation. Retrieved from <https://tvbrics.com/en/news/15-years-since-the-first-brics-summit-history-of-cooperation/>
- UNCTAD. (2023). *Economic development in Africa report 2023*. United Nations.
- World Bank. (2023). *Africa's pulse: An analysis of issues shaping Africa's economic future*. World Bank.
- Yu, S., & Zhao, L. (2023). China's infrastructure investments in Africa through BRICS cooperation. *Journal of Infrastructure Policy and Development*, 7(2), 113-129.