

## **BRICS and Climate Governance: India–South Africa Cooperation in a Multipolar World**

Climate change has become one of the most defining challenges of our century, and its politics has moved far beyond being an environmental concern. It has become a unique marker of how nations imagine development, justice and power in our century. The shift from Western power blocs to a multipolar world has created new opportunities for the Global South to communicate its visions of sustainability. Among these, the cooperation of India and South Africa lies within the framework of BRICS, involving not just priorities but also demonstrating how climate governance can be reframed to cater to the needs of justice and equity.

BRICS originated as an economic grouping counterbalancing the dominance of Western institutions like the IMF and World Bank, but in recent years, its agenda has expanded on a large scale. BRICS today addresses issues relating to health, technology, development and climate change. In comparison to the traditional forums where developed nations have dictated terms, BRICS today offers a safe space for emerging economies to come forward and deliberate on their own and bring forward positions that originally reflect their developmental needs. This makes India–South Africa relations dynamic and important, with South Africa positioning itself as an ambitious leader within Africa and India emerging as a major Asian power to put forward global ambitions that represent both national priorities and continental concerns.

Equity is the base and root standpoint of climate diplomacy between India and South Africa. Their shared argument is that developed nations are historically responsible for emissions, and they must take the lead in reducing their carbon footprints, along with sharing and supporting developing nations with finance and technology. At the same time, neither India nor South Africa can ignore their heavy reliance on coal and the demand of economic growth, especially South Africa, whose 80% of electricity comes from coal. This stress put both countries in a delicate balancing act; on one hand, raising a voice for justice in global negotiations and on the other, attempting a gradual transition to renewable energy as a source without destabilising

their domestic economies. This balancing act makes their cooperation symbolically important and practical.

India, in recent years, has evolved its role as a leader in renewable energy and climate justice on various occasions, like the Paris Agreement of 2015, promoting renewable energy transitions by offering financial, technical, and institutional support, particularly to developing countries. One such creation is that of the International Solar Alliance reflecting the shift in Indian foreign policy to take a leadership role in the climate space in solar energy, and to assert global power under PM Modi. South Africa is a prominent ISA member, holding significant solar energy potential, often referred to as a “sunshine state” of the continent. Though its engagement with ISA is more moderate than highly active, as it is constrained by domestic challenges like heavy reliance on coal, financial limitations, lack of knowledge and technological advancements. While South Africa has achieved notable successes through its Renewable Energy Independent Power Producer Procurement Programme (REIPPPP), integrating SSC Frameworks like ISA in its national energy policy has been limited.

As Western-led forums sometimes fail to meet the expectations of developing nations, BRICS is one of the most important platforms for creating new ways of negotiations and solidarity. India and South Africa's collaboration indicates that multipolarity is not about strategic rivalries among great powers but about enabling the middle powers of the Global South to shape norms globally that are more diversified and inclusive. Both countries becoming active proponents of the principles of “Common But Differentiated Responsibility and Respective Capabilities” (CBDR-RC) sets an example of how the language of climate governance is influenced. It is a reminder that the climate debates are not just technical but profoundly political, i.e. who bears responsibility, who finances the transition and how the developing needs of countries like India and South Africa are respected.

Challenges come with the growing needs of the cooperation; both India and South Africa have their domestic limits. Though India has a rapid expansion in wind and solar energy, yet coal remains embedded in its energy mix. This can even be seen in the case of South Africa, where almost 80% of electricity comes from coal, leading to different energy crises and electric blackouts, and alternative sources remain underdeveloped. Policy and Governance Issues, such as Misaligned policies and bureaucratic hurdles, pose challenges to seamless energy collaboration. Infrastructure Gaps as South Africa requires significant investments in

renewable energy infrastructure, which remains a bottleneck for large-scale projects. Adding on to the domestic issues comes the internal issues of BRICS, particularly between Russia, China and others, which weakens the efforts of collective action on climate change. For India and South Africa, this means walking a fine line between collaborative action and utilitarian national goals.

Yet, the possibilities of India and South Africa cooperation remain considerable and significant. This synergistic partnership is the backbone of various renewable energy projects, like joint research into next-generation technology of green hydrogen and battery storage and linking them to expertise and infrastructure with collaborative learning programs for engineers and policymakers. India gets its gateway to extend various such initiatives through South Africa and even to wider African contexts, assisting in resolving poverty and climate vulnerability across the region. In this context, cooperation is not restricted to bilateralism but resonates with a substantial aspiration of South–South solidarity.

Both countries, India and South Africa, emphasise most on mutual benefit and co-development, making this partnership significant in its ability to rethink the accounts of climate actions. This has made the partnership go beyond a linear model and donor-receiver model long characterised by north-south relations. Their discourse holds on to the thought that climate justice is not only about reducing emissions but also about ensuring that these adaptations are also socially and economically sustainable. This century makes this vision critical for developing countries as climate governance cannot be separated from issues and questions of livelihood, poverty eradication and inclusive growth.

Within the framework of BRICS, South Africa becomes a key player in India's Global South vision for a more equitable global energy landscape. Their partnership reflects the broader future of climate politics, involving and balancing the complexities of development with sustainability. This makes BRICS a platform having the potential of multipolarity to produce new coalitions and ideas and shifting the centre of climate governance towards the Global South, ensuring climate justice and equity.

Today, the world faces an intense paradox: climate action has become significant than ever, yet the pathways towards agreement and unity are deeply challenged. At such a moment, the cooperation between India and South Africa becomes a symbol of how developing countries with similar development trajectories and historical struggles can craft unique and innovative

solutions. Engagement within BRICS seeks to build a sustainable future where justice and equity go hand in hand and makes multipolarity inclusive by amplifying diverse voices and shaping collective priorities.

The partnership of India and South Africa reimagine global politics, making the climate regime fair, inclusive and effective. Therefore, this partnership in BRICS is more than a bilateral relationship; it is a creation of how the Global South can move from the margins to the centre of climate governance, narrating a course towards a just and sustainable world.

**\*Views are personal**

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*The Department of African Studies has launched an initiative called "Scholars on Africa" with the primary objective of promoting the research ideas of scholars and faculty members on current happenings and contemporary issues related to the African continent. This initiative serves a dual purpose, as it not only facilitates academic exploration but also provides valuable insights to the policymakers of India on matters concerning Africa. By actively engaging with scholars and faculty members, the initiative aims to foster a better understanding and relationship between India and Africa, bridging the gap between the two worlds.*

*Under the "Scholars on Africa" initiative, Scholars of the Department of African Studies are encouraged to contribute write-ups on various African issues, not exceeding 300 words in length. It is noteworthy that these write-ups will be forwarded by any faculty members of the Department. These write-ups serve as a platform for scholars to express their personal views and insights on a diverse range of topics, including History, Politics, economics, culture, and social issues prevalent in Africa.*

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