

BRICS 2026



A staff member trains robots at a textile workshop in Cixi, Zhejiang province, on Sept 3. XU YU / XINHUA

BRICS to give Global South greater role in AI governance

Closing development gap and bridging digital divide key pillars of group's goals

By YANG RAN
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The BRICS bloc is emerging as a significant force in the development and governance of artificial intelligence globally, experts say, highlighting its crucial role in championing the interests of the developing countries and bridging the digital divide.

BRICS has evolved into a crucial mechanism for Global South nations to pursue shared development. Since 2023, every joint declaration issued at BRICS summits has addressed AI governance as a key pillar of the intergovernmental group's agenda.

BRICS members and developing nations in general regard AI as both an unprecedented opportunity and a strategic imperative. Jiang Tianjiao, a research fellow at the Center for Global AI Innovative Governance in Shanghai, said that these countries see developing AI as a way of increasing productivity, improving public services and narrowing the digital divide, but also as an essential path to reduce dependence on developed countries for technology, computing power and rules.

A landmark move came at last year's BRICS Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, where the bloc issued its first leadership-level consensus document on global AI governance, The BRICS Leaders' Statement on the Global Governance of Artificial Intelligence.

It underscored digital sovereignty and the right to development as central to global AI governance.

The BRICS consensus serves as a crucial corrective to the global AI governance system, experts said.

Carlos Correa, executive director of South Centre, a Geneva-based intergovernmental organization for developing countries, said: "The consensus among BRICS countries reflects the goals shared by the Global South, notably to harness AI in line with national development priorities. This differs from Western-led blocs that attempt to dictate the AI trajectories of developing nations."

"By seeking fair and equitable access to AI technologies, accompanied by digital capacity-building and skill development, especially for the youth, BRICS countries advance a different vision for how AI can be used to support global development"

Jiang Qingquan, deputy director of the BRICS Economic Research Center at Xiamen University of Technology, said global AI governance discussions have often fixated on security risks, overlooking the more fundamental issue of the development gap.

"By enshrining the right to development as a governance principle, the BRICS statement compels the international community to address the crucial question: how to ensure all countries can access and use AI before discussing its regulation," Jiang Qingquan said, adding that the group places the right to development at the core of AI governance.

"Giving priority to capacity building for developing countries before

delving into rule details better aligns with the practical needs of Global South nations," he said.

He said the bloc's role could be as a "collective spokesperson for Global South AI governance".

Despite varying strengths in AI technology, computing infrastructure and energy support, experts see these differences as a unique advantage for BRICS multilateral AI collaboration, potentially playing a significant role in bridging the global digital divide.

Jiang Tianjiao underscored the complementary strengths among BRICS members in creating a "resources-technology-scenario-energy" synergy.

"China has a complete AI industrial chain and open-source model capabilities; Russia and India excel in algorithms and talent; Brazil, Indonesia and South Africa have abundant application scenarios in different sectors; and countries such as China and Brazil offer clean energy for high-energy-consuming computing power," he said.

This complementarity is translating into concrete mechanisms. In Bengaluru, India, in July, BRICS member nations signed an agreement on collaboration in standardization, the bloc's first collective foray into setting international AI standards.

This initiative enables BRICS members to jointly shape international norms within standard-setting bodies, thereby amplifying the voice of emerging economies in the governance of frontier technologies, Jiang Qingquan said.

BRICS is translating consensus into actionable cooperation mechanisms, with China playing a key role

in driving this practical implementation, experts said.

Addressing the 16th BRICS Summit in Kazan, Russia, in 2024, President Xi Jinping announced the establishment of the China-BRICS Artificial Intelligence Development and Cooperation Center, expressing China's readiness to deepen collaboration on innovation with all BRICS countries to unleash the dividends of AI development.

Xu Shan, an expert at the cooperation center, said, "The center's establishment is about converting this vision into implementable cooperation mechanisms, ensuring BRICS countries become co-creators of innovation in the AI era."

The center has already facilitated 55 supply-demand matching events for AI companies, promoting plans for international collaboration, she said.

Beyond industrial collaboration, the center focuses on capacity building. Its training programs have reached 105 senior officials in 58 countries, extending the benefits of BRICS collaboration to the wider Global South.

For the public at large, Xu said AI cooperation can translate into tangible improvements: farmers in remote areas using AI-powered pest detection, grassroots hospitals drawing on AI-assisted diagnoses to help alleviate doctor shortages, and speakers of minority languages accessing intelligent services in their native tongues.

"The ultimate test of AI collaboration is whether people in BRICS and Global South countries can genuinely benefit from this technological revolution," Xu said. "That is the fundamental purpose of everything the center does."

Training cooperation builds skills across bloc

By ZOU SHUO
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Four years after the BRICS Technical and Vocational Education and Training Cooperation Alliance was set up, it has grown into a platform that mirrors the technical and vocational education and training priorities of each member country. As such, it offers a space for policy dialogue, knowledge exchange and joint capacity-building.

The alliance, which has 97 institutions as its members and is managed by the China Education Association for International Exchange in Beijing, translates high-level BRICS consensus into grassroots people-to-people collaboration, said Yang Jun, vice-president and secretary-general of the association.

Its work has been acknowledged in summit documents from the 14th to the 17th BRICS summits. Most recently, the declaration of the 13th BRICS Ministers of Education Meeting in Bhubaneswar, India, adopted on Aug 7, highlighted its work in joint projects, information sharing and collective upgrading of technical and vocational education and training.

The alliance adopts a multi-stakeholder governance model involving governments, industry associations, training institutions and companies, Yang said. This has enabled a series of practical initiatives — policy dialogues, best-practice sharing, faculty exchanges, student engagement and industry-academia match-making — and it has steadily expanded its activities, membership and influence, he said.

Since 2022, annual hybrid forums have been hosted by each rotating BRICS chair, with sessions held in Beijing, Johannesburg, Moscow, Brasilia and New Delhi. Discussions have focused on skills related to the green economy, sustainable workforce development and inclusive digital transformation for technical and vocational education and training, creating a recurring high-level dialogue channel for practitioners across the member states, Yang said.



Young participants from BRICS countries cheer at the *Rising Star* TVET Student Camp in 2024. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Raphael Obonyo, a public policy analyst from Kenya, said the proposed system could be particularly significant for Africa because it would help establish a common mechanism for tackling diseases and outbreaks, with a focus on prevention, detection and response.

He said greater BRICS cooperation could strengthen disease surveillance, diagnostics, vaccine research and manufacturing, as well as technology transfer.

"Most importantly, the cooperation will aid Africa in building resilience, innovation and sustainability in the prevention and response to mass infectious diseases," he said.

Health is a key area of cooperation among BRICS members, with intensified joint efforts in collaboration in recent years in disease control and prevention, research and innovation and improving universal health coverage. Cooperation mechanisms such as the BRICS Tuberculosis Research Network and BRICS Vaccine Research and Development Centre have been established for member states to collaborate on research, technology transfer and capacity building.

Youth mobility and skills development form another core pillar. Three sessions of the *Rising Star* TVET Student Camp have brought together more than 100 young participants from BRICS countries. The program includes keynote speeches, cross-cultural youth panels, corporate site visits and cultural immersion, helping young professionals expand international peer networks and sharpen job-ready competencies, he said.

One participant, Fatimah Rashed N. Almahasheer from Saudi Arabia, said the camp "unites youth from diverse backgrounds to share perspectives and brainstorm innovative solutions to shared global challenges".

Another participant, Yeaymrokal Kebede Mola from Ethiopia, said the alliance creates opportunities for young people to engage in meaningful dialogue, discuss ideas and collaborate on projects related to important global issues.

Goitsewang Itlotleng Maledu of South Africa said BRICS members stand to gain collectively through better infrastructure, trade finance and strengthened science, engineering and technical capacities.

To improve teaching quality across the network, the alliance has run 12 online workshops and seminars for faculty members and institutional administrators, Yang said.

With the help of 50 international specialists, these sessions have covered digital-resource building, industry-education integration, curriculum design and teaching evaluation, reaching more than 1,000 teaching and managerial staff, he said.

Joint research has also become a cornerstone. Last year, the alliance published a report that examined technical and vocational education and training in various countries and the implications for economic development.

Work on a second-phase research project began this year, with participation extended to the new BRICS-plus members Ethiopia, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates, Yang said.

Africa to benefit from health initiative, experts say

By SHARON NAKOLA in Nairobi
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Health cooperation among BRICS countries could help Africa close persistent gaps in disease surveillance, research, diagnostics and vaccine production while strengthening health systems and improving access to medical products across the Global South, experts said.

The potential benefits are drawing attention as plans advance for a BRICS Integrated Early Warning System for the Prevention and Response to Mass Infectious Diseases. The initiative is aimed at strengthening disease detection, information sharing, preparedness and coordinated responses to future outbreaks.

In July, at the 16th BRICS Health Ministers' Meeting in Chandigarh, India, member nations supported the establishment of a dedicated sub-working group on the early warning system to advance the initiative, which is considered a mile-



Workers unload medical aid supplies from China at Tirunesh Beijing General Hospital in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in July last year. The hospital was built through a bilateral cooperative agreement between the governments of Ethiopia and China. MICHAEL TEWELDE / XINHUA

stone in advancing regional and international health security.

For Africa, the proposed system could make an important contribution, particularly if it connects effectively with surveillance and early

warning systems already in operation across the continent.

"In an outbreak, speed matters enormously. The earlier we identify an unusual signal, the greater our chance of containing it before it

becomes a much larger emergency," said Saran Koly, director of communication and public information for the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention.

She said the fast sharing of epidemiological information, laboratory results, genomic data and risk assessments across countries could improve the ability to identify and contain emerging threats.

Koly said the priority for Africa should be ensuring interoperability between the BRICS-proposed early warning system and existing continental and national health structures in Africa.

"We already have national public-health institutes, laboratory networks, Africa CDC's regional structures and surveillance systems operating across the continent," she said.

"The BRICS system will be most useful to us if these systems can communicate with each other and information can move quickly enough to support decisions on the ground."

Beyond the early warning system, Africa CDC envisions opportunities for other practical cooperation projects between African and BRICS institutions.

Several BRICS countries have strong capabilities in pharmaceuticals, vaccines, diagnostics, biotechnology and genomic surveillance. "We would like to see that translated into very practical cooperation with African institutions: joint research, stronger laboratory networks, clinical trials, training, technology transfer, partnerships between manufacturers and faster development of diagnostics and other medical countermeasures," Koly said.

For Africa to benefit fully from the emerging cooperation with BRICS in disease prevention and control, Obonyo said institutions such as Africa CDC and national public-health agencies must ensure the necessary systems and capacities are in place to support timely detection and effective responses.

African nations must also invest in preparedness before emergencies occur, including through stronger health systems, surveillance and cross-border coordination, he said.