



THE INCLUSION OF SOUTH AFRICA IN BRICS: SKEPTICISM AND CHALLENGES WITHIN AFRICA

Kshipra Vasudeo

*PhD Research Scholar (Centre for African Studies (cas), School of International Studies)
Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, 110067, India*

ABSTRACT

The focus of the paper will be to analyze the formation of BRIC and later the inclusion of the newest member, namely South Africa in 2010, leading to the renaming of this multilateral agency to BRICS – with “S” denoting South Africa to reflect the group’s expanded membership. The paper will also look into the political, economic and social challenges faced by South Africa, the smallest economy of the five members, as a result of joining this multilateral forum.

KEYWORDS: BRICS, South Africa, Multilateral.

INTRODUCTION

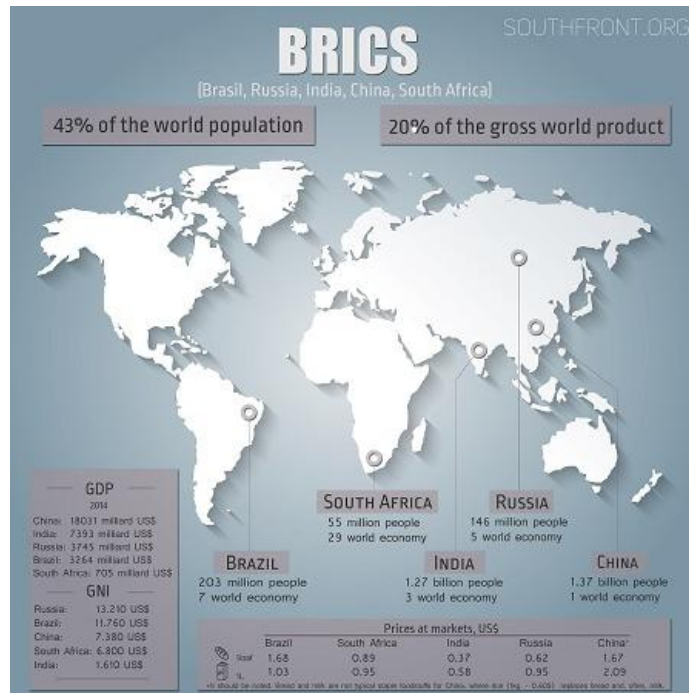
The term “BRIC” which stands for Brazil, Russia, India, and China were invented by Goldman Sachs’ economist, Jim O’Neil while drafting a report on the economic growth prospects for these four countries in 2001. The economist’s paper titled “Building Better Global Economic BRICs” concluded that “over the next 10 years, the weight of the BRICs and especially China in world GDP will grow, raising important issues about the global economic impact of fiscal and monetary policy in the BRICs” (Neil Report, 2001). Supporting the growing strength of these four countries, Goldman Sachs in their 2003 report, “Dreaming with BRICs: The Path to 2050” stated that “by 2050 these economies together would be larger in US Dollar terms than the G-6 (“Group of Six”), consisting of the United States, Germany, Japan, the United Kingdom, France, and Italy” (Neil Report, 2003).

Even though the four countries started informal discussions in 2006, and grouped themselves meanwhile the first meeting of BRIC Foreign Ministers on the margins of UNGA in New York in 2006, they formally officially met in 2009, in the BRIC’s First Annual Summit at Yekaterinburg in Russia. From 2001 to 2010, the BRIC countries achieved significant progress in the economic and the political arena. In December 2010, South Africa was invited as the fifth member of the group and China is regarded as the prime initiator of this invitation. Jim O’Neil, referring to South Africa’s joining the BRIC stated that many of developing countries with advanced economies and better performance than South Africa, such as Indonesia or Turkey (BBC 2011, in World Bank and IPEA 2011), or Saudi Arabia, which has traditionally been a very important provider of overseas development assistance (Mawdsley, 2012). Within the African continent, Sub-Saharan African countries were hoping to get an invitation

to join the BRICS, as they saw the opportunities of connecting with the BRIC economies and the African market. Instead, South Africa was invited and BRIC officially became BRICS at the third summit in Hainan, China in April 2011.

The South African economy is the leading economy in the African continent and it is a rising economy with a huge supply of natural resources. Politically also, it is very important for BRIC countries. Moreover, South Africa is considered as a regional power in the southern part of the African continent and represents the whole of the Africa in the existing world order.

Reason for the evolution of a dynamic forum– BRICS, is because of the change in the world trade and world politics. After the cold war era, the world order system changed, which affected all countries, not just politically but also economically. In the context of creating a new power system/ order, BRICS is one of the good indicators and examples of South-South cooperation. Furthermore, it brings out the challenges of Breton Woods’s institutions like IMF, World Bank which have failed to solve the problems of developing countries. BRICS as a new power alliance, with formal trade relations, is a counter to the developed nations’ political and economic hegemony. The new initiative taken by BRICS, that is, setting of the New Development Bank with a \$ 50 billion reserve fund, and offering the financial loans for development on a global scale, also proves that BRICS is challenging the existing “superpowers”. New Development Bank does not focus just on BRICS countries, but also extends help to other developing countries and thus, provides a new alternative to the traditional World Bank and IMF.



Source: Infographic Online web, accessed on 20-07-2019, <https://www.google.com/>

search?q=infographic+brics&tbn=isch&source=univ&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiPvpSuzcPjAhXOinAKHV6QAllQsAR6BAGlEAE&biw=1366&bih=608

“There is the growing sense that transformation of the structures of global governance is desperately and urgently needed. This is where the BRICS do become extremely relevant as the only countries that can convincingly challenge the status quo” (Sahni, 2016).

Although, BRICS countries have been criticized of not having much in common, having a different expectation; and objectives from this multilateral forum, it’s important to note that they have the similar stand on/against the west dominated institutions such as the World Bank and IMF and their hegemonic nature in various multilateral institutions. BRICS forum has provided a platform for the South-South cooperation. As BRICS emerged during the economic crisis in 2008 and it tried to transform the global system and desired to make it heard to strengthen its representation in the international arena. According to Wentd, BRICS forum evolved as common ideas,

“The manner in which the BRICS grouping has evolved broadly conforms to two central “constructivist” tenets: first, shared ideas, as opposed to material forces, have primacy over determining the structure of human association; second, the identities of purposive actor are a function of shared ideas and are not decreed by nature” (Wentd, 1999).

Grouping of the BRICS club and the hope that they can challenge the western club has set an example and is getting solidarity amongst the newly emerging economies. This is also giving them the ideas and for exploring newer partnerships for development.

South Africa, which is a part of BRICS since 2010, it have been facing some challenges in managing their regional politics.

CHALLENGES OF SOUTH AFRICA WITHIN AFRICA

When South Africa joined this multilateral forum, the debate over South Africa’s getting comment from insiders of African countries. South Africa’s desire or expectation from partnering with BRIC countries is that it will enhance the country’s economic development and also enhance its representation visibility as an ambassador of the whole African continent in the world politics. The peaceful transition of the South African politics with ending of apartheid to the beginning of democracy has been appreciated by the world community. Although South Africa has redefined itself within the region, the post-apartheid phase of the South African foreign policy faced huge challenges as a result of this transition. During the apartheid period, South African politics was enjoying the fixed identity of hegemony in the region, but the post-apartheid identity has expanded and become more complex. “The post-apartheid South African government has worked to support regional and continental integration as well as representation of regional and continental on the world politics”. (Ufo, Naidoo, 2012:1-4). According to both Adler (1997) and Wentd (1999), the international system consists of social relations as well as material capabilities. Another argument is that “the identities and interest of states are tied to how states relate to one another given these factors” (Ufo, Naidoo, 2012:1-5). “discourse theories are not just concerned with the way in which social actor understand their particular worlds, but attention is focused more on the creation, disruption and transformation of the structure that organizes social life” (Stavrakakis, 2000:6).

The post-apartheid South African government has slowly and painfully learned that the country’s preparedness to drive the regional agenda clashes with the region’s willingness to have South Africa play this role (Ufo, Naidoo, 2012: Pp.92). The legacy of South Africa nature was aggression and domination of its neighbors. The South African leadership of Africa is condemned by its “unhappy past”, as well as the

deep inequalities were reflected and perpetuated by its residual power (Vale and Maseko 1998: Pp.12).

These changes in the country's political environment internally and externally have set a new framework standard for the reconstruction of the South African foreign policy. Developing a foreign policy, which looks at dealing with neighbouring countries and getting a new identity in the region and in the continent, has been of critical importance for South Africa.

“Over the years after achieving democracy, South Africa has emerged as a regional power in the world politics. But the dilemma of new identity or newly formed foreign policy mechanism also reflected the country's status in the global politics. As understood, a big challenge in front of South Africa is that this dilemma of having an enabling environment which allows newer directions and alternatives. “The transition has occurred when a particular configuration of power prevailed in the global order that not only established the parameters which govern its evolution, but also determined which interests prevailed within it” (Habib,2009: Pp.143).

By the end of cold war, Africa has been further marginalized and lost its prominence as an ally in either supporting or stemming the advancement of the communism (Okele Uzodike, 1996). In an essence, South Africa was forced to formulate its new developmental agenda within Africa and outside. Further, with the end of the cold war era South African geostrategic requirement was the shaping of the new foreign policy for security dynamics to the neighbourhood.

“In responding to this predicament South African foreign policymakers have found themselves in a new dislocation moment: the gradual shifting of the long-standing international architecture where emerging economies are forming alliances (such as BRIC and IBSA: India, Brazil, South Africa) to assert themselves against American hegemony. In this regard, South Africa's lack of credibility as a partner in the region contrasts sharply with its acceptability to BRIC countries as an important African partner” (Okele and Varsusha, 2012: Pp.96).

The major challenge for the South African government was to manage its own perception, that for building regional internal relations and to fulfil international expectations the opportunities generated by its inclusion in the BRICS must be harnessed for this overarching vision. The need for cooperation between South Africa and the Sub-Saharan region requires that they think together, act together and build together. (Okele and Varsusha, 2012: Pp.97).

“In the South African foreign policy, hosted by the Department of International Relations and Cooperation in October 2010, Ambassador Mo Shaik (The head of the foreign branch, state security Agency) noted that “our survival depends on us being less South Africa and more Southern Africa.” Another statement that was made in this context is; “Our struggle for a better life in South Africa is intertwined with our pursuit of a better Africa in a better world. Africa's place in South African foreign policy is Primary and central” (Department of International Cooperation, DIRCO, 2011)

In an evolving international politics, South Africa's inclusion in BRICS is not a complicated task to handle, if managed well, it can result in empowering and strengthening South Africa in ensuring development in the region.

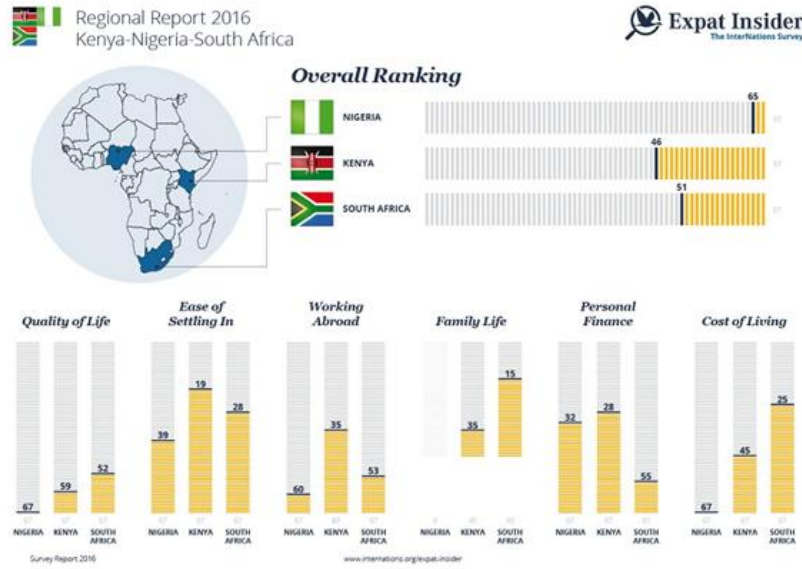
The debate around South Africa's membership - debate about Nigeria's and South Africa's economic problems.

When the foreign ministers of BRIC countries met in New York in 2006 and decided to hold a summit, the group decided that one African country should be included. This was the new decision of the informally formed BRIC. The debate was that South Africa is economically not relevant; rather it's only good for providing raw materials to the rest of African countries. Hence, two names were suggested one being South Africa and other was Nigeria, but the stand was that only one can become a part of BRIC. South Africa was chosen over Nigeria, as it was a larger economy during that time (2006 to 2014) when compared to Nigeria. Although, after 2014 Nigeria's GDP grew by 89% and it has become the 26th largest economy in the world, ahead of South Africa whose GDP expansion was 34%.

The continuous decline of South Africa's economy affects its position in Africa as well as at the BRICS. The South Africa's foreign policy is facing another challenge that is the debate of South Africa in BRICS within Africa as well as others on an account of the external actors.

The Nigerian foreign policy also maintained the bilateral relationship with the BRICS countries. Most of the Nigerian trade with Brazil is in the oil and gas sector; Nigeria provides is a largest source of petroleum products to Brazil. Secondly, “Nigeria and Russia's relationship has progressed considerably since the latter's independence culminating in the signing of a series of Memorandum of Understanding in 2008”. “China and Nigeria relations affected Sino- Nigeria relations. China's renewed engagement with Nigeria since the end of the cold war era has lead to China investing \$4 billion in Nigeria's infrastructure in return of the first refusal rights on four oil blocks in 2008” (Folarin Ibietan and Felix, 2016: Pp;5-7). Adding to that, India and Nigeria have signed a strategic partnership deal called the “Abuja Declaration”. Nigeria and South Africa relationship is also resulting in the continent's development, moreover, historically these countries are playing an important role in Africa. “Thus, Nigeria and South Africa's relation is shaped by the fact that South Africa is strongest in the Continent and versatile economy, while Nigeria is Africa's largest consumer market”. “Although South Africa has an advantage over Nigeria in terms of technology and infrastructure, Nigeria has advantage large market, the potential for the investment and large pool of human resources”. (O Agbu, 2010: pp; 109-126).

With the aforementioned background, it's important to note that in recent years, Nigerian economy has been growing and emerging as a regional power in West Africa and this can be a big challenge to South Africa, which must work towards improving its economy and rebalancing its foreign policy with rest of Africa and other international actors.



Source: <https://www.internations.org/expat-insider/2016/africa> accessed on 23-07-2019.

This gives an overview of the various African regions and their economic growth. It can be noted that not only the Southern part of Africa but Central Africa’s economic growth is low when compared with West Africa. Therefore, the debate on replacement of South Africa by Nigeria in BRICS is not relevant, but it can be said that South Africa should further improve its status within the African continent. Whether South African economy is slowdown but it maintained quality of life, cost of living, and family life etc.

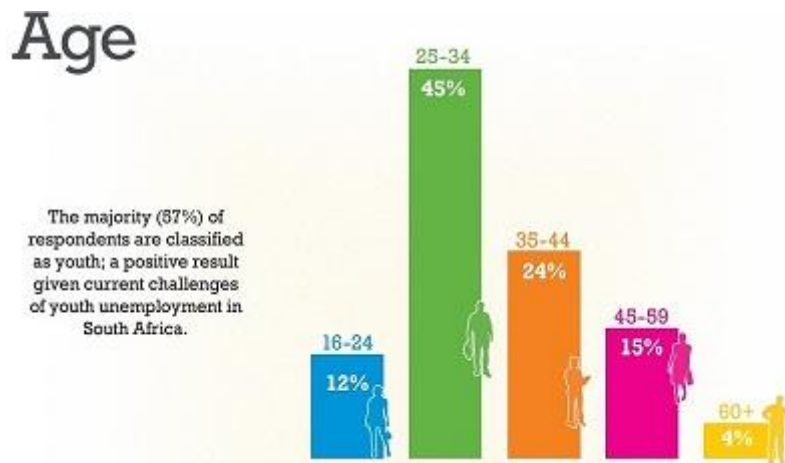
INTERNAL CHALLENGES OF POVERTY, UNEMPLOYMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

After apartheid, the South African government’s first priority was to improve the economy and reduce any forms of inequality, poverty, and unemployment. Since 1996 South African economy grew at an average of 3.2% till 2008. The economic crises¹ of 2008 affected the South African economy and slowed it down. In 2013, the economy grew by 1.9%. In comparison with the other emerging market, its economic growth was not satisfactory. Slow economic growth is a big challenge in front of the South African government as it is continuously facing a decline since 2008 to date.

Another problem that South Africa is facing, is the highest level of income inequality because of which it is ranked 117th out of the 124 countries in the world (Carmody, 2013).

UNEMPLOYMENT

It is a well-known fact that in contemporary times, the world economy has a big challenge, which is to provide adequate employment opportunities. In present times, it’s not just South Africa which is facing this challenge of high unemployment rates, but other emerging countries such as India and Brazil are also facing the similar challenges. “In both Southern Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, over 70 percent of workers are in vulnerable employment” (World Employment Social outlook, ILO, 2016). Despite South Africa being the second largest economy in Africa, it is unable to provide an adequate policy on employment. In South Africa, unemployment has risen to 24%. Additionally, debt has grown to 44% of GDP, and the trade deficit is at 6%. The unemployment rate in South Africa averaged 25.37 percent from 2000 until 2016, reaching an all-time high of 31.20 percent in the first quarter of 2003 and a record low of 21.30 percent in the fourth quarter of 2008”. (South Africa Unemployment Rate; 2000-2017)².



Source: <https://www.brandsouthafrica.com/investments-immigration/state-of-entrepreneurship-in-south-africa>, Accessed on 20-07-2019.

The South African government is in trouble at present, because of the huge demand of employment by the citizen. In fact, this is the biggest challenge in the at present and in order to solve this problem, the South African government is taking several actions for improving the employment rates.

The February 2013 “National Development Plan Vision for 2030” attempts to end poverty by taking a long-term approach to addressing social and economic inequalities, including unemployment and education, through the provision of improved services via both the public and the private sectors. Ambitious in its scope and desired outcomes, two years after its inception, there are few if any, NDP runs on the board yet. According to the World Bank, of the jobs that have been created in South Africa since 2000, the majority have been in the services sector. Given the dual nature of the South African economy, that growth will be likely to continue, even if it occurs more rapidly at some times than others (Luke, 2016: Pp:2-7).

The South African government has taken initiatives for reduction of the unemployment by implementing the National Development Plan (NDP)³, and the Nine-Point Plans economic interventions, which seeks to increase an economic growth and boost job opportunities in key sectors of the country. Major other plans of Mr. Jakab Zuma s government (President of South Africa), which is regarded as the government for the youth, is to have around 200 National Rural Youth Service Corps (NARYSEC). An analysis shows that there are two major policies to alleviate employment are impressive: “first policy is a targeted wage subsidy that every South African youth will receive when he or she becomes 18 years of age; and the second policy is immigration reform policy, which is to allow and encourage the immigration of highly skilled individuals” (Lavinsohn J, 2007: Pp; 2). Although many policies are there for youth employment still a large population is struggling and demanding for jobs and it is badly affecting South Africa’s economy, which in turn increases poverty and inequality in the country.

POVERTY

South Africa’s history shows that it has faced a lot of unrest. Since the end of apartheid in 1994, the country has been continuously fighting for the eradication of poverty and inequalities. Poverty is a multi-dimensional socio-economic problem in the Sub-Saharan countries. Poverty and inequality are common in South Africa. During the colonial and apartheid period, disadvantaged groups like blacks, women, and youth were struggling for minimum needs of life. (Prudence, 2013: pp; 5643-5649).

South Africa is struggling to combat poverty, but despite being a regional power it is unable to end poverty in its country. South Africa has triple challenges in present time; one is poverty and the other two are- inequality and unemployment. These challenges affect the South African economy, which in turn declines the GDP growth.

“Essentially, the latest statistics say that 21.7% of South Africans live in extreme poverty, not being able to pay for basic nutritional requirements; 37% of people don’t have enough money to purchase both adequate food items and non-food items so they have to sacrifice food to pay for things like transport and airtime; 53.8% of people can afford enough food and non-food items but fall under the

widest definition of poverty in SA, surviving on under R779 per month” (Nicolson G, 2015: Pp; 2).

There is a need for a comprehensive policy, which will address removing of disparities between rich and poor. Albeit, the government statistics are showing an increase growth rate, the ground reality on poverty showcases a different scenario, South Africa. The South African economy is the second largest in Africa has no effect on the levels of poverty that people in the country face. There are a number of factors behind the continuing poverty- for instance, the colonial legacy, natural disasters, diseases like HIV/AIDS, mismanagement of political-economic structure etc. However, not everything is so gloomy; the South African government is continuously involved in new partnerships with the multilateral organisations like IBSA, G-20, BASIC and BRICS etc., for getting help in the eradication of the poverty and in addressing health issues. President Zuma also emphasised that South Africa is the gateway of Africa for BRICS. The main purpose for South African government to join this multilateral forum was not just for its own economic development and sustainable development, but also for the growth of the whole African continent. According to UNDP, Human Development Report 2016⁴, South Africa’s HDI value for 2015 is 0.666 which put the country in the medium human development category positioning it at 119 out of 188 countries and territories.

While South Africa is still struggling with poverty in recent time, the South Africa government and international initiatives for reduction of poverty and inequalities are focusing on policies and investing in meeting the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals set by the United Nations. International initiatives are – “UNDP partner, coordination role within the UN system, UN agencies facilitate the provision of technical and institutional expertise in the areas of specialized capacity development to strengthen national macroeconomic capacities for pro-poor policy formulation” (inclusion growth, UNDP in South Africa)⁵.

The national and international programmes are focused on the poor population especially on women, children, and youth. But the results of these programmes are not satisfactory so far. “These programme’s objectives are to convert tenancy rights into formal agreements with a specific focus on farm workers, women and traditional systems prevailing in homelands” (inclusion growth, UNDP in South Africa)

SOUTH AFRICA’S INITIATIVE TO ADDRESS THESE CHALLENGES

South Africa’s growth is stuck in low gear with real GDP growth estimated at 1.3% in 2015/16 and projected at 0.8% for 2016/17, due to a combination of domestic constraints and external headwinds arising from the fall in commodity prices and slowdown of the Chinese economy. The weak growth performance has exacerbated the already high unemployment, inequality, and macro vulnerabilities. Weak economic outlook has made the fiscal outlook more challenging. As part of the budget Law 2016/17, the government announced an adjustment package of expenditure savings, for one-third, and tax measures, for two-thirds, to reduce the budget deficit from 3.9% of GDP in 2015/16 to 3.0% of GDP in 2017/18 and stabilize the gross debt Burden at about 51% of GDP, helping minimize pressures on the sovereign rating” (UNDP in South Africa)⁶. The current government is actively tackling the economic challenges and trying to build an efficient and inclusive society. Priority of the government is to address the 2030 National Development

Plan (NDP), which outlines the two main objectives-, first is to double the GDP by 2030 and remove poverty and the inequality (UNDP in South Africa, The World Bank)

“South Africa remains a dual economy with one of the highest inequality rates in the world, perpetuating inequality and exclusion. Life expectancy, after falling dramatically from 62 years in 1992 to 53 year in 2010, recovered to 62 years in 2014. The recent recovery was in large part due to the rapid expansion of the antiretroviral treatment programs to fight HIV/AIDS. And it is supported by declines in both adult and infant mortality. The poor are particularly vulnerable, and high HIV and AIDS infection rates, as well as TB infections, have severely strained the health system, contributing to the poor health indicators” (The World Bank)⁷

The South African government is taking action for an improvement of the economic development. Its “focused leadership that provides policy consistency; ownership of the plan by all formations of society, strong institutional capacity at technical and managerial levels, efficiency in all areas of government spending including management of the public service wage bill and making resources available for other priorities, and prioritization and clarity on levels of responsibility and accountability at every sphere of government as well as a common understanding of the roles of business, labour and civil society”(The World Bank,2016)⁸.

High unemployment, low level of job creation and the low economic growth results in a great disparity in the society. The South African government brought various plans for the economic development, but it did not provide the positive results. It can be said that not only the internal disturbances but the external economic crisis in 2007- 2008 are also affected the South African economy. Although, the weak health care services and declined economic growth affected the South Africa foreign policy on the continent as well at the international level. These all problems also reflect the lack of sustainability and inclusiveness in South Africa.

CONCLUSION

Thus, in conclusion, it can be said that the government policies are not effectively bringing in down poverty alleviation and inequality. The South African government should work towards improving its economy and maintain a good relationship between regional and international multilateral forums. It should work with all the African countries to build solidarity and work together for economic development and for the elimination of poverty. The most open market country in the BRICS is South Africa but unfortunately, it is facing low market growth and unemployment. Having said that, South Africa, by joining a multilateral forum like BRICS, is on the path of emerging as one of the important players in global politics. South African diplomacy is trying to maintain good relationships with the other African countries and also in various international platforms. Although there are some criticisms on South Africa’s membership in BRICS; and it replacing Nigeria in BRICS, availability of natural resources and technology will continue to play a significant role in ensuring its membership in the multilateral organization such as BRICS. Since last few decades, South Africa’s economy has not been impressive; whereby it has ranked low on economic development when compared to other countries. South Africa as a middle-income economy has well developed

tertiary sector, which had a contribution of around 65 percent to the GDP in 2014. Secondly, the financial sector plays an important role in the domestic economy. Even though South Africa has a small share in the New Development Bank, it has an equal amount of shares in the bank, with the same voting rights. After examining and analyzing all the indicators and their data, a conclusion can be drawn that South Africa, in terms of political and socio-economic development, is not lagging behind the other members of BRICS. Her position is almost equal to them. South Africa is equally fit to be in this group; it deserves this leadership on behalf of Africa. BRICS is providing better opportunity, South Africa, to lead in the global politics, through its enthusiastic participation.

ENDNOTES

¹ *The economic crisis is a testimony to the fact that unregulated markets are unworkable and unsustainable in the long run, not only for the improvement of the human wellbeing but also for the market. It has also forced the proposition that the market is not always self-regulating.*

² <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/south-africa/unemployment-rate>

³ <http://www.gov.za/issues/national-development-plan-2030>, accessed on 23-07-2017.

⁴ http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/es/ZAF.pdf

⁵ http://www.za.undp.org/content/south_africa/en/home/ourwork/poverty_education/overview.html (accessed 05 march 2017)

⁶ http://www.za.undp.org/content/south_africa/en/home/countryinfo.html (accessed 07 marches 2017)

⁷ <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/southafrica/overview> (accessed 07 March 2017).

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