



Press statement

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South African chapter of the BRICS Business Council acknowledges BRICS countries' endeavours to accelerate women empowerment

As South Africa celebrates the Women's Day on 9 August 2023, SA BRICS Business Council chairperson Busi Mabuza says women must be put at the centre of economic development to enable them to contribute significantly to the growth of BRICS economies.

In the past decade, BRICS countries have made considerable progress in improving the status of women in the fields of healthcare, education, economy, technology, and participation in decision-making and management, according to the 2023 BRICS Women's Development Report.

"The progress that has been made to reduce the gender gap between men and women across the BRICS countries is commendable. However, there is still a lot of work that needs to be done to promote gender equality and close the gap between men and women, not only in BRICS countries, but across the world," says Mabuza.

The Global Gender Gap Report, published annually by the World Economic Forum (WEF), attests to the existence of gender gap globally that needs to be closed. The 2023 Global Gender Gap Report found that the gender gap has closed by 68.4% globally, up 0.3% from 2022's 68.1% score.

At this rate, the report -- which measured gender parity across 146 countries in areas such as economy, education, health, and politics -- indicates that it will take the world another 131 years to close the gender gap.

Out of the five BRICS nations, South Africa has consistently been at the forefront when it comes to making progress in attaining gender parity. In this year's Global Gender Gap Report, South Africa is ranked 20th in the world out of 146 countries that are covered by the report.

While it is a reality that women all over the world still face discrimination and are under-represented in leadership roles; they, in addition, are generally paid less than men, work longer hours, and in many instances have limited access to education and healthcare.

"However, BRICS countries are making progress in elevating the status of women in healthcare, education, economy, technology, and participation in decision-making and management. Closing gender gap must continue to be a priority," says Mabuza.

According to the 2023 BRICS Women's Development Report, published by the BRICS Women's Business Alliance, the proportion of mothers who are delivered by skilled health workers in BRICS countries is generally high and well above the world average of 84%, with China and Russia close to 100%.

In the area of education, the 2023 BRICS Women's Development Report reveals that the proportion of women receiving higher education continues to increase across the BRICS countries although there is still apparent gender gap in accessing science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subjects in higher education institutions.

The proportion of female STEM graduates in South Africa stood at 42.76% in 2022 compared with men, who made up 57.24% of STEM graduates. There is a need to boost the representation of women in STEM occupations because these occupations are well remunerated and generally elevate the economic status of graduates.



Mabuza called on BRICS countries to pay more attention to improving female labour participation rate, which is yet to recover to pre-covid pandemic levels. During the pandemic, the closure of retail, tourism, education, and other service industries due to implementation of lockdowns negatively affected women's employment.

According to data from the World Bank, the labour force participation rate for women aged 15-64 in most BRICS countries declined at the height of the pandemic in 2020. Only China has rebounded to pre-pandemic levels and managed to achieve a small uptick. However, Brazil, South Africa and India are yet to recover, while Russia has enjoyed a slight recovery.

Across the BRICS countries, progress is being made in recognising female leadership. In 2021, women made up 19.7% of boards around the world, according to the 2023 BRICS Women's Development Report. The report reveals that South Africa has surpassed the global average, and that women made up 31.8% of boards in 2021.

South Africa will host the BRICS summit in Johannesburg from 22 to 24 August this year. BRICS is a grouping of five influential emerging market economies comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, hence the acronym BRICS.

Together these countries account for about 42% of the world's population and based on International Monetary Fund's (IMF) statistics, the contribution of BRICS countries to global gross domestic product (GDP) has surpassed that of G7 countries since 2021. BRICS currently account for about 32% of global GDP while G7 economies contribute about 30% to global GDP.

By 2028, BRICS countries are projected to contribute 33.6% to global GDP.

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About the South African Chapter of the BRICS Business Council

Currently in its 10th year, the South African Chapter of the BRICS Business Council was established during the Fifth BRICS Summit held in March 2013 in Durban, South Africa. The objective of creating the council was to constitute a platform which will promote and strengthen business, trade and investment ties amongst the business communities of the five BRICS countries, ensure that there is regular dialogue between the business communities of the BRICS nations and the Governments of the BRICS countries; and identify problems and bottlenecks to ensure greater economic, trade and investment ties amongst the BRICS countries and recommend solutions accordingly.