

Speech at the BRICS Think Tank Meeting. N Pandor -
Minister of higher education and training

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A warm welcome to our guests from Brazil, China, India and Russia. South Africa is honored to serve as BRICS chair this year. We regard the role of this component of BRICS as critical to contributing to the achievement of the stated goals of the BRICS partnership. I also wish to welcome South African delegates from our universities, science councils and other organizations that have an interest in BRICS.

The decision several years ago to establish both the academic forum and this collaboration of think tanks was a welcome recognition of the contribution that research and policy advice should play in influencing development. BRICS has become an important block in global politics, but there is a great deal we need to do to translate the block into one that has the capacity and knowledge that supports it to impact on and shape world affairs.

Beyond focusing on our partnership concerted effort has been directed at finding a means of ensuring that the rich portfolio of resources, capacities and expertise brought together in BRICS is used effectively to support the development agenda of Africa and of other BRICS regions that require development support. I am pleased to note that this strategic imperative is supported by all our BRICS partner governments.

South Africa has shown practical commitment to contributing to the development priorities of the continent as set out in Agenda 2063 of the African Union as well as the regional agenda of SADC.

All the colleagues gathered here will probably agree that as part of the knowledge generating community we live in uncertain times. A time in which knowledge and truth are threatened not just by those who are very powerful and wealthy, but also by those who have been so marginalized in our world that the opportunities offered by knowledge are regard as an irrelevant and distant

stranger. Our think tanks need to reflect on these developments and provide advice on how they should be approached by policy makers and by BRICS.

The BRICS partnership offers an alternative model of global friendship and solidarity. It needs to articulate a more optimistic and a more resolute narrative of inclusion and progressive values, a narrative that commits to addressing the needs and interest of the most vulnerable, a narrative that suggests the possibility of a block that can redress the imbalances that confront so many millions in our communities and the world broadly.

The partnership programmes the BRICS nations have developed indicate that we know what must be done. When BRICS was first established the key areas of cooperation tended to be largely economic, with a focus on international trade and global governance. Reform of multilateral institutions such as the IMF, World Bank, and the UN Security Council were key on our agenda. These remain as areas we must address.

However, we have recognized the need to elaborate a broader agenda and have done so. Our agenda includes issues ranging from agriculture, health, education, energy, science and technology, academic exchange and many others. We must ensure though that this list contributes to real change and not increased dialogue.

We believe the think tanks facility establishes a strategic platform for designing initiatives that will signal a collaborative approach to knowledge creation, research and the development of concrete advice on solutions. Of course it will be vital that the ideological philosophy that informs our knowledge generation is progressive and oriented to people development, justice and democracy.

Linked to this hope we also need to factor in the important task of creating a new body of talented young people able to lead think tanks such as the ones gathered here and fully appreciative of the need for progressive and responsive concepts and ideas.

When the BRICS leaders met in Sanya in 2011, and later in New Delhi in 2012, there was consensus that for the BRICS initiative to succeed, it must have its own body of experts and a think tanks formation that would guide policy making and development trajectories for BRICS as a collective as well as for individual member countries. I assume that the work done would integrate use of critical lenses on policy such as gender equality, diversity and development. I have not been told of the nature and outcomes of the process of evaluation that you use to assess the impact of the think tanks work and proposals.

The stated expectation of our leaders in launching the BRICS Think Tanks Council was to have a capacity that would be a reservoir of ideas for BRICS leaders. Is this the status of the council?

I have been informed that much has been achieved by the Council since its formation in 2013. This meeting in the 10th year of the BRICS Summit provides a unique opportunity for the Council and the Academic Forum to take stock and reflect on achievements and impacts in

their first five years. This will also allow you to determine matters on which you may wish to interact with ministers of education and research and possibly BRICS heads of state on Think Tank matters.

It is vital to have the following questions answered?

Have we achieved all we wanted to?

Has our work had any impact on decisions taken by BRICS leaders?

What happens to the papers that we publish from our meetings?

One of the inadequacies in many of our countries is short term policy thinking. We need to think long term and plan long term and if capacity for this is lacking we must ensure it is created.

The programme you have adopted over the next few days clearly draws on previous themes and commitments. The 2015 long term strategy document of the Think Tanks

Council included a focus on peace and security; health and education; social justice and sustainable development; and inclusive growth. All of these continue to be important for BRICS and we must generate sufficient knowledge in these to guide policy interventions.

South has decided to ensure it includes the Africa outreach programme for the 2018 summit, this is in line with the conclusions of the Sanya Summit.

This continuity is intended to ensure continuity with commitments made in the 2013 summit in South Africa, especially those of support for African industrialisation and infrastructure development. The summit will include a number of invited African heads of state based on the current or pending Chairship of their regional blocs.

This year's Academic Forum will include several African embassy representatives as observers. I am certain that as the BRICS knowledge project grows and matures and takes concrete shape, more stakeholders and interested

parties will be invited to participate. Again this will be acting on the intentions expressed in various resolution of our summits as communicated by BRICS leaders.

In conclusion, I trust that the 2018 BRICS Academic Forum will be a great success, and that the resolutions and recommendations agreed here will find resonance with the decisions and resolutions of the Summit to be held in July.

Thank you.