

Department of Higher Education and Training
Van der Sterr Building, Stellenbosch University
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Deputy Vice Chancellor of Strategy and

Internationalisation at Stellenbosch University Prof

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Vice Chancellors and Deputy Vice-Chancellors present

Members of the BRICS Network University across the

BRICS countries

Welcome to the 3rd conference of the BRICS Network University. A warm welcome, in particular, to our international guests from Brazil, Russia, India, and China. Welcome to South Africa, and thank you for coming to here to be part of a series of BRICS events under South Africa's BRICS Presidency this year.

The BRICS partnership has come a long way.

In the beginning there were many sceptics and naysayers who gave it little chance of success.

Yet here we are today, with a series of meaningful structures, collaborations and exchanges across a wide spectrum of areas in place.

What started off as a trade and economic partnership has evolved into an array of collaborative projects in education, science and technology, arts and culture, agriculture, health, sports and many others.

Talking of sports, I congratulate Russia not only for hosting one of the most memorable FIFA World Cup events in recent history - barring the one that was hosted by us of course - but also for progressing so far in the tournament.

It has been a great spectacle, and I am enjoying it immensely.

Education is an important area of collaboration for BRICS, given the many developmental challenges that our countries still face.

In November 2013 the BRICS Ministers responsible for education met on the margins of the UNESCO General Conference in Paris to agree on a road-map for education collaboration across BRICS.

Higher education mobility was a key aspect of the discussions, leading to the establishment of the BRICS Education Working Group a year later in Brasilia.

There, the BRICS heads of state reaffirmed the importance of higher education exchange for BRICS and called for a network of universities across the BRICS countries to collaborate and exchange knowledge and research experience.

In November 2015 a Memorandum of Understanding on the establishment of the BRICS Network University was signed in Moscow, Russia.

I relate this brief background to show that the Network University initiative is deeply entrenched within BRICS,

and in fact a lot is expected from it, not only by the BRICS leaders and countries, but by the entire developing world.

If universities in the BRICS collaborate successfully on research and teaching, engage in student and staff exchanges, we can make a significant contribution to global knowledge production.

The BRICS Network University is grounded in the challenges, opportunities and aspirations of the BRICS communities.

Through its research partnerships, the BRICS Network University can help reduce poverty, unemployment and inequality that characterise many countries in the developing world.

Through its teaching partnerships, the BRICS Network University can promote academic programmes that produce the kind of graduates that can lead our societies into the future.

The thematic areas - energy, information security, climate change, water resources and pollution treatment - for the BRICS Network University have been carefully crafted to exploit our knowledge strengths.

We have a clear thematic focus, but this list is not exhaustive. There are many others that we will have to consider as we strengthen our collaboration. Issues such as food security, health, the changing nature of work and others will come to mind.

Our BRICS university collaboration has enormous potential to bolster the existing strong political and economic relations between our countries.

By working together we can achieve our goal of becoming a powerful force for growth, development and discovery.

As part of the global effort to combat diseases such as HIV/AIDS, our countries have made significant progress in the production of generic antiretroviral drugs.

As part of the global effort to explore the universe, our countries have made significant progress in satellite construction and astronomy research.

As part of the global effort to contain the impact of climate change, our countries have taken significant steps.

The BRICS Network University is an important structure that will undertake the research that is needed to inform the overall BRICS collaboration and how it must evolve.

We need to manage participation in the network carefully.

We must ensure that we do so in a way that does not advantage only a few universities.

We must seek to ensure that a broad spectrum of our universities benefit from and contribute to the shaping of this important structure.

There are pockets of excellence in all our universities and our goal should be to benefit all.

The development of joint research projects and joint postgraduate programmes at Masters and PhD levels is important.

The BRICS Network University can be a driving force for building a closely knit BRICS intellectual community.

It can foster new dynamics in South-South cooperation while fostering intellectual bonds and exchanges among the BRICS academic community.

It can be a transmitter of cultural knowledge and exchange between the BRICS countries.

I hope that our universities will take full advantage of this initiative and seek opportunities to collaborate in terms of research, and in doing so learn as much as possible from one another. I hope that universities will take

ownership of the initiative and come up with collaborative projects that will be of benefit not only to BRICS, but the developing world as a whole.

I will be hosting the BRICS Ministers of Education on 10 July 2018, and I look forward to reflecting on the outcomes of this conference then.

I wish you a very successful conference over the next two days.

Thank you.

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