Cooperation in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) Working Group

ISSUES NOTE

BRICS 2025

1. Background Information

Technology is evolving rapidly; while it offers hope for a better future, it also raises concerns about its impact on society and the economy, especially because resources are not always equitably distributed between countries worldwide.

The BRICS Communications Working Group plays a key role in fostering collaboration among member countries in areas such as media partnerships, public communication strategies, information dissemination, and technological exchange. Given that a significant part of the global population remains excluded from these discussions — lacking access to basic technology and essential tools — the Working Group's efforts are critical to promoting public policies to tackle these challenges.

In 2024, while holding the G20 presidency, Brazil seized the opportunity to underscore key issues central to modern society in an increasingly interconnected world. This highlighted the visibility and growing influence of the Global South in shaping the digital economy agenda.

Brazil welcomes the opportunity to collaborate with BRICS member states to foster discussions on digital inclusion and universal, meaningful connectivity. In a world where AI is becoming increasingly prevalent and discussions on space and environmental sustainability have gained urgency due to recent climate change, these issues are more critical than ever.

2. Priorities

Building on the achievements of past chairships, Brazil proposes the following key areas under the BRICS Working Group on ICT Cooperation for 2025:

2.1. Universal and Meaningful Connectivity

Digital inclusion, universality, and meaningful connectivity were central themes during Brazil's G20 chairship. The document produced by Brazil in collaboration with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) - *"Universal and Meaningful Connectivity: A Framework for Indicators and Metrics"* - and its Annex I - *"List of Core ICT Indicators on ICT Access and Use by Households and Individuals"* - outlines six key dimensions for evaluating universal and meaningful connectivity (UMC): connection quality, availability of use, affordability, devices, digital skills, and safety and security. It also includes a list of 23 potential indicators for measuring UMC without delving into specific measurement metrics.

Building on the collaborative efforts initiated in G20, Brazil's chairship aims to further the concept of UMC by developing metrics to serve as benchmarks for countries to assess their levels of digital development.

2.1.1. Questions for Discussion:

- Can the list of Core Indicators for Universal and Meaningful Connectivity assist BRICS countries in better identifying and closing the existing gaps in digital connectivity?

2.2. Space Sustainability

At the dawn of the 21st century, only 14 nations had authorized satellite operators. Today, satellites from 91 countries orbit the Earth, with the number of companies engaged in space activities steadily increasing. These advancements hold the potential to bridge the digital divide, making universal, meaningful connectivity an achievable goal.

Space exploration is no longer the sole domain of national agencies. Private enterprises, international partnerships, and even space tourism are rising, intensifying the need for responsible space management. As this sector continues to expand, long-term space sustainability has become a priority for governments, international organizations, small satellite operators, and established ventures across both the public and private sectors.

This rapid progression into a space-reliant era is evident in the rising number of regulatory filings for satellite systems in low Earth orbit, coupled with pioneering missions focused on lunar exploration and activities around the Moon. The filings for low-Earth orbit satellites have risen significantly, with approximately 10,000 satellites launched in the past decade, resulting in a ten-fold increase in the mass launched annually. The expanding space economy is projected to reach USD 1.8 trillion by 2035, based on an average annual growth rate of 9 percent.

As this promising future unfolds, fostering purposeful and collaborative efforts to ensure the responsible and sustainable utilization of space resources is essential. Policymakers, telecommunications agencies, leaders, and experts from the satellite and space sectors within BRICS must engage in discussions to develop policies, best practices, guidelines, and strategies to safeguard access to and sustainability of space for current and future activities. Since outer space is a common heritage of humanity, actions must be strengthened at both national and international levels to secure equitable and enduring access to space.

2.2.1. Questions for Discussion:

Given this context and considering the reaffirmation by BRICS leaders during the recent summit in Kazan on their commitment to ensuring the long-term sustainability of outer space activities, the BRICS Working Group on ICT Cooperation will address the following questions within this domain:

- Can we agree on a set of principles on Space Sustainability to ensure that outer space remains safe, accessible, and sustainable for future generations?

- What key parameters should guide the ITU, as the global regulator of radio spectrum use and coordinator of frequencies for geostationary (GSO) and non-geostationary (NGSO) satellites, to optimize spectrum use while preventing harmful interference between space-based devices?

- What concrete suggestions can be offered to enhance space access, raise awareness of space science, and contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals?

2.3. Environmental Sustainability

Despite the clear benefits of ICTs, e-waste has emerged as one of the fastest-growing environmental challenges worldwide. According to the *Global E-Waste Monitor 2024*, if current trends persist, the world will generate approximately 82 billion kilograms of e-waste by 2030. Simultaneously, the development of artificial intelligence (AI) is driving an unprecedented demand for energy and resources as the need to train and operate generative AI systems increases at an alarming rate.

While achieving consensus on environmental sustainability and climate change can be challenging, these discussions remain central to all international groups. The ICT sector can be critical in promoting sustainability while driving economic development and advancing new technologies. Some telecommunication companies are already addressing these issues by generating their own energy and powering their operations through renewable sources.

At COP29 in Baku, leaders in technology and the environment endorsed a declaration pledging to use digital technologies to accelerate climate action while reducing GHG emissions from tech manufacturing. According to ITU, digital technologies can be pivotal in advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, mainly through their use in monitoring climate change.

To address these issues, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) launched the Green Digital Action initiative to advance sustainability through digital innovation. Key areas of this initiative include emergency telecommunications, ICT sector GHG emissions, green standards, and the circular economy, among others. Additionally, the ITU promotes the COP Digitalization Day to spotlight the role of digital technologies in advancing climate resilience, review the progress on tech-industry climate pledges, strengthen global frameworks for monitoring and reporting, and showcase solutions.

2.3.1. Questions for Discussion:

Considering that the Kazan Declaration adopted by the leaders at the BRICS Summit commits to "strengthen cooperation on a wide range of solutions and technologies that contribute to the reduction and removal of Greenhouse Gases (GHGs)," and in light of the context outlined above, the Working Group on ICT Cooperation will address the following questions regarding environmental sustainability in the digital economy:

- What measures can regulators and policymakers implement to mitigate the environmental impact of substantial energy consumption by ICT companies, considering distinct levels of national development?
- What measures currently implemented by ICT companies can serve as best practices and benchmarks for environmental sustainability?

2.4. Digital Ecosystem

Digital ecosystem governance has emerged as a strategic, cross-cutting priority for BRICS. In an accelerating global digital transformation era, member countries must coordinate their efforts to foster collaborative and innovative solutions. The inherently cross-border nature of digital operations challenges traditional governance models. With the evolution of the digital ecosystem, governments have been reviewing their traditional telecommunications administrative structures, broadening their mandate to encompass digital issues.

Meanwhile, the increasing influence of private actors in shaping digital norms directly affects state sovereignty and human rights. By tackling these issues within a BRICS framework, member states can develop mechanisms that balance private-sector responsibilities with governments' duty to protect their citizens.

A multisectoral model involving governments, the private sector, academia, and civil society has effectively created inclusive and sustainable digital policies. Within BRICS, such coordination can strengthen participatory frameworks tailored to each nation's context.

2.4.1. Questions for Discussion:

Considering this background, the WSIS+20 agenda—which underscores digital inclusion as a pathway to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—holds particular relevance. By aligning domestic and regional policies with global goals, BRICS countries can jointly propose innovative strategies to bridge the digital divide, thus demonstrating leadership worldwide. BRICS could further solidify this leadership at WSIS+20. Given this context, the ICT Working Group could discuss the following questions:

- In what manner are the BRICS countries addressing the digital ecosystem within the context of governance?
- Furthermore, given the upcoming World Summit on the Information Society—WISIS+20—process in 2025, what are the prospects for global governance of the digital ecosystem?

BRICS
Brasil 2025
COOPERATING FOR AN INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE WORLD