



# BRICS Environment Working Group (EWG)

## ISSUE NOTE

### BRICS 2025

#### 1. Background Information and Strategic Vision

The BRICS Environment Working Group (EWG), established in 2015, serves as a platform for BRICS member countries to address fundamental environmental challenges and foster collaboration through dialogue, shared experiences, and the exchange of information and best practices.

The EWG convenes annually within the framework of the BRICS Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Environmental Cooperation, signed by the BRICS Environment Ministers in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 2018. This MoU identifies key priority areas for cooperation, including air quality, water, biodiversity, climate change, waste management, and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Additional areas may be included by the participants' mutual agreement.

A Plan of Implementation for 2023–2027 was developed to translate the EWG commitments into actionable outcomes. This Plan provides a structured roadmap for enhancing environmental coordination and cooperation among member countries while supporting their compliance with national and international environmental conventions. The EWG plays a pivotal role in this process, overseeing the effective implementation of the MoU. As the current chair, Brazil aims to strengthen the implementation of this Plan to foster action-oriented cooperation.

In 2024, the EWG launched the Contact Group on Climate Change and Sustainable Development (BRICS+ CGCCSD) and initiated a High-Level Dialogue on Climate Change. Although these initiatives will continue under Brazil's chairship in 2025, they are addressed in a separate issue note.

The 11th BRICS EWG meetings will be held under the theme: "Advancing Environmental Cooperation amongst BRICS towards Sustainable Development and a Just Transition for All." Brazil's chairship will convene preparatory videoconferences to ensure continuous engagement, facilitate in-depth technical exchanges and alignment on priorities, and hold an in-person expert meeting.

In tandem with the review and the strengthening of the Plan of Implementation for the MoU (2023-2027), which will be a crosscutting priority, Brazil proposes that the EWG work focuses on collaborative solutions and best practices in addressing relevant, current environmental issues, encompassing, particularly the following topics:

- Desertification, land degradation, and drought;
- Plastic pollution;
- Preservation, restoration, and valuation of ecosystem services;
- Collective leadership for climate: synergies between climate change and the priority issues selected by the Brazilian chairship.

Those thematic priorities were chosen for their global relevance and particular significance to developing countries and emerging economies, without prejudice to other themes outlined in the MoU and its respective Plan of Implementation. With their diverse ecosystems and climates, BRICS countries are uniquely positioned to propose people-centered solutions tailored to their specific needs. This includes emphasizing the active participation and well-being of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in environmental decision-making and action.

The chairship proposes that, when addressing these thematic priorities, the BRICS member countries emphasize their social and economic dimensions and synergies with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to support the timely achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This approach highlights the interconnectedness of environmental management, sustainable development, and poverty eradication, particularly in regions where Indigenous Peoples and local communities rely on natural resources for their livelihoods. In this regard, it would be timely for BRICS countries to agree on an Annual Work Plan (AWP) that links MoU priorities to achieving the 2030 Agenda.

The planned deliverables for the EWG thus reflect a holistic approach that integrates social inclusion, environmental protection, economic development, and poverty eradication. Cooperation activities are expected to support governments in developing national policies that guarantee just transitions to a sustainable and inclusive global economy while ensuring that no one is left behind.

## **2. Priorities**

The Brazilian chairship will advance a BRICS climate leadership agenda focused on five concrete priorities with actionable deliverables:

### **2.1. Desertification, Land Degradation, and Drought**

Desertification, land degradation, and drought (DLDD) are critical issues with severe social and economic impacts, particularly in developing countries. The groups most vulnerable to DLDD include Indigenous Peoples and local communities, such as riverine communities, small farmers, and artisanal fishers, among others. DLDD is aggravated by climate change and requires urgent adaptation and mitigation strategies. Addressing DLDD requires people-centered solutions, such as adopting sustainable land management practices and resource management, to rehabilitate degraded areas and protect those most affected by them.

Thirty years after its adoption, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) continues to face persistent challenges in securing robust means of implementation and concerted international action to achieve its objectives. The negotiations at COP16 in Riyadh last December illustrated both the urgency and the complexities of building consensus on key topics. By prioritizing DLDD, Brazil aims to contribute constructively to advancing these critical discussions.

The Brazilian chairship proposes the following key issues for addressing DLDD:

- Building Resilience and Promoting Adaptation to DLDD;
- Advancing Sustainable Land Management (SLM) to Prevent Desertification and Restore Degraded Lands;
- Fostering Exchanges on Best Practices and Technologies for DLDD Mitigation and Adaptation;

- Supporting BRICS Countries in Meeting their Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) Targets under the UNCCD; and
- Integrating DLDD efforts with Climate Change and Biodiversity Conservation Initiatives.

## **2.2. Plastic Pollution**

Plastic pollution is a growing global crisis, threatening ecosystems, biodiversity, and human health. With plastic production exceeding 400 million tons annually – half of that being single-use plastics – urgent action is needed to reduce plastic waste, particularly in the marine environment. Microplastics, now found everywhere from oceans to human tissues, emphasize the pressing need for integrated, comprehensive solutions.

BRICS countries are uniquely positioned to lead efforts to end plastic pollution, mainly by advancing the development of sustainable alternatives and substitutes and implementing and enhancing efficient waste management systems. We can also exchange solutions through the BRICS Clean Rivers Programme, based on national policies and measures aimed at preventing and/or cleaning up the water bodies of our countries from pollution. The upcoming resumed fifth session of UNEP's Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC), scheduled for mid-2025, will serve as a crucial platform for BRICS countries to provide constructive inputs to the negotiations of the legally binding international agreement on plastic pollution, mandated by the United Nations Environmental Assembly in 2022.

Brazil thus proposes focused discussions on the following key issues:

- Addressing the Impact of Plastic Pollution on Human Health;
- Promoting Innovations in Plastics;
- Strengthening Waste Management Systems;
- Promoting Circular Economy; and
- Exchanging Knowledge and Sharing Best Practices to End Plastic Pollution.

## **2.3. Preservation, Restoration, and Valuation of Ecosystem Services**

Ecosystems provide essential services, such as air and water regulation, climate mitigation, and biodiversity conservation. Their importance cannot be underestimated, as they provide invaluable cultural, educational, and recreational benefits and support the economic livelihoods of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. Strengthening the preservation and restoration of ecosystem services is crucial to maintaining their integrity, ensuring that ecosystems continue to function effectively, and delivering essential benefits to the communities that depend on them.

Ecosystem services also support local communities in cities and urban areas by mitigating heat islands, improving air and water quality, and offering green spaces for recreation and mental health benefits.

Tropical forests merit special attention, given their role in protecting biodiversity, water basins, and soils, as well as regulating hydrological cycles and storing carbon in different BRICS countries. To promote the conservation, sustainable management, and restoration of these ecosystems, Brazil launched, in August 2023, the group United for Our Forests. This group currently comprises countries that encompass more than 70% of the world's tropical forests. Among BRICS members, Indonesia is a founding member of the group (such as Bolivia, a BRICS partner country), and China, Ethiopia, India, and South Africa have been invited to join it. Additionally, BRICS partner countries such as Cuba, Malaysia, Nigeria, Thailand, and Uganda, have also been invited. The main objective is to discuss the existing mechanisms to support the prevention and control of

deforestation, as well as the conservation and restoration of forests. While various options are available, such as Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+), new initiatives like the Tropical Forest Forever Facility (TFFF) may need to be established to ensure predictable, reliable, and long-term funding for the conservation of standing tropical forests.

There is a compelling economic case for preserving, restoring, and valuing ecosystem services. On the one hand, studies estimate that ecosystem degradation could result in a significant decline in global Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Furthermore, the UNCCD has warned of a potential \$44 trillion loss if current trends continue. On the other hand, integrating the valuation of ecosystem services into economic frameworks can attract funding for conservation and provide incentives for sustainable practices.

In this regard, the Brazilian chairship encourages the discussions on the following key issues:

- Promoting Institutional Support;
- Mobilizing Financial Resources;
- Engaging the Private Sector; and
- Improving Cooperation to Exchange Knowledge and Share Best Practices.

#### **2.4. Collective Leadership for Climate:**

Countries, especially developing nations, face the daily challenge of dealing with the consequences of the climate emergency. Climate is interlinked with other environmental issues, such as the ones selected as priorities by the Brazilian chairship.

In this context, and notwithstanding the creation of the CGCCSD as the "locus" in the BRICS to discuss climate change specifically, Brazil, as both the current BRICS chair and the host of UNFCCC COP30, proposes to highlight the synergies between climate change and the priority issues selected for the EWG. The interlinkages between those issues would be explored in the appropriate videoconferences, and the results of the debates would be incorporated in the ministerial declaration to be adopted in April. Also, as the host country of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+12), which decided to adopt the 2030 Agenda, Brazil would explore the positive impact of the SDGs on addressing these environmental issues.



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