

## Through the Lens of Brazil: The Changing Dynamics of Human Rights and Global Philanthropy in Emerging Powers

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### BRICS: The Meaning and Implications of “Emerging Power”

*Participants gained a fundamental, critical understanding of what defines a country as an “emerging power.” What are the implications—and expectations—of “emerging power” status on domestic and foreign policy? What is the nature of the relationship between emerging powers and developed economies? Among other emerging powers?*

Speaker: **Adriana Abdenur**, Researcher, BRICS Policy Center

Moderator: **Michael Hirschhorn**, Executive Director, IHRFG; President, Jacob and Hilda Blaustein Foundation

- Where does the term “emerging powers” come from?
  - The term “emerging power” originated from a Cold War theory of power: International stability does not come from an equal distribution of power, but instead from a hierarchical power structure. Within this hierarchy, there were four categories of states. Of these four categories, the third level was comprised of states likely to rise in the hierarchy and attain considerable regional influence—but that were constrained by either resources or domestic conditions.
  - The term was next used by Jim O’Neill, an economist at Goldman Sachs. He came up with the grouping of the BRICS nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), and predicted that these nations would see dramatic GDP growth, eventually overtaking the combined GDP of the G7 nations.
- What are the characteristics of “emerging economies”?
  - Emerging economies generally have a growing middle class that changes both the country’s internal politics and international standing.
  - They challenge the current global governance architecture, and feel that the current regimes are unfair and inefficient. These countries want to open more space for themselves in the system.
  - A lot of these countries have experienced a surge in economic growth, and have begun to have some pull politically.
  - They start to band together into coalitions that magnify long-standing claims for reform of global governance.
    - E.g. BRICS have opposed efforts by OECD to harmonize development efforts. They don’t want to be rule-takers but instead participate in establishing global norms.
  - However, the question remains: To what extent can they propose and back up own norms?
- What is the relationship between emerging powers and other countries?
  - There is a high degree of interdependence in today’s world.

- Some emerging powers tend to say that they represent the Global South (e.g. Brazil and India). Such claims are problematic and lack legitimacy because the interests in South are so diverse
- What impact have BRICS had on human rights?
  - New alliances among emerging powers can either facilitate or constrain human rights.
    - For example, the BRICS are comprised of three democratic countries that verbally commit to human rights, but also two that do not (Russia and China).
  - Because of this tension, they tend to push aside civil society and human rights in favour of the discourse of national sovereignty.
  - However, India, Brazil, and South Africa are democratic rising powers. They occasionally include elements of promotion of civil society and human rights.
  - The channels that block and facilitate human rights in the BRICS need to be mapped out.

## Discussion and Q&A

- For development to occur, is it sometimes necessary to suspend democracy/human rights for a time?
  - Democracy is part of development. A body of research establishes that it is not necessary to have autocracy in order for a nation to develop. However, the answer to that question also depends on how development is defined: just GDP growth?
  - A troubling trend is that the myth of trickle-down economics is making a comeback. There are better ways to build dams and complete major projects. However, the BRICS act as though just building a dam will result in development
- How true is the perception that the newly rich do not give, and that the philanthropic terrain changes slowly in emerging economies?
  - That question is a matter of opinion. Often, giving is predicated on incentives for giving. In Brazil, the incentives are lacking.
  - Religious communities have a culture of giving.
  - Participants commented:
    - Local giving in emerging powers is increasing. [Giving Pledge](#) is now going to Asia. There are 3,000 small donors in Nepal. How do we define philanthropy?
    - People are giving more; just not for social justice or human rights.
    - In Turkey, the culture of philanthropy means building schools, food, medicine. Family donors choose least sensitive topics to fund. There is a large number of philanthropists in Turkey, but they have agendas in line with the government.
    - In Brazil, the culture of giving focuses on the 3 “ch”: children, charity, churches.
    - In South Asia, a diaspora community sends money for religious purposes, disaster relief, children.
- Is there a space for BRICS at the UN (or outside) where civil society can influence the BRICS’ agendas? What are the strategic points of intervention, and how can funders support?
  - Civil society needs to engage with the UN’s [Sustainable Development Goal](#) process; otherwise, it will be state-led.

- Another opportunity is through the [Development Cooperation Forum](#) (DCF) within the Economic and Social Cooperation Forum (ECOSOC), meeting in June/July.
- Another opportunity is at BRICS head of state summits, accompanied by BRICS parallel events.
- The deepening of ties between Russia and China is very concerning. It is important for the other BRICS to deepen ties among one another
- Is there a threat of a disregard for human rights in general with the rise of the BRICS?
  - We may see a narrowing of human rights to encompass only social, and disregard political, dimensions, rather than a complete suspension.
  - This relates to a very heavy respect for national sovereignty in the BRICS.
- Will the BRICS agenda affect Official Development Assistance (ODA)?
  - In South Africa, ODA is less than 2% of national budget.
  - The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) decided to expand efforts to include South-South cooperation in its global aid agenda, and bring all parties together to agree upon principles of aid and cooperation – e.g. transparency, accountability.
  - The BRICS have opposed this on two principles:
    1. It is occurring outside of UN and presented by rich donors club
    2. This definition does not represent what south-south cooperation actually is.
  - Adriana responded that the BRICS already do affect development assistance.
  - South-South cooperation and financial flows is huge. The South takes pride in offering aid without conditionality .
    - The problem is that the BRICS have not proposed an alternative. Brazil not against transparency but is against being handed a northern agreement that claims to be a “global agreement.”
- How much of BRICS is a construct that doesn’t hold together? What does that mean for civil society—does this create a new space for action? What opportunities are created by these conversations?
  - Civil society needs to be more proactive.
  - The naming and shaming approach is seen as hypocritical by many BRICS—this strategy can generate backlash.
  - Civil society is seen as oppositional to many BRICS governments, but bridge-building important.
- How do the BRICS influence smaller countries such as Sri Lanka?
  - The BRICS implemented the BRIC Development Bank as an alternative to the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. It focuses on large-scale development projects.
  - Countries that will borrow money from this bank will adopt trickledown economics.
  - Civil society needs to contest this, as it will lead to the dislocation of many people. However, the basic design of bank has already been established.
- Are the BRICS norm entrepreneurs?
  - The G77 weren’t just norms blocking, but presented alternative ideas.
  - Brazil proposed “Responsibility while Protecting.” It was a great idea, but lacked political strategy.
    - Brazil put the idea on table and then backed off.
  - Brazil also proposed making privacy a human right at the UN.

- The protests in Brazil over past year were all related to domestic issues; not one was about foreign policy. “Black box” diplomats and heads of state have a lot of leeway, and there is a need for more accountability.
- In the South, there are vivid memories of colonialism and how the West enriched itself at the expense of the South. There is an emotive feeling that the South should get together as much as possible.
- These feelings are real and important. They need to be channeled into positive impact, rather than reproducing power asymmetries and colonialism in our own societies. Addressing the colonizer and the North is a way of avoiding our own perpetuation of subjugation.

**Panelist Biographies:**



**Adriana Erthal Abdenur**  
**Researcher, BRICS Policy Center**

Adriana Erthal Abdenur is a professor at the Institute of International Relations of the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro and a researcher at the BRICS Policy Center. Her research focuses on the role of rising powers, including the BRICS, in development cooperation and international security. Her recent publications include journal articles in *Third World Quarterly* and *Africa Review*, and as well as policy briefs for Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Center, South African Institute of International Affairs, the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, and the Woodrow Wilson Center. She is a former Fulbright Research grantee and fellow of the India China Institute. Adriana received her doctorate from Princeton University and her Bachelor of the Arts from Harvard University.



**Michael Hirschhorn**  
**President of the Trustees, Jacob and Hilda Blaustein Foundation; Executive Director, International Human Rights Funders Group**

Prior to directing IHRFG, Michael was Executive Director of the Coro New York Leadership Center from 2003 to 2008. Earlier, from 1995 to 2001, he served as Executive Director of the Literacy Assistance Center in New York City. He was an Assistant to the Chancellor of the New York City Public Schools and a Visiting Non-Profit Executive at Yale’s School of Management. Michael also serves on the boards of several rights-related and educational non-profit organizations. Michael received his Bachelor of Arts from Yale University in 1981 and his Masters of Business Administration and Master of Social Work degrees from Columbia University in 1989. He has served on IHRFG’s steering committee since 2002.