

Prof. David Monyae

The Future of Africa, China, and the BRICS

This is the edited transcript of David Monyae's presentation as delivered to Panel 2 of the Schiller Institute's Sep. 9, 2023 Conference, "Let Us Join Hands with the Global Majority!" Professor Monyae is Director of the Center for Africa-China Studies (CACS) at the University of Johannesburg. The entire conference is available [here](#). Embedded links and subheads have been added.



Schiller Institute

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It gives me a great pleasure to join you all. Let me take the opportunity to thank the organizers for putting up this wonderful seminar. We are looking forward to the discussions.

My focus will be looking at the BRICS. Why do we need it? What's the focus of BRICS? I will then focus on where BRICS is going, and how it affects global relations. More importantly, given the fact that China is the biggest BRICS member, constituting almost 60–70% of the entire BRICS GDP, I will focus on China in terms of China-Africa and my own country of South Africa, and Africa's relations with China. I'll focus much more, in the part on infrastructure development and relations with other developed countries.

Firstly, our understanding of BRICS has to be put into a context. The post-1945 world order was an order defined by the United States and Western countries, and most of the African countries besides South Africa were not present in the formation of this order. They became latecomers, and therefore they are rule servers, not rule makers. Everything was done in a way that advantaged Western countries.

The Rise of Developing Countries

In 1955, we saw the very first meeting of the developing countries, African and Asian countries, meeting in Indonesia for a major summit—the Bandung Conference. For the very first time, we heard the grievances of the developing world. What were their grievances? Their grievances were very simple. They

wanted to see reform of the international order, in which these developing countries are taken seriously, that there would be justice in terms of distribution of resources, cooperation, transfer of technology, and a number of people-to-people issues that were raised in the [Final Communiqué](#) of 1955 of the Bandung Conference.

So, these were major grievances, and developing countries thought that the international order at that time, ten years after the end of the Second World War, needed to see a transformation of this order. Then, becoming active participants in that order, and making that order more democratic, transparent, and representing all continents in a way. As we have witnessed since 1955, however, we did not see *any* movement of the developed countries reaching out, understanding, or changing to meet the developing world, to meet the Final Communiqué of 1955.

We saw the rise of yet another grouping that is quite important, just for us to have a much more clear context, of where the BRICS comes from. In 1961, we had the Non-Aligned Movement, established in the very same context, the Cold War, consisting of countries that did not want to be bogged down in a Cold War in favor of either the United States or the then-Soviet Union. The bulk of these countries were developing countries. You could see similarities with Bandung right straight to the Non-Aligned Movement of 1961, in terms of the grievances of the developing world.

A third formation is the Group of 77 (plus China) within the United Nations itself. It was very strong, raising more or less similar issues.

Enter the BRICS

However in 2010, we then saw the rise, prominently, of the BRICS—formally established in 2009, and South Africa joining in 2010: Brazil, Russia, India, China, and then South Africa. These countries also came from the Global South, and their main issues

with the global order were similar to the ones I've already laid out.

However, what made BRICS much different from say, the Bandung Conference, as well as the Non-Aligned Movement or the Group of 77, is that the BRICS of 2009 was much more a suggestion by Jim O'Neill, born on Wall Street. A suggestion that there are emerging countries, and therefore, considering the growth of these countries in terms of how big their economies are, and how they can contribute in the development of capitalism and markets. The BRICS was seen in those terms—in the neo-liberal approach.

With the inclusion of South Africa, and now with the 2023 BRICS Summit that took place in Johannesburg, South Africa, we see a breaking away from hegemony of the neo liberal conception of what we understand as BRICS. While Jim O'Neill's conception was much more Western Wall Street, thinking in terms of markets, individualistic Western norms and values of markets, the BRICS that is emerging now is a BRICS that is contrary to that. It's a BRICS that looks far beyond the strength of the economy.

Yes, it's important how big your economy is to be a member, but it also looks at people-to-people. It looks at issues of development. It's state centric, developmental, adding people, concerned with issues of democratization and representation. It's a direct response to these very same grievances of the developing world that these countries organized themselves, and are now playing an active role considering they are also members of the G20—meeting in India now; with climate change summits—with COP28 that is coming up. As well as from September 18–26, we're going to have the United Nations General Assembly gathering in New York City.

We already see that BRICS countries are increasingly becoming more powerful. They have added six more countries—Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, Ethiopia, Argentina, and Iran. That in itself has changed the whole strength and legitimacy of the BRICS; it's become much stronger. It has already surpassed the G7 in terms of the strength of the economy. The future of the world of capitalism resides more in the developing world, and BRICS countries will increasingly be becoming more powerful.

We are also going to see change, particularly when it comes to China, the most important country in terms

of the size of its economy, and the role that it is increasingly playing in the infrastructure development. At a time when the West feels it's losing space, losing legitimacy, losing leverage that they had—particularly in Africa, where China is making inroads in infrastructure development and a number of other issues. We are going to see anti-China, when it comes to decoupling and the other thing that the developed countries are using: de-risking. This will have huge implications, not just for the United States, but for Europe as well, given the fact that the colonial powers in Africa are coming from Europe.

In recent weeks and months, we have seen endless coups in West Africa [such as] Burkina Faso, [and in] Central African Republic, Sudan, Gabon, Mali, and terrorist issues. Peace and security are becoming critical. Resource nationalism is on the rise, where these countries in Africa are arguing that they need more assistance and cooperation around infrastructure development. But more importantly, they do not want only to sell raw materials; they want beneficiation of the raw materials—some of the critical minerals for the Fourth Industrial Revolution, as we get into the changing of the economy: lithium is important, uranium is important. These resources are found mainly in Africa. So, Africa will become an important player, and you are going to see more competition between the developed countries, mainly with China and Russia.

In the context of Russia—the Ukraine war—the situation worsened with the talk about Wagner [private military company] involvement on the African continent. There is an early phase of a new Cold War that is approaching us that is going to worsen the situation where the United States continues to look at Africa through the lens of security instead of development.

These are some of the issues that Africans are arguing: that we need much more development. You cannot separate development and security. Therefore President Xi Jinping's Global Security Initiative, Global Development Initiative, and Global Civilization Initiative are critical concepts that are appealing to more African countries and the developing world in dealing with this.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In conclusion, I would like to argue that there *is* room for cooperation, there *is* room for building bridges. When we talk about BRICS, we do not see BRICS

as fighting the developed countries. I think we are going to play a complementary role, and therefore there is more room for the Global South to meet the developed world halfway. Find ways of doing that in a more peaceful way; avoid the war approach; avoid dumping of weapons in these African countries.

Corruption needs to be fought in Africa, and everywhere else. We need good governance and democracy, not just on the African continent. I think Africa and most of the developing world want to see democracy as

the pinnacle of institutions of global governance, particularly the United Nations. That needs to transform, reform in a way that involves the developing countries. That will answer some of the issues of climate, gender inequality, poverty, disease, and lack of opportunities for all.

I'd like to take this opportunity once again to thank you all. I look forward to meeting some of you one-on-one when time permits.

Thank you.