

BRICS 2023: The Africa Roadmap, Opportunities and Way Forward

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South Africa hosted the 15th BRICS summit from August 22 to 24. The BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) members have thoroughly discussed wide range of significant issues including the bloc's expansion, common currency, investment and trade, the bloc's strategy and geo-policy. We already know that BRICS members consistently champion the rights and interests of Africa, and also plays an increasing role and influence in the global governance system – particularly international financial and economic organisations.

Holding the 15th summit especially this crucial time, within the context of emerging multipolar world, BRICS discussed steps forward for deepening interaction in the sphere of trade and investment with the nations of Global South, including Africa. In fact, the BRICS-Africa Outreach and BRICS Plus Dialogue in Johannesburg on August 24 was considered as an important component event of the summit.

On the sidelines of the BRICS summit, Kester Kenn Klomegah had the chance to talk with Professor Arnold Boateng over a number questions connecting BRICS and Africa. Professor Arnold Boateng is an Entrepreneur, Consultant, Speaker and Author. [Books: Dreams of Our Youth: The African Youth Question: Ananse Verses: Foundations for Life... (Available from Amazon & Kindle Store)]. Here are the interview excerpts:

Kester Kenn Klomegah (KKK): In your view, how do you assess the 15th BRICS summit held here in Johannesburg, South Africa?

Arnold Boateng (AB): The summit is a huge success. It is living up to the hype and expectations prior to the summit. Invited guest showed up and gave a thumb up to the agenda. Two critical expectations were the admission of new members and the issue of BRICS currency for trading. The organisation of the summit went according to script. A notable hitch was the absence of President Vladimir Putin, but his Foreign Affairs Minister Sergey Lavrov is a qualified representative.

KKK: And also how would you evaluate, within the context of emerging new world, Egypt and Ethiopia as new BRICS members?

AB: Egypt is the largest economy in North Africa with a GDP of US\$435 billion and a population of 112 million. Its economic growth is around 3.6% for this year. According to the IMF it is expected to grow at 5% in 2024. Ethiopia, on the other hand, with its population of 120 million and a GDP of US\$305 billion bring good matrices by any measure to the table. Both countries have young population and strong middle class. Their political environment are relatively stable for strong economic development.

KKK: With a bit of emphasis on BRICS supporting Africa's development and ... to undermine western domination and influence, what could be Egypt and Ethiopia's role in this issues across Africa?

AB: As I see it, BRICS may build these two countries into economic successes and use them as carrots to rope in other African nations. As you indicated, the era photo and handshakes to get Africa dancing are over. Even the era of infrastructure funding is ending to give way to industrial base...manufacturing funding. BRICS sees it clearly as the most secured way to go. Egypt appeals to the North African Islamic states whilst Ethiopia appeals to the Horn of Africa and part of the East. With both nations developing economically, their economic successes would create synergies which overflow into surrounding economies. They would also be the trump card BRICS would need to demonstrate to Africa and other regions that, it offers a better option than the West's exploitative programmes. So far BRICS support of Africa's development are largely words since we cannot equate China to BRICS. Even if we could, China's infrastructure funds went to corrupt governments.

KKK: Next, what's your take on Vladimir Putin's proposal that BRICS becomes a trading bloc? What are the obvious implications, particularly for Africa?

AB: Vladimir Putin's call is the best and most practical statement to come from BRICS so far. He seems to have identified the pulse of Africa and our teaming youth. Africa wants more trade and less and less aid. Wealth and economic prosperity is what Africa needs. Africa needs investment on the continent and cross border trade. Once BRICS began to function as a trading block with fair terms of trade Africa may apply to join em block. If BRICS position itself as a trading block, with effective and open trade rules it may very supplant WTO in a generation. Africa is tired of WTO which favours North Atlantic Nations. BRICS has the population...about 40%, the mineral resources, and technological knowhow to thrive and compete. Even trade within the BRICS block would be enough for African nations to realise their respective dreams. This is what Africa has been waiting for. A trading block with the raw reserves, youthful population underpinned by fair trade, open borders and honest trading partners.

KKK: How feasible that can be and what peculiar challenges it poses for Africa, and for the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) under the auspices of the African Union (AU)?

AB: Its applicability lies in the guidelines for joining the BRICS; Africa Union adopting BRICS policy which is skewed towards trade. Africa's trade policies are fragmented. That is what AfCFTA seeks to overcome and usher in an era of true free trade. Lukewarm attitude from countries; competing trade policies, internal political situations pose huge challenges. Furthermore, road and logistical infrastructure are challenges even if Africa could overcome political and technical regimes of taxes, cross-border issues and intractable issue like

corruption. Thus nationalistic tendencies are key challenges to overcome. BRICS may have to impose its own trading protocols as an assistance to African Union (AU) and AfCFTA to help them steer the task of streamlining trading rules. BRICS may also consider harmonising trade rules with AfCFTA. The African Union is now viewed with mistrust in certain capitals. African leaders see it as attempting a power grab. It must focus on coordination and getting Africa leaders to support AfCFTA to achieve its mandate.

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