

Horizons of the Institutional Framework for Energy Cooperation in the BRICS: Prospects of the Action Plans 2020-2025 & 2025-2030

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Executive Summary

This *Policy Brief* presents a summary analysis of the content of the Action Plans for energy cooperation in BRICS (2020-2025 and 2025-2030), highlighting advances and continuities. The group's energy agenda has accompanied its expansion, generating adjustments to include new strategic members. The analysis indicates that, although the Plans maintain their emphasis on certain themes, their scope has been broadened to incorporate a hierarchy between areas and new priorities. However, there are limitations in public access to data, which highlights the need to expand the information system by creating unified, permanent, and open-access repositories. It is also noted that the institutional incentive system, for example, could be improved in terms of valuing good practices. The potential impact of these measures is twofold: to consolidate the strategic role of BRICS in global energy governance and to expand the conditions for intra- and extra-bloc cooperation.

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Introduction

The energy sector is one of several areas in which sectoral cooperation develops within BRICS. Encompassing both renewable and non-renewable sources, it involves issues such as security and supply, efficiency, trade, and energy transition. Since the early stages of the group's trajectory, energy has been present on the agenda and discussed from different perspectives (Baumann 2018). In 2018, at the Johannesburg Summit, an important milestone occurred in the institutionalization of negotiations in the sector: the creation of the BRICS Energy Research Cooperation Platform (ERCP), designed to promote the advancement of the energy agenda. From 2020 onwards, annual reports on energy cooperation began to be published. Another instrument also emerged from this initiative: the Action Plans, structured around areas and themes with timelines, planned initiatives, and expected results (Leão 2025).

The BRICS Action Plans for energy cooperation are agreed upon within the framework of Ministerial Meetings, involving Ministers of Energy and Heads of Delegation of the member countries. By reaffirming commitments and strategies in the field, these documents define the main areas of collaboration, such as the implementation of energy efficiency technologies, the development of bioenergy, hydrogen, and renewable sources, the use of low-carbon fuels, and the strengthening of international technical and scientific cooperation (de Moraes 2025).

Among the reasons why energy occupies a central position in the thematic matrix of BRICS is the fact that, even prior to its institutional expansion, the group was already configured as an energy power. Its countries were among the major actors in international trade of energy commodities, both as producer-exporters (Brazil, Russia, and South Africa) and as consumer-importers (China and India) (Losekann & Tavares 2019).

In its current expanded format, which includes eleven permanent member countries³—Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia, Iran, and Indonesia—it is estimated that BRICS(+) represents 44% of global oil production and 44% of global oil reserves, 38% of global natural gas production and 55% of global natural gas reserves, and 72% of global rare earth mineral reserves (Brasil 2025). Further

3 This new format also includes the participation of ten other associated-partner countries: Belarus, Bolivia, Cuba, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Nigeria, Thailand, Uganda, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam.

representing 36% of global GDP and 46% of the world population (Guitarrari 2023), the weight of this institution in the international scenario is reinforced.

This scenario highlights the group's growing influence over the energy market, both through its capacity for supply and consumption and through its economic participation and management of flows, which may indicate greater margins of self-sufficiency and a privileged space for negotiation (Leão 2025). Although they have distinct energy systems, BRICS countries have institutionalized guiding frameworks for future joint strategies. The interests driving this agenda are diverse, ranging from the pursuit of security and guaranteed supply to price control and alignment with global commitments to address the climate crisis.

The examination of the content in this policy brief is restricted to the two Action Plans for energy cooperation published to date (2020–2025 and 2025–2030). In the analysis of the documents, the focus is on ideas, conceptions, and guidelines, in addition to contents that indicate elements of both innovation and continuity.

Despite the existence of Action Plans, access to the results of the stages of implementation of their proposals is limited, as is access to other ERCP reports and information related to ongoing initiatives and projects. This restriction undermines transparency and makes evaluations more difficult, in addition to increasing the complexity of conducting research on the subject. The absence of detailed data reduces the capacity for monitoring by non-governmental actors and limits the possibility of comparative analyses among member countries, reinforcing the need to expand the BRICS information system by creating unified, permanent, and open-access repositories.

Analysis

The Action Plans contain elements that were maintained and others that were modified between one publication and another (Table 1). The Plan covering the period 2020–2025 presents three implementation stages for 11 coordination actions, while the 2025–2030 Plan establishes four objectives to be achieved during the period, distributed across 12 coordination actions. In both cases, the content of the coordination actions is organized around two branches of cooperation: “cross-cutting issues” and “sectoral cooperation.” Regarding the presentation of the actions, both documents list initiatives, expected outputs, and anticipated delivery timelines, with the difference that the more recent document adds justifications for each action.

Table 1 – Common descriptive and textual elements of the Action Plans for energy cooperation in BRICS (2020–2025) and (2025–2030)

BY NATURE

- Voluntary cooperation / No legal ties or obligations
- Five-year scope
- Guided by the ERCP Terms of Reference (2019)

OPERATIONALIZATION

1. Conduction

- Implementation led and coordinated by the Committee of Senior Energy Officials
- Practical work carried out within the ERCP framework

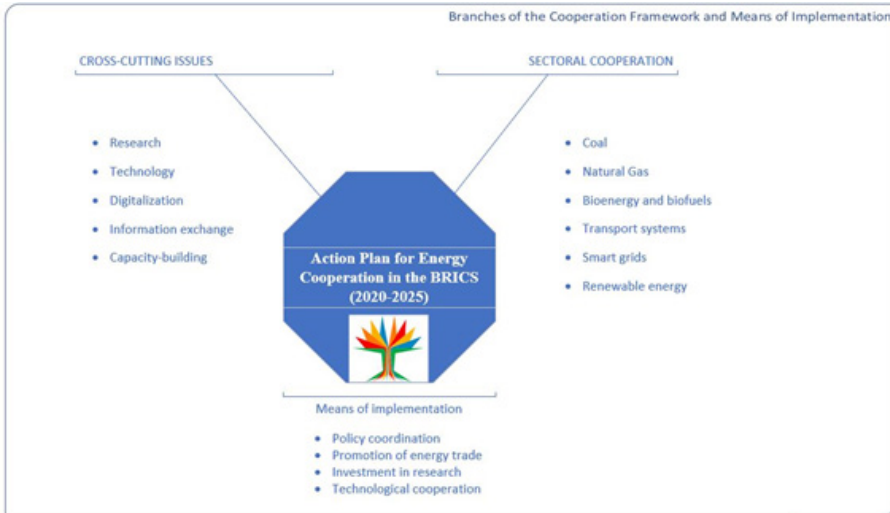
2. Use of BRICS mechanisms

- NDB
- Energy Working Group of the BRICS Business Council
- BRICS Think Tanks Council
- Youth Forum (and others)

Source: Developed by the authors based on the Action Plan (2020–2025).

The 11 cooperation actions set out in the 2020–2025 Action Plan are presented in Figure 1. The areas envisaged for research include the evolution of the energy mix, energy production and consumption, achievements and challenges in the development of national energy systems, among others. Technology is addressed as a key element in building efficient, resilient, and sustainable energy industries. Digitalization is treated as a strategy to increase the efficiency, flexibility, and reliability of national energy systems. Another highlighted axis is information exchange, which involves the dissemination of best practices among member countries. Finally, the Plan emphasizes capacity building for institutional development, including the exchange of students, academics, and experts, as well as staff training programs.

Figure 1 – Branches of the structure, actions, and means of implementation of the Action Plan for energy cooperation in BRICS (2020–2025)



Source: Developed by the authors based on the Action Plan (2020–2025).

In the sectoral cooperation branch, the Plan notes that most member countries have abundant coal reserves and that this resource will continue to be used efficiently in power generation and industrial activities, which requires the development of new technologies applied to the sector. With regard to natural gas, the expectation of a significant increase in demand is highlighted, especially in power generation, industry, transport, and residential use, emphasizing the importance of ensuring security of supply and transportation. Regarding bioenergy and biofuels, the importance of exploring the economic and environmental benefits of the sector is underscored. The item on transport systems addresses the introduction of advanced technologies, the incorporation of electric vehicles, and the reduction of the environmental footprint. Smart grids are discussed in terms of their role in electricity generation and distribution. Finally, when it comes to renewable energy, the Plan emphasizes that BRICS countries can benefit from the exchange of best practices and the use of advanced technologies related to the field.

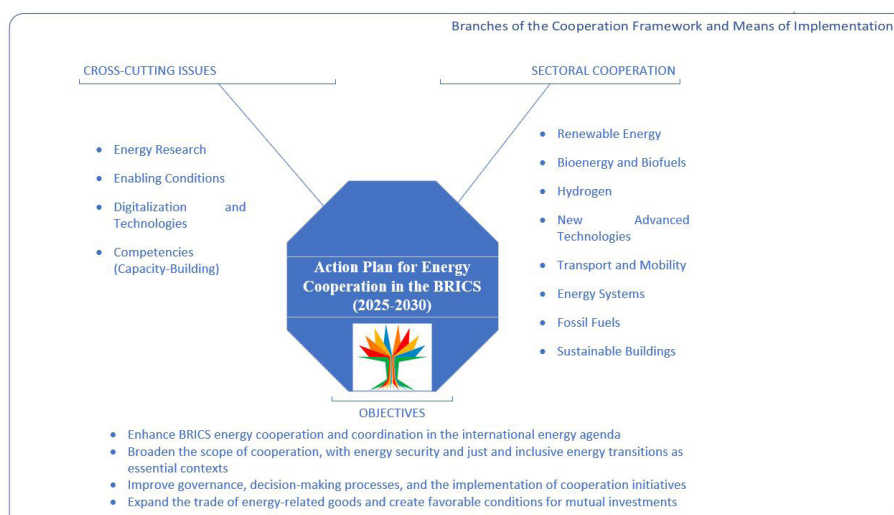
The document ends by presenting a list of actions, expected results, and delivery timelines for the *Roadmap*. This list is organized into three lines of action: (1) “Development of national energy systems of BRICS countries through the deepening of intra-BRICS cooperation” (nine actions); (2) “Implementation of new technologies and improvement of conditions for

investment in the energy sector” (six actions); and (3) “Facilitating the stability of energy markets and strengthening the role of BRICS countries in global energy issues” (three actions). The established timelines vary, ranging from 12 months of implementation—such as in the case of the development of the ERCP (creation of a Secretariat, designation of experts in priority areas, and of scientific research institutes), to actions of a continuous nature, expected to be delivered annually or throughout the five-year duration of the Plan, such as jointly held events (for example, the *#TogetherBrighter* campaign).

Regarding the 2025–2030 Action Plan, 12 coordination actions/themes are presented. A reordering of items is observed, structured according to a hierarchical approach in levels, priority issues and thematic areas. Among the main differences, the following stand out: (i) the grouping of capacity building, financing, standards, regulations, and strategic planning as conditions that “enable” the implementation of the Plan; (ii) the association between digitalization and technologies, whose description now incorporates innovations such as the application of AI; and (iii) the reference to the NDB, indicating that it “may support joint energy projects using local currencies”, an aspect that has generated extensive debate in the media due to the critical context involving the U.S. government and trade disputes with BRICS countries (Figure 2).

Regarding the items in the sectoral cooperation branch, some descriptive enhancements stand out: (i) the composition of renewable energies is detailed, with mention of solar, wind, hydropower, and geothermal sources; (ii) three new topics were included: hydrogen energy, “new advanced technologies”, covering issues such as carbon capture and storage and direct CO₂ capture from the atmosphere, and sustainable buildings; (iii) in transport and mobility, the discussion now also addresses new aviation fuels; and (iv) the item related to energy systems (previously referred to as “smart grids”) broadens the topics of debate, incorporating solar panel systems and transnational grid interconnections.

Figure 2 – Structural pillars, actions, and implementation mechanisms of the Action Plan for Energy Cooperation in BRICS (2025–2030)



Source: Developed by the authors based on the Action Plan (2025–2030).

It is relevant to highlight that, regarding items previously treated separately, “coal” and “natural gas”, now unified under the category of fossil fuels, there was no specific mention of oil. This resource was not cited in any of the Plans. This absence is noteworthy, especially in light of projections according to which, with the expansion of the group, BRICS could control between 40% and 50% of the global oil supply (EIU, 2023). The only indirect reference appears in the 2025–2030 Plan, with the statement that “fossil fuels remain important to national economies and energy mixes, and the need to address the environmental impacts of the use of these sources is recognized.”

The 2025–2030 Plan also presents four general objectives (described in the image presented), which are to be achieved over its period of validity. Its list of actions comprises 16 items (two fewer than in the previous Plan), with similarly variable timelines: some measures are to be implemented throughout the entire period, such as mapping BRICS financing needs in collaboration with the NDB, while others are periodic, such as the approval, scheduled for 2026, of the new version of the BRICS ERCP Terms of Reference.

Limited access to data and information related to the implementation of the Action Plans’ targets, as well as to other reports, initiatives, and projects developed by the ERCP, hinders not only the monitoring of processes but

also represents a gap that restricts the participation of research centers and investors, who rely on trustworthy data to guide decisions and propose solutions. In the context of increasing complexity in the energy agenda, the lack of transparency may reduce opportunities for technical and scientific cooperation among BRICS countries.

Recommendations

One of the recommendations put forward by this policy brief reinforces what was indicated by Leão (2025): it is necessary to expand the transparency of ERCP reports and of information related to projects under development. The 2025–2030 Plan cites the ERCP as a repository of documents and records of initiatives; however, there are no publicly accessible links for consultation. This is an important step so that the external community can monitor and contribute to the oversight of the Action Plans' proposals. It is also necessary to facilitate access to ongoing studies and to results that have already been produced.

Another recommendation draws on the terms developed by Guerrero (2022), who, in defining BRICS as an international institution, structures it into systems. It is recommended to enhance the BRICS institutional incentive system in order to boost the operationalization of goals related to strategic cooperation—either through the valorization of best practices or through more systematic and comparative monitoring mechanisms among member countries. It also becomes essential to expand its information system, which is directly connected to the first recommendation, to regulate the flows and outputs of data and information produced.

Proposals for Policy Implementation

The proposal presented here converges with what is already envisaged in the 2025–2030 Plan and therefore reinforces an already structured idea: the creation of repositories that centralize data on public policies, domestic regulatory aspects, and research institutions in the energy sector of member countries. It thus involves creating a permanent, integrative, and open-access platform for studies on energy cooperation among member countries. Another initiative that deserves investment is the development of pilot projects to demonstrate case studies capable of presenting concrete results and encouraging their replication in different national contexts.

Conclusion

According to previously mentioned authors, even with diverse energy systems and at different stages of transition, BRICS has demonstrated efforts and commitment to the institutionalization of cooperation and to the pursuit of convergence around common objectives in the energy agenda. The ERCP and its supporting instruments, such as the Action Plans, constitute an appropriate and legitimized approach for this purpose. However, it is worth questioning: what is the reach of this instrument at the national level of the member countries? How is it integrated into domestic policies in light of their internal differences? Questions of this kind open up research horizons that allow BRICS to be understood also as an institutional political project.

Based on an energy-oriented framework shaped by global energy transition directives and, at the same time, designed to attract investment and strengthen internal trade, BRICS has been establishing a sphere of action that consolidates it as a strategic and essential actor in international energy governance. To properly understand the scope and results of the ERCP and its instruments, it is necessary to consider that the “international” and “national” dimensions are not dissociated,⁵ but rather dynamic, and that their mutual interdependence constitutes a fundamental assumption. In this sense, informational mechanisms that ensure access to the data and information produced within the framework of BRICS energy cooperation are indispensable.

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