

# BPC Policy Brief

## **The Monitoring, Reporting and Verification Mechanisms for Developing Countries under the UNFCCC: an analysis of the BASIC countries Biennial Update Reports**

Alice Amorim



**BRICS Policy Center** Centro de Estudos e Pesquisas - BRICS



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### BRICS Policy Center/Centro de Estudos e Pesquisas BRICS

Rua Dona Mariana, 63 - Botafogo - Rio de Janeiro/RJ  
Telefone: (21) 2535-0447 / CEP/ZIP CODE: 22280-020  
bpc@bricspolicycenter.org

[www.bricspolicycenter.org](http://www.bricspolicycenter.org)

## BPC Team

### GENERAL SUPERVISOR

Paulo Esteves

### ADMINISTRATIVE COORDINATOR

Lia Frota e Lopes

### ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

Bruna Risieri

### COMMUNICATIONS ANALYST

Thalyta Ferraz

Vinicius Kede

## BRICS and Climate

The impact of the actions of the countries that constitute the BRICS goes beyond the scope of the economic sector, reaching, among others, the socio-environmental agenda through issues such as the exploitation of natural resources, land use, the promotion of rights as a crucial part of this agenda, and most of all climate change. Hence the growing need, in recent years, to promote researches and disseminate.

In order to engage this debate and contribute positively to the climate agenda, the BRICS Policy Center and the GIP —Gestão e Interesse Público Pesquisa e Consultoria— have established a partnership aiming at stimulating and strengthening researches and debates between scholars, civil society, government, and other sector of Brazilian society on the subject. This is the context in which the BRICS and Climate project is born.

### COORDINATOR

Paulo Esteves

### RESEARCHER

Maureen Santos

### ASSITANT RESEARCHER

Beatriz Mattos

### GIP

Ana Toni

Alice Amorim

### INTERN

Diogo Grion

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## **Executive Summary**

This Policy Brief has three main objectives: Firstly, to present the basic international policy framework for the MRV for developing country Parties under the UNFCCC; Secondly, to provide a short comparative analysis of the latest version of the BURs presented by the countries that belong to the BASIC bloc, with an emphasis on the national MRV component of the Reports; Thirdly and lastly, to provide a set of policy recommendations for the BASIC countries.

## **Key-words**

BASIC, Climate change, Biennial Update Reports, UNFCCC.

# The Monitoring, Reporting and Verification Mechanisms for Developing Countries under the UNFCCC: an analysis of the BASIC countries Biennial Update Reports

Alice Amorim

## 1. Introduction

The countries that are part of the U.N. climate change convention (UNFCCC) will have the next Conference of the Parties, COP23, this November in Bonn (Germany) under the presidency of Fiji. Among the priority topics set by the Fijian Prime Minister Bainimarama are climate adaptation finance and effective approval of implementation guidelines, known as the Rulebook to the Paris Agreement<sup>1</sup>.

The technical discussions on UN rulebooks try to accommodate the requests and concerns of all Parties. Thus, they tend to be heavily bureaucratic and hermetic to any audience beyond the climate expert community. However, they will address important procedures that link countries' international and national agendas, for example, regarding the measurement, reporting, and verification (MRV) of actions and policies implemented by each and all countries.

These new guidelines do not come from a regulatory vacuum. Developed countries are already obliged and developing countries are invited, depending on national circumstances and capabilities, to regularly inform their actions to the UNFCCC. The Parties have some degree of autonomy to decide what needs to be reported under the UNFCCC. However, the accuracy of their reports has direct impact on the analysis of parties' progress to tackle global warming and the likelihood of global success in reaching the objective of the UNFCCC and of the Paris Agreement.

Needless to say that this bears a heavy political weight in the international context as the “pictures” provided by countries of their own climate efforts, resources and demands might influence future climate and development international finance flows, the political power distribution in the climate

(1) The Paris Agreement entered into force in early November 2016, right before the beginning of COP22.

regime, and further evidence the map of climate vulnerable populations and where climate refugees can potentially come from.

The Paris Agreement Rulebook, as a new international policy framework, can play a positive or negative role in enhancing climate domestic action in both developed and developing countries. They shall drive the implementation of current and upcoming Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and correlated climate domestic policies, such as the speed and comprehensiveness of energy matrix transitions, carbon emission reduction plans for low carbon agriculture practices, targets for reducing deforestation rates, the level of urgency of adaptation actions, among others.

For developing countries, there are two main reporting instruments: the National Communications (NCs) and Biannual Update Reports (BURs). Most emerging economies have already published their NCs and BURs at least once, but in different levels of detail, timing, and approach, making it difficult to compare the information. In particular, the BASIC bloc – formed by Brazil, South Africa, India and China, which has been increasingly showing efforts to coordinate positions under the climate negotiations in the past years, reveals a notable difference in the level of depth of detail and frequency of submissions, making it difficult to analyze them as a bloc<sup>2</sup>.

This Policy Brief has three main objectives: Firstly, to present the basic international policy framework for the MRV for developing country Parties under the UNFCCC; Secondly, to provide a short comparative analysis of the latest version of the BURs presented by the countries that belong to the BASIC bloc, with an emphasis on the national MRV component of the Reports; Thirdly and lastly, to provide a set of policy recommendations for the BASIC countries.

## 2. Measurement, Reporting and Verification (MRV) Policy Framework under the UNFCCC

At COP 13, through the Bali Action Plan<sup>3</sup>, Parties agreed on applying measurement, reporting, and verification (MRV) for developing country Parties contributions to the Convention, which laid the foundation for the subsequent elaboration of the existing comprehensive MRV framework for developing country Parties<sup>4</sup>.

The measurement component for developing countries (non-Annex I Parties) applies both to address climate change and to the impacts of these efforts. It relies on national level actions and refers to GHG (Greenhouse Gases) emissions, mitigation actions, and the support, both in terms of capacity building and financial contributions, needed and received.

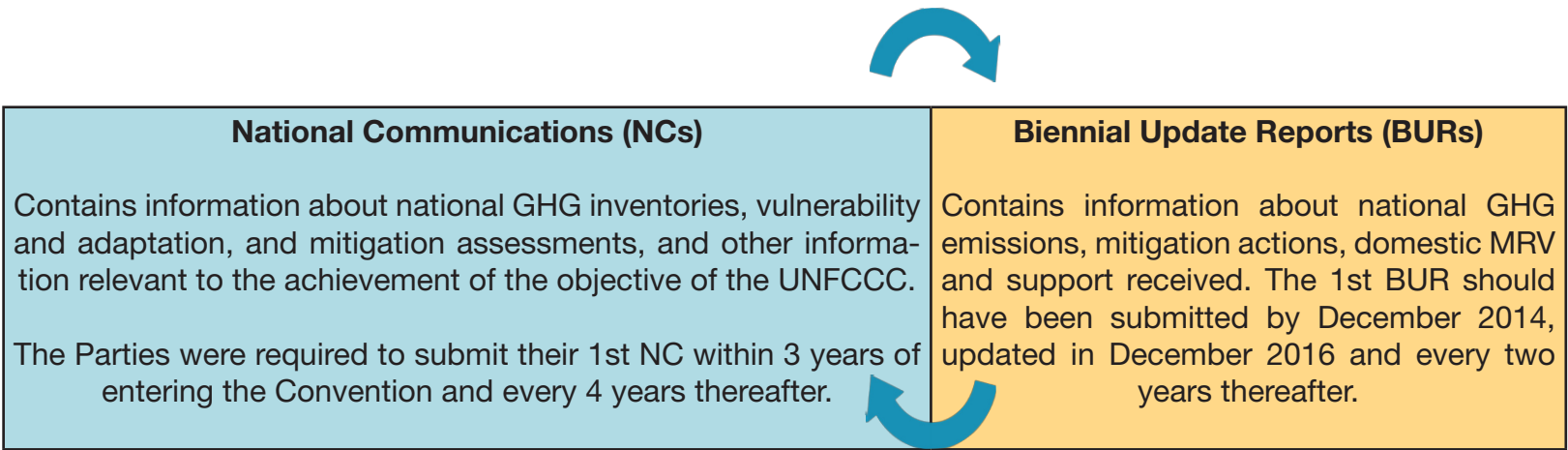
The reporting mechanism for developing countries is implemented through the National Communications (NCs) and Biennial Update Reports (BURs). Following the Convention's principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR-RC), Least Developed Country Parties (LDCs) and Small Islands developing States (SIDS) may submit BURs at their own discretion.

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(2) Radar Socioambiental nº12/2017. Available in <http://bricspolicycenter.org/homolog/publicacoes/interna/7232?tipo=Radar>

(3) Decision 1/CP.13/2007. Available in <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2007/cop13/eng/06a01.pdf#page=3>

(4) Decision 2/CP.17, Decision 21/CP.19 and Decision 14/CP.19 tackle REDD plus results, NAMAs (Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions), CDM (Clean Development Mechanisms), and other relevant topics for MRV purposes, but are beyond the scope and purpose of this Brief and therefore are not analyzed herein.



Lastly, the verification of Parties actions is addressed at the international level, through a comprehensive analytical process of the BURs that is conducted by the ICA (International Consultation and Analysis)<sup>5</sup>. The ICA is a process that takes place under the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI), one of the technical bodies of the Convention. It gathers a group of experts (TTE – Team of Technical Experts) from all over the world and Parties representatives to focus specifically on mitigation efforts and impacts, trying to follow a non-intrusive and non-punitive and respectful of national sovereignty manner.

These MRV processes are quite new for developing country parties and reporting asymmetries among them are naturally expected. However, in the context of designing the Paris Agreement rulebook, the effective implementation of the ratcheting mechanism<sup>6</sup> and the need of progressively increasing ambition of NDCs will put a strong pressure on developing country parties in these coming years to provide evidence of their mitigation efforts and support to other developing country parties, in particular for adaptation actions. The recent announcement<sup>7</sup> of the withdrawal of the Paris Agreement by the United States, the second largest emitter of CO<sub>2</sub>, adds an extra layer of political pressure on developing countries, in particular the BASIC bloc.

If countries are seriously willing to achieve the Paris Agreement’s long-term goal of “*holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels (...)*”<sup>8</sup>, the provision of evidence of these efforts will be critical to avoid a global movement of distrust in the climate negotiations and the global capacity to deal with the challenges imposed by climate change.

But what exactly the BASIC bloc has been doing? How often they have been reporting their actions? How accurate and comparable are their actions? The next section tries to address these questions by providing an overview of the NCs and BURs from each member of the BASIC.

(5) Decision 1/CP.16  
(6) The mechanism is an informal name for the Global Stocktake process detailed in the Article 14 of the Draft Decision CP.21. In short, the process involves a periodic assessment and progress in reducing carbon emissions and the level of collective efforts to accomplish the Paris Agreement long term temperature goal.  
(7) At June 1st the President of United States, Donald Trump announced that U.S. will exit Paris climate accord. The Communication regarding the intent to withdrawal from Paris Agreement can be found at <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2017/08/273050.htm>  
(8) Paris Agreement, Article 2, (a)



## 3. BASIC countries National Communications (NCs) and Biennial Update reports (BURs)

The box below provides an overview of the documents already submitted by each member of the BASIC countries. The full version of the NCs and BURs can be assessed in English at the official UNFCCC webpage:

Country	EIF <sup>9</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup> NC	2 <sup>nd</sup> NC	3 <sup>rd</sup> NC	1 <sup>st</sup> BUR	2 <sup>nd</sup> BUR
<b>S. Africa</b>	27 Nov 1997	11 Dec 2003	16 Nov 2011	(Due by 2015)	17 Dec 2014	(Due by 2016)
<b>Brazil</b>	29 May 1994	10 Dec 2004	30 Nov 2010	20 Apr 2016	31 Dec 2014	3 Mar 2017
<b>China</b>	21 Mar 1994	10 Dec 2004	8 Nov 2012	(Due by 2016)	12 Jan 2017	(Due by 2016)
<b>India</b>	21 Mar 1994	22 June 2004	4 May 2012	(Due by 2016)	22 Jan 2016	(Due by 2016)

As it can be seen in the box above, most BASIC countries did not comply with the suggested deadlines agreed by the parties and except for Brazil, are not in compliance with the Convention rules.

The following section provides an overview of the most recent BUR submitted by each country. Differently from the NCs, which are very different in terms of approach and detail among the four countries, the comparison of the structure of the four BURs show that they are fairly comparable and follow the same overarching framework.

### 3.1 South African 1<sup>st</sup> BUR

Dated as of November 2014, the South African Report is divided in seven chapters: (1) National circumstances; (2) National greenhouse gases (GHG) Inventory; (3) Mitigation actions and their effects; (4) Financial resources, technology transfer, capacity building, and technical support received; (5) Support received for the preparation of the BUR; (6) Measurement, reporting, and verification in South Africa; and (7) Additional information. For this analysis we shall look only at the number 6 (MRV). Other Quarterly Briefs of this series will look at the financial resources, technology transfer, capacity building, and technical support received.

The South African Report frames the development of its national MRV system as a critical area for the accomplishment of the Convention's goals and the effectiveness of the country in tackling climate change. It provides a long and detailed timeline and background of the national policy framework, which has been developed since 2009 when the National Climate Change Response Database (NCCRD)<sup>10</sup>, one of the pillars of the South African MRV institutional structure, was created.

Interestingly, the South African approach to the MRV emphasizes the importance of “Monitoring

(9) Each country has a different Entry into Force (EIF) date due to the different length of domestic procedures followed to ratify the International treaties, and the UNFCCC convention, in this case.

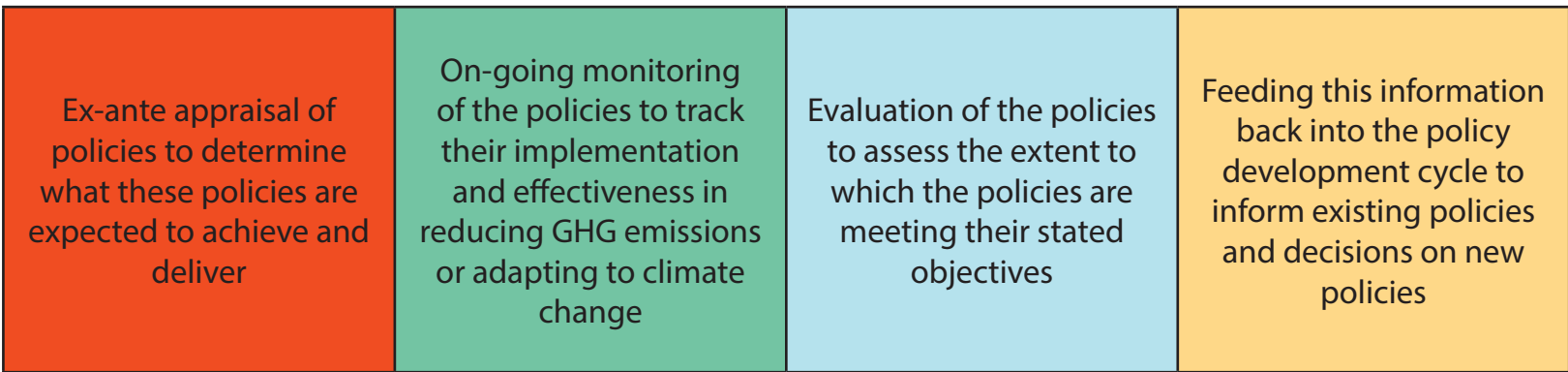
(10) The NCCRD is an online database that contains information on the mitigation, adaptation and research projects implemented in South Africa.



and Evaluation”(M&E) within a broader context of climate MRV, encompassing not only the measurement of GHG emissions, but also the monitoring of support provided and received in terms of financial resources, technology or capacity building for these mitigation actions, the costs and co-benefits of the mitigation actions.

The South African BUR recognizes the need of having a comprehensive and broader climate change M&E system that goes beyond its current NCCRD data and governance structure. Under the leadership of the Department of Environmental Affairs, that designed the system’s framework, it created a multi-stakeholder<sup>11</sup> technical working group (M&E TWG) to develop the technical foundations for the M&E system, which is expected to be in fully operational in 2019.

The M&E system shall encompass tracking both mitigation and adaptation measures, domestic and international support in terms of finance, technology and capacity-building and is based in the following four main elements (S.A. BUR, 2014):



In summary, based on the latest South Africa’s BUR suggests that the country still does not have an established and functional MRV system in place, but that is working towards that in the near future. It is worth highlighting the weight given to the climate adaptation MRV aspects, an element that is consistent with the country’s NDC.

### 3.2 Brazilian 2<sup>nd</sup> BUR

Dated as of March 2017, the Brazilian Second Biennial Update Report is also divided in seven chapters: (1) National circumstances and Institutional Arrangements; (2) National Inventory of Anthropogenic Emissions by Sources and Removals by Sinks of Greenhouse Gases Not Controlled by the Montreal Protocol; (3) Mitigation actions and their effects; (4) Constraints and gaps, and related financial, technical and capacity needs; Information on support received; (5) Funds received for the preparation of the BUR; (6) Information on the description of domestic measurement, reporting and verification arrangements (MRV); and (7) Technical annex pursuant to decision 14/CP.19.

Unlike the South African report, which focused more on the policy framework of the MRV and the need of balancing mitigation and adaptation, the Brazilian Report is much more succinct and substantively climate mitigation oriented.

(11) Including members of the Government from the Departments of Environmental Affairs, Energy, Transport, Economic Development, Mineral Resources, Presidency, Trade & Industry, Science & Technology, National Treasury, Public Enterprises, Agriculture, Forestry & Fisheries, South African Local Government Associations, Civil society, labor, business, state-owned research institutions, among others.

It focuses on two systems: the SMMARE (*Sistema Modular de Monitoramento e Acompanhamento das Reduções de Emissões de Gases de Efeito Estufa*), under the auspices of the Ministry of Environment (MMA, acronym in Portuguese) and the [SIRENE](#) (National Emissions Registry System) under the supervision of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation. Whereas the first was developed to monitor the national sectorial plans, within the context of a national voluntary commitments established in the Brazilian National Climate Policy and Plan<sup>12</sup>, the second was designed in 2016 to continuously keep accessible the results of the National Inventory of Greenhouse Gases. Considering that the National Adaptation Plan was only released in 2016, it comes with no surprise the lack of attention to the adaptation component in the MRV system.

The Report highlights the fact that the whole Brazilian climate governance and MRV system needs to be updated to a post-Paris Agreement reality and adapted to the monitoring and evaluation needs related to the Brazilian NDC implementation. However, it does not provide any evidence of at what stage this process is at, how it is likely to unfold, or which are the fundamental aspects that need to be addressed.

Furthermore, the Brazilian Report does not mention the MRV components related to the provision of financial support, capacity building, or the articulation with other public policies development and cycles beyond the national climate laws. As such, despite being the only country of the BASIC bloc that is in compliance with this reporting obligation under the UNFCCC, the content of its report, at least in what concerns the MRV component does not provide a sharp picture of the efforts pursued by Brazil in developing a national MRV system.

### 3.3 Chinese 1<sup>st</sup> BUR

Dated as of January 2017, the Chinese First Biennial Update Report is divided in eight sections: (1) National circumstances and Institutional Arrangements for Addressing Climate Change; (2) National Greenhouse Gas Inventory; (3) Mitigation actions and their effects; (4) Finance, Technology and Capacity-Building Needs and Support Received; (5) Information on Domestic Measurement, Reporting and Verification (MRV); (6) Other Information; (7) Basic Information of the Hong Kong SAR on Climate Change; and (8) Basic Information of the Macao SAR on Climate Change.

Similarly to the South African BUR, the Chinese Report presents a detailed timeline of the progress made from 2011-2015 in establishing a domestic climate change statistical database as a basic infrastructure to enact the MRV system. The Chinese BUR is very methodology oriented. Different from the South African and Brazilian reports that pose some attention to what still needs to be done, the Chinese report is much more focused on what has been done so far and how.

The fundamental difference of the Chinese approach to the other BASIC countries, however, is the fact that it has managed to associate climate change concerns to a key national planning development policy instrument, namely, the 5 year Plan for National Economic and Social Development (the 12<sup>th</sup> FYP). In fact, the report suggests that even before the 12<sup>th</sup> FYP, as early as 2009, *“the State Council Executive Meeting decided to incorporate carbon intensity reduction target into the medium and long-term national economic and social development plan as a binding target, for which national statistical, monitoring, and assessment methodologies were to be developed.”*

This decision provided the institutional base to link climate statistics to the overall government statistical indicators system, under the auspices of the National Development and Reform

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(12) Law 12.187/09 - [http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil\\_03/\\_ato2007-2010/2009/Lei/L12187.htm#art11](http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2007-2010/2009/Lei/L12187.htm#art11) and Decree 7.390/2010 - [http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil\\_03/\\_ato2007-2010/2010/Decreto/D7390.htm](http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2007-2010/2010/Decreto/D7390.htm)

Commission and the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). The Chinese Climate Change Statistical Indicator System presented covers five categories of climate topics and a whole range of indicators, covering mitigation, adaptation and financial resources in different economic sectors.

Another singularity of the Chinese MRV system and GHG statistics is that it set rules to be followed at national, provincial and local levels, and for enterprises, defining specific guidelines per sector such as power generation, iron and steel, chemicals, oil, and gas among others.

Whereas the speed and accomplishments of the reported climate MRV systems are impressive, it is important to bear in mind the difficulties and constraints in securing transparency and basic access to information under the Chinese political regime.

### **3.4 Indian 1<sup>st</sup> BUR**

Dated as of December 2015, the Indian First Biennial Update Report is divided in six chapters: (1) National circumstances; (2) National Greenhouse Gas Inventory; (3) Mitigation actions; (4) Finance, Technology and Capacity-Building Needs and Support Received; (5) Domestic Measurement, Reporting and Verification Arrangements; and (6) Additional Information.

The report suggests that India does not have and is not likely to have a MRV system to track climate mitigation efforts unless international support is provided to do so. It reinforces many times throughout the document the message that GHG emissions estimation and mitigation action are not subject to any MRV system at any level. Like the Brazilian report, it is focused on a climate mitigation approach rather than also incorporating adaptation and financial aspects of the UNFCCC MRV debates.

The Indian government thus presents and describes a set of other MRV systems that it has put in place that are related to, but not necessarily associated with, climate change matters, such as in Energy (Energy Efficiency and Renewable Purchase Obligation MRV systems) and Forestry Monitoring, among others.

Among all the BASIC reports, the Indian BUR content, at least on MRV, is the less constructive in terms of contributing to the goal of increasing transparency and accountability of the international MRV system under the UNFCCC. It is illustrative of the Indian position at the international climate negotiations of reinforcing its developing country nature rather than of assuming its position of one of the leading global economies and top carbon emitters.

## **4. Conclusions and Policy Recommendations**

This Quarterly Brief presented the basic international policy framework for the MRV for developing country Parties under the UNFCCC and provided a short comparative analysis of the MRV component of the latest Biannual Updated Reports presented by BASIC countries.

Except for China and South Africa, the latest BUR's presented by the BASIC does not clearly support with evidence the "substantial achievements" narrative that the countries of the bloc have been claiming to have achieved in combating climate change, both on the implementation of

pre-2020 mitigation and adaptation actions.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, despite the constant and increasing joint statements suggesting the willingness of coordination among the countries of the bloc, the analysis of the Biennial Reports does not imply any concrete effort in that sense.

The establishment of solid and comprehensive national MRV systems by the BASIC countries would provide a strong political signal to the international climate regime and the global community that the efforts to implement the Convention and the Paris Agreement are being followed. A system that serves the domestic purposes of better monitoring and verifying the measures that effectively reduce carbon emissions and adapt communities to climate change impacts is, or should be, in the self interest of the countries themselves, rather than framed as an effort only to comply with the demands of the UNFCCC, as the Indian BUR slightly suggests.

The Chinese case is a good sample of how to use the MRV as an opportunity to effectively tie climate change concerns to economic and social development decisions. The South African case is an example of progressive learning on how to build such a system and the Brazilian experience, while not well captured by the document, is a good example of a long term solid commitment with GHG emissions data accuracy and knowledge that can be shared with other developing countries. The analysis of the documents show that there is room for further collaboration and knowledge exchange within the bloc and that a broad understanding of where the countries are in terms of climate action may take a few years to come.

### **Policy Recommendations for the BASIC countries:**

- 1) For better bloc coordination and to support other developing country Parties, the BASIC countries should attempt to develop a common statistical framework for climate change indicators, to be annually updated, inspired by what has been done by the countries statistical bodies to the Annual Brics Joint Statistical Publications .
- 2) For more transparency and better assessment of global climate action progress, the countries should commit to publish their National Communications and Biennial Updated Reports on time.
- 3) The countries should establish a mutual learning platform focused on MRV system that enhances the actions of the bloc ahead of the upcoming Facilitative Dialogue under the UNFCCC that shall take place in 2018.

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(13) BASIC 24th Ministerial Meeting on Climate Change held in Beijing in April 2017.

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## About the Author

**Alice Amorim** Msc in Political Economy of Late Development from the London School of Economics and Political Sciences, researcher at BRICS and Climate project and coordinator of projects in Climate Change and Development at *Gestão de Interesse Público, Pesquisa e Consultoria* - GIP



**BRICS Policy Center** Centro de Estudos e Pesquisas - BRICS

Rua Dona Mariana, 63 - Botafogo - Rio de Janeiro/RJ  
Telefone: (21) 2535-0447 / CEP/ZIP CODE: 22280-020  
[www.bricspolicycenter.org](http://www.bricspolicycenter.org) / [bpc@bricspolicycenter.org](mailto:bpc@bricspolicycenter.org)

