

The BRICS and the emergency response for the Global Tuberculosis Programme

Since the creation of REDE-TB at the beginning of the last decade, we have experienced several troubled political moments. The flexibility, adaptability and innovative approaches have made our REDE-TB a partner organization of the different sectors, capable of networking on the various fronts to fight tuberculosis.

Almost ten years ago, REDE-TB inspired the creation of the **BRICS Tuberculosis Research Network** in 2017, in its concept of a multiple-front of collaboration for the formulation and implementation of TB public policies.

In 2025, cuts in international funding imposed by policies' changes are rapidly modifying the multilateral scenario and forcing a severe restructuring of the WHO. In this movement, the Global Tuberculosis Program (GTB) is being merged into a Department of HIV, Hepatitis, STDs and TB, as recently announced to the Organization's staff.

Unquestionably, the impact of the drastic reduction in personnel and financial resources seriously threatens the global response to the infectious disease that leads mortality on the planet.

REDE-TB sees with apprehension the development of this emergency for the GTB. On the other hand, it points to an important opportunity: the rapid concertation through the BRICS governments, that could cover the budget deficit of 65% of the Global TB Program, ensuring the financial maintenance of the essential actions to combat tuberculosis.

Background

The BRICS, an acronym for Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, emerged in 2001 initially as a concept to identify countries as emerging economies with great growth potential, as proposed by the U.S. economist Jim O'Neill. In 2006, the concept became a bloc, or formal political and economic grouping, the BRIC. In that year, the original bloc (Brazil, Russia, India and China) had its first meeting of Foreign Ministers. In 2011, South Africa was incorporated, becoming the **BRICS**.

The group has a broad agenda, including economic, financial, food security, universal access to health, and promotes annual technical, ministerial and heads of state meetings. Although not a formal economic bloc like the European Union, the BRICS seek mutual cooperation, defending common interests and offering an alternative collaboration to the logic of the Bretton Woods institutions.

In 2014, the BRICS and other partner countries created the Shanghai-based New Development Bank (NDB)¹ as well as the BRICS Reserve Fund to finance infrastructure and sustainable development projects and provide financial support to member countries.

In the current global scenario, the BRICS+ now have a greater projection since the group includes six new full members plus new partner members, which represent 40% of the global population and 40% of the global GDP, according to the World Bank. This expansion of the bloc aims to strengthen cooperation between emerging and developing countries, restructuring the global order, with an emphasis on multilateralism and South-South cooperation, seeking shared benefits.

¹ Also known as the BRICS's Bank

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Since 2008, under a rotating presidency system, the BRICS have repeatedly reassessed their role on the global stage. During the annual meetings of the heads of state, they address and define different topics of common interest and priorities.

In order to streamline the activities of the BRICS, four networks were created in the area of Education, as well as three networks in Science, Technology, Innovation and business partnership. In the area of health, the **BRICS Tuberculosis Research Network** was established in 2017; after that, the Memorandum between BRICS Medical Device Regulatory Authorities (2019) was signed; the BRICS Vaccine Research and Development Center was established (2022); finally, a networking among the BRICS National Institutes of Public Health was recently initiated.

The opportunity for the BRICS with the emergence for the Global Tuberculosis Programme

In 2025, the Brazilian government assumed the annual rotating presidency of the BRICS and set the meeting of Heads of State for July, in the city of Rio de Janeiro. Throughout the year, several technical, ministerial-level and high-level meetings have been held in different cities. On May 14 and 15, 2025, the 18th Meeting of the BRICS Tuberculosis Research Network was held in Brasilia, with an extensive agenda. The results of the different meetings will be announced by the governments in due course.

Much has been discussed about the role of the BRICS' Bank in accelerating the elimination of TB through innovation, development, production and evaluation of health supplies and equipment. The topics of vaccines, medicines, basic science, and diagnostic platforms, as well as the effectiveness of actions for the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of sensitive and drug-resistant TB (DR-TB) in BRICS health systems. Aiming to intensify investment against the disease, WHO recalled that for every dollar invested in TB prevention, diagnosis and treatment represents an economic return of US\$ 43 for the society.

The GTB is facing a serious situation due to the recent withdrawal of financial support from U.S. Government's institutions (USAID/CDC) which represent 65% of the Program's budget. In the last weeks and months this scenario has been shared in different forums and governmental visits to various countries in search of support.

If there is no emergency financial contribution to cover GTB's costs in 2025, and we ensure the continuity of financial maintenance, we will no longer count on the Program in conducting and promoting global technical and political actions to combat TB.

WHO's GTB has the mission of establishing global guidelines, coordinating actions in prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of sensitive and DR-TB and responding to TB-related emergencies. These actions have benefitted 80 million people in the last two decades. The Program has played a pivotal role during the COVID-19 pandemic by monitoring and ensuring rapid actions to maintain TB care and research activities, in the period when 70% of diagnosis, prevention and TB treatment services were interrupted worldwide.

Through the GTB, a TB research and development agenda has been strengthened, with emphasis in innovation and evaluation, including the adoption of new technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) diagnosis, rapid diagnostic tests, new vaccines, more effective and shorter-lasting treatments for resistant strains.

The funding withdrawal to the GTB and its shrinking jeopardizes WHO's effort to reduce the global TB burden, with danger of 20 years regression in the advances we know.

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The 2018 and 2023 UN High-Level Meetings on TB consolidated the commitment of Member States to a significant increase in investments in the fight against the greatest infectious disease killer. Countries have not made the agreed financial contributions, and Covid-19 worsened the situation, which is now aggravated by the funding cuts.

Besides GTB funding withdraw, to reduce costs it is being considered to moving the new department to other global regions; as by other experiences, results were far below expected.

These measures will inevitably remove TB from the center of international political networking and drastically reduce its responsiveness and its conditions to reach the necessary resources to confront the disease.

The impact of such changes could be soon visible, obliterating the effective TB response across the globe.

The call for an urgent response by the BRICS

We understand Brazil should assume a leading role in concerting a movement within the BRICS+ to ensure the reduction of the global TB burden at this critical moment. An immediate allocation of the necessary resources would guarantee the **GTB's continuity, technical integrity, and capacity to lead international actions to eliminate the disease.**

To make this initiative viable, a **minimum emergency contribution by the BRICS members** can maintain the GTB. This modest investment represents far less than the cost of a single large clinical trial. Yet, has the **potential to save thousands of lives** by preserving an essential framework for the global TB response.

The world awaits an immediate and responsible response by the BRICS members, in face of the imminent risk of a collapse of global technical leadership against TB.

This gesture does not represent a significant burden on national budgets, but affirms the BRICS bloc as a strategic and supportive actor in the face of global health emergencies.

This decision **is political and urgent**, as it will be discussed in Geneva as from May 19, 2025, during the 78th World Health Assembly.

The effective response of the BRICS will have the impact of preserving lives and all the advances achieved in recent decades, at the global level.

REDE-TB trusts in Brazil's leadership at the head of this initiative.

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Note: In view of international funding retraction and imminent risk of dismantling the GTB, this feeling of urgency is shared by other Brazilian institutions committed to global health: see The International Tuberculosis Observatory (NUBEA/UFRJ)

https://nubea.ufrj.br/images/Observatorio/Boletim_25-05.pdf