

Concept note

BRICS Digital Economy Cooperation

Overview

The Strategy for Economic Partnership 2025 states that digital economy is an important tool for modernization and transformation of the industry, promotion of inclusive economic growth, facilitation of the decision-making process and stimulation of the national economies to meet the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Digital workplace, digital healthcare, education and entertainment have all shown great vitality since the COVID-19 outbreak. Especially in the field of trade, the traditional trade model is transforming in the direction of digitalization. However, the development of trade in the digital era also faces challenges: trade protectionism, digital divides, data security, privacy protection and other issues should not be ignored. The solution of these problems calls for multilateral coordination on rules.

At present, the WTO, G20 and other multilateral platforms are conducting extensive cooperation on e-commerce and the digital economy. Among the emerging economies and developing countries, BRICS members have implemented domestic digital transformation strategies and laid a solid foundation for cooperation among the BRICS countries. In 2015, BRICS leaders approved the Framework for E-commerce Cooperation. In 2017, the E-commerce Working Group was formally established under the guidance of the Contact Group on Economic and Trade Issues (CGETI). In 2018, the Cooperation Framework on Inclusive E-commerce Development was approved. In 2020, the Strategy for BRICS Economic Partnership 2025 was approved, which identified priorities for cooperation in digital economy. In 2021, the five countries reached the Implementation Roadmap on Trade and Investment related aspects of the “Strategy 2025”, of which digital economy is an important part.

In 2022, building on past discussions and cooperation, BRICS countries may deepen practical cooperation, strengthen coordination of positions, enhance discussions on rules in relevant areas, seize the opportunities presented by digital transformation in international trade and the world economy to promote strong and inclusive growth.

Proposed Outcomes

- Conduct exchanges and coordination on international rule-making in the areas of trade facilitation, investment cooperation, consumer protection, MSMEs cooperation, and capacity building. On the basis of such exchanges and coordination, a framework for BRICS digital economy partnership may be developed to identify common grounds for future cooperation.
- Upgrade the BRICS E-commerce Working Group to the BRICS Digital Economy Working Group, to reflect the growing importance of cooperation on digital economy among the BRICS countries.
- Hold the BRICS Digital Economy Dialogue. Entrepreneurs, government officials, experts and scholars, stakeholders and representatives of International Organizations from relevant sectors will be invited to discuss digital economy issues from the trade and investment perspectives.
- China considers hosting a series of activities to promote online sales of products from BRICS countries ("Buy BRICS"). During the China International Import Expo (November 2022) and the China Online Shopping Festival (April 2022), in collaboration with selected e-commerce platforms, China will organize special events for promoting BRICS products on more than 100 e-commerce platforms to further enhance the visibility and recognition of BRICS products in the Chinese market, with the view to enable enterprises of BRICS countries to share the benefits of China's vast and fast-growing e-commerce market. In addition, a series of online trainings will be held to provide training on e-commerce to MSMEs and government officials.
- The United Nations Conference on Trade and Investment (UNCTAD) and International Trade Center (ITC) will be invited to provide technical support and draft relevant reports on the digital economy in the BRICS countries.

Timetable

- **At the first CGETI meeting in February 2022**
 - Members will discuss the concept note and share views and suggestions on the cooperation areas and outcomes of the year.

- **Before the second CGETI meeting**
 - BRICS Digital Economy Dialogue will be held.
- **At the second CGETI meeting in April 2022**
 - Members will discuss the first draft of the BRICS Digital Economy Partnership Framework.
- **Between the first and second CGETI meeting and in November 2022**
 - Special events will be held during the China Online Shopping Festival and the China International Import Expo. Online trainings on e-commerce will be held at an appropriate time.
- **At the third CGETI Meeting and the Trade Ministers' Meeting in late May/early June 2022**
 - Adopt the BRICS Digital Economy Partnership Framework and submit it to the Trade Ministers' Meeting.

Guiding Questions

1. How can BRICS countries strengthen cooperation in the digital economy and advance the implementation of the Strategy for Economic Partnership 2025?
2. What are the commonalities and complementarities among BRICS countries in the field of digital economy, and in which areas CGETI can focus its cooperation?
3. How can BRICS countries seize opportunities of digital economy development by further deepening cooperation in trade facilitation, consumer protection and promotion of MSMEs, coordination on the formulation of international rules on digital economy, and creating a conducive environment for harnessing the digital economy for development?