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What Does Ghana Want from BRICS?

Ghana's decision to pursue BRICS partner-country status has prompted an important debate about the country's economic and diplomatic direction. The government sees an opportunity to diversify partnerships and deepen cooperation with emerging economies. Critics question whether Ghana is sufficiently prepared to benefit and whether closer engagement could complicate existing relationships.

Both the opportunities and the concerns deserve examination. Ghana has good reason to explore partnerships that could expand its development options. It also has a responsibility to assess the terms, costs and likely benefits of those relationships. The same standard should apply to every international partner: how does the engagement advance Ghana's national interests?

Ghana already maintains substantial bilateral relationships with several BRICS economies. The question, therefore, is what participation in this framework could help it achieve beyond existing arrangements. Could it support domestic processing, strengthen technological capabilities or create more opportunities for Ghanaian businesses?

Answering these questions requires defined economic priorities. Those priorities should guide the arrangements Ghana pursues through BRICS engagement and provide a basis for judging whether the partnership delivers meaningful gains.

What BRICS Partnership Can—and Cannot—Deliver

A realistic assessment begins with the status Ghana is seeking. Partner-country status offers participation in selected BRICS meetings and activities, with more limited involvement than full membership. It does not confer an equal role in shaping the grouping's collective decisions.

Nor does participation automatically grant preferential market access, attract investment or unlock development financing. BRICS is not a common market, and its members retain distinct trade policies, commercial interests and regulatory systems. Ghanaian exporters would still need to meet destination-market requirements, while investors would assess projects on their commercial merits.

The New Development Bank also has its own membership and lending processes. BRICS partnership should therefore carry no presumption of automatic admission to the bank or guaranteed project funding. Any financing Ghana pursues would require separate engagement and assessment.

The framework's potential additional value lies in sustained policy dialogue, stronger institutional connections and opportunities to advance shared development priorities. These relationships could help Ghana identify partners, develop proposals and mobilise support for specific initiatives. Their usefulness would depend on Ghana's preparation and follow-through.

“Negotiating for” should consequently mean pursuing practical arrangements with governments, businesses and institutions through the opportunities that engagement creates. Ghana should approach partnership with clear proposals and realistic expectations about what each counterpart can deliver. The task is to turn access into agreements, and agreements into productive outcomes.

Value Addition, Technology and Markets

Ghana’s engagement should centre on three connected priorities: expanding domestic production, building technological capabilities and securing markets for a more diversified export base. Together, these would give substance to the government’s ambition to broaden its development options.

First, Ghana should seek investment partnerships that increase the value retained within its economy. In cocoa, this could involve commercially viable processing linked to buyers, distribution networks and product development. In agro-processing, partnerships could combine production with storage, cold chains and reliable purchasing arrangements. For minerals, proposals should identify processing opportunities supported by sufficient feedstock, dependable energy, infrastructure and credible demand.

These sectors have different commercial requirements. Government should avoid treating every processing proposal as equally viable or assuming that local value addition automatically produces competitive exports. Its role should include identifying constraints, facilitating credible investment and negotiating opportunities for Ghanaian suppliers. Contracts for local inputs, maintenance and professional services can help connect major investments to the wider economy.

Second, Ghana should pursue technology and skills arrangements that build lasting domestic capability. Purchasing machinery is one step; developing the expertise to operate, maintain and adapt it requires deliberate investment. Partnerships should incorporate practical training, collaboration with universities and technical institutions, and opportunities for Ghanaian engineers, managers and firms to assume greater responsibility.

Meaningful technology transfer would leave local institutions and businesses better equipped to solve production problems, improve processes and develop products. Where public support is involved, training commitments and supplier development should have clear responsibilities, timelines and measurable outcomes.

Third, Ghana should connect productive investment to export demand and suitable finance. Buyer introductions, standards cooperation, certification support and better logistics could help businesses enter unfamiliar markets. Such arrangements should be built around specific products, credible demand and an understanding of the costs of reaching customers.

Financing should follow the requirements of viable projects. Working capital, equipment finance and infrastructure lending serve different purposes and carry different risks. Proposals should demonstrate repayment capacity, account for currency exposure and explain the expected development benefits.

Ghana must also arrive prepared. Credible project proposals, capable public and private counterparties, predictable regulation and timely decisions will influence the quality of partnerships it can secure. Understanding prospective partners' commercial interests will help Ghana identify workable agreements. A focused agenda backed by evidence will provide a stronger negotiating position than a broad catalogue of aspirations.

More Options Without New Dependencies

Diversifying partnerships can widen Ghana's choices, but it can also reproduce familiar vulnerabilities. If closer engagement mainly increases raw-material exports and imports of manufactured goods, Ghana could deepen the economic pattern it hopes to change. The terms of individual arrangements will therefore matter as much as the range of partners involved.

Financial commitments require particular discipline. Borrowing should reflect realistic project revenues, repayment capacity and currency risks. A loan presented as an alternative source of development finance still warrants scrutiny of its interest rate, maturity, security provisions and potential demands on public resources. Projects with uncertain returns should face rigorous assessment regardless of the lender.

Technology partnerships also require safeguards. Competitive procurement, access to maintenance expertise and clear contractual provisions can reduce dependence on a single supplier. Ghanaian institutions should retain sufficient flexibility to upgrade systems, change providers and develop domestic technical capacity.

Diplomatic consequences deserve careful assessment. Ghana should examine possible effects on trade, investment and cooperation with existing partners, while avoiding assumptions that retaliation is inevitable. Clear communication of its development objectives, consistent engagement and respect for existing commitments can help sustain those relationships as new opportunities emerge.

These choices require coordination across foreign affairs, finance, trade and sector ministries. Major agreements should be transparent and subject to appropriate parliamentary scrutiny, with responsibilities for implementation clearly assigned. Businesses, research institutions and affected communities should have meaningful opportunities to inform decisions.

Domestic reform and international engagement must reinforce each other. Stronger institutions, predictable regulation and credible implementation improve Ghana's bargaining position and its ability to secure lasting benefits. The objective should be wider economic choices supported by the capacity to exercise them.

Conclusion: The Test Is What Ghana Gains

Government should publish a concise framework setting out Ghana's priorities for BRICS engagement, the institutions responsible and the outcomes it intends to achieve. This would give businesses, Parliament and the public a basis for assessing progress.

Announcements and signed agreements are initial steps. Their significance depends on implementation: processing capacity brought into operation, productive investment delivered, contracts secured by Ghanaian suppliers, skills acquired and exports reaching more diversified markets. Reporting should distinguish proposed commitments from realised benefits and identify obstacles requiring attention.

Periodic review would allow government to revise priorities, address implementation failures and reconsider arrangements that underperform. It should also assess whether the resources devoted to engagement are producing sufficient value.

Ghana's negotiating position will be stronger when it knows what it wants, what it can credibly offer and which commitments advance its interests. That preparation must guide the practical agreements pursued through BRICS relationships.

The eventual test of partnership will be its contribution to stronger productive capacity, greater value retained within Ghana and wider economic choices for the country and its businesses.



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