

BRICS WOMEN'S STARTUPS CONTEST 2025

Building Global Bridges: Women Strengthening BRICS Economic Boundaries

1. INTRODUCTION

As the BRICS nations come together under Brazil's presidency in 2025, this year's edition of the **BRICS Women's Startup Contest** takes centre stage, celebrating women entrepreneurs who are driving innovation and sustainable development across the Global South. Building on the success of the inaugural contest, this edition seeks to empower women-led startups while fostering collaboration, innovation, and economic integration among BRICS countries.

This initiative reflects the shared commitment of BRICS nations to promote inclusive growth, support emerging businesses, and address global challenges through innovative, scalable, and impactful solutions. Guided by the principles of sustainability and equity, the contest aims to spotlight startups that combine technological ingenuity with a dedication to improving lives across sectors such as healthcare, education, technology, and sustainability.

In alignment with the BRICS vision of fostering a multipolar and equitable global order, the contest encourages the participation of women entrepreneurs whose projects are driving meaningful impact within and beyond the BRICS markets. This year's theme—"**Building Global Bridges: Women Strengthening BRICS Economic Boundaries**"—underscores the bloc's commitment to championing innovation, resilience, and collaboration.

As Brazil assumes the presidency of the BRICS in 2025, it takes on the responsibility of hosting the second edition of the BRICS Women's Startup Contest. Under the leadership of SEBRAE, the Brazilian Service of Support for Micro and Small Enterprises, this year's contest will build on the achievements of the inaugural edition held in Russia in 2024. Russia's successful hosting of the first contest laid the foundation for this initiative, which aims to spotlight the transformative contributions of women entrepreneurs across BRICS nations.

The contest also aligns closely with the objectives of the BRICS Women's Business Alliance (WBA), which plays a pivotal role in promoting the empowerment of women in business and fostering collaboration across the bloc. The WBA will once again provide strategic oversight and coordination, ensuring that the contest not only showcases entrepreneurial talent but also strengthens networks and partnerships within the BRICS framework.

This collaborative effort underscores the bloc's shared vision of supporting women-led innovation, addressing global challenges, and creating opportunities that advance inclusive economic growth and sustainable development.

1.1 About the 2024 BRICS Women's Startups Contest

The inaugural BRICS Women's Startups Contest was launched in 2024, hosted by Russia as part of its presidency of the BRICS bloc. Organised by the BRICS Women's Business Alliance (WBA), the contest aimed to spotlight the transformative potential of women entrepreneurs across BRICS nations while

fostering collaboration and innovation in key sectors such as healthcare, technology, education, and sustainability.

The contest attracted significant interest, with over 1,000 applications submitted by women entrepreneurs from BRICS countries and 17 other nations. Following a rigorous evaluation process, 26 winning projects were selected, representing innovative solutions with significant potential for impact and scalability across the BRICS markets.

The winners were honoured during the BRICS Business Forum in Moscow, which included a dedicated award ceremony on 18 October 2024. The event was accompanied by a robust programme featuring visits to leading Russian enterprises, such as the Velpharm-M pharmaceutical company and Sberbank's AI and robotics centres. This provided the winners with valuable insights into cutting-edge innovations and opportunities for knowledge exchange.

The BRICS WBA played a pivotal role in coordinating the contest, ensuring it aligned with the bloc's broader goals of fostering inclusive growth and supporting women entrepreneurs in addressing global challenges through sustainable and innovative solutions.

1.2 The 2025 BRICS Women's Startups Contest

The 2025 BRICS Women's Startups Contest, led by Brazil under the presidency of the BRICS bloc and organised by SEBRAE, aims to empower women entrepreneurs by fostering innovation, collaboration, and sustainable economic growth across BRICS nations. Building on the success of the inaugural contest, this second edition seeks to highlight and support women-led startups that create meaningful solutions to global challenges while driving progress in key sectors.

Aligned with the overarching theme of "Empowering Women-Led Startups for a Sustainable BRICS Economy", the contest focuses on advancing entrepreneurship as a catalyst for positive change within and beyond BRICS markets. It strives to position women entrepreneurs as leaders of innovation and contributors to the bloc's shared vision of inclusivity, resilience, and sustainability.

1.3 Specific Goals of the 2025 Edition

- *Foster Sustainable Development*
Encourage startups that deliver innovative solutions addressing climate change, environmental sustainability, and energy efficiency, contributing to the bloc's green agenda.
- *Promote Economic Inclusion*
Empower women entrepreneurs from diverse socio-economic backgrounds by providing equitable access to resources, networks, and opportunities across BRICS nations.
- *Strengthen Integration Among BRICS Markets*
Highlight and support startups with potential for scalability and market integration within the BRICS economies, strengthening intra-bloc economic ties.

- *Support Innovation in Key Sectors*
Prioritise projects in sectors such as healthcare, education, agriculture, technology, and renewable energy, aligning with SEBRAE's strategic focus on sectoral development.
- *Build Entrepreneurial Resilience*
Promote business practices that enable startups to adapt and thrive in dynamic markets, fostering resilience against economic and environmental challenges.
- *Highlight Women-Led Solutions for Global Challenges*
Recognise startups that address pressing global issues, including food security, public health, and socio-economic inequalities.
- *Enhance Collaboration Between BRICS Nations*
Encourage cross-border partnerships, joint ventures, and knowledge-sharing among entrepreneurs, investors, and other stakeholders within the BRICS framework.
- *Raise Awareness of Sustainable Business Practices*
Showcase projects that integrate ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) principles into their business models, promoting responsible entrepreneurship.
- *Promote Technological Adoption and Digital Transformation*
Support startups leveraging technologies such as AI, IoT, and blockchain to innovate and address complex challenges effectively.
- *Strengthen Local Economies Through Global Connections*
Inspire women entrepreneurs to develop businesses that contribute to their local economies while leveraging opportunities within the BRICS and global markets.

By focusing on these goals, the 2025 BRICS Women's Startups Contest positions itself as a key platform for recognising and supporting transformative women-led initiatives, driving inclusive economic growth and sustainable development within and beyond BRICS countries.

2. WHO CAN APPLY

The 2025 BRICS Women's Startups Contest invites applications from women entrepreneurs leading innovative and impactful startups across BRICS nations and partner countries. This contest celebrates entrepreneurial talent and supports solutions that drive progress in key sectors aligned with the bloc's strategic priorities.

2.1 Eligibility Requirements

2.1.1 Residency and Representation

Women entrepreneurs must hold citizenship or permanent residency in one of the BRICS nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran, United Arab Emirates) or BRICS partner countries (Belarus, Bolivia, Kazakhstan, Cuba, Malaysia, Nigeria, Thailand, Uganda, and Uzbekistan). Alternatively, they must operate primarily within BRICS markets or demonstrate a clear

and actionable plan to expand into these regions. However, if you are applying based solely on having a clear and actionable plan to expand into BRICS markets, this option is only available for startups from Kyrgyzstan, Mozambique, Lesotho, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

2.1.2 Leadership Role

The applicant must hold a key leadership position (founder, co-founder, or equivalent) within the startup and play an active role in its operations and strategic direction. Multidisciplinary teams with diverse expertise are highly encouraged.

2.1.3 Innovation-Driven Startups

Eligible projects must align with the definition of a startup: businesses that focus on developing innovative, scalable solutions to address significant challenges.

- Startups must demonstrate a strong technological foundation, incorporating tools such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, IoT, or other advanced technologies to deliver impactful solutions.
- Applications from deep-tech ventures—those leveraging cutting-edge scientific research or complex engineering to create transformative innovations—are particularly encouraged.
- Projects should have a clear potential for growth and scalability within and beyond BRICS markets, reflecting the entrepreneurial spirit central to the contest.

2.1.4 Business Stage

Applications from startups in any of the three following stages will be evaluated within their respective development level to ensure fair competition and recognition.

Stages of Development	
Early-Stage	Startups in the MVP or prototype phase. These businesses are focused on validating their concepts, identifying market needs, and laying the foundation for future growth.
Growth	Startups with an established product or service that has gained initial customer engagement or market acceptance. These businesses are focused on scaling their operations and refining their models.
Scale-up	Mature startups that have achieved significant growth and are expanding into new markets , particularly within the BRICS economies. These businesses demonstrate strong operational performance and scalability.

2.2 Types of Eligible Projects

The contest seeks startups that align with the priority sectors of the 2025 edition and meet the following requirements:

- Projects must address challenges in one or more of the six contest categories: Healthcare and Wellbeing; Agriculture and Food Security. Education and Skills Development; Energy, Infrastructure, and Mobility; Commerce, Services, and Digital Transformation; and Sustainable Development and Climate Solutions (refer to Section “3. Categories” for further information).

- Proposals must demonstrate potential for innovation, scalability, and positive impact within BRICS nations.
- Startups integrating ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) principles into their operations are strongly encouraged to apply.

The 2025 contest is particularly interested in projects that leverage innovation and cross-border collaboration to create transformative solutions for the bloc's shared challenges.

3. CATEGORIES

The 2025 BRICS Women's Startups Contest will feature five categories, each representing a priority sector for the BRICS nations. These sectors align with the bloc's strategic goals of fostering innovation, sustainability, and socio-economic development. Startups are invited to apply under the category that best represents their core area of impact and innovation.

For each category, three winners will be selected—one from each stage of development. This approach ensures a fair evaluation of startups at different stages of their entrepreneurial journey, recognising excellence across the following stages:

- Early-stage
- Growth
- Scale-up

Each category will showcase the diversity of entrepreneurial talent and solutions within BRICS nations, with recognition for startups at every stage of their growth journey. Applicants are encouraged to select the category that best aligns with their mission and scope of innovation, ensuring their work is highlighted on a global platform.

The contest features five categories representing priority sectors for BRICS nations and partners. Applicants must select one category that best aligns with their project:

1. **Healthcare and Wellbeing:** Startups addressing challenges in public health, medical technology, healthcare accessibility, and solutions promoting physical and mental wellbeing. This category highlights innovative approaches to improving health outcomes and building resilience in the healthcare sector.
2. **Agriculture and Food Security:** Projects focused on enhancing agricultural productivity, reducing food waste, promoting sustainable farming practices, and ensuring food security. Startups in this category tackle critical challenges to feed growing populations while addressing regional agricultural needs.
3. **Education and Skills Development:** Solutions advancing access to quality education, lifelong learning, and vocational training. This category encourages startups leveraging innovative methods or technologies to address educational inequalities and prepare the workforce of the future.
4. **Energy, Infrastructure, and Mobility:** Startups innovating in areas such as renewable energy, energy efficiency, urban infrastructure, logistics, transportation, and mobility. This category

emphasises solutions that drive industrial modernisation, optimise supply chains, and enhance connectivity.

5. **Commerce, Services, and Digital Transformation:** Startups providing transformative solutions in trade, financial services, retail, and other service sectors. This category also welcomes projects driving digital transformation and leveraging technologies such as AI, IoT, and blockchain to improve efficiency and customer engagement.

6. **Sustainable Development and Climate Solutions:** This category is dedicated to startups that develop transformative solutions to advance sustainable development and address climate-related challenges. It includes projects in renewable energy, energy efficiency, waste management, water conservation, carbon reduction, and innovations that promote environmental resilience and green economies

4. EVALUATION CRITERIA

The evaluation process for the 2025 BRICS Women’s Startups Contest will be guided by a structured set of criteria to ensure a fair and transparent assessment of all submissions. Each criterion has been carefully weighted to reflect the strategic goals of the contest and the BRICS bloc’s commitment to fostering innovation, sustainability, and socio-economic development.

The proposed evaluation framework ensures that each project is assessed holistically, recognising both tangible and intangible strengths. Startups are encouraged to provide clear evidence supporting their eligibility in each criterion, maximising their chances of success in the contest.

Criterion	Weight	Description
<i>Innovation</i>	20%	This criterion evaluates the originality and creativity of the proposed solution, focusing on the project’s potential to disrupt traditional approaches and create meaningful advancements in its respective field. The ability to integrate cutting-edge technologies or methodologies is highly valued.
<i>Positive Impact</i>	20%	Startups will be assessed on their capacity to deliver social, environmental, or economic benefits. This includes addressing global challenges such as inequality, climate change, and access to essential resources, while contributing to sustainable development within BRICS nations.
<i>Scalability in BRICS Markets</i>	15%	This criterion measures the potential for the startup to expand and succeed across multiple BRICS economies. Points are allocated for the market adaptability of the business and its ability to navigate diverse regulatory and cultural environments.
<i>Commercial Viability</i>	15%	The feasibility and sustainability of the business model will be examined, with emphasis on the project’s financial prospects, market fit, and operational efficiency.

<i>Relational Capital: partnerships and networks</i>	10%	Projects that leverage strategic cross-border partnerships, networks, or collaborations to enhance their scalability and market penetration.
<i>Human Capital</i>	10%	Startups with teams that demonstrate exceptional leadership, technical expertise, and diversity.
<i>Structural Capital</i>	5%	Startups demonstrating robust internal processes, intellectual property, or operational structures that strengthen their long-term viability.
<i>Presentation Quality</i>	5%	The clarity, structure, and professionalism of the project's presentation are essential. Applicants must effectively communicate their vision, goals, and roadmap, using compelling narratives and visuals to engage evaluators.

5. SELECTION PROCESS

The 2025 BRICS Women's Startups Contest follows a comprehensive three-stage selection process to ensure a fair and thorough evaluation of all applications. A maximum of 2,000 applications will be received.

This process is designed to assess the eligibility, technical merit, and strategic alignment of the projects, leading to the selection of the most innovative and impactful startups across the BRICS nations. The contest will consist of the following stages:

- Qualification Stage
- Technical Analysis
- Final Review

5.1 Qualification Stage

The first stage, known as the Qualification Stage, focuses on verifying that applications meet the contest's basic eligibility requirements. The Selection Committee reviews all submissions to ensure compliance with the residency and representation, leadership, and stage-of-development criteria. This stage also confirms the submission of all required materials and evaluates whether the projects align with one of the contest's five categories. Only applications that satisfy these prerequisites move forward to the next stage.

5.2 Technical Analysis

In the second stage, the Technical Analysis, sector-specific experts conduct an in-depth evaluation of the projects. These experts are selected based on their technical knowledge and industry experience, and the analysis is conducted anonymously to maintain impartiality and fairness. This stage is also regionally focused, meaning projects will be assessed by experts from BRICS countries familiar with the specific challenges and opportunities of their respective regions. Projects are assessed against the

official evaluation criteria, such as innovation, impact, commercial viability, scalability within BRICS markets, presentation quality, and regional representation. The 10 highest-scoring projects in each category and business stage — early-stage, traction, and scale-up — are shortlisted for the final stage.

5.3 Final Review

The Final Review is conducted by the presidents of the BRICS Women's Business Alliance chapters, representing each BRICS nation. At this stage, the shortlisted applications are evaluated with a focus on their strategic alignment with BRICS priorities and potential for regional impact. While the scores from the Technical Analysis form the basis for this review, broader strategic considerations may also influence the final decision. Ultimately, three winners are selected for each category, with one representing each business stage.

6. AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

The 2025 BRICS Women's Startups Contest offers a range of prestigious awards and opportunities to recognise the outstanding contributions of women entrepreneurs from BRICS nations. Winners across all categories and business stages will receive valuable resources to further develop their startups and expand their impact.

Comentado [PG1]: Adicionar Technical Mission

- *Access to Resources and Networks*
All winners will gain access to exclusive resources, including business opportunities, strategic partnerships, and participation in high-profile networking events. These connections aim to foster collaboration and provide startups with the tools to scale their operations within BRICS markets and beyond.
- *High-Profile Business Meetings*
Winners will be invited to engage in high-level business meetings with key stakeholders, investors, and decision-makers from across the BRICS nations. These meetings offer an invaluable platform to showcase their projects and explore avenues for collaboration.
- *Technical Mission in Rio de Janeiro*
The 18 finalists will participate in an exclusive Technical Mission in Rio de Janeiro, where they will visit leading innovation hubs, engage with industry experts, and take part in immersive sessions designed to enhance their business strategies and international expansion.
- *Attendance at the Finale in Rio de Janeiro*
Winners will attend the grand finale of the contest, held during the **BRICS Business Forum** in Rio de Janeiro in July 2025. This prestigious event brings together leaders and representatives from all BRICS nations. All travel, accommodation, and related expenses for the winners will be fully covered.
- *Recognition Certificates*
All finalists and winners will receive certificates of recognition, highlighting their achievements and contributions to innovation, sustainability, and socio-economic development.

7. HOW TO APPLY

Applications for the BRICS Women’s Startups Contest 2025 must be submitted through the official online portal at <https://bricswomen.com/brics-womensstartups-contest/>. Applicants are required to complete the online form, ensuring that all fields are accurately filled out and that all supporting documents are attached. Incomplete applications will not be considered.

To finalise their application, candidates will be required to upload the following documents:

- Business pitch (maximum 15 pages, PDF format).
- Short video presentation (maximum 3 minutes, uploaded via YouTube/Google Drive link).
- Proof of eligibility (citizenship/residency or business registration document).

All applications must be completed in **English**, and all written materials must be submitted in PDF format. Video files should be in MP4 format and must remain accessible throughout the selection process.

The deadline for submission is **4 May 2025, at 23:59 (Brasilia Time, GMT-3)**. Late applications will not be accepted under any circumstances.

8. KEY DATES

The BRICS Women’s Startups Contest 2025 follows a structured timeline, ensuring a transparent and organised selection process. From the official launch to the final awards ceremony, each phase is carefully designed to evaluate and recognise the most innovative and impactful women-led startups across BRICS nations.

The timeline below outlines the key milestones of the contest, including the application period, evaluation stages, and final events in Rio de Janeiro. Applicants should pay close attention to deadlines, as late submissions will not be accepted. Any possible changes to the timeline will be officially communicated through the contest’s official website.



Evaluation Stages
Qualification: 26 Mar - 10 May
Technical Analysis (1): 20 Apr - 27 Apr
Technical Analysis (2): 06 May - 13 May
Final Review: 15 May - 25 May

*18 Finalists will be granted a trip to Rio to participate in a technical mission and join the Awards Ceremony.

9. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The BRICS Women's Startups Contest 2025 represents a unique opportunity for women entrepreneurs to gain international recognition, expand their networks, and access strategic resources to accelerate the growth of their businesses. By fostering innovation, collaboration, and sustainable economic development, this initiative strengthens the integration of BRICS markets and highlights the transformative role of women-led startups in addressing global challenges.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to carefully review all eligibility criteria, submission requirements, and evaluation stages before completing their applications. Only fully completed submissions received by the deadline will be considered for evaluation. Any false or misleading information provided may result in immediate disqualification.

The organisers reserve the right to request additional documentation or clarification during the selection process. Participation in the contest constitutes full agreement with the terms outlined in this Call for Applications and the **Terms & Conditions**, which are available on the official website.

For further information or assistance, please contact concursobrics@sebrae.com.br.