To
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Report on In-country consultation on Civil Society-BRICS Engagement Initiative in China on August 24, 2012

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On August 24, 2012, the In-country consultation on Civil Society-BRICS Engagement Initiative in China was commenced in Beijing. 23 participants (6 government bureaus, 9 civil society organizations, 6 academia) presented the consultation. The consultation is designed to inform civil society organizations of the BRICS countries about the current policy priorities of BRICS; and to facilitate civil society engagement with key BRICS actors to influence their policy priorities. When planning and organizing the consultation, potential partners were identified, preliminary contacts were established with stakeholders in government bureaus, civil society organizations and scholars.

In order to involve government bureaus and invite relevant government officials to explore possible partnership with government authorities, the consultation was co-organized as a seminar “Finding Ground: Civil Society in BRICS Global Governance”, with Beijing Normal University and China Central Compilation Bureau. We have successfully established contacts and confirmed with major relevant government bureaus delegates to attend the seminar. Unfortunately, two government bureau delegates, Counselor of Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Deputy Director of China National Non-Government Organization Administration Bureau who had agreed to attend the seminar, called to cancel their presentation just one day before the seminar; however, they are still interested and agreed to be engaged in relevant discussion in the future. The seminar is just a beginning of the Civil Society-BRICS Engagement Initiative in China, a starting point of exploring civil society BRICS engagement in China. If there would be a next round of consultation with only Chinese civil society organizations, government bureaus, scholars, an even more considerable step forward might be achieved.

At the beginning of the seminar, Yoke Ling Chee, on behalf of FIM board member introduced some background of civil society and global governance, orientation of FIM In-country consultation on Civil Society-BRICS Engagement Initiative, and laid the background for further discussion.

Mr. Yang, from International Department of China Communist Party Central Committee, talked about roles that Chinese civil society should play in the BRICS global governance, that is, to monitor, to rectify deviation, and to consult, which shows that Chinese government authorities are not rejecting civil society engagement with global governance issues. Mr. Yang also introduced about some BRICS initiatives and agendas that relates to non-government engagement, which suggested some possible opportunities to follow up. One opportunity is the BRICS think-tank (or academy) mechanism. There have been 6 BRICS think-tank meetings on varies topics, of which some are potential topics that civil society could engage with, such as development and international cooperation, global finance governance,
development and security among BRICS countries.
Delegates of Chinese NGOs introduced about their experiences of engagement in global governance issues, global climate change, and education development in Africa. Very few Chinese NGOs are currently engaged with global governance issues, and at a very early stage of development, but they are important in filling the gap between governance bodies and citizens, linking local issues with global issues, communicating media and people. Some suggestions are proposed on how NGOs from China could actively engaged with global governance issues, such as capacity building for NGOs in China such as network support; and government should have a more inclusive approaches for mutual engagement with civil society organizations, regular meeting, informal consultations are suggested between authorities and civil society organizations; Chinese government should have more favorable policies to include voices from NGOs, to support Chinese NGOs working with international NGOs, and be more open, tolerable to various voices; Chinese NGOs are willing to help with capacity building and work closely with local NGOs in Africa.

Chief Representative and governance program officer from Ford Foundation Beijing office expressed their interests in helping Chinese civil society organizations to understand different cultural and social background when working overseas and engaging with global issues. Another potential area discussed for BRICS civil society engagement is the BRICS Development Bank/BRICS Investment Fund in research and preparation, which is reported to be launched next year. As a new global financial and development institution aims at mobilizing resources for infrastructure and sustainable development projects in BRICS countries and other emerging economies and developing countries, the BRICS Bank is to function somewhat like and will be cooperating closely with World Bank. Civil society needs to be engaged with BRICS bank formation process to ensure developing reformed governance architecture in international financing; ending aid dependency of the poorer and developing countries; complementing to their own contextualized national development strategy; and financing development projects based on Free Prior Informed Consent.

With presentation and discussion during the seminar, some potential areas for Chinese civil society to be engaged in BRICS global governance were discussed; climate change is one of the most active areas that Chinese NGOs have been engaged in, and there have been some Chinese NGOs engaging with global climate change; China has gained a lot experiences in poverty alleviation, in primary education development for the past decades, however, the experiences are now sharing majorly via government bureaus channels, now with engagement of Chinese civil society organizations, some experiences could be disseminated; BRICS Development Bank is another important area for engagement, transparency, accountability for BRICS people as well as other emerging and developing nations needs civil society participation; And there are still some areas like MDGs, urban poor, BRICS heath agenda, intellectual property rights, are all potential starting points for BRICS civil society engagement.

At the global level, a network of civil society global governance should be established to support civil society organizations in BRICS countries to share and disseminate their experiences, and to help a balanced civil society global governance engagement in all BRICS countries.
Participants list, In-country consultation on Civil Society –BRICS Engagement Initiative in China

Aseem Prakash  Jindal School of Government and Public Policy, Assistant Professor, Assistant Dean
Celso Castro  Escola de Ciências Sociais Fundação Getulio Vargas, Director
Yoke Ling Chee  Forum for Democratic Global Governance (FIM); Third World Network, Director of Programs
Gao, Guangshen  Sunshine Culture Foundation, Vice Secretary
Gao, Xinjun  China Center for Global Governance and Development, Professor
Guo, Weiwei  China Center for Global Governance and Development, Professor
Hu, Xiaojiang  School of Social Development and Public Policy, Deputy Director
John Fitzgerald  Ford Foundation Beijing Office, Chief Representative
Kathleen Hartford  Ford Foundation Beijing Office, Program Officer
Li, Fan  World and China Institute, Director
Lo, Sze Ping  Greenovation Hub, Campaigner
Miguel Salazar  School of Social Development and Public Policy, Beijing Normal University, Professor
Robin Lewis  Director of Global Partnership Network, School of Social Development and Public Policy, Beijing Normal University
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(This is a report for consultation with PRIA International, further details, comments are still being collected from seminar participants)