Civil Society Engagement in BRICS and IBSA processes

Organisers: CIVICUS, FIM Forum for Democratic Global Governance and Global Citizen's Forum

In an increasingly multi-polar and rapidly changing world, new identities and alliances are being forged between governments, businesses and civil society. As the centre of global geo-politics continues to shift, much attention is being focused on the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) group of emerging economies and the IBSA (India, Brazil and South Africa) group of emerging democracies as their heft in global political and economic affairs increases by the day.

The BRICS alliance is driven primarily by trade and commerce with a focus on cooperation between five rapidly expanding economies who see themselves as a bulwark against the entrenched hegemony of the twentieth century global economic order. BRICS constituents position their developmental agenda and world view as being clearly aligned with the global ‘south,’ challenging the control of international financial institutions and global trading systems by a handful of traditionally rich countries.

The IBSA trilateral on other hand positions itself as a coordinating mechanism between three “multi-ethnic and multi-cultural democracies” bringing their voices together on global issues and deepening their ties in multiple areas of common interest. Although IBSA is focusing on multi-sectoral cooperation, the trilateral has also been formulating joint positions at multilateral forums, including at the UN Human Rights Council. There is a joint IBSA civil society fund that seeks to promote development and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in southern countries.

As the five constituent countries that make up the IBSA and BRICS alliances deepen the nature of their relationship, the lack of civil society involvement in their activities is glaringly apparent. IBSA and BRICS meetings/summits are largely official affairs whose agenda is determined in secrecy by government officials and business leaders.

The IBSA and BRICS groupings will have an increasingly significant influence on global economic and development agendas yet civil society remains on the margins of these processes and is not involved in any substantive manner in either the agenda setting or the deliberations. There is a critical mass of active and experienced civil society across these five economically and politically powerful countries that can help shape and inform public opinion with regard to governments’ priorities and activities in the two alliances. The workshop will thus seek to address the following questions:

- What are the current entry points for civil society to engage in the agenda setting of the BRICS and IBSA alliances?
- What are the possibilities of these two alliances championing reforms in global governance structures?
- How can civil society in the all the five countries that make up the alliances pool energies and resources to advance the human rights and development agenda?