

# Civil Society – BRICS Engagement: Opportunities and Challenges

**Rajesh Tandon  
&  
Kaustuv Kanti Bandyopadhyay**

*Published by*



FIM-Forum for Democratic Global Governance

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Society for Participatory Research in Asia

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Rajesh Tandon &  
Kaustuv Kanti Bandyopadhyay

New Delhi, June 2013

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## Acronyms

|       |  |
|-------|--|
| ASEAN | Association of Southeast Asian Nations                 |
| BTTC  | BRICS Think Tanks Council                              |
| CRA   | Contingent Reserve Arrangement                         |
| CSO   | Civil Society Organisation                             |
| DAC   | Development Assistance Committee                       |
| IAEA  | International Atomic Energy Agency                     |
| IBSA  | India, Brazil, South Africa                            |
| IDS   | Institute for Development Studies                      |
| IFI   | International Financial Institution                    |
| IMF   | International Monetary Fund                            |
| INGO  | International Non-Governmental Organisation            |
| MDG   | Millennium Development Goal                            |
| NEPAD | New Partnership for Africa's Development               |
| NGO   | Non-Governmental Organisation                          |
| OECD  | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| PIDA  | Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa     |
| SAARC | South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation      |
| SDG   | Sustainable Development Goal                           |
| UN    | United Nations   |
| UNAOC | United Nations Alliance of Civilisations               |
| UNGA  | United Nation General Assembly                         |
| UNSC  | United Nation Security Council                         |
| WTO   | World Trade Organisation                               |

## Introduction

The established global order since post-World War II is changing quite dramatically, particularly with the dawn of the new millennium. It seems the old global order characterised by the North American and European hegemony is gradually being replaced by a new global order, characterised by new forms of co-operation, across many emerging economies in the global south. New forms of alliances are emerging amongst southern nations based on varied interests ranging from regional, geo-political, security, trade, and so on. Examples include, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), a geo-political and economic organisation of ten countries located in Southeast Asia, formed in 1967; the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) an organisation of South Asian nations, established in 1985; New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) a technical agency of the African Union, established in 2001; and Mercosur or Mercosul an economic and political agreement among several Latin American countries, established in 1991. Amongst all these formations, an alliance which has caught the attention of most people and seems to be capable of changing the global order significantly is called BRICS – an alliance of five nations - Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. These five nations are considered to be the most promising economies, though some other economies like Indonesia, Nigeria, Mexico, and Turkey present similar potential.

This paper reviews the emergence of BRICS and its perceived potential and limitation. More importantly, it critically examines how it matters to civil society. Does BRICS as an alliance of the 'rising powers' hold any promise to address the shared interests and concerns of civil society in these countries nationally and globally? What does the collective BRICS represent in the emerging architecture of global governance? Should civil society take notice of its agenda and its implications on the citizens? Should civil society engage at all with BRICS? If answers to these open ended questions are found in the affirmative, what should be the modalities and purposes of such engagements? What are the potential pitfalls? In the next Section, BRICS' emerging agendas and interests are analysed before addressing the above questions.

This paper has been produced under the project "Civil Society-BRICS Engagement Initiative" supported by FIM – Forum for Democratic Global Governance in Montreal, Canada. The initiative was jointly implemented by PRIA (India), the Polis Institute (Brazil), the Isandla

Institute (South Africa), the Participation Centre (China) and the Commission on Social Policies, Labour and Living Standards, Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation (Russia). The main purpose of this paper is to inform civil society about BRICS and initiate deliberations primarily amongst indigenous civil society from BRICS countries and with civil society from other developing countries (affected by BRICS' agenda) with a view to exploring the relevance, scope and modalities of civil society engagement with BRICS.

## History and Emergence of BRICS

In 2001 a Goldman Sachs Report called “Building Better Global Economic BRICs” first coined the phrase BRICs. Another Goldman Sachs Report called “Dreaming with BRICs – The Path to 2050”<sup>2</sup> was published in 2003 to further elaborate on the global economic significance of Brazil, Russia, India and China (BRICs). The thrust of the argument of these reports was that the four BRICs countries would together account for 27 per cent of world economy and 40 per cent of its population by 2050. This projection made the policymakers of the world take notice of a grouping which hitherto did not exist as a collective. It also began to interest bankers, investors and trade negotiators as they saw BRICs as engines of economic growth regionally and globally.

However, the political dialogue amongst the four BRICs countries began only in September 2006 when the foreign ministers of these four countries met on the side lines of the United Nation General Assembly (UNGA). As a follow-up, the Finance Ministers of the four BRICs countries met in Sao Paulo (Brazil) on November 7, 2008 and in London on March 13, 2009 (mostly in the context of emerging G20 Heads of States gatherings then convened by the US President George Bush and the British Prime Minister Tony Blair). At the initiative of Russia, the first informal meeting of the four Heads of States from BRICs countries took place on the side lines of the G8 summit in Japan on July 9, 2008. Russia offered to host the first BRICs summit in 2009, and the rest is history.

Since its first formal Summit in Yekaterinburg (Russia) in June 2009, the BRICs have had five Summits – the second in Brasilia (Brazil) in April 2010, the third in Sanya (China) in April 2011, the fourth in New Delhi (India) in March 2012 and the fifth in Durban (South Africa) in March

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<sup>1</sup> Goldman Sachs (2001)

<sup>2</sup> Goldman Sachs (2003)



2013. It was in late December 2010 that South Africa was formally invited to join the collective and the necessary transition from BRICs to BRICS was made.

As Cynthia Roberts<sup>3</sup> cites, the then Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, while opening the first formal BRICS Summit in 2009 said that the BRIC should create conditions for a more just world order and described the June 2009 inaugural BRIC summit as an outstanding, historic event marking the emergence of a new format for addressing global problems. The final declaration<sup>4</sup> from the First Summit called for 'a more democratic and just multi-polar world order'. The Summit also called for 'reform of International Financial Institutions (IFIs), United Nations(UN) and World Trade Organisation (WTO)'. It reaffirmed that 'the emerging and developing economies must have greater voice and representation in IFIs, and their heads and senior leadership should be appointed through an open, transparent, and merit-based selection process'. It particularly recognised 'the status of India and Brazil in international affairs', and supported 'their aspirations to play a greater role in the United Nations'. In this sense, the primary focus of the BRICs coalition has been to find ways to calibrate their collective strategies in matters related to global finance, trade and economy. Yet, the political implications of BRICs as a countervailing force to American 'unipolarism' and G7 western capitalism was not lost sight of. When the Russian President suggested that the sovereign funds of his country should be invested in other currencies (other than US Dollars), the US Dollar fell by nearly one per cent in value in global trading markets. The declaration from the Summit called for a 'stable, predictable and more diversified international monetary system'. The primary thrust of the First Summit was to develop a shared perspective on issues facing the global economy and its impact on the national economies of the four BRICs countries. However, it also invited the international community to 'minimise the impact of the crisis on development and ensure the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)' and asked the developed countries to 'fulfil their commitment of 0.7 per cent of Gross National Income for the Official Development Assistance and make further efforts in increasing assistance, debt relief, market access and technology transfer for developing countries'. In addition, it reaffirmed the need for stable, sustainable and diversified energy sources, implementation of sustainable development principles, constructive dialogue on climate change (based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibility), and contribution to global food security.

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<sup>3</sup> Roberts, Cynthia (2010)

<sup>4</sup> First BRICS Summit Declaration (2009), Russia

By the time the Second Summit was held in Brasilia in April 2010, the global economy was in such turmoil that the Summit was designed to strengthen financial co-operation amongst these four 'emerging markets'. A major co-operation agreement was signed between the National Development Banks of the four countries. The declaration also included preparations for the forthcoming G20 meeting in South Korea in November 2010. The thrust of the declaration was to take such a stand on global political economy issues and matters related to UN reforms that other formations and associations of countries from the developing world could find resonance. The declaration included almost all topics mentioned in the First Summit's declaration but a stronger language and sentiment was used with regard to the reforms of various global governance institutions. It reiterated that 'the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank urgently need to address their legitimacy deficits. Reforming these institutions' governance structures requires first and foremost a substantial shift in voting power in favour of emerging market economies and developing countries to bring their participation in decision making in line with their relative weight in the world economy.' It called for 'the voting power reform of the World Bank to be fulfilled in the upcoming Spring Meetings, and expect the quota reform of the IMF to be concluded by the G-20 Summit in November this year'. It emphasised 'the need for an open and merit based selection method, irrespective of nationality, for the heading positions of the IMF and the World Bank and' staff of these institutions needs to better reflect the diversity of their membership'. A strong position was also articulated 'to resist all forms of trade protectionism and fight disguised restrictions on trade.' At the same time stronger support was articulated in favour of 'Russia's bid for accession to the WTO.'

In the run up to the Second BRIC Summit a number of inter-ministerial meetings, like the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Development and Ministry of Finance, were also organised. The most interesting inclusion of non-state actors included the first meeting of cooperatives, business forums and a conference of think tanks (which was later referred to as the BRICS Academic Forum). However, any engagement with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations (CSOs) remained elusive. The only window of opportunity that was made available through the declaration was an affirmation to support the Alliance of Civilisations an initiative of the United Nations (UNAOC) to promote international, intercultural and interreligious dialogue and co-operation.

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<sup>5</sup> Second BRIC Summit Declaration (2010), Brazil

By the time the Third BRICS Summit was hosted by China in April 2011 in Sanya, South Africa had formally joined the collective and by then it was BRICS. The focus of deliberations hereunder the theme “Broad Vision, Shared Prosperity” was far more explicit on such issues as reforms of Bretton Woods Institutions, Doha Development round of WTO, international terrorism, climate change and the achieving of the MDGs. The Summit declaration continues to call for support to 'a multi-polar, equitable and democratic world order'. A major thrust of the agreements at the China Summit was to strengthen co-operation amongst BRICS countries beyond the official government bodies. Specific focus on co-operation in the areas of science, agriculture, health, sports, arts and culture was mentioned; exchange of scholars, sports persons, youth and various other formations (like trade associations) was explicitly planned as joint programmes of BRICS. It is useful to note that there was still no reference to any exchange or co-operation between NGOs or civil society among BRICS countries.

Both the articulation of purposes and programmes of BRICS and its public communications improved during the Third Summit held in China. To reiterate its clear purposes:

- ❖ To arrive at a consensus on how to cope with global challenges and make contributions to resolving global problems.
- ❖ To enhance coordination and collaboration among BRICS countries in international affairs.
- ❖ To further deepen and expand pragmatic co-operation of BRICS in all fields.
- ❖ To further strengthen the bilateral relations among BRICS countries.

The fact that all the BRICS nations were present in the United Nation Security Council (UNSC) concurrently during the year 2011, the Sanya declaration acknowledged it as 'a valuable opportunity to work closely together on issues of peace and security'. It denounced any use of force and supported the principle of maintaining the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of each nation.

The programme of work that evolved during this Summit identified common domestic issues for co-operation more clearly – inequality, knowledge-intensive economic development, social security, inflation and flow of 'hot' money. Beyond economics, focus on inequality and social security broadened the scope of co-operation amongst BRICS.

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<sup>6</sup> Third BRICS Summit Declaration (2011), China

The Fourth BRICS Summit in Delhi Declaration<sup>7</sup> in March 2012 focused the discussions, under the overarching theme, “BRICS Partnership for Global Stability, Security and Prosperity”. The complexity of the Euro Zone crisis, the possibilities of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) and the Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity being hosted in Brazil and India respectively later this year; the upcoming G20 Summit in Mexico, the 8th WTO Ministerial Conference in Geneva, the emerging political scenario in the Middle East and North provided the backdrop for this summit. The commitment to the norms of international law and multilateral decision making for maintaining macroeconomic stability was emphasised.

The Summit called for a more representative international financial architecture, with an increase in the voice and representation of developing countries including quota and governance reforms in the IMF to protect the voice and representation of the IMF's poorest members. The World Bank was urged to give greater priority to mobilising resources and meeting the needs of development finance while reducing lending costs and adopting innovative lending tools, while welcoming the candidatures from the developing world for the position of the President of the World Bank. It was reiterated that the Heads of IMF and World Bank be selected through an open and merit-based process and the need for reforming the governance structure that reflects current economic and political reality. A significant articulation included a call to change the nature of the World Bank from an institution that essentially mediates North-South co-operation to an institution that promotes equal partnership with all countries as a way of dealing with development issues and to overcome an out-dated donor-recipient dichotomy. China and Russia reiterated the importance they attach to the status of Brazil, India and South Africa in international affairs and supported their aspiration to play a greater role in the UN.

The Finance Ministers of the BRICS countries were directed to consider the possibility of setting up a new Development Bank for mobilising resources for infrastructure and sustainable development projects in BRICS and other emerging economies and developing countries, to supplement the existing efforts of multilateral and regional financial institutions for global growth and development. The recommendations were expected to be shared in the next Summit in South Africa.

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<sup>7</sup> Fourth BRICS Summit Declaration (2012), New Delhi

The Summit called for a resolution to settle the conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa, in particular the Arab-Israel conflict on the basis of the universally recognised international legal framework including the relevant UN Resolutions, the Madrid Principles and the Arab Peace Initiative. Concerns were raised about the current situation in Syria and invited to end all violence and violations of human rights. The leadership of BRICS recognised Iran's right to peaceful uses of nuclear energy consistent with its international obligations including the need for continuity of dialogue between the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and Iran and in accordance with the provisions of the relevant UN Security Council Resolutions. The Summit shared its commitment to Afghanistan for continued development assistance and co-operation, preferential access to world markets, foreign investment and a clear end-state strategy to attain lasting peace and stability.

The Summit called for actions to address the issues related to economic development, eradicating poverty, and combating hunger and malnutrition in many developing countries. It reiterated its support to the forthcoming UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation. It affirmed that the concept of a 'green economy', still to be defined at Rio+20, must be understood in the larger framework of sustainable development and poverty eradication and is a means to achieve these fundamental and overriding priorities, not an end in itself. It resisted the introduction of trade and investment barriers in any form on the grounds of developing a green economy.

The Summit also viewed the MDGs to remain as a fundamental milestone in the development agenda. It recognised that there is a storehouse of knowledge, know-how, capacities and best practices available in the BRICS countries that can be shared and on which meaningful co-operation can be built for the benefit of people.

Recognising the public health challenges, including universal access to health services, access to health technologies, including medicines, increasing costs and the growing burden of both communicable and non-communicable diseases, the BRICS Health Ministers were directed to take necessary action. The Summit also mentioned the challenges of rapid urbanisation, faced by all developing societies including the BRICS countries and directed the respective authorities to coordinate efforts and learn from best practices and technologies available. A plan of action included organising the first meeting of the BRICS Urbanisation Forum and the second BRICS Friendship Cities and Local Governments Co-operation Forum in 2012 in India.

The Fifth BRICS Summit in Durban was organised in March 2013 under the overarching theme “BRICS and Africa: Partnership for Development, Integration and Industrialisation”. The declaration<sup>8</sup> in continuation with the earlier summit declarations reaffirmed the commitment to the promotion of international law, multilateralism and the central role of the UN and aim to progressively develop BRICS into a full-fledged mechanism of current and long-term coordination on a wide range of key issues of the world economy and politics. One of the most significant decisions included the commitment to provide support to African countries in their industrialisation process through stimulating foreign direct investment, knowledge exchange, capacitybuilding and diversification of imports from Africa within the framework of the NEPAD. It also recognised the need for infrastructure development in Africa through the development of Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA).

Two other significant decisions were to set up a new BRICS Development Bank for mobilising resources for infrastructure and sustainable development projects in BRICS, other emerging economies and developing countries, to supplement the existing efforts of multilateral and regional financial institutions for global growth and development. The second decision was to construct a financial safety net through the creation of a self-managed Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) amongst BRICS countries with an initial size of US\$ 100 billion. The Summit continued to assert the needs for reforms in the IFIs and other global governance institutions by changing the quota system in a time-bound manner. It maintained its commitment to achieve the MDGs, and also emphasised the need for the UN to assume a central role in determining the priorities in post-2015 development goals and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

## Opportunities and Challenges of BRICS

The relationships between BRICS economies and other developing countries are being considered as mutually beneficial affairs. The expansion of the BRICS' markets has enormous potential to help countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia, which can increase their exports. In return, BRICS can also take advantage of the rapid development of the market in these

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<sup>8</sup> Fifth BRICS Summit Declaration (2013), South Africa

developing countries to increase their own exports and growth. The BRICS' economies are also increasing their overseas investment with fellow BRICS countries, for example, China is the biggest investor in Brazil for mutual investments.

The BRICS have a lot in common. All the BRICS countries have taken a common position against trade protectionism. All the BRICS' economies are also victims of the global financial crisis. This has led to unprecedented co-operation in a bid to reform the international financial and monetary system. It is important that the BRICS countries continue to speak in one voice to increase their say and influence in the reform of the international financial system. Climate change is a common challenge for the BRICS countries. All the BRICS countries are engaged in negotiations with the developed countries on the transfer of environment friendly technologies to the developing countries at a low cost. The most important thing is to learn from each other in pursuing a common development goal. BRICS as a group is expected to act as advocate and practitioner in forging a global partnership for development, with the aim to enhancing the influence of emerging economies in world affairs, in the promotion of a more just, democratic international order with respect to world economy, politics and security. On the whole, the BRICS nations can play a much bigger role in global management by systematically creating frameworks offering policy and development options for the emerging nations.<sup>9</sup>

Despite these commonalities BRICS as an entity also faces several challenges from within. One of the challenges is the internal incongruence. “The challenge for BRICS countries has always been the articulation of a common vision, with the member nations being at different stages of political and socio-economic development. While some have evolved economically and militarily they are yet to succeed in enabling plural governance structures, while others who represent modern democratic societies are being challenged domestically by inequalities and fault-lines created by caste, colour, religion and history” (ibid). Deutsche Bank Research said in a report that “economically, financially and politically, China overshadows and will continue to overshadow the other BRICS. China's economy is larger than that of the combined economies of the other three BRIC countries.”As Lin Yueqin<sup>10</sup> mentions, Brazil has a lower growth rate, but it is wealthier than China or India on a per capita basis, the economy of Brazil is potentially more diverse than the other BRICS due to its raw materials and manufacturing potential. South Africa's economy is small relative to those of the four original BRIC members.

<sup>9</sup> Fourth BRICS Academic Forum Meeting (2012), New Delhi

<sup>10</sup> Yueqin, Lin (2010)



Even the economies of India and Russia are five times bigger than South Africa. On the other hand, the BRICS countries are also competing against and oppressing one another. Another criticism is that the BRICS is an assumption based projection and in many ways undemocratic. Of great concern is the large scale disregard for human rights and democracy by Russia and China. It is also true that the BRICS countries neither represent a regional coalition nor a global one. In fact, all the five countries hardly share similar strengths or experience similar development challenges. Thus, the notion of the BRICS countries as a set appears somewhat forced or imposed.

## Relevance of BRICS to Civil Society

The Sanya Declaration of April 2011 is a succinct summary of agreed upon issues and action that will lead to closer BRICS collaboration with many new constituencies. The declaration depicts inclusivity, collaboration and outreach so far as business leaders, sports, cultural activities and joint meetings on finance and health matters are concerned. The subsequent declarations have gradually expanded and institutionalised both agenda as well as newer constituencies. However, there is the continuous and conspicuous omission of civil society, despite the fact that virtually all of the selected subjects are of prime interest to civil society, both within and outside of the BRICS States. As Nigel Martin<sup>11</sup> argues, this omission, whether deliberate or accidental, reflects a misunderstanding of the potential of civil society to play a constructive role in governance at the local, national, regional or even global level. He further mentions that the conditions for quiet diplomacy engagement with BRICS seem to be promising, especially in the backdrop of the presence of an active and experienced civil society in most of the BRICS countries, many of whom are well equipped for engaging in quiet diplomacy. The global events like the Arab Spring, the anti-corruption campaign in India, the mobilisation of civil society in conjunction with the recent elections in Russia and the massive influence of organised civil society in the Senegal elections are all clear indications that civil society has enough potential to influence governance. Thus diplomatic civil society engagement with BRICS seems to be relevant under the present global circumstances. The emergence of this body presents a new opportunity for civil society in BRICS countries to have

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<sup>11</sup> Martin, Nigel (2012)



a stronger voice at regional and global levels. Principles for CSO engagement with multilateralism point to good practices that are based in well-established lessons and can help to optimise civil society participation in such power shifts.

Before strategising what should civil society do to engage with BRICS, it would be useful to clarify the rationale, if any, for such an engagement? To begin with, it is important to recognise that BRICS is emerging as a global influencing mechanism beyond the five BRICS countries. As previous analysis is showing, the BRICS collective is taking positions on several global issues that affect other multi-lateral institutions (like UN, WTO, World Bank, IMF, etc.). They are also taking a common stand with respect to issues such as climate change, MDGs and global terrorism. In essence, therefore, BRICS is emerging as a mechanism whose influence on economic trade and development and the security agenda is having an impact on countries and populations beyond those of the BRICS.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that BRICS itself is a global governance mechanism of inter-governmental nature. As such a mechanism, it is evolving, and maintaining its structure in a rotating and multi-modal manner. The current practice in BRICS is that the host of the Summit acts as a coordinator of the activities for the following year till the next Summit. So, South Africa is expected to play such a coordinating and leadership role after the Durban Summit. However, BRICS is a 'non-legitimate' global governance mechanism; as many forums have been arguing, in its character, BRICS is similar to G7 or G8 of the previous era, or G20 of the contemporary context. These are groupings of countries with a 'club-like' nature, where membership is by invitation only. Unlike the UN system or even Bretton Woods institutions, such 'clubs' do not have democratic legitimacy; hence, they also lack democratic accountability to citizens and/or shareholders. Other than their own internal processes, such global governance mechanisms (like G7, G8, G20, etc.) they do not 'owe' any external accountability, even though their actions (or inactions) have a global impact on citizens, communities and nations.

Therefore, development organisations in particular, and civil society in general, need to understand what BRICS is doing, and what is the impact of its programmes of co-operation, or what they are likely to have on development issues, policies and practices in these five countries, as well as on a global platform. Since the agenda of BRICS co-operation is primarily to advance its own national economic development, first and foremost is the focus of its impact on the populations of these five countries in general, and its poor and the excluded in particular. Such an understanding may create opportunities and spaces for more direct

engagement of national/ domestic civil society with the BRICS process in each of the five countries.

The starting point for considerations of engagement is the review of the programme of co-operation planned by BRICS Summits in terms of its social and human development agendas. Environment, sustainability and equity concerns need to be kept in focus by civil society while reviewing such BRICS programmes. Given the special thrust of civil society, it has to mainly focus on the concerns of the poor and the marginalised at the centre of its analysis of the BRICS programme of co-operation. For example, all BRICS countries are facing the phenomenon of rapid urbanisation and growing urban poverty; how do they co-operate in addressing this set of issues within their broad concern for inequality?

In addition, as BRICS is taking collective positions on many global governance institutions and policies, it is also important that national/domestic civil society reviews these positions from those perspectives as well. For example, a section of the New Delhi Summit discussed the agenda for the Rio Sustainability Conference in June 2012; BRICS tried to develop a common position to influence those negotiations. If civil society from BRICS countries have had concerns about Rio negotiations, and wanted to influence those processes, one channel of influencing that was through BRICS.

As Heather Mackenzie<sup>12</sup> argues, CSOs in the BRICS countries must increase their participation in global governance by building sustainable relationships with the BRICS multilateral grouping. From this respect, it is useful to recognise that networks of civil society in each of these five BRICS countries should come together to explore these questions of why to engage, what to engage and how to engage BRICS from their own national/domestic perspective. Some basic pre-conditions should be followed by CSOs while engaging with BRICS. These are as follows.

- ❖ In opening up a dialogue with BRICS, civil society does not, in any way, intend to confer legitimacy upon BRICS as a global governance mechanism.
- ❖ Civil society engaging diplomatically with BRICS will deal only with the issues affecting civil society within all BRICS countries, and/or civil society globally.
- ❖ Civil society engaging diplomatically with BRICS will not present itself as a gate keeper of civil society throughout the BRICS countries.

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<sup>12</sup> Mackenzie, Heather (2012)

Simultaneously, FIM has adopted the following eight general principles developed by and for civil society to aid civil society actors in their engagement with multilaterals in general; engagement with BRICS could also follow the same. These principles suggest that CSOs:

- ❖ Build and maintain local to global and global to local links;
- ❖ Document and disseminate their practitioner knowledge;
- ❖ Embrace the full diversity of their sector;
- ❖ Understand the broad context of global governance;
- ❖ Are willing and able to engage, and to disengage, diplomatically with those who do not share their vision of the common good;
- ❖ Are actively committed to their long-term vision and goals;
- ❖ Are open and transparent about whom they represent and to whom they are accountable, and
- ❖ Align their practice with their values.

In approaching this effort, two factors have to be kept in mind. First, the nature, scale and strength of civil society across these five BRICS countries vary greatly. While civil society is reasonably strong and visible in Brazil, India and South Africa, its nature and pattern is considerably different in China and Russia. In addition, the democratic space for civil society, though shifting constantly, is relatively open in the first three BRICS countries, as compared to China and Russia. Therefore, civil society's engagements with national policy-makers, political leaders and senior officials are very different in character across the BRICS; much more active, constructive and critical engagements are taking place in Brazil and India, as well as in South Africa, than in the other two at this stage.

Second, the formal political system of national governance also varies considerably in the BRICS countries. India, Brazil and South Africa follow forms of democratic political systems established in the 1950s, 1980s and 1990s. These can be said to be mature democracies. Russia has acquired a democratic political system only in the late 1990s, and is still evolving. China's political system is characterised by the one party rule. As these historical political realities have evolved, each of these BRICS countries has other alliances and coalitions. India, Brazil and South Africa have the IBSA axis (a coalition that is working regularly). Russia is part of the G8 too. China hosts the Shanghai Co-operation (which brings many Asian countries together with

Russia and India). Therefore, the spaces and models of civil society engagements across BRICS have to contend with these complex, evolving and multi-faceted realities.

An interesting discussion took place on the idea/ possibility of the New Development Bank in the meeting organised by the Observer Research Foundation on “Working Towards BRICS Co-operation, Consultation and Coordination” on July 17, 2012 in New Delhi. The idea to form such a bank evolved from the need for an organisation to perform the role of a financial intermediary and mobilise savings. Emerging Market and Developing Economies (EMDEs) require large investments in infrastructure in order to sustain a high rate of growth; relieve the pressures of urbanisation and chart a course for sustainable development. The underlying idea of the BRICS Development Bank is to make the grouping more cohesive and to rebalance the global economy through a supplementary institution.<sup>13</sup> Subsequently, the idea of the BRICS Development Bank was further developed in New Delhi and Durban Summits, however, a clear contour and modus operandi is yet to emerge.

In short, therefore, it seems that the larger social and human development agenda needs to be the thrust of civil society engagement with BRICS. It must have the vantage point of social inclusion and concerns for growing inequality and marginalisation. Its perspectives on social justice, environmental sustainability and gender equality may further inform its approaches. It is interesting to note that some of these issues have found a clear place in the recommendations made by the BRICS Academic Forums. These meetings brought forth the possibilities of BRICS engagement in areas such as climate change, food security and water, urbanisation, universal access to healthcare, skilling and direct investments in education sector, BRICS Development Bank and Impact Investment Fund and technology sharing, innovation and co-operation across industries.

On the whole, though there exist interesting entry-points for civil society to engage with BRICS; yet as Nigel mentions, for some BRICS States there may be a lurking doubt that civil societies, and particularly the CSOs, are a western invention and not to be trusted/ relied upon. Therefore it is imperative that the first civil society contact with BRICS must be made by BRICS based civil society only. Probably, it will be wise to acknowledge and utilise the body of knowledge within BRICS based civil society on how to influence inter-state governance through quiet diplomacy.

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<sup>13</sup> Observatory Research Foundation (2012)

## Civil Society Experience of Engaging with BRICS

FIM-Forum for Democratic Global Governance launched the Civil Society-BRICS Engagement Initiative in November 2011. Although the project was housed within FIM, essentially the leadership of the project came from civil society within the BRICS countries. Towards that end, FIM and PRIA, India agreed to co-ordinate the initiative in collaboration with the Polis Institute in Brazil, the Isandla Institute in South Africa, the Participation Centre in China and the Commission on Social Policies, Labour and Living Standards, Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation. The primary objective of this initiative was to develop a strategy whereby civil society actors from within the BRICS countries can begin to influence this key multilateral initiative. Following the first round of five official BRICS meetings there has been no evidence of a civil society component to the BRICS outreach. Thus the timing was right for civil society to take a proactive position.

The first planning sessions was held in Stockholm on 1-2 November 2011 with participation from civil society leaders from each of the BRICS countries. It was recognised from the outset that the BRICS alliance is new and, at best, partially understood, even by its own leaders. Therefore, civil society actors would consider working on two fronts from the outset. One would be how to best sensitise broad civil society within the BRICS countries to the importance and potential of BRICS. The second priority would be to identify appropriate entry points for engagement and influence within BRICS. These entry points could be issue-oriented where an issue of common concern allows for ready collaboration, or country-oriented where one or more BRICS members share the view that civil society engagement is necessary to achieve certain objectives.

Following the initial planning meeting in Stockholm, PRIA in consultation with FIM prepared a Briefing Note summarising the emergence, history, purpose and declarations from four official BRICS Summits. This note served as a background document for various in-country consultations with civil society. The objectives of in-country consultations were defined as: (i) informing civil society in the BRICS countries about the current governance, functions, and priorities of BRICS, and, (ii) facilitating civil society engagement with key BRICS actors with a view to influencing their policy priorities and governance processes. Till date in-country consultations have been organised in all five countries as part of this initiative. These are as follows.

- ❖ India Consultation, 23 March 2012 and 31 May 2013 in New Delhi organised by PRIA, India

- ❖ China Consultation, 24 August 2012 in Beijing organised by Participation Centre, China
- ❖ Brazil Consultation, 27 November 2012 in Sao Paulo organised by Polis Institute, Brazil
- ❖ South Africa Consultation, 19 February 2013 in Johannesburg organised by Isandla Institute, South Africa
- ❖ Russia Consultation, 14 June 2013 in Moscow, as part of Civil G20 meeting hosted by Russia

The activities carried out under the current Civil Society-BRICS Engagement Initiative have helped develop a deeper understanding of the functioning BRICS and the challenges and opportunities for civil society engagement in the BRICS processes, as well as mapping of other domestic and international initiatives with which the FIM initiative could foster a strategic partnership.

One such initiative was “Engaging with the Rising Powers’ Impact on Development Studies, Development Policy and Development Practice” currently hosted by the Institute for Development Studies (IDS), Sussex, United Kingdom. FIM and its BRICS partners have been in dialogue with their IDS colleagues with a view to learning from each other, provide complementarities and explore opportunities together.

In the run up of the Fifth BRICS Summit held at Durban, South Africa on 26-27 March 2013, FIM, IDS and PRIA also hosted an International Civil Society Meeting on Future Strategies for Civil Society-BRICS Engagement on 19-20 March 2013 at Johannesburg, South Africa. The purpose of the meeting was: (i) sharing experiences and outcomes of in-country consultations; (ii) stock-taking of Civil Society-BRICS Engagement Initiative focusing on revisiting the relevance, challenges, opportunities and pitfalls; and (iii) defining future strategies for civil society engagement with BRICS processes (focusing on thematic priorities, missing agenda, capacities and resources).

The in-country consultations, the discussion in various international meetings, and informal discussions with various civil society, academia and BRICS officials underlined the following points.

- ❖ The engagement of civil society with BRICS is pivotal in deepening and broadening the agenda of democratising global governance institutions. This initiative has contributed to fostering dialogues within civil society and consequently developing a broad consensus on continued engagement with BRICS.

- ❖ Many civil societies resonate with the fact that BRICS as a multilateral entity has taken up an ambitious agenda, which may significantly change or at least provide an alternative to the established norms and practices of international development co-operation, thus far driven by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)/ Development Assistance Committee (DAC). They also hope that BRICS may significantly intensify the volume and tone of the discourse on democratising global governance institutions, particularly the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organisation and the UN.
- ❖ Since a significant amount of domestic public resources will be committed and spent in other developing countries, civil society and citizens should know how the priorities will be set, and what kind of norms and values will be established to determine these priorities, and so on.
- ❖ All the five BRICS Summits and particularly the Third and the Fourth Summits have called for broadening the co-operation among the five countries beyond governments to include business corporations, academic institutions, sports, culture and people to people interactions. The most flourishing among these are the delegation of business corporations and the BRICS Academic Forum, which has now been formalised through the formation the BRICS Think Tanks Council (BTTC). Given the conspicuous omission of civil society co-operation in any of these BRICS Summits, the argument could be made even stronger by showcasing various relationships that CSOs have nourished and strengthened particularly between India, South Africa and Brazil for the last 15-20 years and increasingly with Chinese and Russian civil society groups. So the argument needs to be made that CSOs must have their rightful place in the BRICS compact, as has been envisaged and mentioned for other actors.
- ❖ Civil society efforts to engage in dialogue with the BRICS officials in all the BRICS countries have shown a positive trend. Notwithstanding the challenges ahead especially to institutionalise such dialogues, none of the officials have outright rejected the relevance of civil society engagement in BRICS.
- ❖ The principal value addition of civil society would come from the expertise available with the CSOs. Over the last three decades, civil society in many BRICS countries has contributed to numerous innovations in social policies like health, education, agriculture, management of natural resources, urban development etc., which are already



included in the BRICS agenda. These innovations have been pursued particularly in the context of internal diversities and scale, protection of rights, affirmative action; enabling participation of the marginalised and so on. Civil society interventions have provided alternative methodologies characterised by a bottom-up approach to development as opposed to seeking top-down technical solutions only. The civil society innovations in inclusive local economic development through promotion of micro enterprises and self-help groups have been adopted by many governments including those outside BRICS countries. Civil society particularly in Brazil, South Africa and India has been in the forefront of promoting democratic decentralisation, participatory governance and social accountability practices and policies. Civil society voices have worked at accelerating the reforms in the UN, IMF, WTO and the World Bank long before the official BRICS declarations. However, how far the BRICS country governments can go beyond the parochial national interests is unclear at this stage. So far, the rhetoric is in the right place as far as support to other developing countries is concerned.

- ❖ Though BRICS has clearly articulated its mandate to focus on global economy and 'politics', most of the BRICS agenda seems to be geared towards economic development. Given the diversity of political ideologies within BRICS, civil society needs to be sensitive when engaging on issues related to global political governance. The engagement of International NGOs (INGOs) particularly from the developed countries needs circumspection as some of the BRICS governments are not amenable to open dialogue with such INGOs. Civil society engagement with BRICS, therefore, has to be led by domestic civil society from within BRICS countries.
- ❖ As BRICS has generated considerable interest among academicians evidenced through a number of articles and publications, civil society needs to broaden the engagement with academia in each BRICS country. The civil society-academia-media axis could be a considerable force to generate public debates and discussion on the BRICS policies, programmes and practices.
- ❖ Domestic civil society in each BRICS country is also confronted with the huge dilemma of wholeheartedly engaging with BRICS. On one hand, each BRICS country is globally seen as an emerging economy in terms of economic growth fuelled by economic globalisation and liberalisation; on the other hand, each country also faces gigantic domestic development problems of inequality, pockets of underdevelopment, poverty and marginalisation. Many civil society actors believe that such engagement with BRICS may



divert their attention to something distant while many domestic issues require a definitive resolution.

- ❖ Many CSOs feel that there has been a historical lack of engagement between civil society and foreign policy issues; there has been a divide between the development community and the diplomatic community. As a result, the engagement is somewhat snail paced and mutual appreciation is yet to evolve. They also feel that far better information would enable civil society as a sector to formulate a position regarding a unified civil society voice on issues hitherto confined to the foreign policy fraternity. A number of CSOs raised questions like, does civil society understand what the objectives for each BRICS country are in being part of BRICS and do we agree with this assessment or analysis? Is it about better prioritising empowerment, development, trade or aid? Does civil society know and understand what the geo-political objectives of BRICS are, especially in respect of global economics, infrastructure development and poverty reduction? Is BRICS attempting to create a multi-polar world? Does civil society understand how issues are placed on the BRICS agenda, through whom and with whom civil society should be liaising? Crucially, what are the grounds for inclusion and exclusion to the 'BRICS club'?

## Future Directions for Civil Society-BRICS Engagement

The discussion among the partners on 'Future Strategies for Civil Society-BRICS Engagement' suggested the following strategies.

**Creating an information hub on BRICS for civil society** -It was realised that a large section of civil society is not fully aware about the development of BRICS policies, programmes and practices on a regular basis. Civil societies in all BRICS countries do not have regular access to ongoing commentaries and analysis on BRICS. Thus an information bridging role is crucial for informed engagement by civil society.

**Generating and communicating evidence in support of potential value addition by civil society in BRICS** – Civil society in many BRICS countries has made enormous contributions in shaping domestic social and economic development policies and programmes over the last three decades. As BRICS countries are readying to 'export' many such development policies

and programmes to other developing countries, the perspectives and contributions of civil society need to be analysed and communicated to the BRICS policy makers. Thus there is a need to undertake BRICS cross-country research studies particularly in two areas – (i) contribution of domestic civil society (in BRICS countries) in shaping the social and economic development policies and programmes, and (ii) transnational engagements of domestic civil society (from BRICS countries).

**Fostering dialogues between civil society and BRICS policy makers**As BRICS is an emerging entity and continuously developing new areas of co-operation between the governments, there is a need for continuous dialogue between civil society and the BRICS policy makers. The in-country consultations organised in the current phase should be continued in each BRICS country. The in-country and across the BRICS dialogues should be organised in two inter-related ways: (i) by establishing various thematic working groups which could undertake comparative research and convene dialogues for each thematic area, (ii) by engaging with BRICS policy makers for further democratising the functioning of BRICS by including a civil society network among its related affiliations.

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