

Assessment of FIM`s BRICS initiative

March 2013

The general purpose of the Mission was to participate, on behalf of FIM, at a series of meeting on BRICS and civil society, which were being held in Johannesburg, and to assess the implementation of the FIM BRICS initiative. The complete mandate is outlined in the attached MOU.

The two day session in Johannesburg, with the overall title of *What does the rise of the BRICS mean for Civil Society?* was jointly organized by IDS of Sussex, UK; PRIA of India; the Logolink network and FIM. An important role was also played by the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA). This institute is housed in Wits University and the majority of the sessions were held at the SAIIA facilities.

In some ways this was, in fact, a multi-stakeholder dialogue. This aspect certainly enriched the dialogue and its content, but occasionally led to confusion as to who was accountable for logistical and/or content issues.

Although several components of the programme were clearly the initiative of SAIIA and/or IDS, most aspects of the programmes were identified as being part of the FIM Forum initiative, those having been undertaken by PRIA.

Agenda

Due in part to the absence of some key invitees, the original agenda was considerably modified at the last minute. Amongst other implications, this meant that I was asked to play a much more visible and active role than originally planned. This included chairing some of the meetings, as well as being responsible for wrap-up comments.

On Tuesday morning the FIM/BRICS invitees, along with IDS observers, gave country by country overviews regarding the efforts to date to sensitize national civil societies as to the nature and importance of BRICS. The FIM participants included Silvio Caccia Bava and Julia Neiva of Brazil, Kaustuv Bandyopadhyay of India, and Ming Zhuang of China. I gave an update of the situation in Russia and, although no South African representatives of the FIM programme were present, Mirjam van Donk spoke with participants by Skype.

In the afternoon, a closed FIM session was held in which participants discussed future steps, specifically leading up to the BRICS Brazil Summit in 2014.

The Wednesday morning session was divided into three blocks; 1) The Strategic Questions 2) The Tactical Questions and 3) The Way Forward. The afternoon was a SAIIA-convened event in which panelists, including two from the FIM programme, and participants discussed primarily the relationship between BRICS and development, with a special emphasis on BRICS as a donor body.

Updates on National CSO meetings

All reports were positive, including the report on Russia, which to date is the only country where a national meeting is yet to be convened. The Brazil participants distributed a transcript in English of the Sao Paulo meeting held on November 27, 2012 between the BRICS ambassador and about 35 NGOs. The level of interest by Brazilian NGOs is strong and the participation was very sophisticated as judged by the transcript. There is a very good possibility that the Brazilian authorities will agree to a formal meeting between civil society participants and BRICS sherpas in 2014.

Ming Zhuang described the China meeting as surprisingly positive and reported that the Chinese authorities indicated their willingness to engage in dialogue about the BRICS with civil society. The same mood was reported regarding discussion with Russian authorities and national NGOs and a meeting regarding BRICS is now being scheduled for June in Moscow.

The Skype report from South Africa underscored the relatively low turnout of participants and a clear lack of understanding about BRICS amongst South African NGOs in general. Nevertheless the report emphasized the interest in BRICS and the subsequent need by CSOs for informative material.

The India report concentrated on meetings with the Indian government and their desire to see CSOs as development organizations.

Observations on BRICS

Some interesting observations which were shared about BRICS shed some light on its *raison d'être*, which can help guide FIM in its future strategy.

BRICS was inspired in its structure and mandate by the Non-Alliance movement. This movement highlights the importance of national sovereignty and mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty. Its values include: Mutual non-aggression; Mutual non-interference in domestic affairs; Equality and mutual benefit; and Peaceful co-existence.

The emphasis on national sovereignty will clearly have an impact on the role of the BRICS alliance.

The anticipated arrival of the BRICS Bank will almost certainly increase the BRICS profile and make it a key actor in global development.

South Africa was invited to join BRICS in order to give BRICS an entry into the African continent. It is anticipated that the BRICS Bank will concentrate its development funding in Africa and that South Africa will be expected to give leadership on all questions relating to Africa. This is already a source of concern to some African countries and several African Heads of State have been invited to attend the Durban Summit.

Information needs for CSOs

Although the national meetings of civil society have, to date, been viewed as successful, there was a recurring theme from FIM/BRICS participants that a main priority for the future of the project is the

production and dissemination of information on BRICS. It is recognized that there is already a growing body of work from within the global academic community which is analyzing and monitoring BRICS. This includes work by IDS as well as the Munk center at University of Toronto. However, there is little to date that looks at BRICS from a civil society perspective.

There was considerable reference to the possibility of setting up an Information Hub for FIM/BRICS. The question is open as to whether such a center would produce original information and/or perform a triage of the information already being produced and distribute appropriate material to the FIM/BRICS network.

Academic/civil society relations

One important sub-text of the IDS coordinated meetings was to bring together scholars and activists who have a shared interest in BRICS. IDS is well placed to give leadership on this issue since it has a long-standing engagement in action/ research. There was openness to exploring genuine partnering between academics and activists that could make IDS an important partner for FIM in the future.

Brazil BRICS Summit, 2014

There appears to be a unanimous consensus that the upcoming 2014 Summit in Brazil is the best opportunity for FIM/BRICS to engage in a formalized dialogue with the BRICS Alliance. According to Polis, the Brazil government is open to the idea, but remains cautious as to how to best do it. They are concerned about the reactions of other BRICS members, especially China and Russia. However, given the comments by the FIM/Forum participants an official dialogue may not be resisted by either of these two countries.

Brazil is also concerned about who can properly represent civil society from the BRICS member states. The FIM model of dialogue has been designed to meet this concern and, properly presented to the Brazil authorities, may alleviate their concerns.

Assessment of FIM/BRICS programme to date

1. In some very important ways the FIM/BRICS programme has progressed well to date. The **national meetings** which have occurred have certainly been well received and they have confirmed the need for sensitization and awareness building throughout the national civil societies of the BRICS countries.

It was constantly repeated by participants that more effort is required in this vein and that the level of interest and/or engagement throughout the national civil societies needs to be improved. There was also a feeling that the Durban Summit might, in itself, raise considerably the profile of BRICS, not only globally, but also inside its own member states. This would already appear to be the case.

Clearly, there is a perceived need for more **information about BRICS**. While both the Munk Center and IDS are, amongst others, producing reporting on BRICS, participants felt that there is

a lack of material which is specially geared for CSOs within BRICS countries. There was a suggestion that FIM/BRICS should create an Information Hub or Clearing House.

2. The respective **roles of FIM and PRIA** remain somewhat unclear. The FIM decision to decentralize the programme is respected, but in so doing, what is the value-added of FIM and what should its role be over the medium-term future? Communication lines are sometimes blurred. The role of Logolink also needs to be clarified. The South African meetings were actually convened by parachuting onto an existing Logolink gathering. While this can be defined as positive opportunism, it also raises the question on the very nature of FIM/BRICS coordination within the BRICS countries and also within the broader FIM Membership. Is Logolink and the FIM/BRICS coordinating body one and the same? By selecting Logolink members as the participants from all but one of the BRICS countries, has FIM/BRICS deterred other networks from participating and/or giving leadership?

In some of the Johannesburg meetings , it was unclear to all concerned who was actually chairing the meeting. PRIA? IDS? FIM? This ambiguity, although not disastrous, was mildly embarrassing at times.

3. It must be said that the **absence of South African participants** at the FIM/BRICS meetings is unacceptable. Other participants had come from great distances and the fact that there was no host-country participation raises questions of commitment by the South African partners. Although there were legitimate explanations as to why the first three choices of participants were unable to attend, the meeting nevertheless had been planned for some time and a South African observer at the very least could have been identified. It also raises the question as to whether the Logolink connections take precedence to some participants over the FIM/BRICS mandate.
4. The consensus about the opportunity to engage at the **2014 Brazil Summit** is very positive, but the meetings did not clarify in any substantive way the next steps which need to be taken in order to prepare for Brazil. At the same time, the participants clearly felt that a planning meeting would have to be held in order to prepare for Brazil.

Suggestions for possible future actions by FIM

1. That the FIM secretariat proceed with its planned review of the FIM/BRICS programme and that it include participation by FIM Board members, Logolink members and PRIA
2. That the review give special attention to the respective roles of the FIM Board and secretariat and the coordinating body, be it PRIA or another organization
3. That FIM assess the comparative advantages and disadvantages of working with a coordinating Committee which is, effectively, an existing coalition of CSOs
4. That FIM assess which organization would be the most effective to coordinate any possible dialogue with the Brazilian government and , by extension, which body should play the lead role in negotiating the terms of engagement with the Brazilian host government. That, as part of this

assessment, FIM clearly articulate the value-added which it can bring to the FIM/BRICS programme

5. That FIM examine possible partnering with the IDS

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March 26, 2013