



From G20 to BRICS: Civil Society Engagement and Government Perspectives



14 September 2017, Pretoria

Executive Summary

On 14 September 2017, the Southern African Liaison Office in partnership with Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung hosted a multi-stakeholder dialogue entitled *From G20 to BRICS: Civil Society Engagement and Government Perspectives*. The dialogue aimed at unpacking civil society engagement in multilateral forums, with particular focus on the G20 and BRICS. It sought to explore opportunities for meaningful civil society engagement within multilateral forums, particularly as South Africa prepares to host the BRICS Summit in 2018. In relation to the G20, the dialogue wanted to look at what lessons can be drawn from the recently

held G20 summit which took place in Germany (7-8th July 2017), in so far as civil society engagement by multilateral institutions is concerned.

The dialogue had two panels:

- The first panel sought to interrogate the importance of multilateralism in contemporary global politics. Thereby, questioning whether there is commitment and justification for separate civil society representation at multilateral levels and what lessons, if any, can we take from the G20 for BRICS and beyond?
- The second panel focused on the state of civil society involvement within the BRICS and the G20 and how this compares with other forums, as well as what the challenges and opportunities are. In its critical assessment of the state of civil society, this panel posed the question: what is and who is civil society? The panel also examined whether civil society truly represents multilateralism from below, interrogating issues of representation, coherence, as well as relationships with other sectors such as labour unions, women, and youth.

The speakers for the first session, *From G20 to BRICS: Government Perspectives*, were Ambassador Sooklal, who is the Sherpa for the South African Government for the G20 and BRICS, and Mr. Bernhard Kampmann, Charge d’Affaires at the German Embassy in Pretoria. For the second session there was an interactive Q&A, themed *Multilateralism from Below*. The panel included Dr. Fanwell Bokosi from the African Forum for Network Development, Mr Simon Vilakazi from the Economic Justice Network (EJN), Raymond Matlala the Euro-BRICS Coordinator, and Professor Federico Foders Visiting Professor at the University of Western Cape.

Summary of the Contributions



First Panel: “From G20 to BRICS: Government Perspectives”

Dr. Showers Mawowa, Deputy Director, SALO

In his welcoming remarks, Dr Mawowa pointed out that the dialogue took part within a context of growing scepticism about the ability of large institutions to react to people’s diverse needs and aspiration. This was underpinned by an overall decline in faith in governance at various levels. According to him:

[m]ultilateral institutions are increasingly being questioned- Brexit, Trumpexit, in all its various manifestations down to violent protests on the sidelines of the G20, are just examples of this disillusionment playing out above and below. But this is happening in an era of developmental universalism, supposedly championed by these very multilateral institutions.



Dr. Mawowa therefore argued that restoring confidence in governance at different levels is quite critical for the global community in order to foster and strengthen the pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as Agenda 2063 in Africa. He highlighted how the AU endorsed Agenda 2063, for example, prescribes cooperation between the state and non-state sectors, particularly spelling out engagement with civil society.

There remains scepticism regarding civil society participation within global institutions. According to Dr. Mawowa, these growing concerns around civil society engagement and participation are becoming common within multilateral institutions. In response to the increasing criticism and scepticism relating to multilateral institutions, the concept of 'co-creation' has become the hallmark of engagement between governments and civil society. Dr. Mawowa pointed out that this is important, in that it promises to add value to government–civil society engagements within multilateral forums and frameworks.

Ambassador Anil Sooklal, Deputy Director General: Asia and Middle East, DIRCO



Ambassador Sooklal thanked SALO and FES for providing an opportunity to exchange views on such a key topic. He argued that this is indicative of the growing influence both the G20 and BRICS have on the global architecture, be it political, economic, or financial. Indicating the historical growth of multilateral institutions, Ambassador Sooklal pointed out that participation in all of these structures is grounded within the central role of the United Nations (UN): multilateral engagement. For him, this means reinforcing multilateralism and the importance of the UN in all global interactions. The aim in relation to the UN was for countries to come together to champion common interests, yet the emergence of the G7, and later on the G8, brought about new challenges to the global community which threatened the

importance of the UN structures. Ambassador Sooklal pointed out that these structures had become more influential than the UN system as separate entities. The global economic and financial agenda was taking place within the G8 rather than within the UN system; thereby weakening the overall centrality of the UN, and UN institutions in global governance issues. This posed a challenge to the importance of cooperation among states on global financial and economic issues.

Cooperation around global financial and economic challenges was a key concern that underpinned the creation and establishment of the G20. According to Ambassador Sooklal, the creation of the G20 aimed to provide a platform for global economic policy discussions on how to stabilise the global financial

architecture. The G20 addressed the previous challenges relating to global governance, as it provided an opportunity for collective reflection and impacted positively on global economic governance.

The G20 is an important platform for South Africa, especially as it is the only African country that has a permanent seat within the grouping. The importance of the G20 platform is highlighted by the fact that key multilateral institutions are part of the G20 summit: the UN Secretary-General, the Heads of the IMF and of the World Bank, FAO (UN Food and Agricultural Organisation), and WHO (the UN World Health Organisation). Ambassador Sooklal noted that the G20 should be seen as a collective of all global governance institutions – the political, economic and financial, hence it is important for South Africa to be part of it. He pointed out that:

[I]t is important for South Africa to be there. It is not the only the reason why we are in the G20 – and likewise I will come to the BRICS – but first and foremost we must champion our national interest. What value is it to South Africa? Does it give South Africa prestige as a country? Yes, it does. Everyone is knocking on the door to become a G20 member, so it gives us that prestige. But more importantly it gives us a space at this high table – no longer just four or five or six countries, but a high table of twenty countries, and of all the multilateral institutions that matter – that sits and does agenda setting.

In terms of the agenda setting, Ambassador Sooklal highlighted the unfortunate reality of the lack of legally binding structures within the G20. He argued that due to the fact that what emanates from the G20 impacts on the global community in every sense of the word, the lack of legality provides challenges for the global community.

Ambassador Sooklal emphasised that South Africa's participation in the G20 should be understood in line with advancing the country's national interest, advancing the AU's African Agenda, advancing the agenda of the global South, and ensuring that South Africa reinforces multilateralism. He went on to state that South Africa's vision for the G20 is that of an inclusive world, an inclusive society. Ambassador Sooklal argued that for South Africa to be true to its values in relation to its G20 membership, it must speak directly to the country's domestic challenges, as well as the challenges of the African continent and the global South. South Africa has to constantly remain faithful to championing that within the G20, which is not easy. For Africa, what was important was that for the first time last year China introduced a regional dimension to the discussions in the G20 when it encouraged G20's support for industrialisation in Africa. In terms of the 2017 summit in Germany, the Partnership for Africa was introduced through the Sherpa track as an inter-governmental process. According to Ambassador Sooklal, through the Compact Africa initiative, the Partnership for Africa sought to look at private sector funding in order to channel investments into the African countries.

While appreciating these initiatives by the G20, Ambassador Sooklal asserted that it was important that the Partnership with Africa must speak to Agenda 2063 and NEPAD:

[I]t mustn't invent something new. Africa has a blueprint, let this Partnership talk to that. It must be African owned and African led and we have leverage through South Africa supported by AU – represented by Guinea in this case, and Senegal representing NEPAD – so we had a very good paragraph aligning this initiative of the G20 with that of the AU.

Bernard Kampmann, Charge d’Affaires, German Mission in South Africa

Mr. Kampmann’s presentation sought to look back to the G20 Hamburg summit. The focus was on how the G20 body understands multilateralism. Furthermore, he wanted to focus on the aspect of inclusion of civil society: how it developed, how it is viewed, and what it means. Mr. Kampmann indicated that the summit was a success, despite the challenging global context. The G20 Summit in Germany saw a successful inclusion of civil society. Mr. Kampmann pointed out that civil society was included as a result of strong demands that the focus and agenda of the G20 summit should go beyond the issues denoted by heads of state to include other ‘voices’.



Highlighting some issues that emerged at the summit, Mr. Kampmann pointed out that the G20 saw some fierce discussions on many global issues, including the Paris Agreement as well as the Partnership with Africa for economic development. Making reference to the German experience in relation to the history of the G20 and multilateralism, Mr. Kampmann argued that in Germany diplomats are raised in the spirit of multilateralism, not isolation. Mr. Kampmann pointed out that Germany:

[A]lways looks for a forum in which to discuss foreign policy issues. Maybe the EU is one we always look to; or NATO; sometimes the G8, or G7, or G20; and if nothing helps and no-one wants to be molested with security policy crisis we create at least what we call the contact groups, the contact group for this or that problem. So our reflex is multilateral and that may well apply to many other diplomats in other European countries, and it does in South Africa, I am certain

Mr. Kampmann cautioned against assuming that multilateralism is a natural approach everywhere, as that is not the case for all countries. As such, Germany has been at the forefront of countries advocating for, as well as defending, the importance of multilateralism. According to Mr. Kampmann, it is more likely that better results are achieved if a problem is addressed through multilateral means:

I still believe it and I think – with perhaps the exception only of very marginal questions where we can’t do it by multilateral means – that for the overwhelming majority of international questions a multilateral approach is the only one that really leads to good results, and I think that, in this world, diplomacy is not any longer a zero-sum game.

In closing, Mr. Kampmann pointed out that it is in the best interests of South Africa to be in the G20.

Contributions from the floor

During the Q & A session, conducted after the panelists had made their presentations, a number of key issues were raised by attendees. These concerns included:

- the issue of transparency as well as the active participation of civil society in terms of African negotiations within multilateral forums
- a question was posed about the tangible outcomes that will stem from South Africa’s BRICS membership, aside from the prestige that comes with the membership of such a significant multilateral body

- Iqbal Jhazbhay, from the ANC sub-committee for International Relations, enquired about how multilateral forums such as BRICS can make contributions towards supporting solidarity based initiatives with regards to complex and challenging South African foreign policy issues such as Palestine and Swaziland.
- the importance of ensuring that ordinary citizens from the Global South, including those in Africa, can actively contribute to the agenda at global multilateral forums.

Second Panel: Interactive Q&A “Multilateralism from Below”

Simon Vilakazi, Programme Coordinator, Economic Justice Network (EJN)

Mr. Vilakazi’s presentation sought to share insights based on experiences of civil society involvement in multilateral institutions such as the BRICS forum. He indicated that the EJN has members in all the provinces of South Africa, and that it works with other organisations based in the G20 and BRICS countries to collaborate on issues. Mr. Vilakazi argued that in these collaborations, civil society primarily focuses on issues of food security, land and agriculture, and climate justice. Furthermore, the role of civil society in these global forums is to look at issues of tax justice, human rights, and fiscal policy. According to Mr. Vilakazi, by prioritising these issues, civil society seeks to observe if people’s human rights are being violated by the arrangements made within multilateral institutions. Central to the agenda advocated by civil society is inclusive development. He pointed out that civil society organisations like EJN also advocate around issues of gender equality within the mining sector and youth.



Civil society’s role in settings like the G20 and BRICS is to request the allocation of resources to empower constituencies with information on issues discussed and implemented by these multilateral institutions. This is very important because ordinary people within local communities often lack an informed understanding of how the G20 and BRICS operate.

The importance of active civil society participation within multilateral bodies such as the G20 and BRICS, in order to shape the agenda and contribute to strategic outcomes, was highlighted by Mr. Vilakazi:

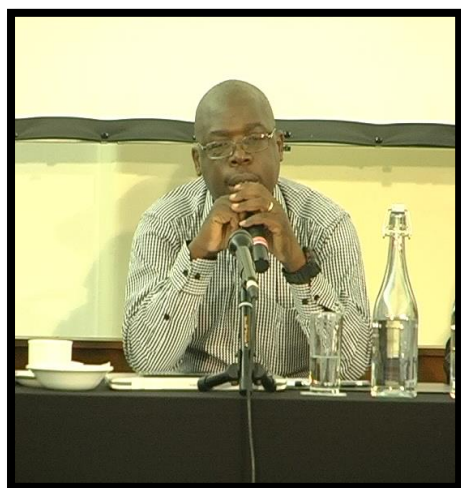
[W]e don’t like to be regarded as civil society that participates just to legitimise agendas that we are not part of, so what we say is that we need to be included in a meaningful way. But we are also saying that these formations must provide us with opportunities for participating in the formation of the agendas and strategies for responding to challenges and issues. We are saying this because we are the people who are experiencing the negative impacts of what is happening. It was indicated that people in communities where mining is [taking place] get affected, when water, land and the environment gets polluted. When we go to these forums we represent those issues, but we also need to set the agenda.

Mr. Vilakazi argued that currently, civil society is seeking mechanisms where it can be included in G20 and BRICS processes with a similar status to other more established structures. He made an example of how

business groupings are given recognisable and important platforms, whilst civil society continues to occupy the side-lines. In this regard, as highlighted by Ambassador Sooklal, established think-tanks and business groupings have managed to attain some form of recognition and high status in the BRICS, so civil society needs to be granted the same status. According to Mr. Vilakazi, this will enable civil society to attend other important sessions beyond the Civil BRICS and Civil20.

Mr. Vilakazi thanked the South African Government, especially DIRCO as it continues to embrace civil society and support its requests for formal recognition within the BRICS and the G20. He indicated that the South African government always provides support for civil society meetings as well as open platforms for engagement during multilateral summits. Mr Vilakazi expressed his gratitude by stating, “I would like to thank the South African Government, because Ambassador Sooklal and DIRCO have embraced us and our request for formal recognition in the BRICS and the G20”.

Fanwell Bakosi, Executive Director, African Forum for Network Development



Mr. Bakosi started his presentation by asserting that one of the reasons African civil society has struggled for quite some time is the issue of participation in multilateral processes. He indicated the differing and contradictory positions that have been adopted by civil society organisations in relation to the G20. In essence, these positions veer between non-engagement with the G20, on one hand, and active engagement with multilateral body on the other. Mr. Bakaliso explained the dynamics behind this:

[C]ivil society has several ways of dealing with the G20. There is a group that says forget about the G20; the G20 actually makes it such that by engaging you are legitimising its existence; it is an organisation with no legal mandate; it's a big boys club and therefore, if you are saying that

you must participate in it, you are actually rendering legitimacy to it. There is also a group of civil society that says, it doesn't matter whether this is just an old man's group of people, whatever they decide will have an effect on what I do; I recognise the reality and not the ideal, so I am going to engage in order that when they actually decide I will be there to say that their decisions are being affected and they are affecting me, and therefore I need to participate.

However, Mr. Bakaliso emphasised the importance of engagement even though the G20 framework has limitations and challenges relating to issues such as representation, inclusivity, and legitimacy. Mr. Bakaliso argued that criticism against the G20 should not be assumed to entail that the grouping has not undertaken any significant and positive work throughout its existence.

Moving his attention to the argument that South Africa stands for the African continent in both the G20 and BRICS, Mr Bakaliso challenged that line of thought. He argued that South Africa should not and cannot claim to represent Africa in the G20, this is because South Africa's inclusion in the G20 is not necessarily premised on it becoming an advocate for African countries. Mr. Bakaliso asserted:

[T]o begin with, South Africa is in the G20 in its own right, and in fact it is not the twentieth biggest economy in the world. If you look at the statistics, it was the country from Africa that was closest to the twentieth economy in the world, so in order for the G20 'big boys' to have this token of inclusiveness, they included South Africa.

Mr. Bakaliso pointed out that the African Union and African civil society should be the structures entrusted with representing Africans in the G20. In his conclusion, Mr. Bakaliso pointed out that South Africa has too

much on its plate, it will be difficult to speak for the African continent. He noted: “[i]f anything, South Africa should be there to fight for the African Union to have a permanent guest role...so that it takes pressure off itself”.

Raymond Matlala, Euro-BRICS Coordinator, South African Youth International Diplomacy (SAYID)



Making his contribution, Mr. Matlala highlighted that Euro-BRICS works closely with South African Youth International Diplomacy (SAYID) to ensure that South African youth participate in the Y20 [the youth forum of the G20]. Through SAYID’s efforts, about forty-seven young people from South Africa have participated in G20 summits since 2011. Mr. Matlala went on to describe the opportunities that the Euro-BRICS forum and SAYID have provided for young South Africans. He emphasised the importance of youth participation within multilateral forums. Mr. Matlala noted that the views of the youth are not taken into consideration at the decision making level, both within the BRICS and G20 multilateral frameworks. Hence, the programmes

and positions that are adopted by the aforementioned multilateral institutions do not directly reflect the concerns of the youth.

BRICS governments are not fully supporting youth agendas and ensuring that important initiatives such as the establishment of a ‘dedicated’ BRICS youth structure are implemented. Mr Matlala stated:

[F]or instance, the first Youth BRICS Summit proposed a permanent structure, to be called the International Youth-BRICS Forum or Assembly where recommendations made by the Youth Summit could be taken...However every time we come back from these summits, recommendations are submitted but no one takes ownership of those recommendations or anything else. Our governments within the BRICS are not coming on board in terms of establishing this particular forum that will be responsible for the implementation of the recommendations of the youth summits.

Professor Federico Foders, Visiting Professor, J. G. Herder Chair, University of the Western Cape



Professor Foders argued that there is a need for multilateralism to regain its legitimacy, especially as it is increasingly being viewed as not contributing to economic progress. In this sense, the perception becomes that it is an impediment to inclusive economic development. Professor Foders noted:

[T]he indication is that economic progress and social progress in the world have now been decoupled, and we have observed that in advanced countries as well as in emerging countries and in developing countries, and so we must do something about that...But what is the implication of this decoupling of social progress from economic progress. Well, multilateralism is no longer accepted in many social groups; multilateralism is under attack...So my position is that the G20’s objectives should be redefined to embrace inclusive and sustainable prosperity, but also human needs, empowerment and solidarity. And this broader perspective should facilitate the social acceptance of multilateralism.

Professor Foders went on to posit that the private sector, in tandem with civil society, has an important role to play with regards to economic development. He noted the importance of building on the foundation established through the implementation of global initiatives such as the Extractive Transparency Initiative. One way of doing this would be to encourage the private sector to invest a portion of profits towards community projects or causes as highlighted by civil society. Professor Foders stated:

So how can mining activities be made more socially inclusive? Well, one way is to commit domestic and foreign mining companies to invest a share of the profits after tax in some of the projects that come up in civil society. Of course the government will have an important say in selecting these projects, but civil society is the one that should propose them. Why? Because civil society has its roots in the communities. The communities feel themselves represented not only by political parties but also by civil society organisations.

Contributions from the floor:

After presentations from the second panel of speakers, there was another Q & A session. The following issues were raised:

- how is the balance attained between the private sector and broader civil society in terms of representation within multilateral forums such as the G20?
- business or the private sector usually have more resources and representation within multilateral forums
- Tamara Naidoo, from FES, highlighted the importance of including the private sector in advocacy and human rights issues and initiatives.

The analysis and recommendations included in this Policy Dialogue Report do not necessarily reflect the view of SALO or any of the donors or conference participants, but rather draw upon the major strands of discussion put forward at the event. Participants neither reviewed nor approved this document. The contents of the report are the sole responsibility of SALO, and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the donors who provided financial assistance for this policy dialogue session.

About the Southern African Liaison Office:

S A L 

International liaison, dialogue and research

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