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CHAPTER 5

BRICS' PROMISE TO DECOLONIZE INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A PERSPECTIVE

Siphamandla Zondi[1]

1 INTRODUCTION

The BRIC emerged in 2009 as a platform for interaction, dialogue and alliance between countries considered to be emerging global economic powers and was only partly what Goldman Sachs anticipated in 2003, when they predicted that Brazil, Russia, India and China (BRIC) would become major economic powers. But the BRIC, and later BRICS, forum was much more than anticipated; it was a significant geopolitical platform for global reform. It immediately became a focus of all those hoping for an impetus to the global push for reform of institutions of global governance, principally the United Nations Security Council, IMF and the World Bank. These countries have taken advantage of the size of their populations, land area and opportunities in the world economy to achieve economic significance on a global scale. This and their development agenda could help decolonize the world economy, from one in which the North Atlantic is the prosperous centre and a largely poor periphery with a sprinkling of States in-between (the semi-periphery). This is the colonial power matrix that Anibal Quijano calls coloniality that BRICS may help transform the coloniality of international development whose genealogy includes slavery from the 15th century, the civilizing mission of the 19th century, development aid of the 20th century and now development partnership.

Because the historical context of the BRICS can be traced to the agency of the periphery in the form of South-South solidarity and alliances that have challenged the hegemony of the North Atlantic in the world system since 1950s, the BRICS' normative framework on international development is well developed for it to embrace fully, being epitomized by the ideas of collective self-reliance, endogenous development and solidarity. Both its position on the current discussions on international development in respect of the post-2015 development agenda debate code-named "The World We Want" and the discussions on development effectiveness through the High Level Forum on Development Effectiveness, on the

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one hand, and the potential role of the BRICS Development Bank, suggests that the BRICS may cause a reset of the idea (and perhaps even practice) of international development. This paper suggests that on this basis the BRICS has a potential to transform how we think about, discourse on and practice international development.

2 ON BRICS AGENCY ON DEVELOPMENT EFFECTIVENESS

With new power has come a new measure of global responsibility for BRICS countries, especially in respect of resolving the problem of elusive development for the marginalized people within BRICS and for the people of the global periphery in general. It is an expectation that true to the age-old southern spirit of solidarity and collective self-reliance, BRICS countries will use their wealth and voice to promote a significant change in the nature of global developmental partnerships. Opportunities for responding to this imperative lie in the areas of generation of ideas about alternative or better ways of responding to the underdevelopment question as well as in the form of practical interventions through effective and concerted development cooperation. This paper argues that with increased diplomatic clout, the BRICS have a precious opportunity to change the discourse going on today through the UN High Level Forum on Development Effectiveness, by focusing it back to questions of ownership and alignment of assistance with national priorities and efforts.

The conference of the High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (HLFAE), which has become known as the Busan or post-Busan process, had its major meeting in November 2011 to negotiate and agree a new approach to partnership with regard to international development, covering both the traditional aid modality called North-South cooperation and the growing one of South-South cooperation. The conference was a culmination of previous attempts to redefine the manner in which development aid was designed and delivered, beginning with the Millennium Declaration in 2000 that adopted the eight MDGs with the eight being global development partnership or aid; the UN Conference on Financing for Development in 2002 that shifted the focus of discussions from the quantum of aid to its quality; Rome conference in 2003 that agreed principles for harmonization of aid; the Marrakech Roundtable on Managing for Development Results in 2004 that agreed principles regarding impact of aid; the 2005 Paris Declaration where principles for aid effectiveness were adopted; and the 2008 HLFAE in Accra, Ghana, which translated all the above commitments into an action plan called the Accra Agenda for Action.

The Busan conference saw strong activism on the part of developing countries as they sought to shift the initiative in these important discussions from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which represents the interests of donor countries, to the global South where most

beneficiary countries are found. The OECD had conceptualized and convened HLFAE since 2003, seeking to ensure that the agenda in the reform of global partnership generally and aid in particular remained in the hands of traditional donor countries. Although, the OECD or donor countries recognized the need to grow the voice of beneficiary or developing countries from 2005, this had not led to improvement in the quality of developing country participation. A key challenge is this regard was the fact that they remained agenda takers rather than agenda setters. In spite of the change in the language of these dialogues from donorship to partnership and from aid to development, the underlying logic of unequal relationship and power asymmetry continued to undermine the quality of the dialogue. In this sense, lacking the immense power of knowledge, technical expertise, negotiation capacity, facilities and resources, developing countries remained junior partners in what was marketed as a horizontal dialogue. For example, donor countries took the responsibility for monitoring implementation against the twelve performance indicators set in Paris and elaborated in Accra, giving them power to assess themselves as having made progress and also to judge the compliance of developing countries. The OECD and a host of western institutions remained repositories of knowledge and data used to make these judgments, thus exercising control over the direction that ideas of development would go.

Developing countries have approached Busan with great confidence and a sense of urgency because the development landscape has changed. The impact of development cooperation between countries of the South had started to show as early as the mid-2000s. Big developing countries like Brazil, China and India had helped alter the model of aid in the South-South direction. Individually, these and many other emerging powers had provided alternative sources of development finance, aid and technical assistance that remained invisible in the eyes of the OECD that had for decades tracked traditional North-South development aid. This had an impact on the tenor of discussions in Accra already as consensus developed around the South's idea of development effectiveness rather than aid effectiveness. It was not only that the former expanded the focus beyond aid to investment, trade, debt relief and so forth, but also that this was to recognize the model of development partnership that south countries represented, which was, as the South Commission Report of 1990 put it, about "growing self-reliance both in individual and collective" and that "the base for a nation's development must be its resources, both human and material, fully used to its needs". The same Report said while traditional aid has the capacity to lead to development thus defined, it could only do so if it is "integrated into the national effort and applied to the purpose of those it is meant to benefit".[2] Secondly, the South understood development to

2. South Commission, 1990. The Challenge of the South, p. 10-11.

imply freedom and self-determination. It must be designed to build the capacity of South countries and peoples to determine their destinies rather than mere to catch-up with others or to mimic them. It thus understand that development as conceived within coloniality was unfreedom, it was what Walter Rodney called underdevelopment of developing countries and prosperity of developed countries.

The BRICS positions since its inception in 2009 has been to call for the full implementation of the MDGs especially Goal 8 on global partnerships. This position is meant to put pressure on the global North to honor its commitments in 2000 to increase aid flows to developing countries to correct the structural and historical inequalities in development. The donor countries also committed to provide additional support for the special needs of the least developed countries, landlocked countries and small developing States. Through Goal 8, developed countries also committed to develop open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system or to avert protectionism that has been blamed for the asymmetric trade balance between the North and the South and for imposing constraints on the South's exports to developed country markets. The goal also included a commitment to ensure reduction in the developing countries' external debt, a major binding constraint to their economic self-reliance. Lastly, developed countries also committed to ensure technology transfer to developing countries on the understanding that technology was an enabler for economic growth and for development.[3] Every single BRICS declaration insists on full implementation of these commitments, thus reminding the global North of their responsibilities for building a global development partnership and suggesting that they are to blame largely for the failure of this to materialize.

Sensing that the Western financial crisis from 2008 might cause developed countries to reduce their aid flow and thus renege on these commitments an additional emphasis is made in BRICS summits and by individual country statements especially at the G20 and the UN General Assessment that there should be no reduction in development aid to poor countries. As it said in its Second Summit in Brasilia in 2010, this was a matter of solidarity seen as strategic for global political and economic stability.

Secondly, BRIC countries commit regularly to improve their provision on the individual country basis of development partnership and international humanitarian assistance, especially in response to food crises. It is important that true to the thinking of the South represented by the South Commission Report quoted above, BRIC (now BRICS) do not call their efforts aid or development assistance, as this represents the paternalistic paradigm of assistance that has characterized the conduct of donor countries, neither do they regard

3. See UN Millennium Development Goals. Avalaible at: <www.un.org/millenniumgoals>. Accessed on: 22 Feb. 2014.

themselves as donors for the same reason, but they prefer development partners and partners. They see themselves as being solidarity with the affected peoples rather than as saviors.

Thirdly, BRICS see development finance by development banks like the World Bank and regional banks as essential for the solution of the scandal of underdevelopment on the periphery. They have pushed the matter of non-diversion of resources away from developing and emerging countries as the World Bank became heavily involved in containing the economic crisis in Europe.

3 WHAT TO MAKE OF ALL THIS?

Clearly, BRICS countries have become important actors in the on-going efforts to shape a new global development partnership agenda or international development, as it is commonly known. Four conditions seem to be crucial for BRICS' potential impact on this agenda to materialize.

The first is the point that intra-BRICS development partnership is one of the fast growing focuses of BRICS countries as ministerial meetings designed to flash out the BRICS agenda with regard to a few areas of social/human development, trade and investment and science and technology.

The second is the ability of the BRICS to play a catalytic role in global dialogues and negotiations, one that draws also from the collective wisdom of the many developing countries.

The third is the concrete demonstration of solidarity with less developed countries to enable them to achieve collective self-reliance. The proof of the pudding of the BRICS development agenda is in how it conducts its development partnerships in ways less constraining, less patronizing, less subordinating than what developing countries have become accustomed to in their experiences of the OECD approaches to development assistance. The BRICS' commitment to the Paris Declaration, Accra Agenda for Action and Development Effectiveness should be shown to be superior and more genuine than what we have seen from the OECD.

Fourthly, the BRICS will also have to harness the unique experiences of developing countries and regional initiatives designed to find alternatives to coloniality of so-called development assistance to build its knowledge-based and wisdom to effectively shift the geography, geopolitics and bio-politics, of knowledge underpinning international development.

To fulfill the promise of decolonial development, BRICS need greater internal cohesion regarding the various tracks of discussion at global level regarding the international development agenda. This cohesion must be that alignment in technical positions on this or that proposal, but it must be a more fundamental

convergence of ideological, theoretical and practical positions about the "the world we (in the South) want", to use the UN pay-off line for post-2015 discussions. Such a fundamental consensus would, of course, build upon the age-old South consensus on three pivotal principles: collective self-reliance, endogenous development and solidarity

The BRICS forum could buttress the heritage of thought generated by dialogues in defense of development up to Busan, while also propagating comprehensive approaches focused on achieving the above-mentioned principles. This would help in strengthening the solidity and cohesion of the South voice in these conversations that are increasingly being deliberately diluted by the power of Western institutions like so-called international NGOs, research institutions and intergovernmental organizations like the OECD.

The extent to which voices from below percolate within the BRICS countries themselves will determine whether these southerly voices are merely government and elite voices or whether they are truly a cacophony of voices from the peoples of the South. The diversity of these and even contradiction amongst them is not a weakness, but a strength, in that it would reflect the lived and historical experiences of a diverse people. Homogenization of any kind requires injustice, silencing and erasure of diverse experiences.

BRICS countries should consider establishing a platform for discussions focusing solely on development consensus within the organization and its positions on international development discussions. Such a platform would best be at a ministerial and senior official level, supported by academic and think tank forums, a meeting of development finance institutions and other stakeholders. It must consider among others the idea of creation of a council of development agencies of BRICS countries, enabling them to develop synergy and harmony in their response to the changing nature of global development partnership, thus helping to decolonize the discourse and practice in this area. Aid is dead, but its underlying ideology and logic remains alive in the new rhetoric of "development partners" and "strategic partnerships" where the so-called partners are not only unequal, but one dominates the other.

4 CONCLUSION

This paper has suggested that the emergence of BRICS countries and the growth of their forum have a potential to decolonize development, especially as this refers to collective self-reliance, endogenous development and solidarity. In order to make this case, this paper has provided a context for dissonance in the understanding of what development means and what implications that has on this idea of development partnership. We could have explored this latter idea more, as it may be more than

a change in rhetoric, but space did not permit. We have linked the development promise to the iteration of the idea of development as an alternative South agenda, its strengths and weaknesses. We use this as the basis for assessing the emerging messages on development within BRICS, both in response to the development effectiveness discourse.

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