

DRAFT VERSION

Plurilateralism and the Global South

--Kamal Mitra Chenoy *

Countries with common interests have traditionally come together in sub groups to formulate, influence and negotiate policies both within and outside multilateral frameworks that characterize international decision making processes. Plurilateralism is not a new phenomenon but has been used by powerful blocs in and outside the multilateral framework for example, G-8, G-77, and the countries in the balance of power in the ‘Concert of Europe’ between the Wars. Given the current complexities of multilateral negotiations, ‘a shared interest among a limited number of governments brings these together for interconnection.’ (Cerny: 1993). This process of forming blocs conceptualized as plurilateralism is critiqued by others as informal and fragmenting and thus disruptive process within the larger multilateral process (Oelemoller, 2007). Which of these positions is accurate and helpful for global policy formulation? What are the possibilities and pitfalls of such plurilateralism? The intersection of the three debates on global economic governance, development cooperation and foreign policy is critical because of two simultaneous processes that are transforming the international system. One, multiple crises [Climate, financial, ecological, food, security] arising from the policies of neo-liberal globalization and two, the rise of new powers termed as the Emerging Countries. These countries like India, Brazil, South Africa, that make up IBSA and Brazil, Russia, China and India that combine as BRIC are using plurilateralism to collectivize their advantage and leverage their influence. This calls for an examination of the process of plurilateralism and its ability to deliver results that actually facilitate the inclusive process of multilateralism.

Critical questions are being asked of the ECs and the new plurilateral formations like IBSA:

- * Will this new ‘grouping’ contest the traditional great powers of the North?
- * Will they converge with the great powers and follow similar paths of development and domination?
- * Are plurilateral groupings like BRIC, IBSA exclusive and thus divisive for the rest of South?
- * Will they present an alternative to great power hegemony?
- * Are they a group at all or are there significant differences within them?
- * Do they have potential to lead the global South?
- * What are their developmental agendas and initiatives?
- * How will these countries respond to the multiple crises?

* Professor, School of International studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India.
kamalchenoy@gmail.com

The Attraction of the Emerging Countries (ECs)

Emerging Countries are characterized with high growth rates; influence on international economics through purchase of bonds, impact on trade, foreign exchange and competitiveness; stable political systems; demographic depth. The ECs are high military spenders with huge standing armies. They have strategic partnerships and influence geopolitics of their region and internationally. All the ECs are increasing their military [and nuclear] capability which they believe will enhance their international status.

The ECs are building strategic alliances, which they believe will give them great power status and balance their neighbors. These countries are seeking resources and advantages from less developed ones, for example India and China have bought hundreds of thousands of hectares of land in Africa; China in Central Asia; South Africa in the rest of Africa, etc.

These characteristics and trends makes the ECs centres of interest for the traditional great powers of the North as well as for the less developed countries. They indicate a shift in the de facto nature of power, even though many of the ECs do not have adequate representation in the institutions and mechanisms of global power which remains asymmetrical. The Report of the South Commission of which India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was Secretary-General, stated: "The decision-making processes that govern the international flows of trade, capital, and technology are controlled by the major developed countries of the North and by the international institutions they dominate. The countries of the South are unfavourably placed in the World economic system; they are individually powerless to influence these processes and institutions and, hence, the global economic environment which vitally affects their development."(The Challenge to the South, The Report of the South Commission, 1990:2)

The North would like the ECs to converge into the already existing blocs that take the lead in international decision making. It is in this context that G-8 expanded into G-20 and has replaced it. The financial crises, failure of banks, increasing unemployment and stagnation which has hit the big financial capitals has led to a questioning of the policies of the Washington consensus. Treasury bonds purchased by several of the ECs like China now, arguably sustain US debt ridden economy.

The security crises in several countries makes the US rely on inputs from the ECs. For example, India's billion dollar aid for stabilization in Afghanistan, Brazil as a stabilizing influence in Latin America, and South Africa's inputs into the troubled regions of Africa. On the climate crises the industrialized West needs an influential group of countries from the global South to carry out its agenda whereby they can maintain high industrialization with minimum cuts in emissions. On all these counts the ECs are useful allies for maintaining the traditional asymmetric international power system. The traditional great powers like the US and the EU are trying for greater 'convergence' of their economic and foreign policies with the South countries. Groupings like the G-20 are designed for achieving this convergence and co-optation. The Emerging Countries have contradictions with the G-8 powers on issues of climate, trade, protectionism, security policies.

The countries of the global south would like to continue to have the ECs on their platforms. G-77 as a grouping remains important to them for negotiating better terms of trade. For these

countries, many of which have fallen off the development map, the only way they can negotiate and have their voice heard is by linking up with the ECs and plurilateral formations like IBSA, BRIC, as engines for their growth. On issues of trade negotiations in the Doha Round of the WTO, the developing countries leaned on India and China to get them a better deal on agriculture subsidies and labour.

The ECs have to make a choice from a menu of policy options. These choices interlink governance, development paradigms and foreign policies. These choices are determined on the one hand by the policy making elite and on the other by the voices of the vast majority that influence popular mandates and their civil society partners who mobilize for social change. The policy making elite would like to continue with the given Washington Consensus and reforms that would minimize the role of the state while maximizing the role of the market. They claim a universality for capital and deem policies that look to labour as 'ideological'.

The strategic thinkers in India argue that groupings like Non- Aligned Movement and G-77 have become largely symbolic though important memorials of the post Cold War World. They work on the unstated assumption that the 'burden' of those left behind need not drag an emerging country like India. The argument given by realists is that the 'reality' is that because of the asymmetrical power relations, motions from the South tend to be rejected "simply by virtue of the proposal coming from the Global North" (Forman, 2006:208). This argument was endorsed by the South Commission: "All the world is linked together, inextricably. But it is linked in an asymmetrical and skewed manner." (The Challenge to the South, The Report of the South Commission, 1990:8)

Thus to be heard, to be powerful and wield influence, new blocs need to be formed that coincide with their new found agency.

It is here that an important distinction can be made in strategy and tactics. The ECs do not have to completely converge with the agendas of the North for their voices to be heard. In fact they have many contradictions with the North like on climate change, trade, agricultural subsidies, etc. The strength of the ECs lies in their distinction with the North and their linkages with the South. The value addition of the plurilateral for a of the ECs like IBSA will be if they are able to [1] use their collective voice in international decision making. [2] Bring the voices of the global South to the high tables of the North. [3] Build a bridge of the excluded with the powerful for collective resolution of common problems. [4] Make multilateralism more effective and viable.

IBSA is specifically a trilateral development initiative to promote engagement between countries of the South since 2003. BRIC that was meant to show the growing strength of four emerging market economies, has been constructed into a reality recently after first meeting in Yektrinaburg in Russia in 2009.

The task of IBSA, BRIC, BASIC, SCO in the countries of the leading South countries thus should include:

* A sustained and comprehensive challenge to the asymmetrical power relations on the level of ideas and replace the dominant paradigm with more egalitarian and pro-people's ideas.

- * Striving for the democratization of international institutions.
- * To link up with regional bodies and institutions of the South states.
- * To widen discussions on climate crises, financial crises, food sovereignty and human security issues.
- * To ensure that the voices of grassroots communities and civil society movements that contest the ideas of ‘convergence with the North and work to build alliances with the South are represented at all international policy levels.

It is for this informal separation that plurilateralism can be used. The ECs have used plurilateralism to building processes like IBSA, BRIC, SCO that can advance their collective interests. But can plurilateralism be used positively, rather than remain just a mechanism? This would be possible if plurilateral groupings like IBSA create and maintain linkages between the North and South. For example, blocs like G-33 of the more influential countries that were formed in the WTO negotiations. Plurilateralism like IBSA does give ECs the voice in international decision making that coincides with their agency. But the issue is can it change the asymmetrical relations of power? Further the question arises what is the purpose of this power and voice?

IBSA, Development Paradigms and the Global South

High growth rates and military capability do not tell the entire story of the ECs. Despite the difference in GDP growth between the ECs and the rest of the Global South a range of common problems remain. These include: great inequity and poverty within these countries; internal displacement and migration of millions; resource conflicts; revolts from the margins; uneven growth, etc. The dominant neo-liberal paradigm of most of the ECs is towards privatization and corporatization of the economy, government, media and public institutions. The policies continue to be a sophisticated version of ‘trickle down’ where surplus from the benefits of privatization are to be used for providing minimum basic rights for the largely excluded masses. There is a simultaneous marginalization of labour and ordinary people. While formal institutions for participation continue to exist, there is a ‘high politics’ of parliaments that maintains distance from the ‘low politics’ of people’s movements.

At the same time civil society has been galvanized in many of the ECs especially in IBSA. These combine the social movements and civil society organizations that mobilize for environment, ecology, oppose displacement because of big dams, special economic zones, mining. They speak for indigenous communities, against structural discrimination and violence. These movements are seen as going against neo-liberal globalization and often criticized as anti-development within states. Internationally these social movements are often found raging against unfair trade practices of the WTO, or supporting stricter regulations as in climate negotiations, which is regarded as a threat to established power dynamics. (Oelgemoller:2007). These movements have been able to make use of democratic and popular politics to make some gains. In India thus, key

legislation has been passed in the last few years on the Right to Work, Right to Information, and education, which despite its limitations and problems in implementation has given some level of human security to the poorest people

IBSA countries have much in common with the rest of the South:

They have common historical memories of fighting colonialism, racism.

They have a history of working collectively with G-77, the non-aligned group, in North-South negotiations, despite the differences and contradictions within these groups. They have a history of collective bargaining with the North.

They have developed civil societies and democratic spaces that can put pressures on their governments to negotiate pro-people policies.

IBSA as a plurilateral forum has stated its commitment to the global South. It upholds the principles of multi-ethnic, multicultural, secular democratization. IBSA countries have Constitutional mandates for social justice and a rights based framework for equity that remains incomplete. Their status as middle powers gives them the capacity to intervene in regional and global processes. Clearly then the political leverage and normative legitimacy for IBSA and the new plurilateralism, will lie in their collective understanding if they use this power for greater common interest of as many people and countries as possible. The potential of this form of plurilateral network can help form a bridge between G-20 and G-77.

The Foreign Policies and Strategies of IBSA and BRIC

IBSA and BRIC countries are committed to the idea of a multi-polar world. This means an international system where multiple powers co-exist and they oppose the concept of a uni-polar world. These countries are thus opposed to unilateralism as a strategy and support multilateralism where ever possible. While all these countries have strategic partnerships including with countries of the North, they advocate an independent foreign policy, through which they would handle their state relations with other states. Thus all these countries are engaged in series of bilateral, trilateral, plurilateral, multilateral and regional arrangements. This is not to argue that they do not have contradictions and competition with other powers, but that in principle, they agree to negotiate their differences through peaceful means and engagements.

The IBSA countries have been very clear in their commitment to the South and the Brasilia Declaration outlines this. BRIC on the other hand has reiterated their commitment to multi-polarity, that by its very nature is an inclusive concept. Clearly, the processes of IBSA, BRIC and even others such as BASIC, Shanghai Cooperation Organization [SCO] have the potential to strengthen these stances in foreign policy and strategy.

Plurilateralism and the Multiple Crises

The next issue is how the new plurilateralism can help to cope with the multiple crises and policies of globalization and how consultation and collaboration between these countries can benefit the South and what are the benchmarks to measure IBSA.

The multiple crises have given an opportunity to re-examine both globalization and the kind of development models. People and countries will remember and be more receptive to the critiques that civil society has made of the failings of free market globalization. It has shown the need for an ecological, equitable and sustainable development based on inclusive and rights based approaches. The idea that the concept of security be broadened to include human security is gradually becoming a reality and part of the security discourse.

It is important to note that: “the Foreign Ministers of Brazil, India and South Africa expressed their concern that large parts of the world have not benefited from globalisation. They agreed that globalisation must become a positive force for change for all peoples, and must benefit the largest number of countries. In this context, they affirmed their commitment to pursuing policies, programmes and initiatives in different international forums, to make the diverse processes of globalisation inclusive, integrative, humane, and equitable.” (Brasilia declaration, 6 June, 2003) The BRIC countries recently met in Moscow to discuss the issue of food security, revealing the importance of this human security agenda.

Problems, crisis and conflicts all flow over from borders to other countries. A common position on food, climate, security etc, will help save resources and resolve problems. Thus countries need to take regional approaches for security and resolution of conflicts. Plurilateral meetings need to work in sync with regional formations so that the region benefits from the synergy of plurilateralism. For example India needs to carry forward the SAARC processes and show how India’s growth have benefited the region as a whole.

The collective weight of the South still remains more than groupings like G 20 and this principle of inclusive decision-making should not be lost by the IBSA. IBSA should include the issues of the South as part of their agenda, and encourage a more equitable global order.

There are many examples of changes that states have made in response to civil society/ peoples’ movements: India has made the right to information, work and basic education a constitutional right; China is investing heavily in renewable energy systems; Brazil has had major land reforms, etc. IBSA should ensure as a bench mark that the civil society of each of these countries provides an input into domestic and external policies and are consulted on governance and development paradigms. And that linkages are developed between civil society and people to people links regionally so regions are more linked.

Avoiding the Pitfalls

Many smaller countries fear that on issues like climate change that seriously affect their future, countries like India, Brazil and China will be able to seek and hold on to their interests, but smaller countries will just lose every time in multilateral dialogues, as in Copenhagen 2010. There can also be a fear that plurilateral formations that emerged from this process like BASIC might converge with the North on this issue. However the strong statement from the BASIC that the Copenhagen Accord does not open a new negotiating track, gave the smaller countries a hope. Clearly the smaller countries agree that there will be need for discussions on issues like mitigation in small groups. Plurilateral groups can be key in this process. IBSA, BASIC will

have to find new pragmatic style of negotiation that will continue to offer protection for the smaller countries but connected to the larger process.

Possibilities and Bench Marks for IBSA

The IBSA Forum should aim that:

- * Their collective voice is heard at the apex decision making bodies and in multilateral forums.
- * That the voices of the South inform the IBSA forum and are part of their agenda.
- * They encourage the countries of the South to stay together to promote their common agendas that range from co-ordination on climate change; deeper democratization; pluralism; regional solidarity; disarmament and equity based development.
- * IBSA be part of the solution to work together to rid Third World debt; transform North-South relations; introduce genuine fair trading system; assistance to poorest communities- gender based and inclusive development.
- * Evolve a paradigm of development that has pro-people development at its core and have solidarity of the South countries as their agenda, especially for the resistance to globalization.
- * Evolve measures that IBSA countries can show to be leaders and drivers for the South in equitable development and pro-people policies.
- * The foreign policies of IBSA be directed at fulfilling their goals which in turn means close links with other countries of the South. IBSA should take special care to strengthen its linkages with the South and demarcate itself with the North on matters like globalization, security and restructuring of multilateral institutions like the World Bank and IMF and also the Security Council. They should strive to democratize these bodies by making them more representative and responsive to the countries of the South and their developmental and security requirements.

Conclusions

IBSA can be a credible forum if it gains moral legitimacy in the comity of nations, rather than becoming 'just one more group' that is looking to advance its collective narrow interest. To gain credibility IBSA's voice has to be based on inclusive agendas of the global South and reflect the views of its vast majority. IBSA has the strength along with other groups like BRIC to have creative variations and new development paradigms.

Plurilateralism used by groups like IBSA could add value to multilateralism if they can connect the largely excluded countries of the South to the blocs of the North and if it goes beyond the interests of capital and assists in creating people centred development paradigm.

References

BASIC (2010): “Joint Statement at the Conclusion of the Second Meeting of Ministers of BASIC Group”, 24 January, New Delhi.

Brasilia Declaration, 6 June, 2003, Brazil, available at: http://ibsa.nic.in/brasil_declaration.htm accessed on 3 April, 2010

Cerny, P.G., (1993) “Plurilateralism: Structural Differentiation and Functional Conflcit in the Post-Cold War Order”, *Millenium: Journal of International Studies*, 22 (1): 27-51.

Forman (2006) “ New Coalitions for Global Governance: The Changing Dynamics of Multilateralism”, *Global Governance*, 12: 205-225.

Oelgemoller, Christina, “Informal Plurilateralism and Policy Laundering”, Draft, 7 December, 2007, www.pol.ed.ac.uk/-data/assets/pdf-file/0013/9130/Oelgemoller.pdf

The Challenge to the South, The Report of the South Commission, (1990) Oxford, Oxford University Press.