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### Brics from Below Peoples' Dialogue

People from different groupings including Mozambique, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Latin America, Swaziland and locals gathered for a three day Brics from Below Peoples' Dialogue in Johannesburg's Observatory; Gender Links Cottages. Unavoidably the meeting had to start by paying tribute to Madiba's passing. There were mixed reflections about Madiba; some questioning with suspicion on times between Madiba's death and the official announcement about his death and whether there was no '*business*' about Madiba's passing.

It was a common view that he was a legend with magical legacy, the face of freedom and unity, humanity, peace and reconciliation in SA, Africa and the world. Nelson Mandela's death was seen as the end of a new era. For some who met Madiba before it was an unforgettable memory, however it was time. It was a general consensus that the ANC of today is no more the one Madiba represents. The incumbent ANC was seen as representing the same policies and practices it purports to have fought against (apartheid). Madiba was remembered for selflessness, as witnessed by his relinquish of power in one term. Madiba's legacy will leave for ever; he was a man of his own kind, born a leader, with charisma that was instrumental in bringing democracy, 27yrs in jail. Unlike other African sit-tight presidents such as Mugabe, Madiba led the country only for five years and surrendered power. Madiba had the ability to recognize and accommodate other actors that contributed to the liberation of South Africa including his enemies. Quite interestingly Latin Americans in the meeting shared online visuals with home musicians singing Madiba songs.

Although it was agreed that he had remorse, deserting his wife Winnie left some questions as others (especially Mozambicans) applauded his marriage to Graca Machel as promoting cultural integration. Some pointed that Madiba wouldn't have been Madiba without other Madibas; he didn't fight alone, and there were many other fighters that were not recognized; he was a symbol of democracy. Other sentiments highlighted Madiba's magic as useful in conditioning the political landscape and resonating so powerfully with tribulations across divides and that we are short of the people like him. However Mandela was largely viewed as a global saint and a humanitarian. Other views were that daily media reports rarely come without protests in the country and this tells more on how the ANC has distanced itself from the Madiba's legacy, and it's very frustrating, it is time to stand-up and take action.

Subsequently after these expressions focus was redirected to the day's agenda, among other things; to deepen our understanding of BRICS in the current geopolitical environment, sharing information, experiences and trends gained from the interventions by BRICS governments and multinational corporations and to understand the role of BRICS and its impact on ordinary people across BRICS civil societies, to understand specifically the role of China in the BRICS alliance and to find out how civil society is engaged in shaping the BRICS policies and practices. It was also about identifying

strategies that can create space for what civil engagement to influence decision making in the BRICS processes and to understand the BRICS strategies on equality and whether or not BRICS can address the interests of the poor. It was also to look at the role of civil society in BRICS and the rationale behind its formation and also what role each of these countries is playing in shaping this phenomenon (BRICS).

The debate went on to interrogate whether or not BRICS are not pursuing an imperialist agenda, why we are interested in BRICS, whether it's a new geopolitical force, an alliance of forces for China to reach its economic goals, an alternative to the WB/WB that will bail BRICS countries from global economic rapture, will BRICS subvert the neoliberal agenda? Will the BRICS countries have an equal share given that China gets 40% shares, isn't it about a new initiative to increase centralization and concentration of power and resources to the elite, recolonisation where SA is the gateway, the new scramble for Africa etc.? It can also be argued that BRICS is a potential space for building new ideas, networks, solidarity and collective programs, or contrary spreading neoliberal capitalism to the furthest rural poor as we cannot see it as a benevolent group; the agenda is that of profit.

Critical questions were raised around the characterization of BRICS; whether it's about sub-imperialism, anti-imperialism, or in-between? The need to understand it's manifestation and interests, how is the BRICS chasing the ecological discourse at all levels, whether it's a new form of wealth creation and accumulation of capital...What position, organizing and consensus can civil society have on BRICS? On the flip side participants observed the possible consequences BRICS can impact on the poor. The question becomes how do we develop a common perspective on BRICS projects e.g. BRICS bank. Understanding the politics behind BRICS was seen as important, whereas the corrupt, parasitic and extractive behaviour of China within this new power relation remains highly suspicious; e.g. China's involvement in striking corrupt and killer deals with governments e.g. the supply of ammunition by the Chinese An Yue Jiang cargo for Zimbabwe in April 2008. The debate continued to suggest the means in which civil society movements can engage BRICS institutions to understand whether the idea is about challenging the current economic powers; the G8, 20...How to make BRICS relevant for our movements and to the ordinary people given that the prospects of BRICS in the global crisis depends in the way in which it plays itself out. How do we compete with China in terms of production, how is BRICS different from other power blocs, what is the comparative advantage, is this development trajectory the one we want.

The general consensus was that China dominates the BRICS alliance hence the most notorious, given the resultant realities of its actions in Zimbabwe, Mozambique, South Africa etcetera. Civil Society was seen as not strong enough to resist BRICS interventions. It came clear that Brics is elite driven with both old and new power domination however there is need not to overgeneralize the phenomenon without knowledge about specific aspects. There is need to understand what sub- imperialism mean, it's dimensions and the nature of domination by BRICS. Some argued that although BRICS has no military intervention or blazing guns, it doesn't mean that it is

not imperialist. Contrary views pointed that BRICS can play a silent role by sponsoring war in its member countries and imperialism doesn't have to be necessarily linked to military intervention. South Africa as a leading economy in the region was seen as practicing the same in other countries in Africa, e.g. Zimbabwe, Mozambique etc. Brics is not homogeneous hence the need to understand the role of each member country, to understand whether BRICS will not undermine existing synergies in the different social settings, to conduct some studies to understand this phenomenon. There is no holistic understanding about BRICS but there is suspension about China as a worrying factor and a dominant player. The Chinese dominance is witnessed in many African countries for its cheap products including clothes, solar panels, and ammunition. There is the perception that BRICS will be used as a springboard in search of new markets and scramble for resources. The setting up of the BRICS bank and whether BRICS has some political power/influence and to what extend remains unclear.

It was almost acceptable that China is not hypocritical or militant in its approach, however it supplies with tools for war. China was seen as predatory given its contribution to land grabs, environmental, water and air pollution. The relationship with China in the BRICS was seen as unequal in that China is able to trade in African countries where African countries cannot invest in China e.g. there is no African malls in China but there is many of them in Africa. Lessons from China points out that China has exhausted its inside space to subsist. China resorted to investments outside the country, inspite of human rights violations and corporate ruptures. There were revelations that 'there is no country that is putting much money to clean their air, water and environment than China. It was recommended that civil society movements must carry the task to ensure their governments enforce their environmental laws. China is the largest investor of renewable energy. We can ask what the tensions and possible linkages that exist.in BRICS NGOs and social movements are to try and challenge BRICS policies and politics, to what extend is BRICS influenced by multinational corporations, to what extend is BRICS a threat to their neighbours.

Lessons from Zambia were that copper belt workers are working on deplorable conditions, and also displacements of people for mining purposes by the Chinese e.g. the Mamba community were displaced to inhabitable conditions.

Revelations from Zimbabwe were that China has led Zimbabwe to commit to the "look east policy" where China is involved in the mining of diamond. This poses environmental threat. In Zimbabwe the Chinese are also involved in the construction of stadiums and malls. Vehicle industry (e.g. Willowvale Motors) has shut down completely in Zimbabwe and now replaced by Chinese vehicle companies. China has flooded the agricultural sector and it's the supplier of farming equipment together with GMO seeds. Zimbabwe textile industries (e.g. Karina textiles) have also closed due to China domination. China supplies medical equipment as India supply with the medication. Russia is interested in the mining of diamond. Agricultural machinery also comes from Brazil. In Zimbabwe there is however popular resistance on Chinese products and use of Chinese malls, China is also known of providing unconditioned financial aid where only a few elite benefit.

Lessons from Mozambique were that all BRICS countries are operating in Mozambique because of the geographic location; even Zimbabwe uses the Mozambique ports. Brazil is running valley Mozambique, the Nacala Corridor in pro-savannah and they got permission to extract phosphates. India is interested in coal, oil and gas extraction and SA'S interest is in agriculture, energy oil and gas. There is a big robbery by Sasol extracting oil and gas to SA. China is also involved in big construction e.g. the airport and the Nacala port. China is also involved in mining and this has led to the displacement of many small scale farmers. The Chinese are most welcomed by the corrupt government officials, e.g. the president known as the number one businessman in the country, now known as Mr 5%. The Mozambican president also forced the country into using the Indian Tata vehicles for public transport. In Swaziland the Chinese domination is also the case; the king is the 1st businessman. The Chinese are interested in energy and they donate money food, etc. to get community acceptance where SA is interested in mining.

Trends and commonalities across these countries show that there is less or no coordinated civil society resistance. The predatory nature of BRICS sounds more of a capitalist development model or can be seen as a contingency plan to meet the financial crisis within BRICS countries. China is the dominant power, however trade relations between BRICS and non- BRICS countries existed years before the BRICS formation. These ties will continue with or without BRICS. Building of infrastructure, extractive mining, corrupt deals with governments are some prominent common features in describing China's role. South Africa being the gateway to Africa, the Durban's Dug-out-Port is one of the big projects opening gates for corporate looting and dumping. BRICS can be described as a creature, and cannot be trusted given the already known behaviour of some of its members, e.g. China's interest in the access of market, land grabs, the scramble for resources and the provision of soft loans to Africa hence the phenomenon should not be isolated from other forces of imperialism; WB, WTO. In their interventions the Chinese bring their own labour and this pose a certain kind of settlement. Brics is like a picture in motion which is difficult to frame, there is fluidity, assumptions and uncertainty about BRICS.

However possible actions could be identified, including working through the existing campaigns and bring on board CSOs across the region and BRICS countries and begin to work together. The need to identify areas of focuses e.g. land, extractivism, pollution as the basis for mass resistance and to build solidarity even out of the BRICS confines, where use of tribunals, campaign against TNCs, and raising consciousness on BRICS impact related issues (e.g. Climate Change, pollution...) can be other avenues. Civil society has to play a monitoring role, exposing and challenging our respective governments on trade and policy agreements and engage communities using simple language while focusing on people's issues, there should be promotion of campaigns like "not in our name!"

End

*China*