India Brazil South Africa
Local Governance Forum (IBSA LGF)
08-09 April 2013
New Delhi
Deepening Democracy Through Local Governance

The Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi, in cooperation with the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, organised a two-day meeting of the India-Brazil-South Africa Local Governance Forum to discuss “Deepening Democracy through Local Governance”. Dr. Farooq Abdullah, Minister for New and Renewable Energy, Government of India inaugurated the programme at the India International Centre. The conference took place with the forthcoming IBSA summit in June in New Delhi in the background. This year also marks the tenth anniversary of IBSA’s inception. The deliberations took place in the context of geopolitical shifts and a growing clamour for the redistribution of power. There was consensus that the IBSA countries represent a unique democratic alliance of the Global South, and can lead the way in the fields of decentralisation and democratic development.

H.E. Carlos Duarte, the Ambassador of Brazil, and Mr. Mark Reynhardt, Minister Councillor of the South African High Commission, stated in their opening remarks that the IBSA countries are global players with extensive geopolitical influence, and their common direction and agenda will be reaffirmed at the forthcoming summit.

Hon’ble Minister Dr. Farooq Abdullah, implored delegates to remember that democracy is a fragile gift that must be safeguarded. Only by building the basic structure of local democracy together, can we ensure that the edifice of democracy remains intact.

Mr. Dinesh Bhatia, Joint Secretary, Multilateral Economic Relations, Ministry of External Affairs, in his welcome address, encouraged IBSA states to devolve powers, ensuring inclusive growth, and inclusive democracy.

Dr. Ash Narain Roy, Director, Institute of Social Sciences (ISS), welcoming the delegates, affirmed that decentralisation has meant a new “architecture of governance”, and that India, Brazil and South Africa, have a role to play by sharing best practices of democracy and development, both amongst themselves and with other members of the developing world. Dr. M.A. Oommen, Emeritus Professor, ISS, in his keynote address emphasised that democracy is about more than just regular, free and fair elections, and involves issues of social justice and fairness, which come about through
public reasoning. His circulated background paper “Deepening Democracy through Local Governance” explored these themes further. The thematic sessions, addressed by eminent political leaders, scholars, diplomats and writers, were on: participatory local democracy; poverty, development and decentralization; empowerment through equity and inclusion; IBSA vis-à-vis BRICS; democracy and participation in multilevel federalism; and what IBSA has to offer the Global South.

Dr. Partha Nath Mukherji, Emeritus Professor, ISS, presiding over the first thematic session, suggested that it was pertinent to understand the socio-cultural milieu of countries while studying federal systems. Specially in the context of India, since the concept of nationhood differed from that of the West, it was imperative that the idea of federalism and local governance be ecologically framed. Dr. Rama Naidu, Executive Director of the Democracy Development Programme in Durban, spoke of the role that human dignity should play in development, and asked delegates to keep this idea central to local democracy. Mr. Mxolisi Nyuswa, from KwaZulu, said that in the context of South Africa, which suffers from massive inequality, access to information and decision-making processes is lacking for most people, which feeds a sense of injustice, even if services are delivered. Mr. Davi Horrle Santos, of the Ministry of Cities in Brazil, discussed Brazil’s anti-poverty strategies, such as the successful Bolsa Familia programme, and argued that IBSA’s democratic nature inspires other countries, meaning the grouping can demonstrate practices of good governance and poverty-reducing policies.

Professor Balveer Arora, Chairman of the Centre for Multilevel Federalism, ISS, offered an enlightening comparison of the three IBSA countries. He showed that their federal structures contain various common features, but since models of federalism are fallible, IBSA countries should be willing to learn from each other, while accepting each country’s distinctive contexts. This point was built upon by Dr. Tanvir Aeijaz, of Ramjas College, Delhi.
Mr. S.M. Vijayanand, the Additional Secretary, Ministry of Rural Development, spoke about the different poverty intervention strategies adopted by the Government of India. Ms. Caitlin Wiesen, the UNDP Country Director, emphasised that the challenge of poverty is still gargantuan. Ms. Wiesen discussed the work of the UNDP in breaking down the silo strategies that fail to view poverty holistically. Mr. B.D. Ghosh, Senior Fellow, ISS, and Mr. Sandile Sithole, Executive Director of the Community Law and Rural Development Centre in South Africa, presented cases of poverty reduction strategies in West Bengal and South Africa, respectively.
Discussions of empowerment through equity and inclusion yielded emotive presentations from various panellists, including Mr. Ranjeet Nirguni, district local government member in Bihar; Ms. Rita Sarin, Country Director, The Hunger Project; Ms. Suparna Ganguly, senior faculty member at West Bengal’s State Institute of Panchayat & Rural Development, and Mr. Bongumusa Zondo, Senior Manager for Programmes at the eThekwini Municipality Imagine in Durban.

H.E. Carlos Duarte discussed the ways in which IBSA and the BRICS came into being. IBSA was founded on ideals of democracy and south-south cooperation but the BRICS were based on a Goldman Sachs report. He argued that their contrasting geneses and purposes will reflect their different roles, and was confident that IBSA remains relevant in the face of the rise of the BRICS. Mr. Mark Reynhardt agreed with this analysis, adding that IBSA has a large number of working groups and cooperative endeavours on development and democracy projects, whereas the BRICS have a different agenda. Mr. Deepak Bhojwani, a former Indian Ambassador, spoke candidly about
the importance of both multilateral bodies, arguing that while IBSA aimed to improve the lot of humanity, the BRICS look outward to reforming international institutions and other structures.

Prof. KC Sivaramakrishnan, Senior Fellow, ISS, and Chairman of the Centre for Policy Research, presented an overview of the lack of progress in India’s decentralisation, particularly in the urban context. He claimed that the countries are directionless in their decentralisation efforts. Prof. Patrick Heller of Brown University compared the levels and functionality of the IBSA countries’ federal structures, and argued for local participatory democracy as it makes good citizens, reveals citizen preferences, and yields public goods rather than patronage goods. Ms. Lara de Lacerda Santos Rodrigues, specialist in International Relations in the Brazilian Department of International Cooperation and Local Governments, presented a case study of decentralisation in Curitiba in Paraná, Brazil. Dr. Lalita Chandrashekar, an independent researcher based in Bengaluru, raised a number of questions about what local democracy would entail, and where there might be conflicts in its design and implementation.

What can IBSA offer the Global South? According to Dr. Sachin Chaturvedi, Senior Fellow, RIS, the trinity of countries act as role models for the developing South. Mr. Amitava Tripathi, former Indian Ambassador to Brazil, spoke of his experiences in Brasilia on the eve of IBSA’s creation, and of his current work with NGOs that practice cooperation with IBSA civil society fora. Other speakers included Dr. Ram Upendra Das, Senior Fellow at Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS), and Dr. Ruchita Beri, of the Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis.

Ms. Lise Grande, UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative, focused her Valedictory Address on the rise of the Global South, pointing out that since the end of the Cold War, great strides have been made in reducing poverty. Governments of the Global South have placed a
renewed emphasis on health and education services, developed innovative poverty reduction schemes, and engaged strategically with the rest of the world. Decentralisation certainly has a long way to go, but on current trajectories, a new world order is in the making, with a great geopolitical shift from the North and West, to the South and East. According to Ms. Grande, IBSA is to be saluted for its efforts to spread democracy and equitable development, and the UN recognises IBSA as a unique organisation for promoting South-South cooperation.

In his concluding remarks, Dr. George Mathew, Chairman of the ISS, spoke of the need to establish an International University on Local Governance. He proposed that this university be based in South Africa, with chapters in India and Brazil. He also committed to organising a delegation of 10 Self Help Group women activists from India to go to South Africa, in order to share their experiences with their South African counterparts. IBSA cooperation has achieved great things, but there is a long way to go.
Local self governance key to democracy: Farooq

Farooq Abdullah was inaugurating the two-day meeting of the IBSA Local Governance Forum organised by the Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi in cooperation with the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. The meeting was organised to reaffirm regional cooperation towards greater participation to promote and deepen democratic decentralisation in the developing world.

He emphasized on the difficulty in initiating decentralization of democracy not to mention of its sustainability so that democracy becomes the norm in the society. He placed the emphasis on decentralization not only on the political class but also on the people themselves so that they embrace their rights along with responsibilities. He also stated that the local government is the foundation of the edifice of democracy and if the foundation is weak, the edifice will fall.

The event witnessed participation by eminent scholars, academicians and practitioners of local self government bodies from the three emerging nations, including Dinesh Bhatia, Joint Secretary, Multilateral Economic Relations, Ministry of External Affairs, Prof. Nelly Rodrigues, President, Association of Local Governance of India, Rama Naidu, Executive Director, Democracy Development Programme, Durban, South Africa, David Horrie Santos, Head of the International Affairs Office, Ministry of Cities, Brazil and George Mathew, Chairman, ISS. The event attains particular significance on the occasion of the forthcoming tenth anniversary of the IBSA Summit in June, 2013.
Local Self-governance Key to Democracy: Farooq Abdullah

New Delhi: Union Minister for New and Renewable Energy Farooq Abdullah on Monday underlined the need for India, Brazil and South Africa (IBSA) to work together to deepen and strengthen democracy.

He was addressing a gathering after inaugurating the two-day meeting of the IBSA Local Governance Forum organised by the Institute of Social Sciences (ISS), New Delhi, in cooperation with the Ministry of External Affairs. For this, he said the empowerment of local self-governments and their representatives is the key.

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