

ActionAid

Questionnaire

1. Please share your experience in exercising, or seeking to exercise, your right to participate in public affairs in one or several of the following global governance groupings/spaces: G7, G20, G77/G24, NAM, BRICS, WEF and BM in terms of:

- **Access;**
- **Inclusivity; and**
- **Influencing the decision-making process.**

ActionAid India has been participating in official BRICS spaces for the past four years. We were part of the official delegation at the BRICS Civil Forum organised by the Forum for Indian Development Cooperation along with the Ministry of External Affairs in 2016, along with our colleagues from ActionAid Brazil and ActionAid South Africa. Similarly, we were involved with the Civil BRICS when it was hosted in South Africa alongside the official summit in 2018.

Our participation in these spaces has been substantive- we have been involved in the process of agenda-setting, drafting position papers, and inputting into the communique. However, it has also been restricted due to the lack of institutionalisation of civil society space within the BRICS forum. The host country decides whether or not to host the civil society forum each year, unlike the Academic or Think-Tank tracks which have been formalised as part of the BRICS forum. This limits the quality of participation in several ways- the uncertainty impacts the continuity of the process, it is difficult to ensure follow-up and implementation of the recommendations and open the forum to wider participation, especially from grassroots organisations.

Due to the lack of a formal process, it also becomes challenging to influence decision-making as the BRICS heads of State may or may not send official representation to the forum. In 2016, for example, the official communique of the BRICS countries did not acknowledge the civil society process at all. At the same time, the opportunity for representatives of civil society organisations to engage with and influence other spaces within the BRICS forum outside of the civil society forum is almost non-existent.

ActionAid India has also participated in civil society spaces of the G20 including Civil20 and Women20. In our experience both fora have set up mechanisms such as virtual discussion spaces which allow for continuity of participation and civil society recommendations to a certain degree. Their recognition as official engagement groups of the G20 has also been helpful in legitimising their work.

However, it has also been observed that their agendas are more often than not reflective of the host country's agenda and there is little scope for influencing them. In addition, the spaces have been

largely dominated by international NGOs and the host country's NGOs for that particular year, thereby limiting the diversity of participants. The process of participation is also not as democratised as it should be in our view. It is common for participants who are not in the working groups or are part of the working groups but not in the core committee, to be able to only input into drafts which have been prepared by the core committee and not have these inputs reflected in the final communique.

2. What were the main structural and/or practical obstacles you or your colleagues encountered when participating, or seeking to participate, prior to, during and after decision-making (for instance in terms of shaping the agenda of decision-making processes, participation at an early stage when all options are still open, accreditation, physical and/or online access to forums, issuance of visas, availability of funds, access to information relevant to decision-making processes, etc.)?

Given the breadth and scope of the issues put on the agenda of groupings such as BRICS and G20 by the governments every year, it is extremely difficult for civil society organisations to substantively engage with them throughout the year. They simply do not have the capacity in terms of human resources, time, and finance to be able to do so. Moreover, since there is no permanent secretariat, every time the presidency of the grouping shifts, the process starts anew which places greater demands on the organisations which want to be engaged.

Due to the limitation of funds for civil society processes of the BRICS and G20 (which are largely dependent on the anchoring organisations' capacity to fundraise), it is difficult for them to have regular meetings. Therefore, they rely on digital methods of participation such as the virtual discussion spaces of the C20 and W20 mentioned above. But this automatically restricts participation from grassroot organisations and social movements, especially those in the global South.

Furthermore, organisations based in developing countries have often complained of not being able to raise funding for their participation. We have also observed that the diversity of participants at the official meetings has been falling, perhaps due to the shrinking of funds available with the core committee, thereby limiting their ability to support participants. Generally, the brunt of this unavailability of funding is borne by organisations from developing countries.

Similarly, participants from developing countries have also reported issues in obtaining visas in time for meetings. This can be attributed to the delay caused in applying for visas due to confusion regarding whether funding to support participation will come through in time or not.

3. Which improvements do you see as key to secure genuine and meaningful participation in decision-making processes of the aforementioned groupings/spaces, including by the underrepresented parts of society as mentioned above, victims of discrimination and marginalization because of their sexual orientation and gender identity, as well as social movements?

The civil society engagement process in these international groupings need to be more decentralised. It is important that the meetings conducted in the process are dispersed amongst the member countries, and not only hosted in the host country in order to ensure wider participation.

Furthermore, governments must ensure support to civil society mechanisms, including through adequate funding. This funding must be done through a common funding pool under the control of the core committee or a permanent secretariat to maintain civil society's autonomy regarding how to utilise it and which organisations to support basis the principles of equity and fairness.

The civil society processes must be institutionalised. They can be instituted as autonomous and self-determining platforms, in charge of their processes for engagement, including the agenda, thematic priorities and non-governmental organisation (NGO) participants from member countries and regional partners. These must include community-based organisations, members of affected communities and social movements.

Civil society participation in international spaces is imperative for ensuring their transparency and accountability, as well as informing them of people's needs and demands. Therefore, governments must consult with and involve civil society organisations more holistically. They must encourage collaboration between different stakeholders such as academics, private sector, and civil society organisations in all the different tracks and issue-based consultations.

4. What has been your experience exercising, or seeking to exercise, your rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association in the holding of meetings of one or several of the aforementioned groupings/spaces and in the margins thereof?

ActionAid has been part of civil society initiatives to self-organise events and meetings on the sidelines of international groupings such as G20 and BRICS. These initiatives have attempted to disseminate information amongst grassroot organisations and social movements, generate interest and encourage them to participate in formal and inform discussions around these groupings, as well as establish connections with like-minded organisations and activists in different member countries.

In our experience, there has been no attempt to violate our right to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association. However, the challenges related to funding and accessing spaces as detailed above apply, and even more so in these cases.

5. Have you or your colleagues been the subject of reprisal because of your participation, or attempt to participate, in a meeting or activity of one or several of the aforementioned groupings/spaces? If so, please provide information on the type of reprisal, the perpetrator(s), whether you reported the case to the organizers and the relevant authorities, and which action they took to address the situation and prevent reoccurrences (if any).

No

6. In your view, what is the overall impact of the economic and financial policies of the aforementioned groupings/spaces on a democratic and equitable international order?

The groupings such as BRICS and G20 are purportedly committed to a more democratic and equitable international order. The economic rise of many developing countries and their inclusion in these groupings has posed a challenge to Western hegemony as it were at the beginning of this century. But it has not necessarily translated into greater power sharing and democratic decision making. These groupings retain the characteristics of exclusivity and competitiveness to the detriment of the developing countries that are not members.

Moreover, due to their informal nature, they are not accountable to the public, despite the fact that commitments and agreements made in these groupings have far reaching impacts on domestic policies and legislations. Unless these governance spaces are welcoming of questioning and scrutiny from civil society and media and unless they transform into spaces of greater collaboration and creative problem solving for diverse stakeholders, they will continue undermining democratic processes.

7. More broadly, in what way(s) do you see a lack of genuine and meaningful participation and lack of influencing of decision-making process by the public in global governance grouping/spaces in general hampering the realization of a democratic and equitable international order?

In continuation to the factors listed above, we believe that a lack of genuine and meaningful participation in decision making processes of spaces such as BRICS and G20, makes it extremely difficult to hold the governments accountable to their commitments.

Furthermore, due to the restricted nature of participation and information sharing, the wider public is often unaware of decisions that are taken at these forums, thus raising serious questions on their transparency and intent.

Also, given the structural shortcomings of participation listed above, it is challenging to bring in a wide set of stakeholders and engage them substantively. This lack of inclusion is extremely problematic and undesirable. Civil society organisations often willingly or unwittingly become part of the problem by legitimising these spaces but not being able to ensure that marginalised and vulnerable voices are adequately represented.