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“70 Years of Brazil-India Relations (Where we came, current challenges in bilateral relations and road for greater approximation)”

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’70 Years’ is a fairly long time-frame to identify “challenges” and delineate scope for “greater approximation”.

Let me cover the last 10-12 years – that is, the period since 2006 when Brazil and India decided to lock themselves into a ‘strategic partnership’. The period tells us a lot about the possibilities of “greater approximation” and also the “challenges” which are, I am afraid, mostly of our own making.
Here four points are in order:

1. A seminar like this, bringing the two think-tanks together, would have been unthinkable some ten years ago. Of all the countries in the LAC region, Brazil alone is India’s ‘strategic partner’ – meaning thereby that there are some identified long-term complementarities in the areas of development, democracy, security and diplomacy, etc.

2. The two countries have rich intellectual capital – an intellectual capital which is capable of developing alternative discourse on development and global order.

3. As their horizons expand and capabilities rise, the challenge for Brazil and India is whether they want to seize the momentum of agenda-setting at regional and global levels.

4. At the minimal level, they need to talk to each other regularly. Simply because, it is in their respective “national interests” – doesn’t matter how narrowly their governments of the day define the term “national interest”.
The state of ‘in-betweenness’

- States such as India and Brazil are “in-between” states. What is this state of ‘in-betweenness’? They do many things; but they cannot do everything. They are not a pushover either. Also they are too big to fit into anybody’s pocket. Countries like Brazil and India invariably would have a mind of their own on most issues of global and regional importance.
- In the past, they had more limited number of resources; may be they still need resources more to spend on their huge domestic agendas. But as their capabilities rise, you see them undertake greater responsibility; and even launch global initiatives on their own. The capability-commitment gap has narrowed down a lot.
- From their own historical experiences, they also bring to the international agenda new issues and values to champion – issues and values which are much closer to the hearts and minds of other developing countries too.
- India and Brazil do lots of things which are right at the international level; though they may not be grabbing the global headlines – the way great powers do.
- All of the above make the ‘in-between’ states essentially coalition builders. Brazil and India are excellent coalition builders. By that very experience, they also bring consensus and harmony in diverse national positions on specific issues.
Strategic partnership: for what and why?

• The answer perhaps lies in the statement, signed here in Brasilia in September 2006, and the Joint Statement that was released after the bilateral meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Brazilian President Michel Temer in Goa in October 2016. The two statements incorporate a whole range of ideas; they read almost like a wish-list. They are an expression of intention; an identification of wide-ranging interests where mutuality and complementarities exist between the two countries.
2006

– The 2006 document identified 3 principal strands to their strategic partnership: bilateral, regional and international

  – To “intensify” links in trade, agriculture and science and technology. The two countries also signed some eight MOUs; interestingly in some very specific areas – human settlement, plant health protection, cultural festivals; (& football).

  – To start a strategic dialogue on “regional and international issues” – among others on energy security, and international terrorism.

  – “Closer coordination in international forums”. Mention was made of WTO and the UN Security Council – one stuck on the issue of protectionism and trade distorting practices of the rich countries, and the other on its outdated composition and structure.
Context and the mood was very different

- There was a context, a background to the Joint Statement and creation of the ‘strategic partnership’ in 2006.
- Starting in the 1990s, Brazil’s foreign policy orientation and interests had begun moving towards the dynamic economies of Asia. As for India, the process of economic liberalization, which started in the early 1990s, had begun producing positive results in the second half of the 1990s in the form of higher and sustained growth rates.
- At the turn of the century, thoughts, interests and policies had begun converging. As Brazil and India discovered complementarities, they had also begun to converge their views on a number of global issues: crisis of UN multilateralism; discriminatory and trade distorting practices of the developed world; and negative fall-outs of economic globalization.
- The upshot of all this was the increase in the number of high level visits; and rise in two-way trade. Starting around 2001, Brazil discovered the Indian pharmaceutical sector. By 2005, Indian pharmaceutical firms had a the annual business of over $400 million with Brazil – supplying bulk drugs, finished formulations as well as local production. Major Indian pharma companies had set up subsidiaries/manufacturing plants by 2005-06 – Ranbaxy, Strides Arco Labs, Torrent, Claris Life Sciences and Wockhardt. It is said that thanks to cooperation in the area of pharmaceuticals, Brazil had become the fifth largest producer of generic drugs by 2005 – which had a deep meaning for Brazil’s public health programme.
• Indian IT companies also made a huge impact. TCS had set up its software development centres in various countries of the LAC region; its operation in Brazil alone employed more than 1200 local staff in 2005. Be it pharma or IT, Indian companies, it was said, created jobs and imparted new skills and knowledge to the local staff. Given the value addition and knowledge-based thrust of Indian ventures, a write-up in the *New York Times* (21 June 2006) had speculated whether India could be a model of a knowledge economy for Latin America.

• Ethanol and sugar were other areas where Indian business showed interest in investment. ONGC Videsh Ltd. (OVL), followed by other Indian companies, had arrived in Brazil in search of both oil producing assets and prospecting and production in the offshore sector.

• Two-way trade crossed the $2 billion mark. In 2005, Indian export to Brazil had reached $1.20 billion and import from Brazil was $1.13 billion. *Increased numbers in visits and trade were a reflection of change in the mindsets at the political and business levels in the two countries.*
India’s GDP growth rate of 9% and above, starting 2005, made big Brazilian companies take note of the promise and power of the emerging economy. CVRD, the mining giant of Brazil, announced opening of its office in New Delhi. Petrobras of Brazil showed keenness to enter into oil exploration and production and had a tie-up with GAIL. Marco Polo, the Brazilian bus body building company, formed a joint venture with Tata Motors in 2006. There was scope for production of aircrafts in collaboration with Embraer of Brazil. Defence was another area wherein India and Brazil showed interest for cooperation.

In 2004, President Lula visited India. He galvanized the Mercosur into signing the Preferential Trading Agreement (PTA) with India in March 2005. Preferential duty (10-20 per cent in most cases) was given to 450 Indian products entering Mercosur and reciprocal concession given to 450 products of Mercosur entering India. It was agreed that the PTA would become effective in 2006 after parliamentary approvals.

Mind-sets had changed at both the levels of government and private business. In 2007, Brazilian president came to India at the head of more than 100 Brazilian businessmen. Brazil-India CEOs Forum was established with Tata and Petrobras heads leading the charge.

Global context was favourable. In a span of two months, Brazil and India had become one trillion dollar economies – Brazil in April and India in May 2007. At multilateral level, the two countries were also moving in concert – formation of the G-4; India and Brazil in G-20+ of agricultural exporting countries etc.

Historical context thus tells us that the ‘strategic partnership’ had a rationale and a justification.
2016

• A decade later, the two countries decided to “reinforce” their strategic partnership. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Michel Temer agreed in their bilateral meeting at Goa in 2016 to “scale up” their engagement.
  – The world had changed a lot since 2006. The Joint Statement (16 October 2016) acknowledges that the decade long bilateral strategic partnership has “opened a new phase” for India-Brazil relations. The detailed document, running into about two thousand words, covers about everything that Brazil and India could conceivably think of for cooperation.
  – The Joint Statement also elaborated upon the institutional mechanisms. It contains a list of fairly large number of commissions, committees and panels for dialogue and to hammer out convergences to cover a host of issues from trade to agriculture, science & technology to animal husbandry.
  – As in 2006, the JS of 2016 lays down a detailed road-map for relationship at bilateral, plurilateral and multilateral levels.
At bilateral level, it was agreed to build “a forward-looking” relationship by “deepening” the bilateral engagement and “better leveraging” the existing complementarities. Energy, food and agricultural security; defence, space, cyber security, infrastructure etc are among the broad areas identified for cooperation. The Joint Statement talks of cooperation in some very specific and targeted areas – production of pulses in Brazil; Brazilian investment in the poultry sector in India; R&D in “second generation biofuels”; and joint development of “five chemical” and “five biological” products so as to make medical treatment “affordable” and ‘universally accessible’ for tuberculosis, cancer and HIV Aids.

– Over and above the dozens of existing agreements and mechanisms, three MOUs were signed for cooperation in the fields of genetic resources; Zebu cattle genomics and assisted reproductive technologies; and pharmaceutical production regulations.

– Plurilateral level: The Joint Statement in particular highlights their relationship and contribution in plurilateral fora such as BRICS, BASIC, G-20, G-4, IBSA. International Solar Alliance (ISA) and Biofuture Platform show the commitment of the two countries towards Paris climate agreement and their ability to offer global public goods.
Two tentative conclusions

• Brazil and India are found working on the same wave-length. Two tentative conclusions that can be drawn at this stage are:
  (i) Political leadership in the two countries agree to further reinforce the ‘strategic partnership’ as it is perceived to be in their national interest; and
  (ii) what is sustaining this partnership are the values and motivations that underlie the philosophy of South-South Cooperation.

• Interestingly, the two countries also see themselves as leaders of the developing world. The Joint Statement of 2016 reaffirms their commitment to “increase the participation of developing countries in the decision-making bodies of multilateral institutions” – the reference being the expansion of the UN Security Council.
Two questions

- In realistic terms, where does the ‘strategic partnership’ stand today and now?
- Let me raise two straight questions here:
  - 1. What is the ‘new normal’ in Brazil-India relations?
- Perhaps nothing; or, may be a lot. It depends on how you see the relationship.
  To me the normal in India-Brazil relationship means a lot. Arrival of the Indian pharmaceuticals had made Brazil a major producer of generic drugs some ten years ago. The two countries were also engaged in the ‘exchange of best practices’ in the area of the social safety programmes – Brazil’s ‘bolsa familia’ and India’s NREGA. Under IBSA banner, there had emerged the idea of ‘Indo Atlantic’ – security of sea lanes of communication (SLOC), stretching from South Atlantic to Indian Ocean besides enhanced coordination at operational level, etc. Five joint naval exercises under ‘IBSAMAR’ have taken place; the last one in 2016.

Alternatively, several analysts have lost hope from this partnership: trade is modest. In 2017, Brazilian export to India stood at $4.65 million as against its imports of $2.94 million. Investment are low and declining. Other relationships are gaining priority; there are not many significant bilateral visits to show in the last two years.

It is said that bureaucratic rigmarole stymie the best of the agreements and mechanisms. Inter-departmental competitions and rivalries frustrate the best of the intentions; it is difficult to bring various departments and ministries coordinate and work together on a single one issue. Agreements are signed in good faith but not with due care and diligence. It seems the 2016 agreement on investment has slowed down implementation for whatever be the reason.
Implementation is a problem: having made such tall commitments and created a plethora of mechanisms, Brazil and India need to walk the talk.

A significant point here is that neither side, no matter what the reservations, is ready to walk out of the partnership.

2. How to sustain the strategic partnership?

- The answer to the above, at the minimal level, is: (i) a strategic partnership must stand on its own merit. Brazil and India cannot look at their relationship from the prism of one’s relationship with some third country; (ii) one side must take into account the strategic sensitivity of the other; and (iii) Private sector is leading the trade relationship. Business firms err in their dealings. So, trade and economic cooperation must not find fault with governments. Brazil-India relationship go beyond trade.
Axis is South-South Cooperation

- What holds Brazil-India strategic partnership is its southerly axis. Whether you like it or not, this dimension of South-South Cooperation does not go away from their relationship. The so-called global south continues to show lots of economic and technological dynamism and promise. Some of the fast growing economies are the developing economies. Intra-South trade continues to grow. The New Development Bank (NDB), the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), or the short-lived Bank of South are a reality of our times. The idea of South-South Cooperation sounded rhetorical in the 1970s; today, it looks realizable.

South-South Cooperation differs from North-South Cooperation in terms of inspiration, implementation and impact. It is a discourse that remains deeply ingrained in the foreign policy outlook and conduct of Brazil and India. Let me elaborate it a little here:
• Both the countries remain committed to promote horizontality in international relations. In addition to the principles of state sovereignty and non-interference, Brazil and India remain champions of the norms of decentralization and representativeness of the global institutions of governance.

• The diffusion of power has strengthened the spirit of volunteerism. Brazil and India now demonstrate more voluntary spirit and initiative in undertaking actual projects under the banner of South-South Cooperation. For instance, India has quietly emerged as a net giver of aid. The two are known as non-intrusive and non-prescriptive providers of developmental aid. What comes to mind is their contribution to capacity building in other developing countries.

• Over the past more than a decade, Brazil and India put their combined weight, along with others, in support of the trend toward multipolarity and shift in the balance of power towards the South. Such foreign policy activism particularly in the case of Brazil served to consolidate its regional and international influence.
IBSA Dialogue Forum

• This Southern axis of the strategic partnership manifests itself sharpenly in plurilateral arrangements – IBSA Forum, BRICS, BASIC, G-4 and several more.

• Let me illustrate the point by focusing on IBSA Forum and briefly on BRICS grouping. The 2016 India-Brazil Joint Statement acknowledges the importance of IBSA and resolves to “impair dynamism and strength to it.” IBSA Dialogue Forum will be meeting for a sixth summit in India this year. In the 15 years since its formation, it has held five summits, seven Trilateral Commission meetings, and a number of other Ministerial and Senior Official level meetings besides as many as 14 Joint Working Groups and People-to-People Forums. Besides, IBSA leaders and representatives continue to meet separately at the margin of all international meetings – UN General Assembly session, G-20 etc. Then, there are sherpas and sub-sherpas. The first IBSA Sherpas’ meeting was held in Chennai recently, on 1-3 April 2018.

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Since the sixth summit is going to take place this year, one may recall the imperatives and spirit in which the Dialogue Forum was formed. This is done in order to identify some of the enduring bases of Brazil-India relationship.

In 2003, the O-5 at the Evian meeting of the G-7, it was clear that O-5 were rendered to the margins of global consultation. O-5 were invited only for coffee but never for the main course. While the developed countries had their mechanism for consultation and coordination, it was realized that developing countries had none.

- An immediate precursor to the formation of IBSA Forum was the formation of the G-20 of agricultural exporting countries, led by Brazil and India.

- It was also felt that while economic globalization had benefitted some, it had left many behind and out. Its benefits were not distributed evenly. Economic globalization was producing social inequalities and destruction of environment through extreme extraction of resources.

- A new force had emerged at the global political level in the form international civil society. IBSA looked at the rise of civil society as partners in global governance and in making globalization a positive force for development.
• This was the context to the formation of IBSA grouping. IBSA had intended to make a difference at the global political level. Three multiethnic democracies from three different continents with a strong historical background of colonial domination and racism were determined to bring their distinctive democratic flavour to the way international cooperation worked.

• In fact, when IBSA was formed there were various proposals – make it CHIBSA, FIBSA. Each proposal had a different geo-strategic dimension and would have produced a very different geopolitical result. For instance, accretion of China would have added a non-democracy dimension in as much as the addition of France could have added a strong technology component to IBSA.

• In the end, it was agreed to keep it as IBSA – a voice of the global south. The large number of documents issued by various meetings of IBSA Forum acknowledges its “role in shaping global discourses” on globalization and the evolving global order from the perspective of South-South solidarity.

• IBSA Sherpas in their meeting in April have resolved to “impart dynamism and strength” to the grouping. How to do it? Certainly, the grouping needs to be reinvented – may be with the greater participation of private sector and civil society actors. It is also said that it is time to upgrade the trade agreement – expand the India-Mercosur PTA. The third meeting of the Joint Administrative Committee of the PTA, held in 2016, had agreed to expand the existing 450 tariff lines to as many as 2500 tariff lines each in due course of time. The first list of 484 tariff lines were exchanged last September as a first step.

• Analysts also continue to propose addition of some new members to add dynamism and strength to IBSA.
How best to capture the spirit of IBSA?

Following points bear significance:

1. It is the only grouping which remains grounded in the idea of sovereign equality. Its spirit and functioning has no possibility of building asymmetrical relationship among members; or cause marginalization of some member at the expense of another.

2. IBSA is a grouping with a bottom-up approach of partnering with civil society. Civil society and academic forums have regularly provided inputs to IBSA resolutions.

3. It is a cooperation mechanism which has worked well in the area of ‘exchange of best practices’—employment, social safety programmes etc.

4. IBSA Fund on Poverty and Hunger Alleviation is by now spread over 27 projects in 15 countries. It had won the UN MDG award in 2010.

5. The Forum brings together three regional poles of growth and stability. Their rising economic and technological strength demands that they lead the processes of regional economic integration and be the first provider of regional security.

6. The five IBSAMAR epitomize the potential of their long-term strategic partnership. The idea of ‘Indo-Atlantic’ so as to provide security of sea lanes of communication and rule of law in the waters stretching from south Atlantic to the Indian Ocean via Cape of Good Hope remains alive and relevant.
• IBSA Forum rejected the idea of an unrestrained market economy. The developmental outlook of the three large-sized emerging economies continues to hold on to the idea of state participation and regulation of the economy. ‘Muddling through’ is an expression often used to describe the developmental strategy of Brazil and India in the last two decades. Role of the state including its large public sector remains embedded in the developmental thinking and strategy of the Brazil and India.

• State is an instrument of social change. The three multiethnic democracies have substantial group and regional inequalities. It is for the state to address the issues of equity and inclusion. All three share the concept of “inclusive development” within democratic parameters.

• Besides, the three emerging from three different continents have continued to posit themselves as:
  - catalyst of South-South solidarity; and
  - interlocutor between the South and the North.

Playing these roles, they have demanded the reform of institutions of global governance which must reflect the aspirations and power distribution of today.
• One may criticize IBSA on various counts: it is a self-serving group etc seeking access to the market of other developing countries; and as a vehicle to promote their own great power ambitions.

• One may not delve into these aspects. What however is undeniable is the fact that the grouping has kept the issue of reform of the institutions of global governance on the front burner. They have worked to make the UN take up the reform issue in a time-bound framework.

• What has held IBSA back and slowed its progress? Perhaps a mix of apathy and indifference; inter-bureaucratic competitiveness; shifting priorities of the three countries.
BRICS and its southerly flow

• From its inception, BRICS attracted some mega narratives: a “tectonic shift” in global geopolitics; a grand ‘geo-economic alliance’; “decline of the West and rise of the rest”; “decline of the Westphalia and rise of the Eastphalia”; rise of multipolarity; and even end of the Liberal order. Notable, most of such analyses came from the Western scholarship. All this could still be true but only in future.

• BRICS is a work in progress. Whatever be its other geopolitical dynamics, its southerly flow remains notable. The presence of Brazil and India in BRICS adds a new meaning and heft to the idea of South.

• Following few points indicate how BRICS is shifting the locus and trajectory of South:
Shifting locus and trajectory of the south?

1. G-20 has emerge as the key mechanism to manage the global financial matters. BRICS have become the voice of the South within G-20 and outside it on issues of global financial governance and reform of the multilateral financial institutions.

2. BRICS are organizing South in some meaningful ways – bringing members of regional grouping for dialogue. At Fortaleza summit, Brazil had invited the UNASUR heads of state and governments; at Goa, India invited the BIMSTEC countries. The outreach programmes expresses the desire of the BRICS to carry and expand regionalism.

3. There are new political precepts and values coming from the global south. In the context of crises in Libya, Syria and Ukraine, BRICS have sought a balance between state sovereignty and R2P. While, human rights be upheld, R2P cannot become a ruse for intervention and regime change. In the wake of the Libyan crisis in 2011, Brazil proposed the norm of RwP (Responsibility while Protecting). RwP is preventive while R2P is intrusive. Humanitarian intervention can be taken recourse to under the UN only as a last resort, guided by the principle of proportionality and keeping in view the balance of consequences.
4. BRICS have offered two public goods in the form of NDB and the CRA - one to provide the much-needed finance for development and the other a support mechanism during financial crunch. NDB is intended to fight off the financial marginalization of the emerging and developing economies. It is guided by a different set of values – values of equal participation; and non-prescriptive and non-conditional development finance. In fact, at the Fortaleza summit, Brazil and India had worked together to keep participation in the NDB on equal bases. Also, I am told, it was Brazil which had come up with the compromise formula of NDB headquartered in Shanghai but with rotating presidency; with the first presidency going to India in the formative years of the Bank. Equal capital participation and a rotating presidency are only to ensure the autonomy of the Bank from the influence of any particular member-state. Besides, it was deemed necessary to impart a sound professional grounding to the Bank.

5. Both the NDB and the CRA are to function independent of the free market-oriented ‘conditionalities’ associated with IMF and the World Bank. BRICS economies are considerably statist in nature; and the group rejects unbridled free-market capitalism, as promoted under the ‘Washington Consensus’. It is also agreed that NDB’s lending shall remain non-prescriptive and non-conditional.

– With the approval of the 2017-18 General Strategy, NDB is ready with its second batch of loans, and the opening of its first regional office in South Africa.
BRICS flow is also easterly?

In addition to its southerly, BRICS since the Ufa summit of 2015 has also been gaining an easterly flow. I wrote something to this effect for ‘the Statesman’ (15 July 2015) when BRICS met for their summit at Ufa.

• BRICS bring Brazil from the far corner of the Planet Earth to the centre – in Asia and the Indo-Pacific. The growing bromance between Russia and China and India’s entry into the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) indicate BRICS getting easterly traction. What does this shift mean for Brazil; and what it is that Brazil brings to the grouping? Analyses pertain to the idea that Brazil’s membership in the BRICS might call upon it to participate and take position on geostrategic issues in Eurasia and the Indo Pacific. Is Brazil ready to do the heavy lifting, if required, in Eurasia and the Indo Pacific? How Brazil can benefit from these changing equations in terms of its developmental imperatives and it rising place in the global power hierarchy? Does the strategic partnership with India help? Is it time to expand the horizons of the Brazil-India strategic partnership?

• The answers to these questions are not simple and straight. Be that as it may, it is clear that the so-called ‘Braxit’ is not a choice.
Brazil and the rise of Asia/India

• Two axioms: (i) An undeniable truth of our times is the rise of Asia. (ii) The most significant shift in Latin America’s international insertion since independence is its relations with Asia in the past quarter of a century.

• What does it mean for Brazil? It seems, there are two kinds of problems here: structural and attitudinal.

(1) Brazil’s relations with Asia are complex, given the nature of trade and investment between Brazil and Asia, in particular between Brazil and China. At a general level, these relations are based on export of resources and import of manufactures and value-added products. This has become unsustainable. Brazil’s economic woes in the last five years are on account of falling demand by the Chinese economy. Some $\frac{3}{4}$ of Brazilian export to China comprise soya, ore and oil. Scholarly writings talk of ‘de-industrialization’ and a new round of dependency for Brazil.

UNECLAC reports over the past ten years have repeatedly underlined the need for Brazil and all other Latin American countries to become part of the Asian value chain.
Jorge Heine, a former ambassador of Chile to India and to China captures the attitudinal issue. He writes:

• “As a rule, conservative governments in the region are less interested in Asia than the progressive ones, and are keener to work with the region’s traditional diplomatic partners in North America and Western Europe than with the Chinas and Indias of this world. The underlying question is how long it will take the word to penetrate to all political sections in Latin America that the action in the new century has shifted from North Atlantic to Asia Pacific” (emphasis added).
• In such a scenario, the Brazil-India strategic partnership could prove handy.
• Last year, there was a new study: R. Evan Ellis, Indian and Chinese Engagement in Latin America and the Caribbean: A Comparative Assessment (U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, March 2017).
• Let me quote some of the broad concluding observations from this report:
  1. In a comparative perspective, Evan Ellis found India’s economic activities in the region are more modest; generally concentrated on a more limited set of countries and sectors; generally featuring a larger number of smaller actors which are more independent of the state and often more entrepreneurial. The author further writes that support of the Indian government to Indian companies in the region is lot more modest and often less coordinated. In sum, Indian firms have added value to Latin American productive structures; added new skills and knowledge; are non-intrusive and mostly private sector driven.
  2. The author suggests that given the character of India’s engagement, its relationship with the region could prove more harmonious and more resilient than that of China.
3. I would conclude by what Ellis concludes: “Yet...India has the potential to build a very positive relationship with the region, in some way surpassing and potentially even serving as a counterweight .... India could become both an important partner with – and a competitor of – other actors within and external to Latin America”.

4. The Brazil-India strategic partnership is based on the imperative of South-South Cooperation. The two countries realize the principles of equity and equality that underlie this relationship. They continue to add new items to an ever-growing list of subjects calling for cooperation, and also continue to create new institutional mechanisms for their implementation.

5. What perhaps Brazil and India need is an overarching monitoring mechanism which could shield the partnership from distractions, delays and an occasional tinge of distrust that creeps in their relationship.

I would end by proposing, what I did some years ago here in FUNAG: create an Eminent Persons Group, which could bring the professional expertise and personal commitment of its members, to steer the strategic partnership forward.
And Finally

• Thank you very much