



# ASPEN INSTITUTE INDIA

*Concluding Remarks:*

## **Aspen- Avantha International Fellowship 2012**

*Arndt-Walter Emmerich*

I, Arndt Emmerich, worked with the Aspen Institute India in New Delhi from 14 August until 15 October 2012, being the third Aspen- Avantha International Fellow. The Aspen Institute India aims to cooperate with outstanding individuals from junior to a senior level, who demonstrate a high degree of energy and strong commitment to Aspen's global mission. Fellows carry out individual research projects regarding the pressing fields of global concerns in the areas of foreign and domestic policy, energy security and development. In 2011, Aspen India commenced its successful Aspen Avantha International Fellowship initiative to allow highly motivated postgraduate students from leading academic institutions in the field of International Relations, International Development and South Asian Studies to learn about the social, political and economic issues facing the world's largest democracy. In addition to international exposure and leadership experience, fellows of the initiative gain firsthand experience in tackling these issues, and learn from the best practices and expert minds in the field.

My first encounter with the field of development and domestic policy occurred when I went to New Delhi in 2005 and worked for one year for a non-governmental organisation which promotes the development of disadvantaged youths. This exposure

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took place in the context of the Social Service for the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development in collaboration with the Indian Government. During the same year, I travelled to the Tsunami affected Andaman and Nicobar Islands to join the Disaster Relief Team and worked for a Water and Sanitation Management Organization in the earthquake affected area in Gujarat. Moreover, learning a new language, Hindi, was enormously enriching and enabled me to interact with a new and diverse culture. As a result of this crucial experience, I started a sociology and political science degree and developed a strong interest in developmental debates with respect to India and the ongoing dynamics in the region. In addition, I participated in an exchange program at the University of Mumbai in 2009, and was able to carry out an independent research project in the Film City of Mumbai. In 2011, I returned to India for a three-month fieldwork assignment in Bangalore, Mysore and Mangalore to research about domestic policy implications in the state of Karnataka.

Being a fellow of the Aspen Institute India has been a unique and eye opening experience for me. Previous to the Fellowship, I completed my Master in Philosophy (MPhil) at the University of Oxford in July 2012 with disciplinary grounding in International Development and a strong focus on South Asia. After the fellowship, I will continue as a doctoral research student in the same academic discipline.

Given my long interest in and engagement with India, the Aspen- Avantha International Fellowship constituted an invaluable opportunity to acquire practical insights into the working of a renowned non-governmental and non-partisan organization, interacting closely with experts in the field of foreign policy, the private sector, and international development. In addition, I made some life long friends in the Aspen office among my colleagues and learned immensely through the rewarding interactions with Ms. Kiran Pasricha, Executive Director and CEO of Aspen India, during the two months fellowship. In the following, I will summarise and reflect upon some of the major activities and events I was involved in, such as the organization of international conferences and policy forums, independent research assignments and the design of funding proposals. Subsequently, I will provide a brief conclusion about my stay in New Delhi and point out



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as to why I believe that the fellowship scheme is a pertinent contribution to Aspen's global mission and its commitment to international leadership.

I vividly remember my arrival in the Aspen India office in Gurgaon on 14 August 2012. I had just arrived from Indonesia, where I finished a teaching assignment with the Australian National University. I flew via Mumbai to meet some Oxford colleagues at Mumbai University. On arrival in the Delhi office, one day before India's Independence Day, I was given a brief overview and introduction to the staff by Ms. Kiran Pasricha. I spent the initial days reading through and inquiring about previous Aspen assignments, policy and annual reports, and executive summaries of roundtables about Bangladesh, Myanmar, Iran, China or Russia, and about events like Ideas India in order to obtain a full fledged overview of the Institute's activities.

As part of the fellowship I met and worked closely with the other Aspen-Avantha International Fellow, Rishikesh R. Bhandary, PhD Candidate from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy in Boston, who already completed one and a half months working with Aspen India. Rishikesh was of great support to me during the first few days. The daily interaction with him was very informative, on the one hand because we were able to talk about our daily and weekly assignments and on the other hand because we were able to compare our different academic backgrounds and university systems from which we had come. Meanwhile I developed a warm working relationship with my dynamic Aspen colleagues who were welcoming and immediately friendly. These colleagues taught me more about the numerous activities of the Institute when there was some time to get to know each other beyond the professional work environment they allowed me to taste their culinary creations which contributed to a wholesome social and cultural experience while being with Aspen.

My first assignment was the design of a proposal for the Socrates Program, where I had to interact with the Aspen Institute of the United States in Washington. The Socrates Seminars are for young professionals to engage with various pressing challenges. These seminars function as network facilitators and are moderated by highly trained experts in various fields. In addition, the seminars are designed to be values-based Socratic



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explorations to facilitate an exchange of ideas. At the core of Socrates is a remarkable group of emerging and recognized leaders including entrepreneurs, venture capitalists, representatives of government, international, nonprofit and non-governmental organizations, academics and journalists. To facilitate the cross-pollination of ideas, participants are provided ample time for interaction, relationship-building and outdoor activities outside the seminars.

The implementation of the Socrates Program in India is currently being designed. I believe it would be effective for a delegation from the United States to visit and host a Socrates India Seminar so that Aspen India can learn and conduct its own seminars in the future.

My task over the course of the fellowship has consisted of reactivating correspondence with the USA Aspen office, inquiring about costs, feasibility, timing and duration of the program and negotiating and discussing avenues for cost reduction and other logistical details. A similar assignment was to generate a funding proposal for Aspen India that has lately been done by Aspen USA. The funding campaign of Aspen USA, “Scholars and Scholarships”, attempts to raise \$75 million. I scrutinized and identified various areas regarding India’s international and domestic challenges, where young, eager and promising leaders can be supported to participate in Aspen’s manifold programs, seminars and workshop (e.g. *environment, energy security, climate change, education, development, entrepreneurship and foreign policy*). The objective is to make an unprecedented impact by supporting young leaders, who drive in innovation and engage with issues of significance.

Moreover, I documented Aspen India events such as book launches, seminars and lectures. These activities constitute superb opportunities to engage with senior Indian Administration Service (IAS) officers, ambassadors and other representatives of the private sector and civil society to discuss ideas and concepts about development and leadership with respect to India in the global context. The first event on August, 27<sup>th</sup>, 2012 was a talk by Dr. Shashi Tharoor on his latest book *Pax Indica- India and the World in the 21st Century*. The well attended discussion was chaired by Ambassador M.



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Rasgotra, President of the Centre for International Relations and the Observer Research Foundation and featured Mr. B.J. Panda, Member of the Parliament. Dr. Tharoor argued that Indian foreign policy has gone beyond the area of non-alignment and entered the political arena of multi-alignment. Hence, Pax Indica is being immersed in different international groups, global networks, and alliances where it will be indispensable in fostering domestic interests and contributing to transnational harmony in partnership with international and regional organizations. The informative panel also addressed the understaffing of the diplomatic cadres and organizations. I learned through first hand accounts that India's 120 missions and 49 consulates are run by 900 Indian Foreign Service (IFS) officers against 20000 deployed by US, 6000 by UK, 6550 by Germany and 6250 by France. Japan, Asia's largest foreign service has 5500 officers and China has 4200. Hence, substantial reforms of the civil service and its recruitment strategies, such as civil service exam, are required in order to go beyond recruiting 'good bureaucrats' towards shaping well rounded diplomats with social and soft skills.

The second event I documented was a book presentation convened by Aspen on 28 August 2012 in which Ambassador R. Viswanathan discussed his recent publication *Malgudi to Macondo - journey of an innocent Indian through seductive Latin America*. The talk was chaired by Mr. Tarun Das, member of Board of Trustees of Aspen Institute India. In his entertaining and engaging book presentation, which was complemented by the witty questions of Mr. Tarun Das and a well-informed and curious audience, Ambassador R. Viswanathan looked back and reflected upon a 14 years long diplomatic career in Latin America that started in Brazil in 1996. He ended his career recently in Buenos Aires in the age of 60. Through participation in the presentation I acquired more knowledge about the political and societal dynamics in the region, especially when the Ambassador explained the shifts from dictatorships, nepotism and ideological polarization to pragmatic and business friendly governments and an emerging middle class in the countries of Latin America. He argued that financial prudence, an over all deficit of under 2%, inflation in single digit numbers over the last decade, and growth rates of 6% in 2010, boosted new confidence and assertiveness within the region, even in the wake of the European debt crisis.

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These book launches are two examples of regular Aspen events, which inform the wider public, bring highly qualified speakers to India, and build platforms for dialogue. In the same context, I was able to participate and help to set up a talk by the US based Pew Research Center on Indian public opinion regarding domestic challenges of corruption, the market system, the economy, the role of state in society, the loss of traditional way of life and Indian views on countries like USA, China and Pakistan. The presentation by Bruce Stokes was followed by a lively discussion in which a curious audience raised their own standpoints regarding these issues. Moreover, former US Ambassador to India Robert D. Blackwill spoke on the next American President and foreign policy differences between Obama and Romney. In terms of the India situation, Ambassador Blackwill argued that neither Romney nor Obama will fundamentally change its current foreign policy towards India. In sum, through the variegated Aspen platforms, the predominately Indian audience receives numerous first hand insights about international affairs with wider implications for the rest of the world.

During my fellowship, the Aspen Institute India shifted office from Gurgaon to a brand new office in the Thapar House near Connaught Place. The new office has a motivating and prolific work atmosphere as well as the latest fingerprint impression door mechanism! To commute to work I took the metro daily which allowed me to pass by the Metro Museum. The Metro Museum is a showroom, aligned with different banners, wall papers, samples of technology and cables, a souvenir shop and class vitrines with various utensils for display, mostly with respect of the planning, constructing and technology implementations. Two explanatory banners on the wall inform visitors and daily commuters as to how spiritualism and Hinduism are integral to the operation of the metro project, underlined with a large picture of a women, sitting on the floor with crossed legs, performing a pranayama asana. I learned that Spiritualism is a guiding force at the Delhi Metro Rail Cooperation and is inherent in the working of the organization and that Yoga and Meditation are important parts in the Metro training curriculum. Finally, the metro was a efficient way to reach my work place in less than 30 minutes, which I would have barely managed to achieve when commuting to work in London or Berlin.

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During my tenure at Aspen, I also conducted independent research and composed two research papers regarding (1) ASEAN-India relations and (2) India as an emerging donor of foreign aid and development assistance. The first paper focused on how the rate of political, societal and economic interactions between India and ASEAN have increased and avenues for future cooperation have been forged over the years. The cultural ties of the key players in the global economy date back thousands of years, and today's partnership is inevitably shaped by mutual interest in the areas of counter-terrorism, maritime security, the rise of China, climate change, and natural disasters. The final section of the research discussed recommendations for sustainable cooperation in the future and concludes that a strong partnership in the 21st century will benefit the Asia-Pacific region as a whole.

The second paper regarding India's emergence as a donor country engaged with the ostensible tension between traditional donors, mainly OECD countries, and emerging donors such as BRICS. In this paper I reiterated India's role as a provider of development assistance since the 1960s and its renewed ambitions to invest in West Africa, Afghanistan and its neighbor states. I was able to do primary research, interviewing academics from Jawaharlal Nehru University, policy makers and development practitioners.

Both of my research papers will contribute to Aspen's upcoming roundtables, seminars and workshops. During these assignments, I learned immensely about India's foreign policy outlook, paradigm shifts over the last decades, the Look East Policy, and relations to multilateral organizations.

In addition, two highlights of the Fellowship were Aspen India's hosting of the Trilateral Forum and International Committee Meeting. Through my involvement in these events I gained crucial knowledge in how to plan and execute VIP events under the invaluable guidance of Ms. Kiran Pasricha. The India Trilateral Forum took place in the Leela Kempinski Hotel and was organized in partnership with The German Marshall Fund (GMF). A delegation of International experts attended the two-days forum and for Aspen India it was a rewarding exercise to cooperate with the European associate, GMF.



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The interaction between the Aspen and GMF team was mutually beneficial and the conference resulted in a successful process in bridging the gap in Indo-US-Europe relations. My tasks consisted of welcoming new arrivals, documenting the event, talking to and guiding the participants and facilitating microphones during the course of the forum.

Finally, I was fortunate to participate in the International Committee meeting, which was hosted by Aspen India in the Taj Mahnsingh Hotel and the Leela Chanakyapuri between the 10-12 October 2012. Numerous Aspen United States, Aspen Europe and Aspen Japan representatives discussed past projects and future avenues with respect to its global agenda. For the event I had to generate a chart, which showed how several Aspen USA programs influenced and inspired the Aspen Institute India. The Aspen committee debated, in that context, how to work on more transparency and coordination among the individual country offices. During the three days event the whole Aspen India team benefitted immensely from Ms. Kiran Pasricha experience and practical knowledge how to handle, and organize such a large scale event with various development and foreign policy circles.

In summary, the Aspen- Avantha International Fellowship has been a wholesome and extremely rewarding experience for me. In this context I strongly recommend other graduate students to apply to this unique scheme. From an academic and theoretical point of view, I can say that I acquired an advanced understanding about pressing issues regarding India's foreign policy and development debates. Being able to conduct individual research has been of immense value and it opened new corridors for future projects and academic interests. In addition, I learned about the working of Aspen India, its objectives and cooperation with other international organization, the private sector and the government. Ms. Kiran Pasricha was of you huge inspiration to me and it has been a real privilege to work with her in the field of policy making and political dialogue. The numerous interactions with people in the Aspen office complemented my stay and I was able to make some close friends for life.





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Moreover, the work of Aspen contributes to India's role in the world as an emerging power and helps to build cross cultural bridges and international networks. Aspen India contributes to India's smooth integration into the global community and facilitates platforms for policy and development discussions. The Aspen Avantha International fellowship, in that respect, reinforces the global mission of Aspen and personally I will further stay committed, and support the network and its global vision of leadership and development. Lastly, I would argue that emerging powers like India should be cautious about embracing multilateralism, in particular if more promising bilateral policy avenues are offered. Recently, however, India has shown initiative to contribute to international humanitarian and financial institutions more than it has in the past. Therefore, I believe that Aspen India has a significant role to play in fostering dialogues and interactions at the multilateral as well as at the bilateral level.

*Arndt-Walter Emmerich, Aspen - Avantha International Fellowship  
Doctoral Researcher in International Development, University of Oxford  
arndt.emmerich@gmail.com*