

BREAKING GLOBAL DEADLOCKS: Reflections on Global Governance

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"We must develop new tools and approaches to successfully address evolving global issues. These can only be addressed by a broad representation of world leaders that can collectively speak for large segments of the world population." –Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, 2005.

THE LESSONS

Project History

Established in 2003 by the Centre for Global Studies (CFGs) and the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI), the L20 project investigated the concept of a forum for government leaders to reach pragmatic solutions to critical global problems in an informal setting. The project explored the possibility for a top level (inter-governmental) forum to facilitate commitments to breaking global deadlocks on issues that cannot be resolved through other mechanisms. The project examined potential roles in global governance for a Group of 20 leaders (e.g. similar in country composition to the existing Finance Ministers G20), specifically the role of discussing pragmatic ideas and strategies to reach a consensus on otherwise insolvable issues. The group was deemed small enough to be effective yet large enough to represent the world's diversity.

The L20 (the "L" was to distinguish the proposal from existing fora) project was rolled out in three phases. During the first phase, meetings held in Canada and Italy revealed strong governmental and non-governmental support for the creation of a Summit of Leaders modeled after the G20 Finance Ministers forum. Phase II and III built on that support, introducing a series of topical meetings that focused on intractable issues such as climate policy, agricultural subsidies, water issues and terrorism. The meetings provided insights into how the L20 could assist in solving global problems and established key criteria for developing the agenda for an initial L20 meeting.

The subsequent Breaking Global Deadlocks (BGD) project demonstrated the L20 hypothesis that a more inclusive and well-prepared summit process would lead to progress on climate change and energy security. It was a simulation exercise - a reality-based series of meetings designed to provide definitive "proof of concept" to the L-20 Leaders Forum approach. Former and serving government officials and policy experts were involved in a "mock" preparatory process, modeled after the traditional G8 summit process. This process includes multiple preparatory meetings during which political "sherpas" (leaders' personal representatives) from each country involved refine the problem to be addressed and debate possible solutions. The political "sherpas" then produce a draft communiqué which forms the basis for discussion and decision by heads-of-government at the Leaders Forum.

The process, based on an enlarged summit table, produced an illustrative consensus package, aggregating many proposals, to gain commitments and initiate action. The package includes a list of actions, including the mobilization of the efforts of a large range of international

organizations to contribute in their area of competence. The sequel project “Widening and Deepening Global Governance” then successfully tested the BGD results with representatives of “think tanks” and organizations working on climate change, with senior political personalities attending the Clinton Global Initiative, and with media opinion leaders from the G8+5 countries.

The Lessons

Leaders are Essential

At the global level there is a need for leadership and coherence, which can only be provided by some sort of informal council. A forum at the leaders' level is the only means whereby cross-cutting package deals can be crafted - leaders can strike deals that transcend the traditional silos of government ministries and international institutions. Leaders have the ability to mobilize their governments through top-down political direction, ensuring that their global promises translate into national action. Leaders can rise above domestic politics and adopt policies that provide global collective benefits. Leaders can apply peer pressure and clarify enlightened self interest in coordinating actions on deadlocked global crises. Inter-personal trust among leaders allows for candid discussion of sensitive issues without political posturing.

Composition is an Intractable Issue

Some believe that a meeting of twenty leaders may be too large a group for effective dialogue and for rapport to build among leaders. Some argue that the most appropriate countries for one issue might be the wrong group for another. In the variable geometry approach, additional countries may be invited to the table, depending on the agenda topic to be discussed – this variable geometry approach, however, may hinder the growth of collegiality among leaders. There is a strong case for an Islamic country - Egypt, Turkey or Indonesia, in the core group. We landed on 14- the Heiligendamm G8+5 plus an Islamic country¹.

More Voices leads to Better Results

Our hypothesis was that a more inclusive summit would lead to better results, both in terms of more effective initiatives and in the perceived fairness and acceptability of decisions, leading to them being implemented in fact. The “Deal” produced by the project was indeed very different from the package that would be produced by a capable well-meaning group with experts from just the G8 countries.

Proof of the Eisenhower Aphorism

Eisenhower said:

"When I can't solve a problem I always make it bigger until I can find a solution. I can never find a solution by trying to make it smaller." In the climate change area, emerging and developing countries' “common but differentiated” responsibilities are unlikely to accept binding commitments on emission targets if that is the only issue on the negotiating table. We have demonstrated that colloquy and compromise on mitigation commitments are possible only if a large package - global R&D consortia, technology transfer mechanisms and financing

¹ For the past 3 summits, Brazil, China, India, Mexico and South Africa have been invited to the G8 summits. At Heiligendamm, the Germans proposed an ongoing dialogue process with these 5 countries. We have included representatives of Egypt in our project; Egypt having the added characteristic of being an African country. Japan is likely to invite Indonesia to its forthcoming summit.

arrangements to support adaptation - is simultaneously on the table. Such a package requires a serious preparatory process.

There is a Market for a “Track 1 ½” *GPAGNet*

The project has proved the value of a network comprising governance and policy research experts, outsiders prepared to be explicit when “the Emperor has no clothes”. A second track of de-politicized policy discussions would be very valuable. A safe space must be created within which tough issues can be debated. The most effective way to bring forward significant policy change varies from country to country. The needs and interests of the +5 countries are not homogenous. The vitality of networks comes from complementarity, not from aggregation. Networks require common purpose, but not common structure. A network of think-tanks (and individuals) could be helpful, particularly if it was plugged into, but not a creature of, official negotiations. The network should result in the creation of a safe space to push the envelope of the possible. A think-tank network could be part of mobilizing a policy “demand pull” from leaders.

The market for the network's products— policy ideas and insights- has been demonstrated. The Japanese Prime Minister's senior adviser on climate change invited the group to Tokyo and found the exchange very valuable. The Mexican Foreign Ministry invited us to discuss ideas about practical reforms to the international institutional architecture, convening representatives of the network in Mexico City, March 10. The OECD is hosting us March 31-April 1 to consider initiatives on economic policies for climate change. Secretary General Gurría has asked for a one-hour meeting on April 2 with a group from the network to discuss its future.

Non Susceptible Issues

The project has canvassed a variety of critical global issues to determine which were susceptible to resolution by a well prepared and more inclusive Leaders Summit and also for which the timing was ripe. Global issues that were not appropriate were the “Doha” trade round, the global fishery, UN reform, failed states, reform of the ODA system, international financial institutional reform, and safe water and sanitation. Three topics that were promising, but currently not ripe for summit consideration were terrorism, global infectious diseases and global public goods. The prospects for these last three topics could change overnight, however, with the right catalyst or fervent well-placed champion.

History and Culture Matter

We must anticipate the impact of bilateral irritants which can derail multilateral efforts. The weight of history can block progress and win-win outcomes. Japanese and Chinese sensitivities are a case in point.

Untouchable Issues

To engage the attention of decision-makers, facts, logic and reason are necessary, but not sufficient. Some issues are unmentionable. An example in the climate change area is the factor of population. Notwithstanding the obvious consequence of the effect of avoiding a 33% increase in population over the next 40 years², the policy community is unwilling to address policies to decrease population growth in the set of mitigation initiatives.

² The IPCC base line assumption for population increase by 2050 is about 50%.

While per capita targets are a prominent part of the debate, attempting to discuss the denominator is a recipe for being sidelined.

The Elusive Aristotelian Mean³

The technical content of material presented to a meeting of policy experts with global governance experts must be carefully calibrated. Too much detail and the attention of governance experts is lost. Serving and retired officials, expert in global governance processes and international institutional decision-making, have little patience for technical details. Governance experts are accustomed to “briefs”, succinct executive summaries. Intolerant of any presentation longer than five minutes (two is preferred), governance experts insist on avoiding the “weeds”. In contrast, policy experts are proud of their mastery of an issue’s technical complexity. Policy experts believe it is an irresponsible disservice to “dumb down” any serious presentation to less than twenty minutes.

The Difficulties of Cross Cultural Choreography

It is almost impossible to manage the structure and flow of a meeting with global participants. Scenario preparations must account for cultural differences. Generally, a meeting of North Americans will respect the conference organizers’ stated intent to limit presentations to five minutes, comments to two minutes and “2 handed” interventions to thirty seconds. In meetings with participants from around the globe, “brutal” chairmanship, flashing red “over time” lights, and ringing bells have had only modest success. At a recent conference, a very senior non-North American chair of a two hour session organized to have two lead speakers used thirty minutes for his “introductory” remarks. Chairmen must be carefully selected and well briefed.

This is an Expensive Business

Face to face contact is essential to establish the requisite relationships, especially in Asia. Recruitment of meeting participants is risky without prior personal visits – “due diligence” would avoid inviting “tourists”. Conferences of 25-30 participants drawn from 30 countries involve high transportation costs and time consuming administration of logistics. Prominent academics are more likely to contribute custom tailored papers if honoraria are provided.

³ Andres Rozental would prefer this lesson’s title to be the “Oxford Phenomenon”, where presenters at an L20 meeting at University College, Oxford on “Agriculture and Doha” focused on a level of detail and minutiae so excessive that it tried the patience of that most consummate diplomat.