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There is little doubt that the international community is living through some truly momentous times. Our capacity to tackle a variety of complicated social and economic problems is greater at the turn of the new century than has been the case at anytime during the last few centuries. Technological development, economic prosperity and cultural evolution, all characteristics of globalization, have sharpened our ability to resolve many of the social evils that still exist.

## Urgent Global Problems, New Global Solutions

Poverty and the wealth gap within and between countries continue to grow and unless we act decisively by 2020 the number of people living on less than two dollars a day may well increase substantially beyond three billion.

Protecting the environment is a further dilemma as we pursue greater economic wealth for developed and developing countries. A number of other serious issues, such as global pandemics, drugs trafficking and people smuggling continue to pose new difficulties for governments across the world.

How the world deals with these global challenges over the coming two decades, not the next half-century will determine the planet's fate for generations. However, though we have the capacity and potential to tackle the most serious international problems, our ability to do so is hampered by the tools we use to tackle the dilemmas facing the global community. In their current form, our traditional institutions are not capable of addressing the many serious issues facing the global community today. A more intelligent alliance between public institutions, private bodies and civil society is needed.

### } Global problems

Identifying the correct tools to fit the problem is key, but a first step is to identify and understand what are the most pressing issues and which of these are global. If we see these issues as global then it follows, in an increasingly interdependent world, that we must develop an approach that involves all nations working within a framework of collective action. This approach needs to be based on clear methodologies; yet it is not clear that anyone has definitively identified what

makes certain issues inherently global.

There are at least such 20 inherently global issues that merit real focus by the progressive left over the coming two decades. These can be divided into three broad categories: *global commons* (issues asking how we share the world's physical space), *global coalitions* (issues of global concern asking how the world should share its humanity), and *global rules* (legal and regulatory issues that ask how the world should share its rules).

## 20 Global Issues, 20 Years to Solve Them

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### 1. The Global Commons

Global warming; biodiversity and ecosystem loss; fisheries depletion; deforestation; water deficits; maritime safety and pollution

### 2. Sharing our humanity

Renewing the attack on poverty; peacekeeping; conflict prevention and preventing terrorism; education for all; global infectious disease; digital divide; natural disaster prevention and mitigation

### 3. Sharing our rulebook

Reinventing taxation for this century; biotechnology rules; global financial architecture; fighting illegal drugs trade; investment and competition rules; intellectual property rights; e-commerce regulations; international labour and migration rules

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Three striking features that these issues share are evident. Firstly, they are planetary, in the sense that they have make or break consequences for the whole planet. Second, they are urgent and demand greater attention now, within the next 20 years – not 30,

40, 50 years from now. Every year that they are not addressed makes them harder to tackle. Third, though costly to tackle in the short term, which can make it hard to galvanise policy-makers, these issues are relatively affordable over the long term. The monetary cost of tackling the most serious issues is minor in comparison to resources spent on trying to solve these problems once they have happened.

The tools that the global community has at its disposal to solve these issues are inadequate and the idea of the nation-state is perhaps the biggest obstacle to solving this. The nation state necessarily acts from territorial self-interest. Over time it has, however, recognised that there is a need for greater co-operation and partnership with other nation states. Nevertheless, the mechanisms created to facilitate this, treaties and conventions, G-8 meetings, intergovernmental conferences, and 40 or so international institutions often termed global multilaterals, while useful in themselves have not been able to decisively tackle urgent, inherently global issues.

Some global commons issues are recognised by existing treaties, though some of these treaties have not been ratified by all states and holdouts render other treaties ineffective. 240 environmental treaties launched since 1960 have hardly made a dent. One example is the UN treaty on marine fish management that fell before it had a chance to work as 15 of the top 20 fishing nations did not ratify it. Global issues to do with sharing our humanity are not represented well within the treaty system; commitments made in the 1970s to give 0.7 per cent of GDP

to developing countries have still not been fulfilled. The third type of global issues have only very politically been recognised in the international system at all.

The inadequacy of the treaty and convention system helps explain why other forums such as intergovernmental conferences and global multilaterals also receive

**We need more intelligent alliances between public institutions, private bodies and civil society if we are to meet today's global challenges.**

attention. Though certainly welcome and effective to some degree intergovernmental conferences and similar events have serious weaknesses as they are not focused and fail to follow up through action afterwards. Meetings of the G-8 and comparable mechanisms also fail to meet the challenge as the focus here is too broad.

The predecessor of the G-7 ended up creating various task forces and ministerial forums to cope with the issues it was addressing. Many of these new groups are created in response to global problems that already exist. Contrast this to negotiations in 1944 that established the Bretton Woods institutions where 44 rich and poor nations came together to find proactive solutions to the global issues of the times. In addition, by its nature the G-8 meetings are exclusive and even larger

groups such as the G-20 do not include all the relevant countries needed to properly understand the complexity of the issues they are attempting to deal with.

Global multilaterals have significant capacities to contribute towards solving global problems because of the unique knowledge at their disposal gathered from their worldwide operations. However because of the shareholder pattern of these institutions (often including 190 nations of the world) and the poor resources provided, decisions are not easy to make.

In short, the current set-up of global governance institutions we have today does not seem able to truly tackle these 20 issues in 20 years. The diversity of these issues demand a closer connection between the public and bureaucracy; dialogue is vital and needs to be given a higher priority.

### Networked Governance

The nature of today's global dilemmas calls for an alternative idea about how these can be solved. An alternative idea is networked governance. This has two defining features that address the inadequacies of traditional global governance architecture. In a general context, it asks that hierarchy and bureaucracy take second place to resolving global problems, if we are going to get to the core of those global issues that need real attention.

First, it means that excessive layers of incompetence and ritual be minimised by basing membership of any new global problem-solving vehicle on knowledge. It also means that the framework needs to be open and transparent not distant and ready to

engage with contributions from outside of the vehicle where they have value in helping to solve global issues.

Second, the time taken to get these vehicles started and delivering on their objectives must be quick as time is of the essence. The consequences of the most pressing global dilemmas over the next ten years requires that these new devices need to move fast, be geared to taking action and producing norms that influence national governments by directly affecting their reputations.

Moving towards networked governance means that in practice there is a need to create a new form of international public space through which global issues networks can deal each of the 20 global issues above.

### Global networks should appeal to universal values, and seek to resolve global problems in the spirit of global citizenship.

Creating these global issue networks need not be problematic but involves at least three phases: a constitutional phase, a norm-producing phase and an implementation process.

The constitutional phase would last for about one year and see the world's global institutions facilitating the creation of a global network. The network itself would be formed of representatives of national governments from developed and developing countries, for example, civil servants with the right expertise. Individuals from the international civil society organisations with detailed

knowledge of the issues would also be seconded to the global network, as could experienced leaders from the business arena who have serious knowledge and interest in the issues. The most informed global multilateral body might take the lead facilitators on each network with representatives from civil society and business also helping to facilitate. This first phase should last for a year and the network would need to adopt its own code of conduct, raise finance, organise the knowledge base and link with other global issue networks to make sure best practice and ideas on communication are spread.

Once membership of the network has increased, the norm-producing phase should begin and might last for two or three years. During this phase, the goal is for the global issue network to produce norms, standards and work towards policy recommendations. If the right solutions are to be found, then it is imperative that members of the network deliberate as global citizens, sharing their skills and expertise in each of the policy areas within this context. Discipline is key here as the challenge is to mesh together the different areas of knowledge of each global network member.

The global issue network should appeal to universal values as a way of engaging all in the debate and policy prescriptions. By the same token, these fundamentals should strive for a rough consensus, which means agreeing on the fundamentals to proceed with the debate. If they are to work, the networks need to look to the longer term. Public dialogue is important and each network would establish on the side an electronic

town meeting to help many interested participants reach a rough consensus via polling. Furthermore, to help with the evidence base of the knowledge required, an independent expert-panel could serve as an additional adjunct.

At this stage of the process, the aim is to examine the issues, define the major elements and map out the causal and remedial factors. In addition, the network will need to be clear about how much time is actually left to tackle the issue at hand. The beneficial impact that resolving the issue would have for our children if it is tackled at the planetary level also needs to be considered, as well as a detailed account of the scenario in 20 years time.

The final product of this phase would be detailed norms specified for national governments, multilateral institutions, NGOs and business. In the case of nation-states the norms on each issue, define what government should pass national legislation on and what pre-existing treaty they should ratify and execute.

The implementation phase needs to be tough if it is to be effective. At this stage of the process, the more the network is like an active NGO the better. The norms being produced, which would involve an even larger membership, the goal now is to affect the reputation of all relevant actors.

The third phase would last for 10 years or more and the global issues network would start rating states and other global actors on how well they are actually implementing established norms. However, rating should also be positive and networks could rate global actors according to who made the strongest improvements year on year. It should be emphasised that

these norms are not legislative and only have moral authority. Ultimately it depends on each global actor to consider their reputation in the decisions they make. The strength of the global issues network is based on how well it can wield this power through exposure and impact on reputation.

The media has a role to play here and can help in a positive sense to put these issues on the agenda where global actors are not meeting established norms. Regard for reputation can help shape behaviour. One could even imagine that multi-issue ratings for all countries could be developed. The added advantage here is that it sharpens the distinction

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between those who are following norms and free riders that do not. A broader definition of 'roguehood' is implied in all this and could have a powerful impact.

Global issues networks have a number of distinct advantages in comparison to the current mechanisms we have. Firstly, global issues networks are faster and work in the immediate context. They push the international system to respond at a much quicker pace than is the case now. Each network will look at the issues as they are and identify what is the best way of resolving these. Urgency is the key to driving the agenda forward. Second, establishing these networks means designing policies that have application at a global level. It was Jurgen Habermas who observed that the most serious obstacle to achieving



this was the absence of a global culture or global political ethos.<sup>1</sup>

By their very nature, global issue networks can help move beyond this obstacle. Global citizenship is more likely to develop where each issue is dealt with specifically, rather than across the board. Third, a framework that is open would engage a wide variety of people from across the world through polling, electronic participation in the rating process and electronic town halls. A new kind of legitimacy would emerge as deliberations between policy-makers,

of government, civil society and business has to work out how all can work together. The role of Internet technologies in engaging the public is also key. Imagination, ambition and vision are needed. The next twenty years are critical. We do not have time to re-invent the existing international system and the concept of territorial nation-states – but we certainly have ways to put them under greater pressure to solve global issues faster, and better. Progressive politics should take a direct interest in pushing for such alternative ideas.

## Imagination, ambition and vision are needed. Networked governance is essential at this time.

business, civil society and the public takes places. Global issue networks would seek to work with the grain of innovation and existing multilateral institutions, not against these. They are both hard and soft, using the sledgehammer of ratings and reputational effect to achieve change. The current institutional set-up is essential to helping establish global issue networks as they require national legislatures to pass legislation and enforce the treaties and the norms they produce.

Establishing global issue networks will not be a bed of roses and ambiguity and controversy are likely. We have the opportunity to tackle the most pressing global dilemmas of our age. The idea of networked governance is essential at this time and the benefits that such networks could help these address problems with speed and flexibility. New thinking about the place

<sup>1</sup> Jurgen Habermas, *Die Postnationale Konstellation: Politische Essays* (Frankfurt-on-Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1998).



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