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Global Issues Networks: Desperate Times Deserve Innovative Measures

Traditional institutions are incapable of addressing the growing list of complex global issues. Environmental concerns top the chart. Despite a near consensus on the peril of global warming, the 1992 Earth summit in Rio, and the soon-to-be-ratified Kyoto Protocol, developed countries have made little tangible progress curbing carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions. Tropical forests continue to recede at an annual rate of 1 percent. At the current rate of biodiversity loss, one in five mammal species and one in eight bird species are already threatened with extinction, and fisheries are being depleted at a fast pace with no solution in sight. By 2020 one person in two on the planet will suffer from water shortages, yet global efforts thus far have been limited to merely raising awareness of the problem.

Wealth gaps continue to grow within and between countries. By 2020 the number of people living on less than two dollars a day may rise well over today's three billion unless the fight against poverty is massively stepped up. Yet, rich countries have reduced official aid programs by about 30 percent over the past 10 years. Efforts to improve the global financial architecture to promote greater financial stability and to reduce the likelihood of financial crises remain insufficient. Although technological developments, such as e-commerce and biotechnology, continue to enhance a greater number of nations' ability to meet twenty-first-century challenges, they also raise myriad questions that need to be addressed on the global level.

How the world deals with these global challenges over the next two decades, not the next half-century, will determine how well the planet fares for generations. The international problem-solving architecture today consists

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The Washington Quarterly • 26:1 pp. 17–33.

of national and multilateral institutions ill equipped to address these global threats. Instead, with a little imagination and initiative, innovative policy-making bodies called global issues networks can transcend the limits imposed by contemporary territorial and hierarchical institutions that were never constructed to address these inherently global challenges.

What on Earth Is ‘Inherently Global’?

In mid-1999, a group at the World Bank estimated that it was involved in more than 60 global issues. Other agencies and institutions—the United Nations Development Program and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, for example—and experts such as Wolfgang Reinicke, a pioneer in this area, are also looking at a wide range of transnational issues and governance problems.¹

As yet, however, no one has done a definitive job of identifying what makes certain issues inherently global, that is, insoluble outside a framework of global collective action involving all nations of the world. Instead, many problems that are multilateral but not inherently global—air pollution or acid rain in East Asia, the kinds of malaria endemic in Africa—are rashly declared global when they can be tackled regionally and nationally.

Furthermore, relatively little conceptual work has been done on how to categorize the various issues that fall within this wider context of “inherently global issues,” which is a bit alarming as this intellectual vacuum itself may be an obstacle to the design of new methods for global problem solving. An economists’ concept called global public goods has recently begun to invade this fledgling field. Although helpful in some ways, its use has done damage in others, mostly by alienating people by using abstract and jargonistic classifications rather than pragmatic, accessible terms. The underlying “goods” caption has also distracted many from the real question, which is the methodology of global problem solving, and focused them prematurely on aspects such as financing global public goods—aspects which are important but which should follow the question of how decisions should be made in the first place.

About 20 inherently global issues may actually exist, but within this wider context, these issues can be broken down into three broad categories. The first concerns cross-border effects on the physical confines of the world’s living space—what is often called the “global commons.” How should the nations and peoples of the world share the planet?

The second category involves social and economic issues of global concern. How should the world’s nations and peoples share their humanity? Solutions to these issues require global coalitions.

Figure 1: 20 Global Issues, 20 Years to Solve Them

Sharing our planet:

Issues involving the global commons

- Global warming
- Biodiversity and ecosystem losses
- Fisheries depletion
- Deforestation
- Water deficits
- Maritime safety and pollution

Sharing our humanity:

Issues whose size and urgency require a global commitment

- Massive step-up in the fight against poverty
- Peacekeeping, conflict prevention, combating terrorism
- Education for all
- Global infectious diseases
- Digital divide
- Natural disaster prevention and mitigation

Sharing our rulebook:

Issues needing a global regulatory approach

- Reinventing taxation for the twenty-first century
- Biotechnology rules
- Global financial architecture
- Illegal drugs
- Trade, investment, and competition rules
- Intellectual property rights
- E-commerce rules
- International labor and migration rules

The third group deals with legal and regulatory issues that must be handled globally because of free riders and leakages. How should the world share its rulebook? How those 20 or so issues that can be considered inherently global concerns for the next 20 years fall into these three categories is illustrated in Figure 1.²

This list is neither final nor comprehensive. Perhaps some of those topics should not be listed, or perhaps, and more likely, the number of actual global issues is closer to 25 or even higher. The number of inherently global issues, however, is not relevant. Rather, what is more important are the several defining characteristics that bring these issues together and qualify them as burning global issues.

**Global action, not
global legislation, is
the goal.**

- *Planetary*: Many of them have make-or-break implications for the world's common future and each of them, if not tackled, will greatly complicate the relationships among nation-states and peoples of this planet.
- *Urgency*: Every year lost in addressing these issues means several years of delay in getting them under control. Moreover, tackling these issues requires far-reaching, slow, deliberate changes—like shifting a tanker's course or reducing the speed of a locomotive.
- *Relative affordability over the long term*: Global warming, for example, could be tackled for a cost of less than 1 percent of the world's gross domestic product (GDP); fisheries could be protected and enhanced at the same time; aid's effectiveness in fighting poverty could be tripled by changes in approach; and armed conflicts could be more systematically prevented. More fundamentally, the monetary cost of remedying inherently global issues is minuscule relative to the much larger, long-term cost of not addressing them.
- *Costly in the short term*: These issues tend to be tough to solve because policymakers often instinctively believe the short-term costs outweigh long-term gains. This perception is especially true of those issues whose solutions imply high, short-term remediation costs while accruing benefits only over the very long term, those that might cost leaders and policymakers politically, and those that present more extreme technological challenges.
- *Neglect*: Aside from minimal, short-lived attention, the current international problem-solving architecture has not tackled any of these issues decisively and definitively.

Why Can't the World Solve Shared Problems?

Perhaps the greatest roadblock to dealing with these 20 issues is the territorial and hierarchical institutions that are supposed to solve them: the nation-states. Nation-states recognize the strength of their own self-interests and have acted historically to confine them through treaties and conventions. Nations have moved beyond this approach and created three more contraptions to attempt to address inherently global problems: extensive intergovernmental conferences, G-8-type groupings, and the 40 or so international institutions often termed global multilaterals. The international problem-solving architecture as it exists today thus has four parts, none of

which is very effective when it comes to seriously and proactively tackling inherently global issues—and tackling them fast.

TREATIES AND CONVENTIONS

Treaties and conventions can work well to address regional matters but are rarely effective on global issues. The ritualistic methods and glacial pace of global treaty making and ratification do not sit well with today's burning global issues.

Some treaties have generated results for the first category of inherently global issues—global commons issues—or those primarily addressing the environment. Yet, a significant number of these treaties are not ratified, including the Kyoto Protocol of December 1997, which will not include the United States even if others ratify it. Holdouts also render other treaties ineffective, such as the UN treaty on marine fish management, which entered into force in December 2001 and was crippled when 15 of the top 20 fishing nations failed to ratify it.

Perhaps even more crucial, a large number of treaties and conventions suffer from weak commitments or from slow and lax enforcement even when ratified. In particular, the so-called secretariats set up under many environmental treaties range from nonexistent to weakly funded; few have any enforcement power. The contrast between the either insufficient or nonexistent progress on virtually all global commons issues and the enormous number of environmental treaties and conventions—some 240, most of them dating from the last 40 years—speaks for itself.

Global issues in the second category—those that deal with social and economic challenges—present the opposite situation, with few treaties and conventions in place. Supposed commitments, such as the pledge made by developed countries in the 1970s to give 0.7 percent of their GDPs as official aid, have remained in limbo.

In the third category—global issues that require establishing some system of worldwide rules—about half the issues have not been addressed through international undertakings at all. Treaties and conventions have partially addressed some of them but with political difficulties that have made progress incredibly slow. Some labor-rights convention agreements signed more than 20 years ago, for example, are still not ratified.

At any rate, treaty making's limitations and slow pace help to explain why the other three parts of the international system—intergovernmental

Civil society and business have yet to be integrated into global problem solving.

conferences, G-8-type groupings, and global multilaterals—have moved to the fore to attempt to address global concerns, mostly during the second half of the twentieth century. A closer look at the remaining three, however, conveys the inadequacy of each of these approaches alone to meet global challenges over the next 20 years.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL CONFERENCES

Over the last three decades, the UN has mounted heroic rearguard battles in sustaining the pace of big conferences (e.g. Cairo on population, Copenhagen on social issues, Durban on racism) with each devoted to one particular topic of global importance. All nation-states participate, with each leader generally afforded only a few minutes for a statement. The sessions continue for about a week with some sort of declaration drafted beforehand and issued at the end. These massive, sporadic conferences have well-known shortcomings. They are too ritualistic, too long on declarations, and too short on follow-up mechanisms—often boiling down to little more than promises to look at the issue again five years down the line. (Kyoto became the Rio summit in 1992, or Rio+5; Rio+10 happened in Johannesburg this year.) These conferences are useful for raising awareness about global issues but weak on effective global problem solving.

G-8 AND SIMILAR GROUPINGS

Similar to intergovernmental conferences, the G-8 and comparable mechanisms do not provide strong responses to most global issues. The broad mandate the group sets for itself defines a lot of nominal power through which it mobilizes its members to take action, such as the calls for debt relief for the poorest countries, for resolution of the Kosovo crisis, or against financial havens—all achievements of the G-8 in the last few years.

The G-8's scope, however, is too broad. Recognizing in the 1980s that its mandate was too big and too loose, its predecessor—the G-7—began sprouting ministerial forums, task forces, and working groups. In the 1990s, Russia was assimilated, more or less, and the G-7 became the G-8 at Kananaskis in 2002. In 1999 the group begat a specialized offspring, the G-20—this time to pull in other emerging economies such as China, India, Mexico, Turkey, and Brazil in response to the global financial crisis.

In a way, the G-8's expansion is progress in itself. Yet, several limitations remain, including the way the G-8 and similar groups create task forces, working groups, communiqués, and other papers, almost always in reaction to problems that have already materialized. In 1944 the establishment of the Bretton Woods institutions—the World Bank and the International Mon-

etary Fund (IMF)—pulled together representatives of 44 rich and poor nations to brainstorm solutions to these problems proactively and effectively, not just define them. In contrast, “sherpas” negotiate the draft communiqués in the G-8 word by word several months in advance of summits, which are loaded with formal events and photo opportunities that leave little time for proactive brainstorming.

Furthermore, the G-8 is exclusive. China reportedly declined to participate in the Okinawa summit in the summer of 2000. Even in more expanded groupings such as the G-20, exclusiveness hurts. Reportedly, the G-20 was created to broaden the dialogue, providing the justification for why countries such as Brazil, Saudi Arabia, and others are included. Then, the Swiss and the Dutch (major actors on the financial scene) were excluded, even though the G-20 dealt mostly with crisis prevention and the global financial architecture.

These groups also often lack the knowledge necessary to deal with the complexity of most major global issues. The knowledge base of civil servants whom governments dispatch into such groupings will never be strong enough without the participation of civil society and business. The G-8 has yet to find an effective way to enlist those other sectors.

It is time to move from traditional hierarchical government to networked governance.

GLOBAL MULTILATERALS

Inherently global issues cannot be tackled alone by global multilateral institutions—international bodies that have global mandates and whose membership includes more or less all countries. These institutions include the UN’s agencies and programs (some 40 of them, such as the UN Development Program, the International Labor Organization, and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees), the World Bank and the IMF, and the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Created as part of the postwar world order, global multilaterals have significant capacities to contribute largely because they have become unique repositories of specialized knowledge gathered through worldwide operations over decades. Unfortunately, because these institutions are multilateral and thus owned and overseen by the world’s 190-odd nation-states, they cannot readily take on major global problem-solving initiatives on their own.

Moreover, most people have unreal expectations of the power of global multilaterals. Such institutions are often extremely poorly resourced and, at the same time, badly overstretched. In addition, a great number of them suffer from low staff morale these days as well.

In sum, none of the four parts of the current international problem-solving architecture looks very promising when it comes to the challenge of solving these 20 issues in 20 years. Although its constituent parts are doing useful things, this architecture was not designed for the kind of urgent global problem solving needed for intense change.

Finally, the distance is great between the population at large and the governmental officials who preside in all of these groupings—whether treaties, intergovernmental conferences, organizations such as the G-8, or global multilaterals. There is no real dialogue. This situation became glaringly obvious during the 1999 WTO meetings in Seattle and the 2001 G-7 summit in Genoa. Much of the soul-searching since then has been about that distance.

Networked Governance

These inherently global challenges and contemporary policymaking impracticalities call for an alternative concept to solve these issues: networked governance. This concept has two generic characteristics that directly address the limitations of the current international system.

First, bureaucracy and hierarchy must be minimized. Each global issue requires its own problem-solving vehicle so that the greater global issues challenge is unbundled. To minimize excessive layers of incompetence and ritual, membership in the problem-solving vehicle for any given issue should be strongly knowledge related. Furthermore, the architecture of the vehicle should be open rather than based around a hierarchy that creates distance from the people or is closed to alternatives proposed by outsiders. Intelligent input should be welcome when it can contribute to the solution of a global issue.

Second, start-up and delivery time must be fast. The world cannot afford to waste the time it takes to negotiate treaties, let alone ratify them by quorum. The projected severity of these issues in just 10 years necessitates that these vehicles aim not for global legislation but for global action outside of the slow-moving traditional public arena. These vehicles must operate in a space that moves faster—one that produces norms and influences nation-state behavior by directly affecting their reputations. Moreover, existing institutions should be utilized so these vehicles might harness the expertise, knowledge, and legislative power of governments and get the best out of existing multilaterals. Time is insufficient to establish new institutions and waste the capabilities of old ones.

To address global issues effectively, these two requirements call for a passage in global affairs from traditional hierarchical government to a kind of networked governance—specifically, the creation of a new form of interna-

tional public space through global issues networks, each focused on one urgent global issue among the list of 20.

The life cycle of a global issues network would entail three phases:

- the constitutional phase, when the network is convened and set in motion;
- the norm-producing phase, which would begin with a rigorous evaluation of options and alternatives; and
- the implementation phase, where the network assumes a rating role, using the norms generated by the network to exert influence on international actors by affecting their reputations.

Global multilateral institutions would become catalysts, not problem solvers.

Each network would be enduring, not transitory, allowing it to continue weighing on international reputations. Initially limited membership would increase as each network enters a new stage, continuously evolving over its lifetime.

THE CONSTITUTIONAL PHASE

This first phase need only last about one year or less, starting with an initial event such as an intergovernmental conference or, better yet to conserve time, a more informal event convened by a global multilateral whose focus and capacity best correspond to the issue at hand. That global multilateral—possibly a UN agency or one of the Bretton Woods institutions—would assume this role merely as a facilitator or catalyst, not as a problem solver.

Each network's inception would additionally enlist individuals drawn from three kinds of partners: (1) national governments of developed and developing countries that are especially concerned with, or experienced in, the issue and that can lend some of their most knowledgeable civil servants to the effort for a long period of time, in which clout would come not from the nation's GDP but from expertise on the issue; (2) international civil society organizations that can lend individuals with comprehensive knowledge of the issue and represent other elements of civil society; and (3) firms that, whether they are part of the problem or part of the solution, possess knowledge of the issue and are able both to represent other businesses and lend highly experienced business leaders to the effort.

More precisely, each network could start with three facilitators: the most informed and experienced global multilateral on the issue in the lead, with

one representative each from the network's civil society membership and business sector cofacilitating. Together, these facilitators would select and enlist the first members, organize early events, raise funds, and organize the knowledge base. As facilitators, they would, in effect, be at the heart of what the Internet world calls an "open-source project"—establishing and moderating open-horizon, permanent efforts spanning as many years as needed.

During the constitutional phase, each network would adopt its own code of conduct and also link with other global issues networks to share best practices on how to operate, organize, and communicate.

THE NORM-PRODUCING PHASE

In this next phase, with increased membership, the network would focus on producing norms, standards, and policy recommendations. Depending on the issue, this phase could last two or three years, maybe longer.

Methodologically, the effectiveness of these networks encourages, and depends upon, individual members to speak openly and honestly about the

issue at hand—linking it to their particular organizations, nations, or businesses—but requires that they then deliberate on the issue as global citizens. This challenge of representing various dimensions of knowledge and points of view requires discipline. Open-minded brainstorming and exploration of all options is essential. Thus, the burden falls largely on the individual members; one might join the network

as a representative of a business, government, or civil society, but once inside the network an individual must think and act as a citizen of the world, not as a staunch defender of any narrow interest. Members who prove incapable of this task would dial themselves right out of the equation. This requirement must be clearly spelled out in the network's own code of conduct and strictly enforced by its facilitators.

The methodology would also help create an environment where the network can get the most out of each member by making a constant appeal to universal values, not just in the broad sense in which the philosopher Kant meant it but in terms of the more specific values that are a prerequisite to the solution of the global issue at hand. People can behave as global citizens in such an environment. Research actually shows that in the right environment people can be extraordinarily fair (when it comes to allocating something scarce, for example) and can quickly come to see selfishness as extremely embarrassing.³

Some refer to norms as a kind of soft law.

An effective methodology for networked governance also requires that networks operate on the basis of a rough consensus. Already taking shape in the Internet world, this concept means that enough agreement on fundamentals exists to proceed to policy work or norm production—whatever the problem requires. Full consensus would take too long to achieve. These networks must be more comfortable in using such a work-in-progress concept, not a voting one where a member or a quorum may hold veto power.⁴

Finally, to help reach this rough consensus, each network would create a potentially vast electronic town meeting as an adjunct—aimed at enlisting the public in the network’s work through consultative polling. This undertaking would require harnessing the Internet’s huge mobilizing potential. Each set of alternatives regarding the issue would be polled electronically and the results would move the diagnostic or problem solving ahead, if only by an inch at a time. An independent expert panel might also serve as an additional adjunct; it should remain separate from the network so as to preserve scientific independence.

Substantively, with the help of its electronic town meeting and independent expert-panel adjuncts, each network would go through a sequence of tasks. First, examine the issue, define its major elements and subelements, map out the causalities, and outline the planetary downside. Second, determine how much time is left to address an issue and its subissues, based on the particular characteristics and urgency of the issue at hand. Third, forecast how our children would feasibly benefit 20 years from the present if the problem had been successfully tackled at the planetary level. The electronic town meeting would be crucial for this task, with polling focused on alternatives for describing each item in this stage. Fourth, based on this, extrapolate a detailed vision of the situation 20 years down the line, working backward to determine the intermediate steps and key players needed to realize that vision.

Fifth, draw up a set of norms or standards to set in motion the processes that will lead to the fulfillment of these intermediate steps and, as needed, recommend mechanisms to complement these norms such as funding facilities, monitoring systems, and intergovernmental regulatory setups.⁵ Sixth, determine the means by which norms are specified and conveyed to the various players including nation-states, businesses, multilaterals, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). For example, the network could define the norms by which nation-states should pass national legislation regarding the network’s focus issue or even enjoin countries to ratify or enforce relevant

**Implementation
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existing treaties. Networks might also specify norms for global business conduct and for global multilaterals operating in its particular field, regarding numerous aspects from funding to behavior.

Finally, launch the norm package, or the several norm packages, for a given issue through a high-profile event so that these norms serve as a highly specific, functional ethos for the entire global issue area in question.

THE IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

Some refer to norms as a kind of soft law. The implementation phase of global issues networks is designed so that norms directly regulate the behavior of international actors in a way that might be considered anything but soft.

Networks can define norms for governments, businesses, and multilateral institutions.

This third phase could last 10 years or more, again with greater membership. The network would, at this point, assume the role of a rating vehicle—evaluating countries and other international actors on how well they abide by the established norms or standards, perhaps even along the lines of the International Organization for Standardization's (ISO) 9000 practices. Networks would also positively rate players according to who

made the strongest improvements from one year to the next. The direct intention is to affect the reputations of all relevant players. Both the network and the electronic town meeting would now focus their efforts on how stakeholders implement norms. At this stage, the more the global issues network resembles an activist NGO the better.

Essential to remember, however, is that norms are not legislation. Their realization would hinge on the free decision of each country or business or multilateral—whether or not influenced by the threat of a tainted reputation—to enact conforming legislation or practices. Moreover, networks would have only moral authority, as opposed to any kind of regulatory authority, over representatives of the business and civil society sectors. The depth of a network's power would depend on how well it could wield that power through exposure, disclosure, and reputational effects. In short, global issues networks work by improving the reputation of players that abide by and promote established norms, as well as naming and shaming rogue players that violate or ignore them. Networks would, in all of this effort, be greatly aided by the media. The press loves league tables as much as those rated fear them, and global issues networks could provide quite a bit of copy.

ARE INTERNATIONAL ACTORS REALLY IMAGE CONSCIOUS?

Is there any evidence that regard for reputation can help guide behavior? Over the last two years, the Financial Action Taskforce's exposure of countries involved in money laundering has had an almost immediate salutary effect. An even clearer example is Indonesia, where government authorities lack enforcement mechanisms to deal with business's environmental violations. Instead, Indonesia created a five-tier ranking system for companies: from gold, for those businesses that go above and beyond compliance, to black, for egregious violators. Those companies that rank at the top get public applause while the worst offenders get six months to improve before their names and shortcomings are made public. For fear of public exposure, most of the worst offenders have scrambled to change their ways. Global issues networks can be expected to operate much in the same way on the global scene.

If issue-by-issue exposure were to prove insufficient, global issues networks could work together to produce multi-issue ratings for all countries, thereby sharpening the distinction between good norm-following nations and free riders that fail to abide by norms through national legislation or treaty ratification. This action could, essentially, expand the concept of rogue states in an intriguing way. The UN might even find a role in establishing and perhaps sanctioning these overall scores. Even without that step, however, a broader definition of "roguehood" could have considerable mileage.

Finally, besides engaging in rating activities, the networks would serve also in the third phase as an exchange for best practices, with electronic town meetings functioning as observatories and knowledge exchanges.

Criteria for Success

Global issues networks address four overriding themes that, in one way or another, could improve the current state of global problem solving.

SPEED

Global issues networks would operate on practical immediacy. What are the issues? How much time does the world have? What is the vision of a successful effort 20 years later? How would the world's nation-states get there? What are the options? What do polls convey about how the world feels about these options? Contrast this potential with the time lost in moral pontificating, presenting overly abstract statements, and making vacuous calls for action that characterize much of the record on global issues so far. Furthermore, the political energy and urgency generated by the networks will

pressure the existing international system to respond at a much faster pace than it would otherwise.

REDEFINING LEGITIMACY ON A GLOBAL SCALE

The German philosopher Jürgen Habermas observed that global governance means designing domestic policies for and at the level of the planet. At the same time, he pointed out the serious obstacle to doing this—the absence of a globally shared political ethos and culture, or in other words, a shared global identity.⁶ Global issues networks, as outlined here, can begin to overcome this obstacle on many levels.

First, mobilization begins with a shared concern because networks are issue specific. Global citizenship has a better chance of developing issue by issue than across the board. Second, an open architecture would engage people from all over the world and from all relevant constituencies by polling and encouraging electronic participation in rating rounds. Third, the virtual public space created by electronic town meetings would help to reduce the distance between people and policymakers, fostering civil society, civic responsibility, and democratic practice on a global scale.

The potential result would be a new kind of legitimacy—a horizontal legitimacy—emerging from joint deliberations, both across borders and throughout government, business, and civil society, by a large group of people deeply concerned with and knowledgeable about one issue. Horizontal legitimacy would not replace but rather would complement the vertical legitimacy of the traditional local-to-global electoral processes of nation-states, which deal with all issues but within the confines of a defined territory.

In a way, the horizontal legitimacy of global issues networks is designed precisely to pressure nation-states' traditional vertical legitimacy systems into performing better on urgent planetary issues. Performing better means acting faster and adopting more of a long-term, global-citizenship perspective than those normally taken by traditional systems. At the same time, horizontal legitimacy can be expected to impose accountability on the political systems of nation-states that is currently lacking on inherently global issues. Territorially minded traditional politicians, who are oriented toward the short term, would now have to reckon with something more influential and more focused on issues than the kudos or disapproval of their local constituencies. This development could even result in a new additional basis for judging politicians.

DIVERSITY

By design, networks would involve three parties that often have different vantage points: public, private, and international civil society organizations.

Contributions of expertise from such variegated players can provide a definite advantage over the current international architecture. Some global multilaterals' experiments with such trilateral partnerships (in areas that are not strictly global) show how fruitful this process can be. A trilateral partnership that was established a few years ago, for example, around the issue of traffic safety in the developing world quickly took more creative tracks than if each sector had tried to experiment with a solution alone.

Moreover, given the complexity of today's global issues, players from the private sector and international civil society organizations each have a clear advantage of global reach—and often of greater knowledge—over civil servants from national governments. Time and again, engaging global business leaders in long-term global thinking has been obviously easier than doing so with government leaders, who are bound by short electoral cycles or overwhelmed by the excessive number of issues they are supposed to address.

Civil society organizations possess similar knowledge advantages, particularly when they form international networks among themselves. One could expect the existence of global issues networks to prompt civil society players to form multiple networks just for the purpose of participation. Recent experience, such as that with debt relief or trade, shows how such networks can quickly acquire expertise that surpasses that of traditional experts.

Networks would take on the role of rating vehicles.

COMPATIBILITY WITH TRADITIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Global issues networks and their electronic town meetings are both hard and soft. They use the sledgehammer of ratings and reputational effects, which can be more potent than legislation or sanctions. At the same time, they are open, flexible systems. Global issues networks genuinely need the current four-part international setup, despite its shortcomings, as a foundation from which to build because governance needs government. For starters, a network will need a traditional intergovernmental conference to begin operations, and because it won't legislate, it will need nation-states' legislatures to pass laws or ratify and enforce treaties in line with the norms it sets. Global multilaterals will also be crucial to provide recommended funding or other facilities.

In effect, global issues networks are supplements in the business of leveraging the best out of the existing international architecture. This alternative is far better than creating entirely new institutions from scratch or endlessly working to reform existing ones—each option requiring the kind of time the world does not have.

A New Way of Thinking about Change

Never have there been such massive opportunities for improving the human condition and, at the same time, such uncertainty about our ability to grasp them. Protesters sense the rising anxiety and speak out. Many seek a dramatic change in the way the world addresses global problems, particularly after the U.S. decision to distance itself from the Kyoto Protocol and after the events of September 11. They sense problems with the way the planet is

Global issues networks can leverage the best out of the existing international architecture.

evolving and perhaps intuitively sense that, for many inherently global issues, time is running out.

The concept of networked governance—applied through global issues networks—could become viable at precisely this moment in time; the speed and flexibility of network action address the many issues at hand and the short time left to solve them. One should consider this solution improvised but less than perfect.

Global issues networks will not be a bed of roses. Messiness, ambiguity, corner cutting, and controversy should be expected. Nevertheless, more than a half-century ago, Karl Polanyi, one of the most insightful observers of major social change, mused, “Not for the first time in history may makeshifts contain the germs of great and permanent institutions.”⁷

What is needed is a little imagination and a different type of thinking—new thinking about how government, business, and civil society can and should work together to coax nation-states into passing legislation in the interest of the planet, not just of their own local constituencies. The world also needs new, Internet-inspired thinking to get people to contribute via new technology and to embrace something that can begin to look like global citizenship.

In short, the world needs out-of-the-box thinking and needs it deceptively quickly. Traditional institutions are just not getting the job done. The global community needs network-like setups that create, one global issue at a time, a horizontal, cross-border source of legitimacy that complements the traditional vertical representation processes and legitimacy of nation-states to address inherently global challenges.

Notes

1. See Wolfgang H. Reinicke, *Global Public Policy: Governing without Government?* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1998). Also see Wolfgang H.

- Reinicke and Francis Deng, *Critical Choices: The United Nations, Networks, and the Future of Global Governance* (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 2000).
2. See J. F. Rischard, *High Noon: 20 Global Problems, 20 Years to Solve Them* (New York: Basic Books, 2002). See also Inge Kaul, Isabelle Grunberg, and Marc A. Stern, eds., *Global Public Goods: International Cooperation in the 21st Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).
 3. See Linda Starke, ed., *State of the World 2001* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001).
 4. See "Regulating the Internet: The Consensus Machine," *Economist*, June 10, 2000. See also <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu> for discussions on consensus and governance, especially interviews with Joe Sims and John Perry Barlow.
 5. See Anne-Marie Slaughter, "Global Government Networks, Global Information Agencies, and Disaggregated Democracy," Harvard Law School, Public Law Working Paper no. 18.
 6. See Jürgen Habermas, *Die Postnationale Konstellation: Politische Essays* (Frankfurt-on-Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1998).
 7. See Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1980).