

An inclusive approach for addressing global challenges through coordination

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The large and growing number of international bodies is creating overlapped, and scattered efforts, especially as some lack the resources or the ability to implement and sustain their work. This paper examines how the Group of Twenty (G20) can become a platform for different organizations, including international non-governmental organizations and civil society, to cooperate on addressing global issues through an inclusive approach. It suggests how the G20 can play a role in streamlining the coordination process through steering committees to engage with relevant international and regional organizations and local stakeholders on issues requiring concerted action. This would help to avoid the duplication and fragmentation of efforts and to ensure resource sustainability.

Challenge

International organizations such as the United Nations (UN), the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) were established when leaders of the member states realized the need for a forum to meet, discuss, and agree on how to address global issues, current disasters and challenges, and common concerns. Regional organizations, such as the European Union (EU), the League of Arab States (Arab League), and the African Union (AU) and sub-regional organizations like the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), were also established to address the common issues within a particular region. In addition to these intergovernmental organizations, many international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) work on the same global issues. Subsequently, the current issue of the Yearbook of International Organizations published by the Union of International Organizations (UIA) contains over 38,000 active international bodies linked to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and approximately 1200 new organizations are added each year.^{[1],[2]}

The large and growing number of these international bodies is creating overlapped and scattered efforts, and some lack the resources or the ability to implement and sustain their work. In general, international organizations have long been constrained by financial problems and bureaucratic procedures. Leaders of international organizations have discussed the inadequate resources and the mismatch between available resources and mandates. Some international organizations, such as the AU and the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), appear to suffer from chronic underfunding. Others have a history of repeated funding crises brought about by unexpected partial withholding of member state contributions, such as the case for the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), or as a result of unforeseen demands on international organizations' budgets, such as a refugee crisis or a pandemic. Many of these organizations are relying more on trust funds and voluntary contributions (Goetz and Patz 2017).

To address current and expected global challenges, international and regional organizations have adopted strategies and programs that have common elements. For instance, the OIC-2025 Program of Action has 18 priority areas that include common elements with the UN's 17 SDGs,^[3] making it practical for these organizations to cooperate. However, the different structures, decision-making processes, mandates of these organizations, the need for consensus, the influence of numerous NGOs, and the diversity of interest among the member states make such cooperation cumbersome (Karns and Mingst 2004, 28).

This paper examines a method for the Group of Twenty (G20) to become a platform for the different organizations, including INGOs and civil society, for cooperation through an inclusive approach to address global issues. It suggests ways for the G20 to play a role in streamlining the process of coordination through mechanisms for engagement with relevant international and regional organizations and local stakeholders on issues requiring action. This would avoid the duplication and fragmentation of efforts and ensure resource sustainability.

Proposal

The objective of this proposal is to develop multilateral cooperation that builds on the commonalities among the stakeholders and benefits from their competitive advantage in addressing an issue, especially at the regional and national levels. While we live in a globalized world and are interdependent financially, culturally, and scientifically, each country is distinctive and different. For example, when the WHO had difficulty convincing and accessing communities for polio vaccination in three Muslim countries where polio is still endemic due to misguided religious beliefs about vaccination, it sought the cooperation of the OIC. Hence, the Islamic Advisory Group for Polio Eradication was established in 2014, comprising of leading Islamic institutions, religious scholars, technical experts, and academia from the Muslim world, leading the efforts in cooperation with the WHO and INGOs.^[4]

During the process of drafting policies and programs by international organizations, it is important to engage with the communities who will benefit from the policies being drafted to consider cultural, social, religious, and developmental differences. The power of intellectual and diplomatic soft power should not be undermined in mobilizing support. Non-governmental agencies constitute an integral part of promoting policies for social and economic development and buttress local security (House of Lords 2017).

Global challenges in need of global governance

Certain global challenges cannot be addressed by individual states or international organizations alone. Many regional and international organizations, private foundations, think tanks, and civil society organizations are working on the same global issues. This includes the G20 as an international organization that was created to address socioeconomic challenges. Each of these stakeholders has its strengths and competitive advantages, and limitations and weaknesses. Further, they face similar obstacles, including financial challenges, national sovereignty, and the dominance of certain states (Eberwein and Schemeil 2013).

These different stakeholders require strategic guidance, vision, and leadership, which can together achieve the focus, the coherence, and the coordination required to meet global challenges. The challenges that require such strategic guidance and inclusive coordination are changing demographics and economic balances; global interdependencies in trade, energy, health, migration, illicit drugs, environmental, and security areas; and the new and growing risks of financial imbalances, energy insecurity, climate change, and global pandemics (Bradford and Johannes 2007).

An inclusive approach

This paper proposes the formation of steering committees by the G20 to bring together representatives of international organizations, including financial institutions, G20 and non-G20 member states, NGOs, and think tanks. Each steering committee would tackle a specific challenge, such as poverty, climate change, or disease. The steering committees would guide policy setting, synergy, monitoring mechanisms, accountability, and transparency. They would also add value by clearing obstacles from the road to the successful implementation of a program or a project (Dolfing 2018). The main functions of the steering committees would be to provide strategic direction and support project managers (Pelham 2015). By acting as a coordinating and guiding bureau, the steering committees would ensure that the strategic objectives of the plans and programs being implemented to tackle a specific global challenge are on track. The committees would provide and mobilize support, whether financial or technical, to the executives leading the efforts.

While drafting this paper, the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) erupted as a global challenge, bringing the issue of international cooperation under urgent focus. The pandemic proved how exposed we are, tested the strength of our health systems, and demonstrated how dependent we are on each other. It also demonstrated the need for basic infrastructure and public services and the will of governments and international organizations to take urgent and extreme measures to save lives. However, it demonstrated the inability of any one country or one international organization to handle the crisis by itself. A mechanism is required to coordinate and effectively monitor, decide, and act quickly. The G20 is the right place to set up and host this mechanism because of its size (the number of member states makes it easy to

meet and act).

Furthermore, its members are representative of the different regions of the world of both developed and developing countries and are members of international and regional organizations. Hence, the G20 can play a role in mobilizing support. As it represents 80 percent of the world's economic output and two-thirds of the global population,^[5] the G20 is influential in sponsoring policies or goals. In this paper, we use the development of a steering committee to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic as an example.

General principles for providing guidance

The creation of any legitimate international body involves goals that include representation, effectiveness, a governance system, and the ability of the leaders to form coalitions to act (Bradford and Johannes 2007). The objective of setting up an international body is to provide strategic guidance, vision, and leadership. Therefore, when G20 leaders meet to address a specific global issue, crisis, or challenge, we suggest using steering committees that would coordinate the efforts and provide guidance and support for different stakeholders involved in the process. It is also important to consider global changes and developments, be it demographic, economic, technological, or other.

Representation stands out as one of the main factors when setting up a new international body or reforming an existing one (Bradford and Johannes 2007). It is important to provide an equal voice to all members and involve representatives of relevant international organizations, civil society organizations, think tanks, and research centers to enrich the outcome document and broaden the pool of ideas. This does not necessarily mean that they will all be part of the decision-making because too many opinions and inputs could create chaos and fragmentation. Therefore, the steering committees, whose members are representatives of the stakeholders, would provide regular reports and updates on the working plans for addressing an issue. They would analyze them, identify problem areas, and provide guidance, suggestions, and support to tackle the problems using a cohesive, integrated strategy and action plan. While the engagement groups in the G20, which address various issues and develop recommendations that are submitted to the G20 leaders, is a good mechanism for engaging different stakeholders, they are mainly consultative or expert groups. Going a step further and including their representatives in steering committees would ensure that they are fully involved in the process of decision-making, and therefore, have ownership.

By representation, we also refer to inclusivity, which also impacts effectiveness. An inclusive approach must be implemented earlier on in the process because the impact of the different policy options introduced will also be considered by all sides, thus minimizing future obstacles or resistance. Depending on the issue or challenge, a more representative steering committee can access previously overlooked knowledge, networks, and perspectives for improved outcomes and implementation. The inclusive process increases awareness across the policy cycle and helps orient institutions in support of inclusive outcomes. Actively including the community members in the design and implementation of policies that would directly affect them could increase their legitimacy and effectiveness and create ownership. The engagement of the stakeholders and citizens of the community being affected by the policies would help to access knowledge about needs, solutions, and impacts that could otherwise be overlooked (OECD 2015).

The effectiveness of the steering committees is in the context of transparency and accountability when reviewing reports, performing tasks and mandates, and assigning responsibility. In this regard, they must have joint clear goals and objectives with measurable results. They must follow up on the allocation and use of resources and plans for implementation to provide guidance and support.

A governance system is the establishment of policies and monitoring mechanisms for the implementation of the joint goals and objectives by the different stakeholders. This would enable the steering committees' members to evaluate the progress made, readjust the process if necessary, and report back regularly to the G20 leaders. During this process, external experts, civil society, and public engagement could also be involved to instill ownership and responsibility. Here, we once again stress the importance of inclusiveness. An inclusive process at this stage creates better circumstances for making informed public policy decisions but does not necessarily guarantee inclusive policy results. Involving different community representatives such as women, religious leaders, and youth groups in the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation process would lead to a more accurate and realistic view of the situation. Thus, decision-makers are enabled to make better and acceptable decisions and reduce the inequalities of opportunity and benefit that might arise from marginalization or lack of access (DESA 2009).

Forming coalitions: the steering committees should be able to seek the cooperation and advice of other bodies, especially regional organizations and civil society, if and when required. This is when local bodies in G20 and non-G20 members feel part of the process and are in control of the implementation. This also allows for the different levels of development and different forms of government and decision-making processes in mobilizing support to be included.

A suggested structure

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was an immediate need for the leaders of the G20 to meet and make decisions and take action. Saudi Arabia, as the Chair, decided to call for a virtual emergency meeting. It invited the WHO as the main organization relevant to this crisis. Financial organizations were also invited to the meeting because funding is pertinent to implementation. The International Labor Organization (ILO) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) were invited because of the economic aspects of the crisis. Each of these organizations was tasked with specific mandates, which they are expected to report on regularly.

This situation demonstrates that the G20 is the right place for the proposed steering committees because the Chair was able to call on the organizations most relevant to the crisis at hand, and agree with the G20 members on the recommendations. However, instead of being caught off-guard by an emergency, this proposal suggests that the system for setting up a steering committee is available to address a crisis as soon as it erupts. The proposed steering committees (two to five maximum) could be formed based on the most urgent issues with long-term repercussions, such as pandemics, climate change, and global recessions.

The number of members in the steering committee should not be too large, in order to maintain focus and flexibility; between 10 to 25 members would be reasonable. The membership composition (elected) of each steering committee is different depending on the issue, and it will continue for around four years. Subsequently, the composition could change, or the steering committee could be terminated if it is decided by the G20 leaders that it is no longer required. The country chairing the current G20 and five other countries from the G20 representing five different continents would be members. It could be possible to invite other non-G20 countries that are most affected by the issue of concern to participate in the meetings. For example, in the COVID-19 pandemic, the member countries could be the health ministers of Saudi Arabia as Chair and China, the USA, the UK, South Africa, Brazil, and the EU, and non-G20 countries such as Pakistan, Peru, Kazakhstan, and Egypt could be included. The international and regional organizations most concerned and relevant with the issue would also be members (such as the WHO, World Bank Group [WBG], International Monetary Fund [IMF], UN, Islamic Development Bank [IsDB], OIC, AU, and Arab League, and health and funding INGOs such as the Vaccine Alliance [GAVI] and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation). The level of representation of the members is executive with the ability to make decisions. The members could meet in person twice a year with regular updates and reports shared by email and uploaded on a platform to exchange views, discussions, and virtual meetings. Thus, the steering committee is akin to a coordination bureau with a minimum number of staff and a specific objective and issue to address.

Furthermore, in our proposal, the members of the steering committee to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic would coordinate and consult with the concerned national and local organizations and private sector and civil society organizations who are not members of the steering committee. For example, the WHO would coordinate with pharmaceutical companies, relevant private foundations, INGOs, and regional civil society organizations. Thus, they would form coalitions. They could also meet together as members of the steering committee (for example, the WHO, WBG, IMF, UN, IsDB, and AU) on an ad hoc basis to update and coordinate their initiatives and actions. They can establish working groups and task forces that include external experts and civil society organizations to implement or follow up on activities.^[6]

The objective of the steering committees is to change the approach to decision-making and the channels of communication. They would achieve this by strengthening direct cooperation and coordination between the different stakeholders through better allocation of resources for targeted goals, and more flexible processes and monitoring of progress. The agenda of the meetings would be to overcome systemic barriers to the implementation of existing programs; to identify and promote incentives to advance coherence, complementarity, and coordination between the different stakeholders; and to review good practices and lessons learned. The steering committees could also assist in guiding regional approaches and strategies to foster better response and preparedness and mobilize global action and support.

The overall objective of establishing the steering committees for cooperating on global challenges is to develop long-term plans and goals that are based on coordination, representation, and inclusivity, rather than focusing on short-term quick wins that could compromise or sacrifice larger efforts.

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Disclaimer

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Appendix

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[2] . The Yearbook of International Organizations, Global Civil Society & the UN Sustainable Development Goals. 2020. <https://uia.org/s/sdg/en>

[3] The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). https://www.oic-oci.org/page/?p_id=302&p_ref=106&lan=en

[4] .Islamic Advisory Group (IAG). <http://www.iag-group.org/home>

[5] . G20 website <https://g20.org/en/about/Pages/whatis.aspx>

[6] . An example of a steering committee is the UN Joint Steering Committee to Advance Humanitarian and Development Collaboration (<https://www.un.org/jsc/content/joint-steering-committee>). It consists of senior executive officials from various UN organizations working on humanitarian and development programs to empower and support resident coordinators and country teams and act as an interface between the UN and national governments. The agenda of the meetings include methods to overcome barriers to implementation, identifying and promoting collaboration and coordination within and between development and humanitarian activities, and reflecting on progress toward achieving key milestones. Another example is The UNECE Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development (<https://www.unece.org/environmental-policy/education-for-sustainable-development/about-the-strategy-for-esd/steering-committee.html>). Here, the members are designated by the governments of the UNECE member states and include representatives of the environment and education sectors, in addition to representatives of international organizations and NGOs who are invited as observers. However, this Steering Committee constitutes the principal decision-making body for the actions on the Strategy for ESD in the UNECE region. It is responsible for providing guidance and strategic direction for the implementation of the Strategy, and reviews the progress of its implementation.

Existing Initiatives & Analysis