An Inclusive Approach to Tackling Global Challenges

Maha Akeel (Asbar World Forum)
June 24, 2020 | Last updated: December 10, 2020  Tags: Multilateralism

This Policy Brief is offered to the Saudi T20 process, as a recommendation to the G20 in 2020.

People need an international system to address security of many kinds and global challenges, but internal disputes or conflict of interests among the member states have hampered in many occasions an active or desired response. This policy brief will address these challenges and suggest ways for the G20 to be more effective and dynamic by having mechanisms for engaging and coordinating with relevant international and regional organizations and local stakeholders. It proposes for the G20 to form steering committees to address specific challenges, such as poverty, climate change, or disease, or to reform an international organization, and set target goals, monitoring mechanism, accountability and transparency.

Challenge

International organizations are established at a particular point in history when leaders foresaw the need for a forum where they can meet, discuss and agree on how to address global issues, current disasters and challenges, and common concerns. Regional organizations have also been established for a narrower and specific scope and mandate. The trend of creating more such regional bodies as well as alliances that are able to tackle region-specific issues is an indication of the ineffectiveness of the international bodies and the erosion of their influence. This in addition to the diminishing political will and funding to support these international bodies.

People need an international system to address security of many kinds and global challenges, but internal disputes or conflict of interests among the member states, in addition to concerns over national sovereignty, have hampered in many occasions an active or desired response leading to further deterioration of the situation and/or unilateral action. Furthermore, this situation exposed them as being fragmented, unrepresentative, and ineffective as well as leading to a decline in their legitimacy (Bradford and Johannes, 2007).

To address current and expected global challenges, international organizations tried to reform their operations, but most of their reform processes focused on administrative and structural reforms and downsizing staff when it should have focused on changing approaches, decision-making procedures and channels of communication. Looking at the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and other international organizations as an example of attempts to reform that somehow failed, this paper will examine ways for the G20 to be inclusive and take a coordinating approach to tackling global issues.

In general, international organizations have been constrained by financial problems and bureaucratic procedures. People have become disenfranchised, disappointed and frustrated with their performance. The reform process underwent by some organizations did not involve or engage with non-governmental agencies and the public. The process was at the official level, adding to the distance, lack of confidence and disenchantment between the people and the organization. Usually, a main promise made during the reform process is to make the organization less "bureaucratic” with bloated overhead costs and ineffective operations and to try to be more personal, dynamic and effective (Hanrieder, 2016). The result most often fails short of achieving that.
For example, the OIC went through a reform process in 2005 and adopted a new charter and program of action (Unay, 2018) and established new departments and bodies under its umbrella (Colakoglu, 2013). However, although during the reform process it sought the opinion and contributions of a select number of prominent figures as wise experts, overall it was still a closed process that involved only official government representatives who finally made all the decisions which reflected their interests.

Other international organizations, such as the UN and the WTO that attempted a reform, also fell in many instances into bureaucratic structures that undermined their original goals. This policy brief will address these reform obstacles and suggest ways for the G20 to be more effective and dynamic by having mechanisms for engaging and coordinating with relevant international and regional organizations and local stakeholders on issues requiring concerted action, to avoid duplication and fragmentation of efforts or slow and ineffective response and ensure resource sustainability.

Proposal

The objective of the proposal is to have multilateral relationships that are based on more than trade and security aspects. We are a global village, connected by all kinds of travel, trade and communication means, and are interdependent financially, culturally, scientifically and in every other way even when we think we are distant, closed and self-sufficient. It is therefore important to include such components as cultural, social, and educational engagement among the peoples. The power of intellectual and diplomatic soft power should not be undermined (House of Lords, 2017). In today’s interconnected world, the influence of social media in shaping opinion, mobilizing support and pressuring decision-makers is an important factor to consider in all strategies and policy procedures. Non-governmental agencies are also an integral part of promoting social and economic development and buttress local security (House of Lords, 2017). Hence, traditional ways of discussing issues, reforming organizations and presenting solutions are no longer valid.

Global Challenges in Need of Global Governance:

There are global challenges where it is clear that individual states or international organizations cannot address alone. Many regional and international organizations as well as private foundations, think tanks and civil society are working on the same global issues such as diseases, terrorism and climate change. The G20 itself is another international organization that was created to address socioeconomic challenges. Each of these stakeholders has its strengths and competitive advantage but also has its limitations and weaknesses, and they face almost the same obstacles including financial, national sovereignty and dominance of some states.

What these different stakeholders need is strategic guidance, vision and leadership, which when taken together these factors can achieve the focus, coherence and coordination required to meet global challenges (Bradford and Johannes, 2007). Among the challenges that need such high level of guidance and coordination are the changing demographics and economic balances; the global interdependencies in trade, energy, health, migration, illicit drugs, environmental and security areas; and the new and growing risks in financial imbalances, energy insecurity and global warming, and threats of global pandemics.

Reform Initiatives That Did Not Go Far Enough:

Several international organizations attempted reform initiatives to be able to address global challenges, including the UN, IMF, World Bank, G8, WTO and WHO. In most cases they stumbled in achieving their objectives of reform due to disagreements among the members about the agenda of reforms, the scope and the proposed reforms.

Taking the example of the reform process of the OIC in more detail, despite some restructuring and redrafting of its priorities, it became apparent that several aspects were not included in the reform. Among them, the OIC still lacks the ability to act quickly especially during emergencies and conflicts by having the means to detect, raise warning signs, analyse, follow up and recommend solutions. It needed mechanisms for conflict resolution and to strengthen the political process and coordination with humanitarian, cultural and social agencies as well as establishing mediation and peace building mechanisms. It was also unable to make use of the power of youth, women, civil
as well as establishing mediation and peace building mechanisms. It was also unable to make use of the power of youth, women, civil society and new communication technology. The most glaring defect is the non-binding nature of its resolutions and decisions, which restrains the ability of its members to act in unity and to implement its resolutions. The 57 member states hailing from four different continents must make decisions by consensus, which prolongs the process of decision-making and makes timely responses to events difficult (Colakoglu, 2013). Numerous reasons were given to OIC’s underperformance in the international scene including conflicting national interests and disagreements between its member states, which made collective decision-making difficult; endemic weakness of coordination mechanisms among the plethora of OIC institutions; structural problems in transmitting member-states driven initiatives into bureaucratic action plans; and institutional capacity to elicit financial contributions for running long-term projects (Unay, 2018). The member states are deeply aware of the need for swift and comprehensive reform to increase the legitimacy and efficacy of the OIC. However, the debates have been mainly focused on the priorities, modalities and scope of the institutional reform process rather than on the underlying weaknesses and problems of the means and capacity of operations and decision-making.

**An Inclusive Approach:**

To learn from the experience of the OIC and other international organizations such as the UN and WTO that attempted to introduce reforms in order to address global challenges and failed to meet expectations, this paper proposes for the G20 to form a steering committee that brings together representatives of international organizations, including financial institutions, as well as member states, NGOs, and think tanks to tackle specific challenges, such as poverty, climate change, or disease, or to reform an international organization. The steering committee will provide guiding policy setting and synergy, monitoring mechanism, accountability and transparency. A steering committee adds value by clearing obstacles from the road to successful implementation of a program or a project (Dolfing, 2018). The main functions of a steering committee are to give strategic direction and to support the project manager (Pelham, 2015). By acting as a coordinating and guiding bureau, the steering committee ensures that the strategic objectives of the plans and programs being implemented by the various stakeholders to tackle a specific global challenge are on track and to provide and mobilize support, whether financial or technical, to the executives leading the efforts.

As we were 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 how dependent we are on each other. It also showed the resolve of the human spirit to overcome and survive, the need for basic infrastructures and public services, and the will of governments and international organizations to take urgent and extreme measures to save lives. However, it clearly demonstrated the inability of any one country or one international organization of handling the crisis by itself. A mechanism is needed to coordinate and to effectively monitor, decide and act quickly. In this paper, we will take the example of the coronavirus pandemic for setting up a steering committee to deal with the pandemic.

**General Principles for Providing Guidance:**

The creation of any legitimate international body involves some main goals including representation, effectiveness, a governance system and the ability for 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 the G20 leaders meet to address a specific global issue, crisis or challenge, we suggest that they set up a steering committee that would coordinate the efforts and provide guidance and support, keeping in mind who are the different stakeholders in order to involve them in the process and to take into consideration the global changes and developments, be they 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 give equal voice to all the member states to express their views and concerns, and to involve in the conversation representatives of relevant international organizations and civil society as well as think tanks and research centres in order to enrich the outcome document and broaden the pool of ideas. That does not necessarily mean they will all be part of the decision-making because too many opinions and inputs could create chaos and fragmentation. Therefore, establishing a steering committee that is representative of the main stakeholders would have regular reports and updates from the stakeholders on the working plans for addressing an issue, analyze them, identify problem areas, and provide guidance, suggestions and support to tackle these...
plans for addressing an issue, analyse them, identify problem areas, and provide guidance, suggestions and support to tackle these problems in a cohesive integrated strategy.

- By representation we are also talking about inclusivity because that will also affect effectiveness. The earlier in the process an inclusive approach is followed the better 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 better access previously overlooked knowledge, networks and perspectives for improved outcome and implementation. An inclusive process is important to give all segments of society who have a stake in the issue being discussed access to the decision-making in order to better reflect their needs and aspirations, both in the policy making and in the service delivery. The inclusive process increases awareness across the policy cycle and helps orient institutions in support of inclusive outcomes. They can be instrumental in preventing control or influence by powerful special interest groups as well as the dominance of informal and often illegal processes, e.g. corruption, over formal and open ones. Bringing citizens actively on board in the design and implementation of policies could also increase their legitimacy and effectiveness, and create the feeling of ownership by citizens. The engagement of citizens and stakeholders helps to access knowledge about needs, solutions and impacts that could otherwise be overlooked (OECD, 2015).

- Effectiveness of the steering committee is in the sense of transparency and accountability when reviewing reports, performing tasks and mandates, and assigning responsibility. In this regard, they need to have joint clear goals and objectives with measurable results and follow up on the allocation and use of resources and the plans for implementation in order to provide guidance and support.

- A governance system is the establishment of policies and means of monitoring the implementation of the joint goals and objectives by the different stakeholders so that the steering committee members can 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 instil ownership and responsibility. We again here stress on inclusiveness. An inclusive process at this stage creates better circumstances for making informed public policy decisions, but again do not necessarily guarantee inclusive policy results. However, by involving the different segments of society in the monitoring and evaluation would lead to a more accurate and realistic view of the situation, thus enable the decision-makers to make a better and acceptable decision and reduce the inequalities of opportunity and benefit.

- Forming coalitions: the steering committee 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 even at the grassroots level feel part of the process and are in control of the implementation. This also allows for taking into consideration the different levels of development in the G20 members and the different forms of government and decision-making process.

### A Suggested Structure:

Going back to the example of the coronavirus pandemic, there was an immediate need for the leaders of the G20 to meet and make decisions and take action. Saudi Arabia, as Chair, made the decision to call for an emergency virtual meeting. It invited the WHO as the main organization relevant to this crisis, which is exactly in line with our proposal that depending on the issue at hand to involve the relevant international and regional organizations in the decision-making. Financial organizations were also invited to the meeting because funding is always pertinent to implementation, as well as the ILO and OECD because of the economic aspects of the crisis. Each of these invited organizations were tasked with specific mandates which they are expected to report on regularly.

This is almost the structure of the proposed steering committee, but instead of being reactive in response to an emergency, the proposal suggests that such steering committees are set up in anticipation of and proactive in addressing a crisis before it becomes an emergency. Furthermore, in our proposal, the invited organizations who are members of the steering committee to tackle the coronavirus pandemic would not only coordinate with concerned national and local organizations (for example, the WHO would coordinate with health ministries, pharmaceutical companies, relevant private foundations and civil society), in other words form coalitions, but they will also meet together as members of the steering committee (the WHO, ILO, OECD, WBG and other relevant international and regional organizations) on an ad hoc basis to update and coordinate their initiatives and actions. They can establish working groups and task forces to implement or follow up on activities.

It is important that the number of members in the steering committee is not large to maintain focus and flexibility; between 10 to 20 member would be reasonable. The membership composition (elected) change depending on the issue. Only the country chairing the G20
members would be reasonable. The membership composition (elected) changes depending on the issue. Only the country chairing the G20 and five other countries from the G20 representing five different continents would be members, with the possibility of inviting other non-G20 countries that are most affected by the issue of concern to participate in the meetings. The international organizations most concerned with the issue would also be members, with the possibility of inviting relevant international and regional organizations. The level of representation of the members is executive with 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 for exchange of views, discussions and virtual meetings. Thus, the steering committee is not an extra layer of bureaucracy but rather a coordination bureau with minimum number of staff.

The objective of the steering committee is to change the approach to decision-making and the channels of communication by cutting down on the layers of bureaucracy and decision-making process through strengthening cooperation and coordination between the different stakeholders, better allocation of resources, more flexible process and monitoring of progress. The agenda of the meetings is to consider overcoming systemic barriers to implementation, identify and promote incentives to advance coherence, complementarity and coordination between the different stakeholders and review good practices and lessons learned. The steering committee could also assist in providing guidance on regional approaches and strategies to foster better response and preparedness as well as mobilize global action and support.

The overall objective of establishing the steering committees for solving global challenges is to have long-term strategies and goals that are based on cooperation, representation and inclusivity rather than focusing on short-term quick-wins which could compromise or sacrifice the bigger efforts.

References

   More Information

   More Information

   More Information

4. Dolfing, Henrico (2018), How to Establish an Effective Steering Committee (And Not a Project Governance Board), henricodolfing.com
   More Information

   More Information

   More Information

7. Joint Steering Committee to Advance Humanitarian and Development Collaboration
   More Information


    More Information

    More Information

13. The UNECE Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development
More Information

More Information

Existing Initiatives & Analysis