

The G20: Where to next?

An experiment in institutional innovation

By [Inge Kaul](#)

The present G-20 was born out of necessity and under pressure from the 2008 world financial crisis. Although the emerging new world powers, notably the BRICS states, had for some time expressed dissatisfaction with their marginal involvement in meetings like the G-8 summits, their concerns found a response only when it became more and more inevitable for the conventional major powers to reach the conclusion that many of today's global policy challenges, including international financial regulation, can no longer be resolved effectively by any one nation or group of nations acting alone. These challenges call for international cooperation.

So, the present Leaders' G-20 started as a forum for fostering a global response to the global financial crisis.

A lengthening agenda

Yet, when meeting in Seoul, South Korea, in November this year, the G-20 leaders will consider a lengthened agenda. In addition to financial stability issues, it will especially include a wide gamut of development concerns, ranging from reducing maternal mortality, fostering education, developing human resources for the private and public sectors, and assuring food security to issues like physical and institutional infrastructure building

and the promotion of private investment in developing countries. Some even suggest a new development paradigm of inclusive growth might emerge from the Seoul summit.

The host country, Korea, has been a strong advocate for the inclusion of development into the G-20 agenda because the country's leaders are convinced that they have a lot of valuable development experience to share. Additionally, addressing the existing global development gap might enhance the Group's legitimacy in the eyes of the 170 some countries that are not members of the G-20.

Waning leadership?

No doubt, the recent summit meeting at the United Nations on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) showed all too clearly how far away the world still is from attaining the Goals by 2015.

Development issues deserve decisive action and so do many other global concerns, notably climate change, energy policies, food and cyber security, and migration.

But, a lengthening of the agenda to be considered at G-20 summit meetings could have the effect of pressing assembled world leaders to consider a broad gamut of concerns briefly—but without sufficient focus to generate concrete follow-up action and *lead* real change.

With an expanded agenda, will leaders have enough time to check whether they have lived up to past commitments? For example, will the Seoul meeting leave room for assessing how far we have come in forging a global, concerted response to the 2008 financial crisis?

Moreover, filling the leaders' agenda with too many concerns may leave insufficient time for developing a common, shared vision of a better world in the future, say by 2050, and how we could get there.

Because of the many crises we have faced lately, such envisioning of how

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to realize and benefit from the many promises that the world's opportunities hold, has in recent years been receding further and further into the background of policy dialogues.

There is thus a risk that the G-20 will suffer from the same weakness that marks many other multilateral organizations and debates: that everyone's “pet topic” finds mention - often without translating into new, decisive policy action. The predecessor of the G-20, the G-8, suffered from such an agenda overload.

Towards G-20 Plus: Adding Issue G's

Let us assume that the G-20 leaders do in fact want to be world leaders and that the lengthening of the Group's agenda is not just a way of distracting our - the global public's - attention away from earlier commitments. That is, unrealized promises are not simply abandoned because the worst of the crisis that had put them on the agenda has passed and a new crisis is grabbing the political and media spotlight. If that is the case and the G-20 is at the same time to maintain its leadership capacity, a way out of this agenda dilemma needs to be found. One possibility could be to complement the leaders' G-20 forum with several other G-type bodies each focused on a specific global challenge like mitigation and adaptation to climate change, fostering energy security, supporting failed and failing states and other development issues, enhancing global disaster preparedness and disease prevention, enabling conflict resolution and peace building, guaranteeing food security, and



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ensuring international financial stability (which, of course, was the topic that the original G-20 addressed before its upgrading to the present leadership forum).

These issue Gs could meet at the ministerial level with varying compositions depending on the issue they consider. They could be tasked with finding breakthrough agreements

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on issues where international negotiations are stalled. They could also explore new, neglected issues, but their primary responsibility would be to find breakthrough policy options, wherever possible in close collaboration and consultation with all stakeholders, especially existing multilateral technical agencies and advisory bodies, as well as processes such as the climate change negotiations.

Only when issues cannot be resolved without the special attention of G-20 leaders should they be brought to their attention - not to address nitty-gritty technical details but for decision-making on possible tipping points and the opening of policy doors to possible compromise solutions.

Put differently, it is important to avoid an over-centralization of policymaking and an overloading of the leaders' agenda, lest their capacity to exercise genuine leadership suffer. This could be achieved by creating the proposed second-generation G-20: a G-20 *Plus* composed of the leadership G-20 plus issue-specific Gs to give the former a strong, solid support base and free its time and attention for the big leadership issues.

Fitting the Issue G-20 Model into the Future Multilateral System

Although the existing multilateral agencies, like those of the UN system, have had their successes, and in many respects continue to play important roles, it is nevertheless becoming increasingly clear that the present multilateral system requires fundamental reform. What it seems to

be missing is precisely what is to be added through the Issue G-20s: a more productive balance between representativeness and decisiveness of international decision-making - to resolve existing problems in an effective, efficient and equitable manner. The importance of such decision-making has grown with globalization, greater openness of national borders, deepening policy interdependence among countries, and the emergence of new world powers.

More policy challenges are now global, requiring cross-boarder cooperation; and more actors, both state and non-state, expect to have a meaningful say in matters of global concern. The G-20 is an experiment in institutional innovation, an effort to adjust to today's new and still evolving realities. Most innovations happen by fits and starts. Therefore, the present G-20 should be allowed to evolve toward the proposed G-20 *Plus*. Along the way, changes deemed desirable could be explored, notably alternative membership formulas to foster the Groups' representativeness and legitimacy, and perhaps, ways to institutionalize them.

A question that might arise in this context is the link between the various Gs and other parts of the existing multilateral system. Considering that several actor groups, public and private, national and international are today often involved in addressing global challenges, one could argue that the G-20 *Plus* should exist as a new, additional institutional arrangement, separate from the many other entities that might have to act on a particular issue. Such leadership at arm's length could strengthen the Groups' ability to nudge other actors forward. For example, if a development G were to exist already, it could do what the current G-20 working group on development does - but at the ministerial level, and hence, perhaps with more clout and continuity.

Conclusion

Given the incremental nature of most innovations, the current search for new approaches to international cooperation should be allowed to evolve at an appropriate pace. There is no need to hasten into the institutionalization of what are so far only first, tentative

reform steps that still have to prove themselves viable.

However, it is time to recognize that in today's world fair and effective international cooperation is often the best way to pursue one's own self-interest. States and non-state actors, notably firms, will continue to compete for market shares, investment funds, and other resources. Competition has its place. But where global public good-type challenges are concerned, that is, challenges that affect us all and are not resolvable by any one nation, we need encouragement to cooperate from leadership bodies like those of a G-20 *Plus* - or the web of global crises will become ever more dense and ruinous for all.

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So, returning to the forthcoming Seoul summit, the inclusion of development on the agenda could prove to be a major milestone in the emergence of a new system of multilateralism. It could draw attention to the risks of agenda crowding and thereby encourage the exploration of a Issue G-20 model of global policy leadership that would potentially benefit all, developed and developing nations alike.

The author is adjunct professor at the [Hertie School of Governance](#) in Berlin, Germany and advisor to various governmental, multilateral and non-profit organizations on issues of international cooperation, finance, public-private partnerships and global-issue diplomacy. She was the first director of UNDP's Human Development Report Office from 1989 to 1994, and director of UNDP's Office of Development Studies from 1995 to 2005.

G20 Database & E-Mail Group

Stay informed

Database

If you would like to read more on the G20, recent changes in Global Governance and what it means for specific regions or issues, the G20 Database of the Heinrich Böll Foundation is the right place to go. It is subdivided into the following folders, so you can easily access the analysis and information that is of interest to you:

Folder Structure of the Database	
1 -	Background
2 -	Summits
3 -	Issues
3.1 -	Finance
3.2 -	Climate Change
3.3 -	Development
3.4 -	Energy
3.5 -	Trade
4 -	Country Specific
5 -	Power Dynamics
5.1 -	Within the G20
5.2 -	G20 to non-members
5.3 -	International Organizations
6 -	Civil Society

In addition, every folder contains both a Word and PDF document with annotations of the documents included in the folder.

The database is designed in a way that every member can add documents himself, which are then instantly synchronized so that everyone can access it. This is a great way to share information and build up institutional capacity.

If you would like to know more about the Database or sign up for access please send an Email to Sandro Gianella at gianella@boell.de. To get started right away, here are the 3 easy steps to install the Database on your computer:

1. Install the Programm "Dropbox" from <https://www.dropbox.com/install>
2. Write to Sandro Gianella, who will send you an Email invite to share the G20 Database folder.
3. Accept the invite and you should be able to access the database through a Dropbox icon on your Desktop.

E-mail Group

In addition, the Heinrich Böll Foundation is part of an international network of NGOs and policy-analysts, which have set up a G20-related E-mail Group.

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To customize your subscription, go to <http://groups.google.com/group/alternative-g20> (but you need to create a Google account, if you do not have one)

Replies automatically go the whole group. To minimize email traffic, please do only reply to the whole group if necessary. There is no moderation.

The G20 Database is meant as a way for the Heinrich Böll Foundation and its partners to share and collect information surrounding the G20 and related issues.

Impressum

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