Global Governance Reimagined – An “Astonishing Diversity” of Cooperation

Global governance is a reality. Packages, medical advice, diplomacy cross borders every day – “All this (and much more) happens every day within well-established rules thanks to global governance, which formalizes cooperative problem solving among nations,” writes Keith Porter, president and CEO of the Stanley Foundation for its publication Courier. The venues for global cooperation have expanded beyond the United Nations or the World Trade Organization, aided by the internet and other global communications, and players include NGOs, corporations and trade associations. “The diversity has the potential to break big global problems into manageable chunks and create opportunities to experiment as each venue can be an incubator for new ways to approach issues and organize the players,” Porter writes. The challenges are complex – and global governance on cybersecurity and climate change has yet to mature. Porter expresses hope that the expansion and diversity of players may make global governance more responsive to public concerns. – YaleGlobal

Examples of global governance are plentiful – with increasing numbers of diverse players
Keith Porter
Courier
12 September 2014

Packages are sent across international boundaries every day, flights go from country to country without incident, diplomats meet to tackle serious threats to world stability on a regular basis with little drama, and medical experts share best practices with colleagues across the planet.

All this (and much more) happens every day within well-established rules thanks to global governance, which formalizes cooperative problem solving among nations. While the success rate has been mixed, the existence of the process inspires hope that important modes of international cooperation can be governed even in the absence of any formal, universal rules.

MORE VENUES

At the end of World War II, global governance was largely defined by the United Nations and its agencies, and while the world body is still the centerpiece of global governance, “what really marks the contemporary era is not the absence of multilateralism, but its astonishing diversity,” according to Stewart Patrick, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. The growing landscape of multilateral venues includes the G-20, the Nuclear Security Summit process, Global Action Against Mass Atrocity Crimes, regional organizations, and much more.

The diversity has the potential to break big global problems into manageable chunks and create opportunities to experiment as each venue can be an incubator for new ways to approach issues and organize the players. However, we must assure that how we foster coordination and complementarity does not also promote more competition.

MORE ACTORS

Global governance has almost always been accomplished through organizing nation-state representatives at various levels (heads of state, ministers, ambassadors, regulators, etc.) to discuss and, hopefully, solve problems. Today, however, the issues and potential solutions have moved beyond the sole dominion of national governments to include nonstate actors such as corporations, nongovernmental organizations, religious groups, service clubs, and others.

More democracy and more globalization are the usual answers to the rise of nonstate actors. Advocacy movements thrive in the space created by liberal democratic governments. And globalizing trends, like the Internet and mass media, allow the movements to spread across borders and create transnational membership.

Many of the entities want a voice in global governance—and many of today’s most pressing problems cannot be solved without them. The involvement of nonstate actors has the potential to make global governance more responsive to public concerns, but it also raises tricky questions about who gets to be at the table and why.

MORE COMPLEXITY
Dealing with the discrete, specialized needs of issues like international civil aviation, global postal deliveries, and maritime cooperation, for example, have provided global governance with success stories. But highly complex and integrated issues like cybersecurity and climate change are thus far not yielding to the current methods of multilateral cooperation.

“The degree of difficulty in global governance has gotten harder,” according to Daniel Drezner, a professor of international politics at The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University and author of The System Worked: How the World Stopped Another Great Depression.

Despite all of this, global governance can, and frequently does, work. The triple challenge of more venues, more actors, and more complexity need not lead to despair or discourage multilateral engagement. In fact, these developments may very well hold the seeds of opportunity for creating more-sophisticated approaches, greater resilience, more-inclusive and sustainable outcomes, and an increased potential for concerned publics to impact global solutions.

Keith Porter is the president and CEO of the Stanley Foundation.

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