



Network solutions for global governance

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Jean-François Rischard, the author of High Noon: 20 global problems, 20 years to solve them, talks to openDemocracy about his proposal for a new way of addressing the most intractable questions about the way the world is ruled.

openDemocracy: What are you hoping to achieve with your book *High Noon*?

Jean-François Rischard: *High Noon* is a very personal book. I wrote it in my own capacity even though I am Vice-President at the World Bank. I wrote it because I am convinced that our planet faces a whole new generation of global issues which need solving in the next two or three decades at most, and which the existing worldwide set up is not very well organised to deal with.

I am trying to prompt the reader into lateral thinking about global governance – not the representational and hierarchical terms that we are so used to, but in terms of the possibilities offered by a networked approach.

It's not globalisation, stupid

JFR: There are three parts to my analysis – detailed in the three parts of my book. The first is that there is not *one* big mushy force called globalisation. Rather, there are *two* distinct forces which will change the world

massively in the next twenty years.

The first force is population increase. We are going from five billion people ten years ago to around eight billion people twenty years from now. Our planet is already very stressed, so this growth implies a whole series of environmental and social stresses becoming even stronger.

The second big force is the new world economy – and here I mean a much broader set of changes than the hi-tech economy people have talked about so much. This new world economy is very different from anything the world has experienced before. It will completely change the way things get done over the next twenty years. We're only at the beginning of the changes.

These two big forces – which I explore at more length in the book – are soaring ahead of our ability to manage them. Existing institutions – nation states, government departments, ministries or international institutions – evolve very slowly in comparison to these two big forces. As a result, there is a major

governance gap, and in that gap there is a lot of trouble breeding.

One example is the world financial crisis that has been with us now for five years, affecting country after country. Another kind of trouble is the bad mood in politics everywhere and the distrust people have that politicians will solve the big issues of the world fast enough. One of the results you see is an increasing amount of protest, as people express their discontent around big international gatherings.

Twenty global issues

But the biggest casualty of the gap – and this is the second part of my analysis – is the failure to solve twenty pressing global issues (see panel). And, by the way, there could be five more, or there could be only seventeen – it doesn't really matter: the point is to identify the priorities. None of these are issues to be solved thirty, forty, fifty years from now; they are all of a type that means that we need to solve them in the next five, ten, fifteen or twenty years – if not yesterday, as in cases such as fisheries.

In reality, these issues are not difficult or costly to solve. The short-term costs of solving them are lower than the long-term costs of *not* solving them. There are technical solutions for most of them. But, by and large, they are unsolved.

Twenty global issues

Sharing our planet: issues involving a global commons

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

Sharing our planet: issues requiring 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 rule book: issues needing a global regulatory approach

- Reinventing taxation for the 21st century
- Biotechnology rules
- Global financial architecture
- Illegal drugs
- Trade, investment, and competition rules
- Intellectual property rights
- E-commerce rules
- International labour and migration rules

For analysis, see *High Noon: 20 global problems, 20 years to solve them*.

The failure of existing global institutions

JFR: The third part of my analysis is an examination of why these global issues are not being solved. Firstly, it's important to understand how the international system works. Broadly speaking, it can be divided into four 'chunks'. The first is treaties and conventions; the second is United Nations (UN) conferences such as those in Monterey and Johannesburg; thirdly, there are groupings of countries such as the G8 and the G20; fourthly, there are some 45 global multilateral institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the many UN agencies.

These four parts of the international system do many useful things. I am not knocking them at all. But, the four parts together have not amounted to a system that will solve the big global issues.

oD: Why not?

JFR: Treaties and conventions are usually very slow at solving global issues. Take global environmental problems. There have been no fewer than 240 treaties put in motion since 1960. And yet in Johannesburg a few months ago the leaders of the world had to confront once more that there hasn't been much progress in the environmental area – there has been a regression in many cases.

This is usually for one of the following reasons. Many treaties are very slow to be ratified; it can take decades. Or when treaties are ratified they exclude some major players. Or when they are ratified they don't have secretariats. Or they are not being enforced at all.

The big UN conferences are very useful in raising the awareness of people worldwide about a particular set of issues for a brief time. In that sense they do play an important role. But they are not good at producing real solutions to these issues. They don't last very long. There is no real brainstorming going on, and essentially the communiqués and calls for action are too general to amount to a detailed set of solutions.

Groupings such as the G8 and the G20 (which is an offshoot of the G8 looking at the international financial architecture) have their own set of shortcomings. They do useful things but they are not very good at long-term problem solving. Their methodology is largely reactive.

Another problem with G8-type groupings is their exclusiveness. India and China are not in the G8 even though one person in three on the planet lives there. Also, they tend to lack a full range of relevant knowledge. Civil servants only know so much – they need the complementary knowledge and insights that come from business and civil society.

Then there are the global institutions such as the World Bank, IMF and the UN agencies. Many of these institutions do very useful work and often have precious knowledge. But they can't fly solo when it comes to global problem-solving, in part because the countries that control them won't let them. They also have far less power than is often ascribed to them by public opinion. The WTO, for example, has a very small budget. They are often criticised heavily by protestors, if only because they are the visible part of the system.

The alternative – global issues networks, not global government

oD: So if none of these four parts of the international system are capable of the kind of long-term problem-solving needed, what is the alternative?

JFR: Some people advocate the creation of a global government. My view is that even if it could be done – and I very much doubt that it could be done – it would take many decades, and we don't have that much time.

Instead, I propose a solution that would not mean reinventing the international system but would put it

under pressure to perform faster and to perform better. I have in mind something called Global Issues Networks (GINs), one for each of the twenty issues. These would be permanent networks – not on-and-off affairs like the G8-type groupings and UN conferences. They would assemble around each of the twenty global issues described knowledgeable representatives on that particular issue from three parts of societies – governments, business, and civil society groups. An existing multilateral institution would help convene each of the networks, acting as a facilitator rather than as a problem solver.

The networks would start small and start now with just twenty, thirty or forty people with expertise on a given issue in each sector. There would be a one year long constitutional phase where the network agreed a code of conduct and put together a platform of knowledge and resources. Then, in a second phase, which could last two or three years, they would increase in size to several hundred people – still from business, government and civil society. In this second phase, they would take a problem apart. For example, take fisheries, which are being very quickly depleted; the network would analyse the sub-problems, assess how much time there is to solve it, the options, and create a vision for sustainable fisheries.

Finally in this second phase, it would ask what are the legal norms and standards that will coax the various players towards the intermediate steps leading to that final vision of a solved fisheries problem. This would be what I term 'norm production'.

In the third phase, membership of a given GIN would increase from several hundred to several thousand members. This phase would last ten years or more, and in that phase the network would become more like a rating agency. Its job would now be to monitor how all the nation states of the world, all the big multinational companies and all the other big players are doing in the light of the norms and standards that have been put out by the network, and to name and shame those players that are not abiding by the standards.

The naming and shaming phase is very similar to what happened two years ago when the Financial Action

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Task Force (FATF) produced forty criteria for assessing the tolerance of money laundering for any particular country. The FATF published a list of fifteen countries guilty of money laundering, and a year later half the countries on that list had passed legislation to get off it. So, imagine essentially twenty big GINs doing the same sort of thing very systematically and thoroughly, with a lot of worldwide knowledge and credibility behind them.

oD: Many people do not perceive the global issues you describe to be crises. What would give the sense of urgency and goodwill to make the GIN idea actually work?

JFR: It is true that for many of the twenty global issues I have listed there isn't an outside crisis that is visible. At the same time if you look at them closely, as I do in my book, you clearly get a sense that they must be solved within the next twenty years and that many of them are actually make or break for the planet. Global warming is a good case where scientist are not exactly sure how large the problem is, but they know there is a big problem brewing. But if you wait long enough to get the evidence for it, the process may be irreversible and it could be far too late.

'Expanding the concept of rogueness'

If you don't have an obvious crisis, the question is how to get nation states especially – territorial creatures, whose politicians have a four- or five-year electoral horizon – to think globally and fast about these issues. I think these GINs with their very particular methodology are ways to increase the pressure on the nation states by exposing their performance as global citizens in a very public way.

Naming and shaming those who do not respond effectively could have an enormous effect. Rogue states are defined in a very narrow way these days, but what I'm describing implies an expansion in the notion of rogueness. Thus, you don't necessarily have a crisis, but you create pressure and awareness publicly in the world as to who's playing ball and who isn't. You create a public opinion crisis for the countries that will be

delinquent. The crisis will come first of all from people inside that country being extremely embarrassed about the behaviour of their government, and also the rest of the world being very critical about that country or that company or that player – and then actually engaging in all kinds of reprehension and other popular sanction.

Making it work

oD: How could this work in countries where people are not free, or powerless to put pressure on their governments?

JFR: First, networks are flexible creatures. They can get to people who don't have much voice in the world today. What's more, it may prove possible to incorporate lots more people and lots more countries than we do today through existing systems. Take the example of fisheries again. One of the countries you would include in that GIN is Mauritania; it has an enormous stake in this resource, but at present has little influence in the international community. In the UN system, it has only one small voice among some 185 countries. But in a Global Fisheries Network, Mauritania would play a much larger role because of all the expertise and interested parts of society that it has. So when you cut it into twenty problem-solving vehicles, you make

more room for including in a meaningful way many poor countries, who will be very glad to work on an issue they are familiar with and experienced in.

Secondly, as I describe in my book, each of these GINs would host – as an adjunct forum but not as a decision-making vehicle – an electronic town meeting: an internet site designed to consult thousands, maybe tens of thousands, of people across the world as to what they think about the diagnostics and the solutions being discussed inside each network. Through this form of electronic democracy, which has only come up in the last few years; through the idea of 'rough consensus', which comes from the internet's self-regulation world; through the peculiar methodology of the networks I describe in the book; you can help create norms and standards, and involve people genuinely concerned about the issue. So here again

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there is a new way to bring in new voices – people who care about fisheries or drug trading issues or about taxation or about global warming.

I know that some academics and others may find some of these ideas naïve. But I wonder whether the real naïveté actually lies in trusting that the current international system, or minor variations of it, will deliver solutions in time. It won't. By contrast, if we think creatively, along network lines, there's a chance.

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