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THE LACKING REALISM OF THE POST-2015 AGENDA PROCESS

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A striking feature of the emerging design of the Post-2015 Agenda is its 'missing middle part'. While a large number of goals are being considered for inclusion in the Agenda and many suggestions have been tabled on how to monitor and assess progress in terms of goal attainment, the issue of how to translate the goals into concrete results finds only scant, if any mention.

As this paper argues, the resultant air of unrealism that surrounds the Agenda is symptomatic of a more fundamental problem, viz. the reluctance of the negotiating parties to recognize that the world has crossed an important threshold: We have left the era of the conventional Westphalian state order and stepped into an era that could perhaps be called Westphalia 2.0. Today's policymaking realities call for effective and, to this end, fair international cooperation – in states' enlightened self-interest. Yet, our global governance strategies have not yet fully adjusted to these new realities.

So, in a way, the current unrealism of the Post-2015 Agenda is a blessing in disguise. The fact that its middle part has been left blank affords us an opportunity to insert policy approaches and tools that fit today's policymaking realities. This is of critical importance, considering that we are faced with a lengthening list of unmet and increasingly urgent global challenges like climate change mitigation, the looming specter of natural resource scarcities, the unfinished task of poverty reduction and the growing problem of inequity.

The paper concludes by suggesting that, perhaps, a *Monterrey Plus* conference to be held in early 2016 could have as its objective to fill in the now missing 'middle part' of the Post-2015 Agenda.

In more detail, the argument is as follows.¹

THE ONGOING EASY PART OF THE POST-2015 AGENDA PROCESS: GOAL SETTING

Setting goals is a relatively easy undertaking. This is especially so, if one does what is currently being done in the case of the Post-2015 Agenda, viz.: (i) selecting a large number of goals so as to accommodate the particular concerns of a wide range of stakeholder groups; (ii) avoiding systematic priority setting; and (iii) not specifying who is to contribute what by when and which overall distribution of costs and benefits to aim at.

Proceeding in this way is a recipe for "business as usual", i.e. leaving matters mostly to voluntary, individual-state and private initiative. But, as past experience has shown, policy challenges of a public-good type are at risk of underprovision. One reason is that their publicness, i.e. their being in the public domain and possibly affecting all, tempts individual actors into free-riding: letting others step forward and address the challenge in order to enjoy it free of charge when the good is available².

Global public good (GPG)-type challenges like climate change mitigation are especially prone to be underprovided, because they often depend on contributions from a large number of actors with varying policy preferences. Moreover, in their case, the circles of stakeholders and decision-makers are not always well matched, as conventional power politics continue to prevail in many global-issue areas, despite deepening policy interdependence.³ Yet, where global norms, rules and regulations are being handed down, policy ownership tends to be weak and international cooperation likely to become associated with 'loss of policymaking sovereignty'.

But, as multi-polarity advances, concerns about loss of policymaking sovereignty are no longer to be found just on the side of the developing countries but also on the side of the industrial countries.

Thus, policy responses to global challenges often occur only where and to the extent that they happen to overlap with national or private concerns. Yet, these responses may not add up to what is required in order to meet a particular global challenge.

Nationally, we have created the institution of the state to help us break through such collective-action problems. But, internationally, the state has no equivalent. Therefore, international cooperation has to work through effective incentives, notably through just and fair processes of international negotiations and mutually beneficial bargains. States and other individual actors have to be encouraged to contribute, as and if necessary, more than what they would do, if only guided by pure, narrowly defined self-interest.

Where this condition is not being met, international cooperation is likely to falter, leaving global challenges unresolved.

Yet, under conditions of economic openness, unresolved challenges continue to roam the global public domain, possibly making all worse off. Just think of the violent weather patterns – hurricanes, floods and droughts – that are linked to global warming.

The result is a situation that can be called the 'sovereignty paradox': In order to protect their sovereignty, states shy away from international cooperation. Yet, in policy areas of interdependence, such behavior leads to the opposite result. As lacking cooperation allows problems to persist and exacerbate, states, notably their governments are increasingly compelled to respond to global crises rather than being able to set their own policy agenda. Instead of maintaining their policymaking sovereignty they are increasingly losing it.

The current Post-2015 Agenda process is an expression of states' still being caught in the policy trap of the 'sovereignty paradox' and trying to take the easy way forward: developing non-binding visions of a 'world we like to live in' without getting down to firm commitments on the required deliverables. While such goal setting has its value, it seems to be amazingly oblivious to the multiplying warning calls issued by bodies such as the World Economic Forum, IPCC and the cries for help of all those who are still suffering from hunger or thirst, dying prematurely, or

are, due to environmental degradation or lack of job opportunities compelled to migrate.

THE YET-TO-BE-UNDERTAKEN STEPS: FILLING IN THE MISSING MIDDLE PART OF THE AGENDA AND ESCAPING FROM THE 'SOVEREIGNTY PARADOX' POLICY TRAP

Realizing the extensive goal catalogue of the Post-2015 Agenda requires for all countries to undertake requisite reforms nationally in a decentralized, yet concerted manner. But, it also requires joint, collective action, i.e. measures that no state can, or is likely to, undertake alone. The Agenda debates to date are especially quiet about this latter set of measures that can be viewed as being comprised of: (1) measures aimed at fostering, in issue areas of direct relevance to the Agenda goals, enhanced global fairness and efficiency; and (2) measures designed to enable states more generally to better combine international cooperation and national policymaking sovereignty and, thereby, encourage them to break out of the 'sovereignty paradox' policy trap.

SETTING GOALS FOR AGENDA-RELATED DELIVERABLES THAT REQUIRE JOINT COLLECTIVE ACTION

An important type of measure falling into this category would, for example, be for countries to review existing international regimes from the viewpoint of making them more development-compatible and geared to facilitating the dissemination and use of existing technologies in areas in which crises threaten to assume catastrophic proportions. The Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) regime would perhaps be a prime candidate for such a review. Similarly, firm commitments on the funding of international mechanisms such the Green Climate Fund could also have a positive impact on states' willingness to cooperate. Especially poorer countries might also develop a stronger feeling of international community and solidarity, if they knew that affordable risk insurance and other disaster prevention and management schemes are in place globally on which they could rely should they be struck by violent weather or suffer from the ripple effects of a global economic or financial crisis.⁴

In other words, it would be desirable for the Post-2015 Agenda to include, in addition to such ultimate goals like poverty reduction or climate change mitigation and adaptation also intermediate goals pertaining to key deliverables that require joint, collective multilateral action. These goals should also be subjected to strict reporting and monitoring, as progress towards the ultimate Agenda goals may critically depend on achieving, first of all, progress in terms of the intermediate goals of deliverables.

PREPARING THE GROUND FOR AN ESCAPE FROM THE POLICY TRAP OF THE SOVEREIGNTY PARADOX

Measures such as the foregoing ones would, perhaps, find political support only, if the following complementary reform steps were to be undertaken.

FORGING CONSENSUS ON A NOTION OF 'SMART', MUTUALLY RESPECTFUL SOVEREIGNTY

From the field of international security we have learned that a collective approach to fostering respect for the principle of the inviolability of national borders actually provides more security for all states. Similarly, if all states were to fully respect each other's policymaking sovereignty, e.g. through more careful management of cross-border externalities, all might also find their national policymaking capacities strengthened and be in a better position to combine openness and sovereignty. To this end, it would be useful to enhance the availability of well-documented and well-framed proof that, in global issue areas marked by interdependence, fair and effective international cooperation is actually in states' enlightened self-interest and mutually beneficial international bargains can be constructed.

Sovereignty exercised in this way would be smart, because it would recognize that global challenges for the most part require global policy responses; it would be mutually respectful, because it would seek to avoid, wherever possible and desirable, cross-border spillovers that could harm the welfare and wellbeing of other nations; and it would constitute responsible government behaviour toward national constituencies, because it would promote more inclusive and sustainable growth and development.

As the UN is the international body that has granted states their status as sovereign nations, it would also be the most appropriate body now, taking account of the increased openness of national borders, to promote a collective commitment to such an adjusted, modern notion of mutually respectful sovereignty.

CREATING A GLOBAL STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL WITHIN THE UN

As past experience has shown that states are tempted to renege on international agreements, it could be useful to establish, within the UN, an independent, high-level Global Stewardship Council to assist states in taking global concerns, including longer-term concerns, more systematically into account in international negotiations.

The proposed Council could be composed of a limited number of eminent personalities from all walks of life, representing the interest of different country and population groups, as well as keeping in mind the global concerns such as the planetary boundaries.

If states were to agree once on the creation of such a Council, all could be better off, because they could ask the Council to nudge them into more decisive – decentralized or joint, collective – action, where solving critical challenges call for an expeditious and resolute policy response. Put differently, the Council would not have a decision-making role but only a nudging function. Yet, it would give recognition to the fact that was largely overlooked during the centuries-long process of creating the Westphalian state order, viz. that national interests form one set of concerns that global public policy has to take into account and that the planetary boundaries and other global systemic relations, such as the global economic and social relations among states, form another set, the global systemic requirements that need to be considered – not only in their own right but, ultimately, also in the enlightened self-interests of states, if their goal is fostering enhanced sustainability.

The establishment of the proposed Council would help states to regain their policymaking sovereignty that, today, they feel they have lost and shape public policy even under the conditions of the present global order, Westphalia 2.0.

CONCLUSION: ADDING REALISM TO THE POST-2015 AGENDA PROCESS

If the international community were to agree on the type of additional measures outlined above, it might actually be possible that we would see significant progress toward the ultimate goals of the Post-2015 Agenda. This might require two essentially do-able steps, viz. the tabling and adoption of two resolutions at the forthcoming meeting of the UN General Assembly: *one*, a resolution on convening a *Monterrey Plus* conference⁵ in order to work out the now missing middle part of the Agenda, as discussed in section 2.1 above; and, *two*, a resolution on the notion of mutually respectful sovereignty and the creation of a Global Stewardship Council.

References

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- 1 The following sections draw on Kaul (2013a, 2013b) and Kaul/Blondin (forthcoming).
 - 2 According to standard economic theory, the characteristics of public goods are being non-rival in consumption, non-excludable, or both. Depending on the reach of their public effects, they are being referred to as local, national, regional or global, i.e. transnational, public goods. The term 'good' is value-free, denoting a product, service or condition that exists in the public domain. Important is to note that a goods being public or private (in which case it would be excludable) is, in most cases not an innate property but a social construct, reflecting a political or social choice.
 - 3 Many public goods, notably global public goods are not only public in consumption, as mentioned in the previous note, but also public in their provisioning: They depend on inputs from multiple actor groups, public and private, to be provided at multiple levels. In the case of global public goods, the largest amount of the inputs has often to be provided at the national level. It is mainly due to this fact that the existence of global public goods – like excessive volatility in international financial markets, a global communicable disease outbreak, or climate change mitigation – generates a condition of policy interdependence among countries.
 - 4 No doubt, many expert groups and other international meetings are addressing issues like climate or sustainable development financing or global health infrastructure financing. However, it is one thing for such gatherings to explore various policy options and instruments and another thing for states to firmly commit themselves to well-defined deliverables in the fields of multilateral trade, international finance, technology transfer or the provisioning of official development assistance.
 - 5 A first Monterrey Conference was held in Monterrey, Mexico, in 2002. Its main theme was 'financing for development'. The term Monterrey Plus is being used here to establish the link to the prior Conference, as well as to emphasize that it would be desirable for the follow-up meeting to widen its focus in two ways: first, to discuss the broader topic of financing international cooperation, including both development and GPG provisioning; and, second, to define 'financing' as 'getting the allocation right'. Defined in this way, an important issue would then also be how to reduce the 'money' resources required for certain goals. For example, could this be achieved through enhancing the development-compatibility of various global regimes or better risk management?