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Can't see the globe for the nations:  
Seeking a postnational approach  
to global challenges

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## Can't see the globe for the nations: Seeking a postnational approach to global challenges

Bonn, 28 November 2011. Energy emergencies, health hazards, and crop failures: The effects of these global challenges are variably far away or close to home depending on your circumstances and geographical coordinates, but they are worldwide and shared. Causes of global challenges take root in certain places and activities, with the effects turning to seed globally and locally. Along the way toward making their presence felt, global challenges seem to mingle in unspoken anterooms to conspire to wreak ultimate havoc on multiple systems of the world. They tangle together and create inter-linkages, resembling a Gordian Knot of complexity and interdependency. What is a policy-maker to do?

International co-operation is a *sine qua non* for finding solutions to and understanding the realities of global challenges. To date, it has been successfully employed on a scale both small and large. It occurs in industry, whereby solutions for global challenges are researched, developed, and deployed. Such activity may also be spurred by international treaties, for example, the Montreal Protocol. Ratified more than 20 years ago, with ratification to date by 196 countries, this protects the ozone layer through the phasing out of substances contributing to its depletion. The Montreal Protocol is a prime example of nation states prioritising and realising global good. Yet, balancing national priorities with international agendas is not for the faint of heart. It requires commitment and resources, and, more importantly, a postnational approach.

### What is postnationalism?

In this context, the definition of postnationalism draws upon those offered by Jürgen Habermas and others and specifically refers to the detachment of nation states from national priorities and the recognition of global needs as being paramount. The world has for some time been in a state of transnationalism. But this falls short of postnationalism: The very nature of global challenges requires decision-makers to make global

good paramount or at least tantamount to national interest.

That global good does or must not overlap with national interest is a *non sequitur*. On the contrary, such overlap frequently exists in the long term if not also the medium and short term. The trouble seems to be putting off the reward or realising it exists. Perhaps more importantly, and particularly cogent in the case of international treaties addressing public goods, the challenge is foregoing the potential rewards of non-compliance in the short-term without knowing others will follow (Prisoner's Dilemma).

We currently witness coordinated postnationalism on many occasions each year. Yet, in some cases, major international events cannot even be scheduled without bowing to national interest, as the recent re-scheduling of Rio+20 to accommodate the Queen's diamond jubilee demonstrated. At gatherings such as the G8 and G20 summits, postnationalism is sometimes realised in theory, if not always practice. The declarations from the G8 and G20 are not legally binding, however. In the arena of legally binding international treaties, another story is told, in which the Montreal Protocol is an outlier. The recent Conferences of the Parties (COP) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Cancún and Copenhagen, among other factors, have already led to low expectations for COP 17 in Durban which begins today.

### Challenges and opportunities

While decision makers deliberate and vacillate, global challenges await. What can be done in the meantime to supplement political decision?

Action in the form of international co-operation in science, technology and innovation has demonstrated a great potential to provide deployable solutions to global challenges. *Effective Governance Mechanisms for International Co-operation in Science, Technology and Innovation for Global Challenges*, a current project of the OECD Committee for Scientific and Technological Policy with the

German Development Institute / Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE), the German Federal Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF), and experts from six other countries, endeavours to improve the efficiency and efficacy of the governance of international research co-operation in order to, *inter alia*, enhance the delivery of solutions to global challenges.

Case studies conducted through this project on existing collaborations demonstrate the value of international co-operation to deliver solutions to global challenges. These collaborations are reducing energy poverty and greenhouse gas emissions (International Energy Agency Implementing Agreements), delivering vaccines and prophylactics to at-risk societies (The Gates Foundation), and creating more efficient farming methods (The Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research), among a number of other outputs.

Of course, international co-operation is not without challenges. There are tangible hurdles and intangible barriers on the path to global collaboration. Some of them are old and some of them are new. They change as the actors evolve, the stakes increase, and the funding fluctuates. Identifying responsibilities and ensuring accountability among larger, international actor constellations is

vital to counter the potential of free-riding behaviour and to realise full faith efforts. For these and other reasons, it is vital to improve governance mechanisms to realise the full potential of international co-operation.

### **What is a policymaker to do?**

Global challenges still face a number of other hurdles, including the various market failures by which they are plagued. For this and other reasons, action must be taken. What needs to occur is an up-scaling of resources and commitment for international co-operation in science, technology, and innovation.

In its best form, international co-operation in science, technology, and innovation for global challenges is a realisation of postnationalism, putting the focus of research – and its corresponding potential to benefit the global good – at a paramount level. At the same time, this co-operation often directly benefits national interest. It saves money, takes advantage of the specialisations of partners, and achieves the deployment of technologies and innovations that address global challenges. Yet to realise these benefits, we must look both to global good and beyond national priorities, and realise a postnational approach to global challenges.



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