



*The Current Column*  
of 11 January 2010

**Is the earth still governable?  
... and what that implies for  
development policy**

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## Is the earth still governable? ... and what that implies for development policy

Bonn, 11 January 2010. In 1994 the Israeli political scientist Yehezkel Dror presented a farsighted report to the Club of Rome. The report, entitled “Capacity to Govern” (German: “*Ist die Erde noch regierbar?*”), argues that in the future the only way to guarantee prosperity and sustainable development in the world’s nation-states will be for mankind to govern the ‘earth as a whole.’ Fifteen years ago this was a bold thought.

In 2010 virtually no one would dispute how right Yehezkel Dror was with his analysis. In the coming five years development policy will be concerned with reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The international community has resolved to halve poverty worldwide by 2015. To this end the industrialised countries are called upon to increase the volume and the effectiveness of development cooperation, while the developing countries are expected to provide for good governance as well as for economic, health, educational, and social policies that benefit the whole of the population, and not only elites. The MDGs will not be reached unless the developing countries engage in huge efforts and courageous reforms. But the development policies of the industrialised countries will have to change as well. And what is called for on their side is more inter-donor division of labour, more reliable financial transfers, less bureaucracy, more responsibility for development-minded partners on the ground, and less paternalism on the part of international experts; indeed, what is actually needed are clear-cut agreements on targets and monitoring efforts to determine whether development investments are in fact being used effectively as well as political pressure on governments unwilling to engage in necessary reforms.

But this is only the one side of the coin. Worldwide poverty and international tensions and conflicts will continue to grow in scope unless effective ways and means are found to ‘govern the earth.’ Having derailed in 2008/2009, the international financial markets are now in need of a new global foundation to ensure that economic globalisation will be able to contribute durably to achieving worldwide prosperity. And we must avert dangerous global warming, and find solutions to conflicts in weak states that threaten destabilise entire regions. The concerns here include the struggle for access to resources, politicised ethnic conflicts, difficult-to-control transnational Islamist terror networks. The coming decade will show whether mankind is learning to keep “our spaceship Earth” on an even keel.

The times we are living in are in-between times. Today virtually nobody would dispute that in a closely networked world prosperity and security are no longer to be had without a culture of global cooperation. But is this culture of global cooperation anything more than a naïve idea? The international community seems to be trudging through a period of emotional ups and downs. The opening of the G8 to form the G20 must be seen as a major step forward, signalling as it does the end of the Western industrialised world’s unreserved, and ultimately untenable, claim to leadership of the rest of the world. Never before in the history of mankind have there been so many “global networkers,” actors who perceive the world as a whole and have left narrow national modes of thinking behind: Internationally oriented students, world communities constituted on and through the Internet, worldwide networks of scientists, non-governmental organisations, business enterprises, and cultural workers and creative minds. Barack Obama, a cosmopolitan spirit, has replaced US President G.W. Bush, a sworn unilateralist. In news media throughout the world, social scientists, neuroscientists, and psychologists are discussing whether man is by



nature a cooperative being, one capable of learning, on a global scale, to restrain its egoism and propensity for violence. All this gives us cause for cautious optimism.

However, the accelerated pace of globalisation is also accompanied by envy-driven wrangling among the world's nation-states, which appear unable to strike a reasonable balance between national and world interests: The seemingly endless world trade rounds or the sobering shock of Copenhagen may be cited here as typically self-destructive trends of world politics. In the second decade of the present century, decisions of substantial import for global development are set to be taken in three arenas: Now that the G20 has managed to avert a collapse of the world financial system, will progress finally be made on establishing a new and truly viable world economic order? Will the shock of Copenhagen prove able to set free forces capable of averting, at the last moment, a destabilisation of the world climate system? Will the US, China, and Europe prove able to develop, step by step, a set of common ideas on a new world order – or will, instead, the multipolar constellation given at present block any major advances in global governance?

The scopes open to and the prospects of international development policy will be decided on not least in this global framework. But development policy itself has an important role to play in aiding mankind to learn 'to govern the earth.' Cooperation between industrialised and developing countries can be expected to provide for a situation in which even weak actors have fair chances to participate effectively in debates and initiatives geared to "reshaping the world." If this proves impossible, there will be no legitimate global governance. The times in which the "big powers" were able to rule over the rest of the world have drawn to an end. And development policy can contribute to generating, testing, and disseminating development strategies that have room to acknowledge the limits of the Earth system and the climate system. Without progress in efforts to establish resource-conserving and climate-friendly models of prosperity, not only will efforts to reduce poverty be doomed to failure, the prosperity of the world's industrialised societies will ultimately be faced with erosion.



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