

Response to the Public Consultation of the United Nation’s High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism: Convene Experts in Decision-Making First

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Summary

The United Nations’ High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism aims to make suggestions for governance arrangements to the Summit of the Future in 2023. To that end, it issued a public consultation containing three questions; this document contains my answers. Regarding the present procedure for crafting and selecting the suggestions for governance arrangements, I propose that the method for making decisions about these suggestions be chosen with the help of an even broader spectrum of knowledge and expertise than has been consulted so far. Therefore, in this document, I suggest that the United Nations convene a great variety of experts on decision-making to select a method for deciding global governance arrangements. This will have several benefits, including 1. greater acceptance of the measures by member states and the public (because the measures will be decided using an independently established procedure) and 2. the opportunity to collect a wider range of more fundamental measures than was hitherto possible.

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1 Introduction

Thank you very much for the amazing opportunity to respond to your public consultation about global governance [H-PC]. I will answer your questions in Section 3. In Section 4, I will reflect on areas of improvement for the procedure of which this consultation is part. I am aware that you, as a member of the High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism (HLAB) of the United Nations (UN), may already have made similar considerations.¹ Even so, in Section 5, I will propose convening the widest possible range of experts on decision-making and having them select a method for deciding governance arrangements and other fundamental issues. This is a plan for a meta-decision, for which I will indicate further steps in the conclusion, Section 6. Prior to this, however, let me introduce myself.

2 About me

My name is Arnold Bomans. In September 2020 I quit my job as a system developer to concentrate on averting the worst of the biophysical collapse that is now unfolding. As I have a background in mathematical policy modelling, I designed and programmed a nonmonetary economy called Eranism [E], which I am currently testing. Furthermore, I am part of the Dutch Footprint Working Group and the Wellbeing Economy Alliance. For Extinction Rebellion, I have (among other things) concentrated on citizens' assemblies and concluded that a broader range of participants is needed than citizens alone [C]. After more research, I gained a basic understanding of theories of collective decision-making and acquired a taste for the enormous scope of possibilities and impossibilities. This is why I here submit my proposal for allowing experts in decision-making to arrive at a procedure for making decisions about global system change.

3 Answers

Below are my answers to the three questions posed in the public consultation. These answers also illustrate the main reasons for my proposal.

1. *What are the areas of global concern where governance improvements are most needed?*

Two areas of global concern are biophysical collapse and collective armed conflict. Containing these problems is a prerequisite for addressing other problems, such as epidemics and gross inequality, but that does not imply that the areas of greatest concern should be combated in isolation.

2. *What governance improvements could be achieved?*

As of now, my top suggestion is that any problem (in particular, any area of global concern) should first be subjected to an analysis of the root causes

and goals, preferably in conjunction with other problems, that is, according to an integral approach. Next, a variety of facts, scientific findings, and proposals for improvement (or fundamental change) should be collected. Based on this input and certain principles, knowledgeable participants should deliberate and draw a conclusion; an impartial board guarantees that the conclusion will be properly and publicly corroborated by facts and arguments. Finally, some kind of vote might be needed. However, such a governance improvement may not be accepted by member states or the public. Moreover, I can barely fathom the full range of required decision expertise, so the answer to this question is only a suggestion.

3. *How could the international community seek more equity, fairness and effectiveness in multilateral decision-making?*

As far as I can judge, this is difficult, if not impossible. Equity in decision-making (not in its outcome) seems to mean that stakeholders have an equal opportunity to defend their interests. For multilateral decision-making, this implies that stakeholders from all strata of society are represented. However, their representatives may develop other priorities than equal treatment in the course of the decision process. It is plainly impossible to let each individual represent himself or herself in the international community. Thus, for effectiveness, one may have to drop the condition of multilateralism in the sense of representation of siloed interests. This may lead back to a decision that is based on arguments, as in the previous answer. As to fairness, there are various definitions, such as proportionality and envy-freeness, but I do not understand how any of these other than equity applies to the decision process.² Not being an expert, I might overlook a positive answer, but then again, the presence of states and private corporations in the decision-making process is an obstacle to adopting any such outcome – unless it suits their short-term interests.

As you can gather from my answers above, I would like to draw your attention to an underlying question that, in my opinion, also needs to be answered: what is the right method for making decisions about any governance improvement or arrangement? Before addressing this question, I would like to reflect on possible areas for improvement in the present procedure.

4 Areas for improvement

There are three levels of areas for improvement in the current procedure: measures, governance and programme. The term ‘measure’ means a concrete measure or day-to-day governance. As such, the concept seems to coincide with governance arrangement.³ Governance means the way of deciding measures.⁴ The word ‘programme’ is short-hand for the method used to decide governance, in other words, the way to select a decision method. Below, you will find the areas for improvement that I identified at each of these levels.

Measures

1. **More explicit analysis of the problems and goals.** The measures in Our Common Agenda [OCA] are not explicitly based on root causes, such as overconsumption and overpopulation. Instead, the measures focus on greater equity in consumption without sufficiently questioning the purpose of affluence.⁵ In other words, the proposed measures are not systemic.

Governance

2. **More compatible components.** The proposed concept of governance seems to encompass some rather incompatible components. On the one hand, it should be direct⁶ and between citizens;⁷ on the other hand, it should be networked with private corporations⁸ and states.⁹ This is understandable, but such ‘networked, inclusive and effective multilateral governance’ risks being ineffective because the interference of member states in nongovernmental organisations such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change¹⁰ (IPCC) has led to deadly decisions, for example, the Paris Agreement.¹¹
3. **No exclusion of a non-UN organisation.** It is suggested that no new institutions are necessary.¹² Also, a reform of the UN remains a key element.¹³ However, such a reform has shown to be very difficult.¹⁴ In my opinion, the establishment of a non-UN organisation should not be excluded before the HLAB gives advice.

Programme

4. **Higher probability of acceptance.** When member states decide on recommendations for governance reform,¹⁵ they will not accept any of these recommendations if they are to the member states’ disadvantage in the short term. Similarly, concrete global measures have a low success rate. Thus, there is a need for a method to select such measures (or governance arrangements) so that they run a chance of being implemented.
5. **Better publicised methodology.** There seems to be no mention of a methodology by which the recommendations for measures in Our Common Agenda were arrived at, such as an integral problem analysis. However, a rationale of measures should be provided, if not with every recommendation, then at least once an overview of them has been created.
6. **Better publicised processes.** The way that recommendations for Our Common Agenda were processed (the decision method) does not seem to be public. Neither are the argumentation and the sources.¹⁶ The way the HLAB crafts recommendations or selects advice from public consultation does not appear to be public either.

7. **Inclusion of more fields of expertise.** The HLAB is mainly composed of government officials.¹⁷ However eminent they are, they cannot be expected to make recommendations on governance arrangements based on a wide area of research and expertise. For governance, this would require knowledge of not only politics and global governance, but also of social and public choice theory as well as deliberative, fluid, aleatory and other types of collective decision making. For concrete measures, it would demand in-depth knowledge of areas such as the nuclear arms race, epidemics and management of resources (including outer space).
8. **Higher urgency.** The mere existence of the series of Conferences of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, ranging from COP1 to COP26, is evidence that more summits, advisory boards and conferences in the same vein¹⁸ will not be effective. Moreover, Our Common Agenda refers¹⁹ to the IPCC report of August 2021 for the goal of carbon neutrality in 2050; however, this contradicts the IPCC's own findings²⁰ and the state of emergency called for a few months later.²¹
9. **Greater outreach.** Presumably, the present public consultation is only known to those who happen to actively search the UN's web pages or who are notified by lesser-known social media. If true, then this may limit the scope of the proposals you receive.

This concludes the list of possible areas for improvement, sometimes accompanied by an explicit or implicit proposal for improvement. This does not imply that any such improvement could easily have been effectuated within the current procedure. Hence, I am not going to propose, for example, to equip the HLAB with a still wider range of knowledge and expertise. Instead, I propose that a different decision procedure be selected, as follows.

5 Proposal: a forum for system change

I will first summarise the present procedure: the member states ultimately decide governance arrangements (concrete measures and day-to-day governance such as multilateralism), and this decision process occurs through a series of summits and consultations. The HLAB may suggest governance arrangements but the way it makes decisions about these suggestions has already been fixed.

Therefore, I would like to propose that the entire decision procedure, of which the HLAB is part, be boldly and rapidly re-evaluated by convening the widest possible range of experts in decision-making. By experts in decision-making, I mean researchers and practitioners in the domain of political science and practice, social choice theory, public choice theory, deliberation, decision fallacies, group dynamics and rhetorical ruses, as well as relevant portions of sociology, psychology and any other topic that arises. The subject matter would still be governance arrangements, including fundamental changes. In fact, this

new approach would not only allow for proposals for system change, but would also include experts on problem analysis who would cast doubt on the very nature of the problem. This is entirely consistent with the wish of Guterres for a scientific advisory board,²² especially at the level of decision-making.

Now, suppose that decision-making experts arrive at a method of making decisions about global issues, and that indeed this decision method is enacted. The ultimate decision (the measures) would have a higher probability of being accepted by member states, the private sector and the public because the decision method was established by experts in decision-making; as such, the decision method is agnostic of the outcome, such as networked multilateralism, the economy or any other systemic issue we aim to tackle. It would also be helpful if measures were chosen collectively on the basis of a wide range of data, predictions and interests – but that would be up to the experts in decision-making.

The goal of this project is to provide a forum for system change. I named both the project and the forum ‘Tolma’. The project would follow these stages:

- A **Select a decision method.** Convene experts in decision-making and have them select a method to decide governance arrangements or more fundamentally, system change.
- B **Collect proposals from experts.** Compile proposals for system change from a wide range of experts in the area (for example, technicians or spiritual leaders) so as to profit from a large array of plans and fundamental insights.
- C **Augment proposals.** Collect comments on these expert proposals and gather additional proposals from experts and lay people alike.
- D **Decide.** Use the method selected in stage A and the proposals for system change to make a decision about measures.

A team would have to organise stages A, B and C. Stage D would not necessarily be the responsibility of this team.

6 Conclusion

More important than my answers to your questions are the questions themselves: they help to stress the need for a more fundamental approach to decision-making. To meet this need, I propose the Tolma project, which has two aims. First, to allow experts in decision-making to select a decision method to bring about government arrangements or rather, system change. This would have the advantage that such a method is firmly rooted in science and practice while not being related to the actual decisions. The second aim of the project is to collect change proposals.

To implement this project, a team would have to first convene experts in decision-making, and second create a platform to which change proposals can be submitted. More information, such as the philosophical underpin-

nings of Tolma and many examples, can be found on the project's website: <https://www.tolma.net>.

To reiterate, I presuppose that you have not already embarked on a similar project. If you have not, then I would like the UN to compose a team for project Tolma. Of course, parts of the project would have to be adapted to the UN's practicalities, but hopefully, you agree that the UN should pay attention to a challenge that is currently overlooked: deciding how to decide.

I am aware that this project is very ambitious; however, given our predicament, ambition is the only option left.

Notes

¹'Over the past several months, the High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism has held wide-ranging and inclusive consultations with experts, leaders, and practitioners.' [H-PC].

²Fairness is conceived as 'objectivity, consistency, transparency, reliability, accountability and evidence-based decision-making' [RAND] but these have little to do with fairness in the sense of impartial satisfaction of needs.

³The list of governance arrangements includes 'advancing governance for global public goods' as well as 'peace and security' [OCA, item 103, p.66].

⁴The 'how' [OCA, item 12, p.18].

⁵'Revisiting our patterns of unsustainable consumption and production should enable more efficient and greater equity in resource use [...]' [OCA, item 87, p.59].

⁶However, I also believe that what is most needed at this time is [...] for all parts of the United Nations system directly to include civil society [...]' [OCA, item 121, p.75].

⁷The term 'social contract' can be conceived as '[...] the reciprocal obligations between people, households, communities and their leaders [...]' [OCA, box p.22].

⁸'broader range of businesses' [OCA, item 120, p.75].

⁹'Today, a broader range of State and non-State actors are participating in global affairs [...]' [OCA, item 104, p.66].

¹⁰Paragraph 'Choppy Waters' on p.20 of the IPCC minutes [IISD].

¹¹The Paris Agreement [PA] ignored reality [Sp] and set unattainable [R] and dangerous [BI] goals.

¹²‘[...] to strengthen the governance of our global commons and global public goods. This does not require new institutions.’ [OCA, item 62, p.48] and ‘Networks do not, however, replace our core international institutions, which have a unique role in [...] making space for marginalized voices.’ [OCA, item 105, p.66].

¹³‘[...] the United Nations [...] is one of the key institutions [...]’ [OCA, item 109, p.72] and ‘Effective multilateralism depends on an effective United Nations, one able to adapt [...]’ [OCA, item 6, p.4] so many reforms of the UN are proposed, like a ‘quintet of change.’ [OCA, item 123, p.75].

¹⁴Due to ‘inbuilt constraints’, there is only a 20% success rate of UN reform [Br, ch.6].

¹⁵‘These choices are ultimately in the hands of Member States [...]’ [OCA, item 62, p.48].

¹⁶For example, ‘some thought leaders in the breakfast dialogues’ [OCA, appendix] and it is unclear to what extent the thought-provoking references [OCAR] have been used.

¹⁷‘former Heads of State and Government’ [OCA, item 102, p.65] but as it turned out, also a few academics and an activist [H-M].

¹⁸Four new summits, at least three regular meetings [CIC] and two or more new advisory boards [OCA]. Back in 2018, another high-level advisory board firmly called for new multilateralism, be it for sustainable development [DESA].

¹⁹‘[...] net zero emissions by 2050, as made clear by the Panel [...]’ that is, Aug. 2021 [OCA, item 78, p.55].

²⁰To fix thoughts, suppose the world continued to emit carbon dioxide at the present rate and suddenly stopped, then this stop had to be in 2028 to allow a 83% chance of letting the earth’s atmosphere get 1.5 degree Celsius warmer than before the industrial revolution: Table 5.8, p.5-96 or ‘Technical Summary’ Table TS-3, p.TS-62. [WG1].

²¹‘[...] I call all leaders world-wide to declare a state of climate emergency in their countries [...]’ [Gu].

²²‘[...] I will seek to re-establish the Secretary-General’s Scientific Advisory Board [...]’ [OCA, item 117, p.74].

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