

Providing Global Public Goods: Fostering ‘publicness’ with a new political mechanism

*Providing Global Public Goods: Managing Globalization** proposes that the U.N. could consider assuming new roles as a representative forum to set global guidelines for the provision of global public goods and the management of globalization.

The book suggests that the General Committee of the U.N. General Assembly could inspire an annual meeting at the level of heads of government to provide global vision and policy guidance in order to foster greater public participation on major decisions relating to the financing, production, and provision of global public goods. This would provide a forum that could be used to broaden decision-making and policy-making processes related to globalization and global public goods. These specific suggestions would contribute to the globalization debate advancing beyond the accepted emphasis on private-sector initiatives and benefits to focus new attention on the “publicness” of the globalization process.

Asserting that there is a critical link between globalization and the provision of global public goods, the study calls for a new political process that sets priorities at a global level through the strengthening of international policy-making and decision-making mechanisms. Such mechanisms are essential if an increasingly interdependent human community is to provide global public goods efficiently, equitably, and adequately.

Chief among the institutional changes the study proposes is the establishment of an intergovernmental forum on global public goods and the management of the globalization process based on the membership of the General Committee of the U.N. General Assembly.

The committee is at present comprised of 28 members: a president, the chairs of the six main committees of the General Assembly, and 21 vice-presidents. Among the vice-presidents, five are the permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, and

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16 are nominated every year by each group of U.N. member states: Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Western Europe and other states.

By adding the president of the Economic and Social Council, the committee would lead into a “Group of 29”. A ‘G-29’ of this kind could provide crucial political impetus in moving forward the agenda for global public goods, especially when supported by rigorous policy and financing studies.

The new book is a sequel to *Global Public Goods: International Cooperation in the 21st Century*, which was published in 1999 and is also available through Oxford University Press.

While the earlier study was concerned primarily with identifying and explaining the concept of global public goods, the new book presents a practical framework for providing and financing global public goods so as to create a stabler, more equitable international order. The ‘how-to’ of managing globalization is moving more than more to the political center stage.

The study thus stresses, first, a new political process to set priorities at the global level. As part of the provision process, it also calls for a more structured approach to financing global public goods and a significant increase in participation among different groups of actors and stakeholders.

Public goods have long been understood on a local or national scale; everything from traffic lights and schools to defense systems are examples of these. Now the authors assert, public goods have gone global. Disease control, climate stability, financial stability, international security—these are public goods that must be developed and provided on a global scale.

A nation with a well-functioning health-care system is still vulnerable to the contagion of HIV/AIDS or the West Nile virus. A nation with a strong banking sector could still suffer a financial meltdown that began elsewhere. Such global public bads must be understood to have a common root: They often result from the under-provision of global public goods.

Thus, globalization and the production of global public goods are inextricably linked. Still, such goods are now produced and provided with little strategic design, insufficient political participation, and too little interaction among national governments.

The public aspects of globalization cannot be ignored any longer. In the long run, more equitable cooperation strategies will also be more efficient and enduring.

Providing Global Public Goods contributes to the development of the strategic design so far missing in our approach to globalization. After redefining the concept of public and private global goods, the study analyzes the political, economic, and financial aspects of a global system geared to producing and providing public goods both efficiently and equitably. It argues for new thinking at the level of national governments, enhanced cooperation among nations, renovated international institutions, and innovative ways to combine public and private sector initiatives.

The study concludes with a series of case studies illustrating how the concept of global public goods has been applied in a variety of specific settings. Incorporating a “bottom-up” approach, these studies consider the question of global public goods from the perspective of the world’s poor while reconciling local and global benefits in the provision of global public goods.