Framing Global Problems

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The field of global problem-solving is less than a century old. It began with early scientific recognition that humanity shares a common fate despite its cultural differences. Global events such as the explosion of Krakatoa in 1883 prefigured the eruption of hundreds of shared global problems by the end of the twentieth century. Since 1975, Union of International Associations has mapped about three hundred distinct global problems. The series of UN mega-conferences that began about the same time is another indicator of runaway global problems putting enormous pressure on societies and governments.Decision-makers everywhere face increased uncertainty arising from the contradictory process of global change and resulting indeterminate and unpredictable outcomes. Because global problems are so complex and poorly understood and often are recognized only after massive or catastrophic change occurs, decision-makers must rely upon specialists such as scientists, strategists, or economists to create a global consensus on how best to respond to the problem.But if no such specialist consensus exists or if it is challenged by interests or overruled by ideology, then the common knowledge needed to manage a global problem may be missing or even contested. This may happen when the conditions and systems that create and transmit common knowledge are themselves in flux or if solutions entail sacrificing underlying values for the common good. Decision-makers descend into parochialism that undermines or even destroys the global good.

One way to overcome the inability of governments and markets to solve global problems is to enable global civil society to step into the breach.

Global civil society is itself at a critical formative stage. Its diverse, bottom-up networks and organizations grounded in local realities have adopted innovative transnational strategies to address global problems.

The approach adopted by global civil society is humble and practical. It recognizes that humanity can never fully comprehend nor agree fully on the nature of global problems and related solutions. It nurtures many pathways to solutions that are pursued simultaneously, both to loosen the ties that bind problems together and to offer alternative pathways towards solutions when one or other path is blocked.

Global civil society emphasizes the primacy of achieving cooperative and peaceful solutions that are grounded in communication, coordination, and collaboration to find points of agreement and common ground.

It relies on networking strategies to achieve incremental, widespread, and rapid change at many levels and locales at once, thereby solving many problems at the same time.

It seeks to develop partnerships that share versatile tools across organizational and problem-domains, to share experience and tools across problems and places.

It creates sets of common knowledge about interrelated problems and overlapping solutions in information milieu that foster social learning about the true complexity of global problems and enable adversaries to identify common ground.

These contributions are indispensable to realizing global solutions. In many cases, global civil society will initiate or lead global problem-solving ahead or beside governments and corporations.

Now is the time to build this civilian capacity at a global level. Nautilus' contribution will be to initiate an applied, self-managing, problem-solving network called the Global Collaborative. The Global Collaborative will attempt an advanced form of transnational, civil society networking and partnership that applies global problem-solving techniques in East-Asia and the Pacific.

The Global Collaborative will draw on the capacities of our hosts at Center for the Pacific Rim at University of San Francisco and the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, as well as on the Nautilus networks of collaborating partners and users in over forty countries.

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