

GLOBAL GOVERNANCE IN 2020

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By 2020, the world needs an effective system of global governance for managing sustainable development. It will require systematic improvements in four areas.

First, politics must take account of technical expertise. In international negotiations such as the Copenhagen climate process, negotiators spend a lot of time arguing over the legalities of agreements but little time discussing technological options. There is a tendency to announce targets without technical strategies, and then to miss the targets. The United Nations should follow up the Copenhagen meeting by setting up expert groups to support the practical tasks of climate-change mitigation and adaptation. Within a few years, a new world environment organization should be established to oversee and provide technical support for the major treaties.

Second, public and private investments in new technologies should be managed as part of an integrated system. Almost all environmental challenges, from greenhouse-gas emissions to the depletion of groundwater resources, demand technological transformation. Achieving this will need a mix of public and private enterprise. The public sector will be responsible for issues such as monitoring, regulation and public safety and awareness; the private sector will take the lead in profit-oriented investments, in particular in research and development. Both sides will need to harmonize their actions and seek effective partnerships.

Third, corporate lobbying must be restrained: it is one of the greatest dangers to sustainable development. In the United States, corporate influence through lobbying, campaign funding and misleading advocacy campaigns has been an enormous obstacle to effective regulation of the economy and environment. For example, heavy lobbying by Wall Street contributed to the financial deregulation that helped cause the recent crisis, and pressure from the energy industry has delayed action on climate change. Some countries have successfully constrained such influence through public financing of elections and other means. The United States should follow suit.

Finally, global financing for poorer countries must improve if international agreements on climate, land use and biodiversity are to succeed. The record of aid delivery to poor countries is dismal. Rich countries regularly promise support that never arrives. Two proposals have been made that could improve things: a small tax on cross-border financial transactions, and a global levy on carbon emissions. Both should be implemented alongside more traditional forms of aid to secure a more reliable source of development finance.