

**Implementing the 2030 Agenda:
What Role for the Group of Twenty (G20)?**

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Discussion Draft

01/06/2018

Acknowledgments

The author thanks the following reviewers for their comments and observations on earlier versions of this paper: Helmut Anheier, Pedro Conceição, Moira Feil, Roger Fischer, Christian Flachsland, Thomas Fues, John Kirton, Christine Mayr, Rohinton Medhora, Dirk Messner, José Antonio Ocampo, Annalisa Prizzon; Imme Scholz, Elizabeth Sidiropoulos, Dennis Snower, Ramesh Thakur and YeYu. However, the views expressed in this study are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the reviewers. Any errors or omissions are also the sole responsibility of the author.

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The present study was commissioned by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) on behalf of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development.

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Executive Summary

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, agreed to by 193 countries in 2015, sets out 17 goals and 169 targets for fostering progress by 2030. Its overarching aim is to promote inclusive and sustainable growth and development on a global scale by advancing development at national and regional levels. In support of these efforts, the 2030 Agenda calls for ensuring adequate provision of global public goods (GPGs), such as climate change mitigation, communicable disease control, food security and ocean health.

As stressed in Goal 17, implementation of Agenda 2030 requires effective international cooperation, including greater intergovernmental cooperation and stronger partnerships between state and nonstate actors. To that end, an obvious potential key player is the Group of Twenty (G20), whose self-declared aim is to be the “premier forum of international economic cooperation” and which has resolved to promote strong, sustainable, balanced and inclusive growth and to shape globalization to benefit all people.

So, what role is the G20 already playing in implementing the 2030 Agenda and other related international agreements such as the Paris Agreement on climate change?¹ And how could the G20 strengthen its contribution and live up to its ambition of being the “premier forum”?

This paper explores these questions, drawing on official G20 documents and on materials produced by analysts and observers of G20 processes.

Six functions of a “premier forum” of international cooperation

Considering the nature of the global challenges confronting the world today and current policymaking realities, the paper argues that a “premier” forum of international cooperation would do what other actors cannot do as well or are not willing to do to foster successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda and help resolve the challenges. In particular, a “premier forum” would need to engage in the following six functions, which can also become the criteria for assessing effectiveness:

- *Function 1:* Identifying key entry-points for global (top down) leadership interventions – to complement and stimulate existing bottom up initiatives in line with established global norms and principles.
- *Function 2:* Reducing policy reform and investment backlogs – to pull the world back from the brink of unsustainability.
- *Function 3:* Rewarding innovation – to understand and manage future sustainability risks.
- *Function 4:* Providing and helping mobilize capital – to begin “walking the walk” in the most pressing policy fields.
- *Function 5:* Seeking a “new normal” in international economic cooperation – to make the world less dependent on ad hoc leadership.
- *Function 6:* Monitoring value added – to ensure that the leadership exercised generates the desired outcomes and is perceived by all concerned as legitimate and in the global public interest.

Two main findings

One main finding is that the G20’s current performance fails to meet all six criteria of a “premier forum”. The G20 was fairly successful in addressing the 2007–2008 global financial crisis. However, since about 2010, it has appeared to shy away from an active global leadership role and to limit itself to being a forum where rhetoric rather than action abounds. Moreover, in large measure, this rhetoric

consists largely of acknowledging work undertaken by others or re-affirming “noncommittal policy commitments” adopted at prior G20 summits or in other global governance bodies such as the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions that do not call for any follow-up action.

A second main finding concerns the internal and external factors that are contributing to the G20’s lack of effectiveness. Its indecision and lack of leadership since 2010 appear to be rooted in several ongoing global transformations, including increasing multipolarity, the shift towards a low-carbon global economy and the New Industrial Revolution (also known as the Fourth Industrial Revolution and characterized by a range of new technologies that are fusing physical, digital and biological worlds). These transformations have fundamentally unsettled power relations among states and might help explain why the G20 seems to be practising “competitive cooperation” – cooperation aimed at maintaining a stalemate between conventional and newly emerging global policy-setters, whose ideas still differ on a range of issues, including on the future shape of the world order and the system of international cooperation.

The G20’s future role: Six reform options

Yet, as reports on global risks proliferate, what the world urgently needs is more global leadership and less temporizing. So, how, despite all the differences and tensions among them, could the G20 member states be persuaded to focus meaningfully on at least the most pressing global challenges? The paper suggests, simply, that they could do this by offering a credible, concrete narrative on how to break out of the current cooperation stalemate in those (probably few) areas that all or most of the members clearly recognize as being vital to realizing their own national self-interests and then get down to walking their talk.

Accordingly, the paper suggests, as a first option, that the G20 adopt a new, updated narrative, along these lines: “*Securing Global Sustainability*”.

The other five reform options elaborate on this narrative, suggesting additional steps that the G20 could take to gear up to make it happen. Option 3, the most important, calls for all or at least some of the G20’s members to step forward as lead investors in global mission-oriented projects in policy fields of highest strategic importance to “*Securing Global Sustainability*”. A case is made for three such global mission-oriented projects that could help prevent the further accumulation of unresolved problems, as the world is witnessing now, and thereby avoid the need for other special operational interventions:

- Doing what it takes to avoid crossing the 2° centigrade threshold of global warming while concurrently achieving related goals such as energy and water security for all, as well as other climate change-related goals.
- Keeping public policymakers ahead of the curve in ongoing technological transformations.
- Exploring core elements of a new model of international cooperation that is ready for the global challenges of this century.

If the G20 evolves along these lines, its performance could soon come to correspond much more closely to the “premier forum” it aspires to be.

Now is the time to rethink – and lead again

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the G20’s upgrading from a ministerial-level body to a forum of heads of state and government. Now is an auspicious time to revisit its role and the possibilities for strengthening its leadership role on the global stage.

**Implementing the 2030 Agenda:
What Role for the Group of Twenty (G20)?**

Introduction

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, agreed to by 193 countries in 2015, sets out 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets for fostering progress by 2030. Its overarching aim is to promote inclusive and sustainable growth and development on a global scale by advancing development at national and regional levels. In support of these efforts, the 2030 Agenda calls for ensuring adequate provision of global public goods (GPGs), such as climate change mitigation, communicable disease control, food security and ocean health (see annex B). The 2030 Agenda is thus intended to be of universal relevance and applicability for the benefit of all – richer and poorer countries and the planet itself.

As stressed in Goal 17, implementation of Agenda 2030 requires effective international cooperation, including greater intergovernmental cooperation and stronger partnerships between state and nonstate actors. To that end, an obvious potential key player is the Group of Twenty (G20), whose self-declared aim is to be the “premier forum of international economic cooperation”² and which is resolved to promote “strong, sustainable, balanced and inclusive growth” [and] to shape globalization to benefit all people.”³

So, what role is the G20 already playing in implementing the 2030 Agenda and other related international agreements such as the Paris Agreement on climate change?⁴ How is it complementing the activities of other actors, including multilateral organizations, civil society, business, government entities operating domestically and the global public at large? Is the G20 helping catalyse and realize needed corrective actions of adequate scale, scope and speed? And, if necessary or desired, how might the G20 strengthen its contribution and live up to its ambition of being the “premier forum”?

This paper seeks to answer these questions, drawing on official G20 documents and on materials produced by analysts and observers of G20 processes.⁵

Section I outlines the framework for analysing the international cooperation prerequisites for successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda under current global policymaking realities. For this purpose, it identifies six functions of a true “premier” global leadership forum acting collectively to do what other actors, state and nonstate alike, might be unwilling or unable to do:

1. Identifying the key entry points for global (“top-down”) leadership interventions.
2. Pulling the world back from the brink of unsustainability by reducing reform and investment backlogs in policy fields of vital importance to human security and the health of the planet.
3. Rewarding investment in research and innovation aimed at managing sustainability risks.
4. Acting as lead investor group for global mission-oriented projects in support of these functions.

² It was at the 2009 Pittsburgh Summit that the G20 for the first time expressed the ambition of being “the premier forum of international economic cooperation” (G20 2009a:19). And as the 2017 Leaders Declaration (G20 2017a) shows, it still maintains this ambition.

³ G20 2017a:2.

⁴ The Paris Agreement was a second landmark international agreement adopted in 2015. It is available at: http://unfccc.int/paris_agreement/items/9485.php/. It is closely related to the 2030 Agenda’s Sustainable Development Goal 13, at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg13/>.

⁵ For a brief introduction to the G20, see annex A.

5. Seeking a “new normal” of international cooperation that is better suited than the current system to today’s international cooperation requirements.
6. Monitoring the value added from its leadership to ensure that it complements and stimulates – rather than discourages – contributions by other actors, including other multilateral organizations, national and sub-national entities such as cities, private business, civil society and the global public at large.

Section II describes the evolution of the G20 and compares its performance against the six “premier forum” functions just identified. It finds that, while rather successful in addressing the 2007–2008 global financial crisis, the G20 has since about 2010 shied away from an active global leadership role, acting largely as a forum for rhetoric more than action. Moreover, that rhetoric consists largely of acknowledging work by others or re-affirming “noncommittal commitments” or policy agreements adopted at prior G20 summits or in other global governance bodies. Judging from the most recent summits, the 2030 Agenda – itself long on unprioritized goals and targets – has reinforced rather than altered the G20’s tendency to limit itself to joint communiqués while shunning joint, collective action. It seems caught in a stalemate of “competitive cooperation” between conventional and emerging policy-setters with divergent views who are vying for decisionmaking power to shape global policies and relations between countries. Hence, its current performance fails to reflect the six functions of a “premier forum”.

Yet because the world urgently needs global leadership, section III, in reflecting on the G20’s future role, rules out closure and business as usual. The reform options proposed range from incremental institutional adjustments to a radical re-definition of the G20’s role, envisioning it as a forum of lead-investors in strategically selected global mission-oriented projects aimed at securing global sustainability for current and future generations – a world for all. To spark G20 members’ willingness to reorient and reinvigorate its role in this way, section III suggests that the G20 craft a credible, concrete narrative on how to break out of the current cooperation stalemate and focus, despite any differences and tensions among them, on the few goals that they share with each other and with the rest of the world: securing the foundation of sustainability on which to build the futures they want.

With 2018 marking the 10th anniversary of the G20’s upgrading from a ministerial-level body to a forum of heads of state and government, now seems an auspicious time to refashion its role – to lead again on the policy path towards securing sustainability and creating a world for all people, today and tomorrow.

I. The Role of Global Public Policy Leadership in Implementing the 2030 Agenda

The 2030 Agenda was developed through extensive global consultations and negotiations and was agreed on by more than 150 world leaders at a United Nations Summit on September 25, 2015. The same process holds for the second landmark agreement of 2015, the Paris Agreement on climate change. With these and other accords, the world has more than enough globally agreed-on goals and targets waiting for follow-up action. Implementation is what is needed now.

Making It happen

So, what are the international cooperation requirements (or functions) that need to be met to address today’s global challenges and move, as the 2030 Agenda aspires, towards more inclusive and sustainable global growth and development? This paper highlights six functions that call for a “premier

forum of international economic cooperation” to intervene because no other actors are likely to be as able and willing to undertake them.⁶

Locating the key entry-points

Given the complexity of the 2030 Agenda and the highly interdependent multi-actor world, a first step for an international-level leadership body is to ascertain whether there is need for it to intervene and, if so, where and how to intervene to set in motion self-propelling change, wherever possible.

The 2030 Agenda sets out its 17 goals and 169 targets without prioritizing them. However, addressing each goal and target “just a bit” and with the same intensity risks inefficient and ineffective resource utilization and, consequently, lack of impact. Thus, the first step for a leadership body to take would be to determine whether a comprehensive agenda implementation roadmap has been prepared. If not, a draft resolution should request its preparation in relevant international bodies, including the High-Level Political Forum.⁷

A comprehensive roadmap covering all the goals is an essential tool for gaining strategic insight into the process of agenda implementation, which will involve multiple actors contributing in numerous policy fields and sectors and at varying levels of governance. Interlinkages need to be considered and workflows orchestrated, if, as the 2030 Agenda stipulates, future growth and development strategies are to combine the three dimensions of sustainability – economic, social and environmental – in a balanced way.

For reasons of efficiency, equity and effectiveness, and to inspire a willingness to contribute, the principles of subsidiarity and of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capacities should guide decisions about potential providers of different contributions. This would help establish a proper balance between decentralization and centralization.

An integrated roadmap also provides a firm base from which to explore alternative implementation pathways and instruments, gauge the willingness of actor groups to cooperate, prepare global and disaggregated cost–benefit analyses and spot the “blanks” – the tasks that require leadership interventions.

⁶ It is perhaps useful here to clarify the usage of the concept of “international economic cooperation” as currently used by the G20 and in this paper. In earlier years, for example in 2009 when the G20 Leaders issued the Pittsburgh Communiqué (G20 2009a), the concept of international economic cooperation referred primarily to such issues as macroeconomic policy, exchange rate policy, or international trade and finance. The 2017 Leaders’ Declaration (G20 2017a) also employs the concept. But, it covers a broad range of global challenges, including, besides the foregoing ones, “terrorism, displacement, poverty, hunger and health threats, job creation, climate change, energy security, and inequality including gender inequality, as a basis for sustainable development and stability” (ibid:2). It thus appears that economic international cooperation now refers not to a particular set of transnational challenges but to the policy approach or perspective adopted to determine whether and how to engage in international cooperation on these issues – the economics international cooperation as distinguished from political (power politics-based) or socio-culturally motivated cooperation. Moreover, there exists mounting evidence that most people are not as selfish as the rational choice branch of economics tends to assume. Rather, they are often multi-motivational actors and, sometimes, even committed cooperators. Therefore, the term “economics of international cooperation” now has to consider several – economic and non-economic – dimensions in assessing whether different actors groups consider that international cooperation “pays”: is fair, generating clear net-benefits and, thus, worth for them to crowd in.

⁷ All G20 member countries are, as United Nations (UN) member states, also members of the High-Level Political Forum, which meets under the auspices of the UN Economic and Social Council and has a central role in the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda. For the Forum’s mandate, see <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/>.

Judging from experience, the next five functions are likely to figure among those “blanks”.

Pulling the world back from the brink of unsustainability

The system of international cooperation has been slow in adjusting to the growing urgency of global (transnational) policy challenges that result from the greater openness and policy interdependence among states. In many countries the foreign–domestic divide remains strongly entrenched, although issues such as communicable diseases or carbon emissions are neither just foreign nor just domestic but transnational or global.

The system of international cooperation has also been slow in responding to the growing involvement of nonstate actors in the international policy arena and in fully harnessing their energy and willingness to contribute. As a consequence, international cooperation is a vibrant but fractured policy field, a laissez-faire system of bottom-up initiatives conducted less than optimally. Lack of coordination prevents actors from working together on global challenges in a synergistic, results- and resolution-oriented way. Scholars and policymakers often favour small, disconnected, bottom-up interventions. But this approach largely ignores the need to engage and encourage both international pull and push mechanisms to overcome problems of market failure and collective action, notably for policy challenges with the properties of a global public good (GPG; see annex B).

Moreover, though not in fact true, private and public finance are often seen as interchangeable.⁸ Add to this the tendency of individual actors to address global challenges, especially GPG-type challenges, only to the extent that they overlap with their own interests. It becomes clear, then, why interventions fail and why there is a growing backlog of unresolved problems of ever more daunting dimensions, some with potentially catastrophic consequences for humanity and the planet. In many cases, the sum of the corrective actions that state and nonstate actors are willing to take when guided only by self-interest does not add up to adequate provision of GPGs. Provision gaps persist and challenges remain unresolved.⁹

Global sustainability cannot be built on an unstable foundation of global warming, worldwide water scarcity or pandemics. Policy reform and investment backlogs, especially where we face existential global risks and where corrective action is both technically and economically feasible, must be eased and, where possible, eliminated.¹⁰

One way to do that is to launch global mission-oriented projects, where the mission is to reduce the backlogs in policy reforms and investments and establish a solid foundation for sustainable growth and development.

A review by Mazzucato (2017) of national and international projects of this type finds five defining properties of mission-oriented projects. They address well-defined “grand societal challenges”; draw on public and private resources; rely on economically feasible technical solutions; emphasize both radical and incremental innovations to engage a large number of actors, including private business; and deliberately aim at the diffusion of their results.¹¹

⁸ On the differences between private and public finance see, for example, Mazzucato and Semieniuk (2017).

⁹ Many GPGs, including human-made ones, such as international financial stability, and the natural global commons, such as the atmosphere and the ocean, have particular systemic integrity requirements. This means that certain conditions need to be maintained or achieved in order for a good or system (natural or human-made) to function in an intact and undiminished way.

¹⁰ See, on the classification of systemic risks as existential or first-order and second-order, Annex D.

¹¹ Mazzucato (2017) refers to a large number of past and current mission-oriented projects and to earlier reviews that examined these projects from the perspective of their relevance and applicability to resolving today’s global societal challenges, including the studies by Soete and Arundel (1993); Forey et al. (2012) Mazzucato (2014),

Rewarding innovation in managing sustainability risks

Innovations of low commercial interest are often neglected. In addition, the response to change processes and risks has, in many cases, been to develop new risk-management products. These products are certainly useful, but they strengthen people's, firms' and communities' capacity to cope with risks without eliminating the risks themselves. Thus, global mission-oriented projects might also be an appropriate operational mechanism for developing innovations to manage sustainability risks that may require global leadership.

New risks are emerging all the time, including those associated with the shift toward a low-carbon economy and the New (or Fourth) Industrial Revolution (the blurring of the real world and the technological world). Many of these changes will have far-reaching impacts on societies and economies, and their ripple effects will unsettle international relations and even the core principles of the current world order.¹² These impacts are likely to be global, profound and long lasting.

Given today's rapid pace of technological change, it falls to the current generation to explore and deal with the implications of these processes. True, risk research and innovation in fields such as machine intelligence are booming. But more can and should be done to enable public policy actors to stay ahead of the change curve, understand the governance implications of these new technologies and explore and test new policy approaches and instruments. The aim is to reduce threats to global sustainability and to share the opportunities and advantages that new technologies such as digital intelligence might generate.

Doing this requires strategic investments in rewarding and enabling innovation and risk-taking that neither individual market actors nor individual states and civil-society actors might be willing or able to undertake alone. Hence the need for foresighted global public-policy leadership.

Providing and helping mobilize requisite capital

Considering that now is the time to act and that the international community has agreed on the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capacities, we must also recognize that we live in a world of wide disparities and differences. Thus, global leadership in international economic cooperation, especially if claimed by countries at higher levels of income and technological capacities, comes with a responsibility to back announced policy commitments with the requisite public financial and nonfinancial resources. That would include, for example, regulatory measures, such as differential patenting, to ensure that new technologies are available and affordable, as well as widely disseminated and deployed.

Thus, member states of a premier forum of international economic cooperation could, for instance, offer to provide seed or venture capital for mission-oriented projects and other stimuli packages to mobilize additional investment funds. Implementation roadmaps and benefit-cost analyses as proposed above would recognize that financing key initiatives may be a good investment for the world as a whole as well as for the public and private investors themselves. This would especially be the case if the investment strategy sought to generate long-lasting sustainability effects such that future as well

Mazzucato and Semienuk (2017). Current examples of global mission-oriented projects include: CERN (Conseil Européen pour la Recherche Nucléaire/ European Organisation for Nuclear Research), the International Space Station and the Moon Village, together with the Moon Village Association.

See, for more detailed information about these projects, respectively: <https://home.cern/about>; https://www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/station/main/index.html/; and https://www.esa.int/About_Us/Ministerial_Council_2016/Moon_Village/; <https://moonvillageassociation.org/>.

¹² See, on the potential consequences of the New (Fourth) Industrial Revolution, for example, Schwab (2016) and Siddiqi (2018); and for a broader review of current and potential future risks with "infinite impact," Bostrom (2014), Global Challenges Foundation (2015) and WEF (...).

as current generations might expect to see clear net benefits or reductions in the costs they might otherwise incur as a result of delayed investments in tackling such problems as water stress or new and resurgent communicable diseases.

Also, leadership projects and investments should aim to close GPG provision gaps without duplicating or suffocating the activities of other actors, making a noticeable difference by lifting the total effort high enough to adequately provide or generate GPGs.

Seeking a “new normal” of international cooperation

A novel feature of the 2030 Agenda is that it intends to be universally relevant and applicable. Achieving its goals and targets thus requires the pursuit of a dual international cooperation agenda: promoting growth and development at national and regional levels *and* providing GPGs.¹³ However, a major impediment is that international cooperation in support of GPG provision is being approached “as though it were development assistance” – by development assistance or aid institutions and through development assistance policy approaches, instruments and resources.¹⁴

However, both development and GPG provision suffer when public actors encourage the use of more and more development finance (grant and loan money) for GPG provision rather than adding new resources as incentives for developing countries and private actors, who might be efficient providers and willing to contribute more than they would if guided solely by self-interests. This condition needs urgent correction. Inadequate development can undermine GPG provision. As Medhora (2016:1) emphasizes, development is fundamental, not a sidebar”. For example, weak national capacities and lack of resources may hamper poorer countries’ ability to respond swiftly to outbreaks of infectious diseases or to prevent situations of political fragility and conflict from spilling across borders. By the same token, underprovided GPGs, such as peace and security or an inefficiently managed global knowledge stock, may hold back development, as can be seen in the high and rising number of countries experiencing conditions of fragility and vulnerability.¹⁵

One immediate corrective step would be to launch and ensure the financing of such initiatives as the proposed mission-oriented projects. Another step would be to encourage debate and consensus on a new, expanded system of international economic cooperation.

Wide differences exist between international cooperation in support of development and that in support of the provision of GPGs (see appendix C). For each cooperation strand to function well individually and synergistically, these and other differences need to be recognized and acted on.¹⁶

¹³ Annex B presents a definition of GPGs and highlights some of the special governance challenges they pose. For a more detailed discussion of GPGs and their provision, see, among others, the collection of articles in Kaul (2016).

¹⁴ See, on this point, for example, OECD/DAC 2015 and Kaul 2017.

¹⁵ See, FFP 2017; and UN and WB 2018.

¹⁶ At the national level, development and GPGs are closely intertwined. This is also why developing countries are undertaking voluntary commitments to reduce, for example, carbon emissions. But they often do this for national reasons, such as to improve local air quality. And in such cases, it seems to be appropriate for a country that wishes to do so to use development finance (sovereign loan or grant assistance). However, if a developing country were an efficient provider of carbon reduction and requested by an external actor or the international community as a whole to generate additional reductions in the global interest, additional GPG finance should be provided. The reason is that, in the case of additional reductions, all countries would benefit, and so it would only be fair if developed countries valued the global co-benefits generated by developing countries – as efficient providers – to reward them for their extra effort. Annex D visualizes how in such cases development and GPG finance would interact.

At present, however, policy instruments and resources are lacking to motivate individual actors to offer to do more than they would, if guided by their individual interests and help close current gaps in international cooperation in support of GPG provision and development support. That would require effective and efficient incentive mechanisms and international cooperation deals that all concerned perceive as mutually beneficial and fair worth “crowding in”.

To pre-empt problems of moral hazard, more incentive-compatible international cooperation ought to be matched with more GPG-compatible national policymaking, including better cross-border management of externalities. To this end, countries could agree – for example, through a United Nations General Assembly resolution – to exercise national policymaking sovereignty in a way that respects the sovereignty of other countries and the systemic integrity requirements of GPGs (the conditions needed for a good or system to function properly), including those of the global commons such as the high seas and the Arctic and Antarctic regions.¹⁷

More effective international cooperation, essential to achieving the goals of the 2030 Agenda, requires a basic review and modernization of the international cooperation model. The main aim would be to align such cooperation with incentives for state and nonstate actors and, thereby, to reduce dependence on ad hoc leadership initiatives (see section III).

Monitoring the value added

Global policymaking realities are changing fast, necessitating frequent monitoring and review of policy strategies. Goal 17 of the 2030 Agenda emphasizes the need for frequent and systematic assessments of progress. A leadership body that intends to play a role in implementing the 2030 Agenda might also want to report to the concerned intergovernmental bodies, notably the High Level Political Forum, on its contributions and invite feedback from the global public on how to strengthen them.

In sum: Six ways to recognize a premier forum

From the foregoing discussion it can be argued that the distinctive feature of a premier forum of international economic cooperation is that it seeks to perform, among others, the six functions described above and summarized in box 1.

Box 1. Six key functions of a premier forum of international cooperation

Function 1: Locating key entry-points for global (top down) leadership interventions – to complement and stimulate existing bottom up initiatives in line with established global norms and principles.

Function 2: Reducing policy reform and investment backlogs – to pull the world back from the brink of unsustainability.

Function 3: Rewarding innovation – to understand and manage future sustainability risks.

Function 4: Providing and helping mobilize capital – to begin “walking the walk” in the most pressing policy fields.

Function 5: Seeking a “new normal” in international economic cooperation – to make the world less dependent on hoc leadership.

Function 6: Monitoring value added – to ensure that the leadership exercised generates the desired outcomes and is perceived by all concerned as legitimate and in the global-public interest.

¹⁷ See, for the definition of areas beyond national jurisdiction and the special policy challenges they pose, GEF 2016.

So, the obvious next question is whether the G20's performance meets these six criteria or functions. Such an assessment seems fair considering that all G20 member states adopted the 2030 Agenda in 2015 and then jointly committed themselves in 2016 "to aligning its [the G20's] work with the 2030 Agenda" and to promoting agenda implementation through their "collective and individual efforts, at home and abroad, in a way that makes use of the comparative advantage of the G20 as a global economic forum".¹⁸ That assessment, conducted in the next section, reveals that the G20 meets none of the six "premier forum" criteria. It is a forum in which rhetoric rather than action abounds – for a number or reasons.

II. The G20's Current Role

In 1999, based on an initiative proposed by the Group of Seven (G7) highly industrialized countries, the G20 was established "to provide a new mechanism for informal dialogue in the framework of the Bretton Woods institutional system, to broaden the discussion on key economic and financial policy issues among systemically significant economies and to promote cooperation to achieve stable and sustainable world economic growth that benefits all."¹⁹ But not until 2008, in the midst of the global financial crisis, was the G20 elevated from a ministerial-level body to the leaders' forum that it is today (see annex A). During its early years, the G20's main focus was on revitalizing global economic growth and stabilizing international financial markets.²⁰

Assessments of the performance of the "elevated" G20 tend to agree that it was relatively successful as a crisis manager in the aftermath of the financial crisis. Assessments of its performance since 2010 vary widely, however, from "irrelevant" and "harmful" to "effective" and "beneficial".²¹ These different judgements reflect in large part the assessment criteria applied. Thus, before applying the "premier forum" or leadership functions laid out in section I to assess the G20's role in implementing the 2030 Agenda, the next section provides context through a descriptive overview of the G20's activities since 2010.

An overview of G20 activities

The G20 is not an ordinary organization, with a headquarters office and secretariat. Rather, it is a reiterative annual *process* of year-long preparations for a one-day summit meeting of leaders organized by the country that holds the presidency and acts as the host, a function that rotates annually (see annex A). This year, for example, Argentina is the G20 president and host country. In 2017, it was Germany; in 2019, it will be Japan, followed in 2020 by Saudi Arabia.

The recurrent process nature of the G20 is important to keep in mind when examining the G20's activities. They are considered here from four angles: their type, substance, outcomes, and relations with the existing multilateral system.

¹⁸ G20 2016:1.

¹⁹ G20 2008a:60.

²⁰ G20 2009a.

²¹ For more detailed accounts of the G20's performance during the early years of its existence, see: Cooper and Thakur 2013; English et al. 2005; G20 2008b; Hajnal 2014; Kharas and Lombardi (2012); Kirton 2016; and Wade 2011. For assessments of the Group's performance after the global financial crisis, see: Chongyang Institute 2016, notably the essays contained in Part I; Fues 2017 on the varying interpretations of the Hamburg Summit; Ye 2016 for an assessment of the G20's performance notably from China's viewpoint; and the extensive list of research and resources compiled by the Research Group of the G20 Information Centre of the Munk School of Global Affairs at the University of Toronto, to be retrieved from <http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/>.

Type

Activity types are distinguished by four purposes: organization of and participation in meetings, report production, pronouncement of commitments and follow-up on commitments. The G20 scores high on meetings and reports (both reflective of its process nature), but low on follow-up, as many commitments are “noncommittal” and do not call for any explicit follow-up action.

Meetings

The preparatory process for the 2018 summit, as forecast by Argentina, appears to follow the pattern of meetings that has become standard over the past several years. The number of expected meetings is 60, including 11 Finance Track meetings, 41 Sherpa²² Track meetings, 7 Engagement Group meetings and 1 summit meeting. Around 20,000 people are expected to participate.²³

Reports

Given these large numbers of meetings, it is unsurprising to find a raft of report production activities. For example, the 2017 Hamburg Summit agreed on a total of 16 documents.²⁴ The dozen or so ministerial, working group and task force meetings held during that summit’s preparatory phase also generated reports, including several of the 30 G20 action plans listed in annex F. The Think Tank Engagement Group (T20) alone submitted a report offering “20 solutions” on a wide range of topics, emerging from some 50 background policy briefs.²⁵

Commitments

Again, in light of the large number of meetings and reports, it should come as no surprise that G20 leaders are prone to making commitments. According to the G20 Information Centre, the 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016 Summits made 281, 205, 113 and 213 commitments—812 in all.²⁶

Most of these commitments were not new, but merely reconfirmed prior commitments that G20 members had made at previous summits or other venues of international cooperation, such as the Bretton Woods institutions or the United Nations. Moreover, many were “noncommittal commitments,” because they do not indicate any specific action to be undertaken or any particular actor group to undertake them.

For example, the 2017 Leaders’ Declaration includes the following “commitments”:

“We will strive to reduce excessive global imbalances in a way that supports global growth.”
(G20 2017a:3)

“We aim to foster favourable conditions for the development of the digital economy.” (ibid:5)

“We will engage in voluntary peer learning on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and call upon others to join this important exercise as a complementary action toward Voluntary National Reviews.” (ibid:10)

“We welcome the launch of the Women Entrepreneurs Financing Initiative (We-Fi), housed by the World Bank Group).” (ibid:11)

²² Sherpas are senior members of the staff of the heads of state and government.

²³ G20 2018b.

²⁴ See G20 Information Centre website (<http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/>), which provides links to official G20 documents from 2010, including those approved at and prepared as background documents for the 2017 Hamburg Summit. On the latter, see in particular <http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/summits/2017hamburg.html/>.

²⁵ See, http://www.t20germany.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/20_Solutions_for-the_G20.pdf/

²⁶ See G20 Information Centre website (<http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/>).

But maybe the Leaders' Declaration documents are not the right place to look for concrete commitments. Nor do G20 Working Group documents achieve higher levels of concreteness or commitment. For instance, the Development Working Group prepared the "Hamburg Update: Taking Forward the G20 Action Plan on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" which states: "To further contribute to achieving the 2030 Agenda ..., we have agreed upon the following concrete collective actions in Hamburg."²⁷ This opening statement is then followed by 27 "commitments," suggesting that the G20 will:

"Continue to promote strong, sustainable, balanced and inclusive growth through the Hamburg Action Plan, including our growth strategies."²⁸

"Help ensure a coherent approach and coordinated response between the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and [multilateral development banks] when countries are requiring financial assistance while experiencing macroeconomic vulnerabilities."²⁹

"Ensure the rising demand for food, feed and renewable resources does not result in an unsustainable increase in water use by the agricultural sector. Advance ICT innovation and its application in the agricultural sector."³⁰

"Emphasize women, youth, people living in rural areas and forcibly displaced persons in our continued efforts to promote financial inclusion for all."³¹

"Promote access to finance to help small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) integrate into global value chains, in line with internationally recognized labour, social and environmental standards."³²

"Advance solutions for resource efficiency, promote sustainable consumption and production patterns, and support the transition to a sustainable and efficient use of all natural resources."³³

As these excerpts show, the agreements on "concrete collective actions" are neither concrete nor do they specify any collective actions – actions that the G20 as a group promises to undertake over and above what its members will in any case do individually or together with others in nonG20 contexts.

Then what about the G20 action plans? Do they perhaps contain more concrete commitments?

Not really, as box 2 below suggests.

Follow-up on commitments

Trying to monitor and measure progress in implementing such noncommittal commitments is a formidable task. However, some reporting and mutual assessment are being undertaken. For example, assisted by the IMF and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), G20 members annually review global progress towards strong, sustainable and balanced growth. These reports tend to include "two-line" descriptions of qualifying national actions that members have

²⁷ G20 2017d:3

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid:4.

³² Ibid:5.

³³ Ibid.

undertaken or will undertake.³⁴ But these cursory statements allow for no meaningful judgment of progress and impact. Much the same reporting format is followed in other accountability reports, including those on the 2030 Agenda.³⁵

Box 2 G20 action plans: Plans without action

In addition to the Leaders' communiqués, G20 Summits often approve "G20 initiatives", including G20 action plans. Some of these action plans explicitly state that they are setting out the "concrete collective actions" that the G20 members intend to undertake in the policy field addressed. Others purport to present a "G20 operational plan". These plans may do neither, however.

The 2017 G20 Action Plan on Marine Litter is a case in point. It complements other actors on the work they have already undertaken in this field, mentioning, for example, reports prepared by the United Nations, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Joint Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Environmental Protection. In light of these reports, it even notes that "lack of scientific evidence can no longer be accepted as an excuse for inaction" (p. 1). Yet the "G20 Operational Framework" that follows comprises more than 40 recommendations addressed to no one in particular on what could be done, recommendations that echo what the reports say and what, in similar words, might also have been said in the more than 20 prior "conventions, programmes and initiatives, action plans and measures, and relevant UN resolution", listed on pages 7 and 8 of the G20 Action Plan on Marine Litter, covering the period since the early 1970s.

Moreover, the G20 Action Plan on Marine Litter makes no reference to the United Nations Ocean Conference, which took place one month before the G20 Summit in 2017. At this conference, G20 member states had already committed themselves to removing marine litter by approving UN General Assembly resolution 71/312 on "Our Ocean, Our Future: Call for Action". In its operative paragraph 13 (i), the resolution calls for "long-term and robust strategies to reduce the use of plastics and microplastics". Furthermore, no mention is made of UNEP's Clean Seas Campaign, launched in January 2017, which has been joined by 40 states, including 5 G20 countries.

So, why pile action call on action call, without indicating what difference the latest one will make, or how it will spark transformative change or who is responsible for acting? On this point, the G20 Action Plan on Marine Litter is silent. Unfortunately, that action plan is not the only one that fails to mention concrete, collective actions.

Source: This box draws on G20 2017f, GESAMP (2015, 2016), UN (2016), UNEP (2016), and UNGA (2017).

Moreover, judging by the frequency with which the G20 leaders reiterate prior commitments including, for example, those concerning tax base erosion and profit shifting,³⁶ elimination of fossil fuel subsidies,³⁷ or those on climate change mitigation, a concern they have stressed since 2008,³⁸ they do not appear to feel a strong sense of urgency to strengthen their leadership in resolving particular issues. Certainly, when a challenge has not been adequately or fully tackled and is still a relevant concern, it is useful to repeat it to keep it on policymakers' agendas. But it is also important to ask why

³⁴ See G20 2017b. For the IMF's surveillance reports <http://www.imf.org/external/np/g20/>; for OECD's support to these reviews, see [https://www.oecd.org/g20/topics/framework-strong-sustainable-balanced-growth/and OECD \(2017\)](https://www.oecd.org/g20/topics/framework-strong-sustainable-balanced-growth/and/OECD%20(2017).).

³⁵ See, for example, Annex B of the G20 Action Plan on the 2030 Agenda (G20 2016b).

³⁶ For a detailed history of this topic and its consideration by the G20, see Picciotto 2017. For the joint OECD/G20 project on this topic, see also <https://www.oecd.org/g20/topics/taxation/beps.htm/>.

³⁷ A study by Asmelash (2017:vii), for example, notes that "The 2009 Summit in Pittsburgh committed G20 countries to phase out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies over the medium term. Despite this landmark commitment, however, such subsidies remain significant within the group."

³⁸ See, <http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/analysis/conclusions/climatechange-1.pdf/>.

a problem remains unresolved. Is it because of continuing uncertainty? Or does lack of resolution show lack of political will? (This question is examined in more detail later.)

This apparent lack of urgency may also explain why the G20 operates as it does (which is also typical of UN resolutions): presenting action proposals without firm financial backing.³⁹ Backing may be included if the decision is supported by a donor country, as with the G20 initiative on Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative in developing countries, which was launched by Ivanka Trump in her capacity as Special Representative of the US President at the 2017 Summit.⁴⁰

In other cases, commitments may be implemented, financed and carried forward if they are taken on board by another organization, especially another multilateral organizations. However, these are often initiatives that these entities have themselves brought to the G20's attention, as in the case of the OECD–G20 Base Erosion and Profit Shifting project (BEPS), mentioned earlier.⁴¹ But even some G20 that find a host institution have difficulty securing predictable and adequate financing. That has been the case, for example, with the Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS), initially proposed by the G20 and now an inter-agency platform to enhance food market transparency and encourage international policy coordination in times of crisis.⁴² What most operational topics, projects, programmes and plans get from the G20 forum is a favourable mention in a G20 document and perhaps a justification for adding “G20” to their names and titles.

Substance

Turning to the substance of G20 activities, we now examine what G20 documents reveal about the G20's notions of growth and development, how agenda items are selected and prioritized, and the concept of international cooperation that underpins G20 deliberations.

Notions of growth and development

In adopting the 2030 Agenda, the international community committed itself to pursuing inclusive and sustainable global growth and development, through integrating and balancing all three sustainability dimensions—economic, social and environmental. The G20 also maintains two main substantive tracks: the Finance Track, dealing with global economic and finance issues, and the Sherpa Track, dealing with everything else, including issues related to women, youth, health, employment, digitization and the environment.

³⁹ The fact that the official G20 documents to be quiet about members' willingness to commit financial or nonfinancial resources to their action proposals does not, of course, imply that members individually might choose to offer support to one or the other initiative, either bilaterally or by contributing to a multilateral finance mechanism. What it does imply is that the G20 as a group does not appear to consider offering pooled support arrangements, such as through an issue-specific trust fund within the WBG.

⁴⁰ See, on this project: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/news/ivanka-trump-world-bank-start-fund-women-entrepreneurs-finance-initiative-investment-support-a7832671.html> and <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/818721508187147267/WeFi-Brochure-SinglePages.pdf/>.

⁴¹ See, on the OECD-G20 BEPS project again Picciotto (2017) and Fung (2017) who shows how host institutions with the means – and power – to do so may benefit from the G20 platform to effectively roll-out policy concerns even to hesitant parties. A similar point is made Lopes (2017) who asks in respect to the Compact to Africa: Who of the G20 members and invitees might like to sound a note of discord at the summit meeting and oppose proposed recommendations, especially if they are presented by the host country?

⁴² AMIS was launched in 2011, upon the recommendation of the G20 Ministers of Agriculture. It is an inter-agency platform aimed at enhancing food market transparency and food security. Its host agency is the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN system of specialized agencies. See, for more details, <http://www.amis-outlook.org/amis-about/en/>

In itself, such a two-track system is not problematic, because each issue could be approached in a holistic and multidisciplinary way. And in some thematic areas, that seems to be the case. Yet as Martens (2017b) argues, not only are the two tracks often not well integrated, but economic growth and finance, including private finance concerns – dealt with under the Finance Track – appear to dominate most other issues.⁴³

This lack of substantive integration also characterizes the 2017 Leaders Declaration.⁴⁴ For instance, rather than addressing all three dimensions of sustainability comprehensively and discussing their interlinkages, the declaration lists topics side by side and moves from international economic and finance issues to those of health, energy, women’s empowerment, opportunities for Africa, migration and anti-corruption.

While the Hamburg Update of the 2030 Agenda Action Plan seeks to foster some substantive integration, it does so simply by showing how its action proposals relate to specific SDG goals and which goal could be considered by which G20 “work stream” in their future deliberations.⁴⁵

The disconnect among economic, social and environmental dimensions has largely persisted. An attractive narrative was offered by Think20 (T20, a network of think tanks in G20 countries that provides research-based policy advice to the G20), which could have provided a frame of reference for many of the diverse issues considered at the 2017 summit: recoupling social progress with economic progress.⁴⁶ But the G20 appears to have missed the opportunity to take on that narrative.

Selection and priority setting of agenda items

Most G20 documents lack a strategic vision and refrain from prioritizing the issues in the Summit agendas, which have lengthened since 2010, for several reasons. In part, the nature of the issues makes this difficult. Some issues, such as corruption, require continuous vigilance and therefore stay on policy agendas for years. Other issues mutate when the overall policy environment changes or, for example, when new technologies emerge and require reconsideration of some issues. Financial stability is a case in point. But G20-specific reasons also come into play, as discussed later.

Undoubtedly, the 2030 Agenda contributed to expansion of the G20 agenda. The G20 has repeatedly emphasized aligning its agenda with the 2030 Agenda, and that has happened to a considerable extent. But the alignment has been to nonstrategic agenda-setting – stringing loosely together as many issues as possible without setting priorities among them and without considering what it would take to realize the declared aims. And although the UN bodies concerned have not yet prepared a comprehensive implementation roadmap, G20 leaders have also not asked for one, and neither the Development Working Group nor the T20 has so far taken the initiative to draw up such a roadmap.

⁴³ See, on this point, also Alexander 2018 and 2017. In the same vein, Kappel and Reisen (2017) show that even the framework of the G20’s “Compact with Africa” – a Finance Track initiative – rests on an orthodox agenda, with a set of well-known (neoliberal) recommendations that, so the authors, is unsuitable for African low-income countries. This concern is shared by Lopes (2017) and Sidiropoulos (2017).

⁴⁴ G20 2017a.

⁴⁵ G20 2017a: 3-5 and 6-18. In the G20 context, the term “work stream” denotes minister-level meetings and working groups dealing with a particular topic, including agriculture, anti-corruption, climate and sustainability, development, the digital economy, education, employment, energy transitions, finance, financing investment, the Framework for Strong, Sustainable and Balanced Growth (adopted at the 2009 Pittsburgh Summit), green growth, health and trade and investment.

⁴⁶ Snower (2017a and 2017b)

Concepts of international cooperation

As shown, it is not uncommon to find G20 action plans referring to “concrete collective actions” or “operational plans”, while the ensuing statements mention neither collective nor concrete actions – and sometimes mention no actions at all. Most international cooperation among G20 members is based on rhetoric, taking the form of joint statements, approval of documents, information sharing and participation in G20 meetings.

The main form of international cooperation referred to in G20 documents is “concertation”. This refers to the alignment of national policies and practices where national circumstances allow governments to do so. For example, the Platform for Collaboration on Tax, drawn up in connection with the OECD–G20 Base Erosion and Profit Shifting project, follows this approach.⁴⁷

The G20 leaders recognize that important progress can be achieved if they move on such issues as clean energy and climate change mitigation.⁴⁸ They also see the need for development assistance and to commit to helping mobilize private finance for development, while stressing the importance of such nonfinancial activities as sharing best practices across countries.⁴⁹

In general, however, the concepts of international cooperation underlying G20 documents are undifferentiated, with little if any attention to how well international cooperation works (or does not). They are actor-centred: focussed on what individual state and nonstate actors could do if the conditions under which they operate permit. But the documents largely ignore the systemic integrity requirements of the global challenges themselves and, consequently, whether the sum of the individual contributions will actually resolve these challenges.

In essence, G20 documents provide no new vision or intellectual leadership on international cooperation. Just the opposite seems to be the case. Perhaps more so than in the case of any other international debates, they hold onto a strict, conventional notion of policymaking sovereignty despite repeated references to wanting to shape an interconnected world.

Outcomes

Given the findings so far, it is no surprise that, as Darvas (2016) notes, assessing the effectiveness and impact of G20 activities poses serious methodological difficulties. The reasons are the large volume of often vaguely formulated commitments, the reiteration of commitments stated in previous G20 documents or other international agreements (signed by all or several G20 members), and references in G20 documents to initiatives that others are (or will be) undertaking. So, if “G20 commitments” are actually being acted on, it is difficult to determine whether that is due to their mention in a G20 document.⁵⁰

Also, the G20 has neither a permanent secretariat nor any operational capacity of its own. Much of the preparatory work on issues addressed in G20 documents is undertaken by others, including multilateral organizations (especially the IMF and OECD) and by G20 Working Groups and Engagement Groups. In fact, a study on the effectiveness of the Business 20 (B20) Engagement Group (the B20 leads international business community engagement with the G20) in shaping G20 policy pronouncements found considerable word-for-word overlap between a B20 report and the G20 Leaders’ communiqué (Martens 2017a). In many cases, the actors preparing input are encouraged and even directly

⁴⁷ See, <http://www.oecd.org/tax/beeps/>

⁴⁸ See, G20 2017c:4.

⁴⁹ See, for example, G20 2017c and G20 2017.

⁵⁰ This questions certainly poses itself in respect to “Leaders’ Compliance Assessments” prepared with great meticulousness by the G20 Information Centre. See <http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/analysis/index.html#compliance/>

requested to continue working on an issue that they brought to the G-20's attention. However, official documents are generally silent about any financial or nonfinancial support that individual G20 members or the G20 as a group intends to extend to these initiatives.

The upshot is that the G20 as a group has little to claim as its own contribution. For one, it largely addresses issues already deliberated in other forums – frequently forums in which G20 members also participated. And for another, it generally follows rather than initiates and leads international policy debates, making it hard to assess whether the G20's deliberations generated any value added of global-public interest and import.⁵¹

Relations with the multilateral system

As just described, policy outcomes are closely related to the G20's relations with other entities of the multilateral system. The European Union, represented by its president, is a member of the G20 (along with 19 countries), and the heads of the IMF, the World Bank Group and the United Nations are regularly invited to attend G20 Summit meetings as special guests. But many other multilateral organizations are also involved, often to attract political attention to an issue within the realm of their mandate.

Some G20-related work streams appear to duplicate the work of other entities. For example, why is the G20 Development Group charged with monitoring implementation of the 2030 Agenda in G20 countries when so many other agenda monitoring processes are already underway? Why did the G20 establish its own “voluntary peer learning mechanism on the 2030 Agenda”? Why not join and contribute to existing groups, such as the UN High Level Political Forum (UNHLPF)?⁵² Certainly, the Hamburg Update of the G20 Action Plan on the 2030 Agenda acknowledges the leading role of the UNHLPF in the follow-up and review process on the 2030 Agenda.⁵³ But then why plan special learning processes for the G20's 19 countries – separate from the other 174 countries?⁵⁴ Similar questions could be raised on many other issues, actions plans and Working Group processes.

Applying the “premier forum” functions

Against the backdrop of this discussion of G20 activities, how does the G20's performance compare with the seven “premier forum” functions identified in section I? Of course, given the nature of the present study, the findings of this comparison are preliminary, subject to further in-depth research and study.

In a nutshell, the performance of the G20 falls far short of its self-declared ambition of being the premier forum of international economic cooperation on all six counts (table 1).

⁵¹ The term “global-public value-added” refers to impact in terms of enhanced global welfare and well-being from which all countries, perhaps even all people could benefit. The finding that such impact is difficult to discern does not imply that the G20 processes do not generate other types of benefits. For example, policymakers and experts involved in G20 activities often mention that their work benefits from the networking opportunities that the preparatory processes and also the summit events afford them. Some observers also refer to the positive effects that the summit events may have, for example, in terms of trust-building among leaders. In limited ways, these group-specific benefits may also have positive global spillovers. But, they are, of course, hard to trace and measure and not stated as an explicit purpose of the Group.

⁵² For the UNHLPF, see again FN 7.

⁵³ See, G20 2017d.

⁵⁴ Similar questions are also raised Beisheim (2017) and Fues (2017).

Table 1 G20 activities and “premier forum” functions compared

“Premier forum” functions	Matching G20 activities?	
	Yes	No
1. Locating key entry-points for global (top down) leadership interventions – to complement and stimulate existing bottom up initiatives in line with established global norms and principles		✓
2. Reducing policy reform and investment backlogs – to pull the world back from the brink of unsustainability		✓
3. Rewarding innovation – to understand and manage future sustainability risks		✓
4. Providing and helping mobilize capital – to begin “walking the walk” in the most pressing policy fields		✓
5. Seeking a “new normal” in international economic cooperation – to make the world less dependent on hoc leadership		✓
6. Monitoring value added – to ensure that the leadership exercised generates the desired outcomes and is perceived by all concerned as legitimate and in the global-public interest		✓

Source: Author, based on analysis presented in the paper.

This assessment reflects the status quo-preserving mode of current G20 activities: talking about policy change that would be desirable without taking concrete steps towards achieving it – either by enabling and empowering others to do so or by G20 Leaders deciding to do it themselves. In its current functioning, the G20 is a forum of leaders but not a leadership forum. It lacks strategic vision and impact.⁵⁵

Why is that the case at a time when global challenges are multiplying and taking on ever more serious proportions? Some of the factors that might contribute to the discrepancy between the high level of G20 rhetoric and its lack of policy action and impact are discussed next.

Explaining G20 underperformance

Multiple scholars have sought to identify the reasons for the G20’s lack of effectiveness. The reasons can be grouped into two sets of interlinked factors: those arising from the current structure and functioning of the G20, and those arising from the global policy context.

⁵⁵ No doubt, there can be great value to policy goals being repeatedly stated, even for years and decades, as long as there exists no consensus to act on them. Such repetitive policy dialogue occurs in many multilateral organizations. But, with adoption of the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement the international community now has a consensus-based agenda. Certainly, one or the other country may try to renege on its international commitments. But, that should not prevent other countries, notably G20 members, from forging ahead but to systematically assess whether it is still better for them—in their enlightened self-interest – nevertheless to enter into agreement implementation.

G20-inherent constraints to effectiveness

According to Fischer (2017:2), as the G20 agenda expanded, “not every topic equally appealed to everyone.” So in the interest of decisionmaking by consensus, the vagueness of communiqués increased and contentious issues were avoided as much as possible.

Fischer (2017:2) also refers to the difficulties that G20 members evidently had switching their focus from “restoring normalcy” to “fostering progress toward a new normal”. Restoring normalcy in one particular issue area (though a complex and multi-dimensional one) – international financial stability and economic growth – was the G20’s original purpose in 2007–2008. It may be that the members of the Finance Track still view their role from the perspective of restoring normalcy and may therefore keep a distance from issues discussed under the Sherpa Track, which often involve the search for a new normal, such as realizing a low-carbon economy, understanding and controlling the risks of the new technologies or, more generally, recoupling social, environmental and economic progress –and, therefore, on both sides, the Finance Track and the Sherpa Track, new economic thinking, especially rethinking public economics and public policymaking for the present and future age of globalization.

The T20 should have realized the need for such rethinking and demanded more across-the-aisle interactions but did not do so as yet, at least not in a discernible manner.

Moreover, the G20 leaders opened the gates to issue advocacy and lobbying by seeking to enhance the G20s’s legitimacy after 2010 through outreach to constituencies without first having established a clear definition of the G20’s role. This propensity is further stimulated by the annual rotation of the G20 presidency, which encourages the presidencies to put their mark on the annual agenda. And, in many instances, these marks reflect more national and regional priorities.⁵⁶

Some observers refer to the G20 as a club (e.g., Kirton 2016). However, to understand why it lacks effectiveness, it is necessary to recognize that the G20 is a club without a defined “club good”, or shared purpose, around which to rally. The roots of that predicament are in the global policymaking context, discussed next.

Constraints to effectiveness residing in the global context

Several analysts trace the lack of G20 effectiveness back to the conventional world order: “a spirit of Westphalian assertion in international forums, or ‘every state for itself’”, as Wade (2011: 348) puts it. Liu (2013) makes a similar point. The persistence of a Westphalian spirit in a world of sharp differences and disparities may explain both the noncommittal language of G20 pronouncements and the crowded agenda noted above. As long as nothing concrete is being said, members may not bother much about what is being said – as long as the items they care about are also mentioned in official documents. In fact, Silvestri (2016: 11) notes that efforts “to increase the focus of G20 Summits by shortening their agenda to a maximum of three items” failed because they “produced very different lists and agendas, making it practically impossible to identify a consensual reduction.”

Also, since its inception the G20 has operated in a global context characterized by a growing retreat from multilateralism and a shift to “minilateralism”, by scepticism about top-down policymaking and

⁵⁶ Argentina, holding this year’s G20 presidency, has selected three priorities for the summit process: the future of work, mobilization of private finance for infrastructure for development, and a sustainable food future. But, Argentina also intends to build on the legacy of past G20 presidencies and, therefore, suggests the following additional items for consideration at the 2018 summit (in the order mentioned here): empowering women, fighting corruption, strengthening financial governance, reforming the financial sector, making the global tax system fairer, strengthening trade and investment, taking responsibility for climate action and expanding use of clean energy (G20 2018.a) But why this order? The Presidency’s Overview Paper says: “Who we are, where we are and where we are headed to will all shape the vision of our presidency.” (ibid.:3).

by growing enthusiasm for bottom-up initiatives. These trends were likely also among the reasons for creating the G20 as an allegedly more efficient and effective decisionmaking body than universal membership bodies such as the United Nations. But, how is efficiency and effectiveness being measured in this case? After all the initiative to create the G20 came from the Group of Seven (G7) advanced economies. And to this day, the influence of the G7 has remained strong within the G20, including through the involvement of the Bretton Woods institutions and, notably, the OECD. Mainly for this reason, the emerging market economies view some G20 initiatives with scepticism, including the OECD–G20 Base Erosion and Profit Shifting Project.⁵⁷

In addition to yet-unsettled shifts in global decisionmaking on issues of international cooperation, there is also a growing tendency toward intensifying competition among countries (often also on behalf of private companies headquartered in their jurisdiction) for access to market shares and resources, which are fanning unresolved and new geopolitical tensions.⁵⁸ Further, in several countries, anti-globalization sentiments are growing as people become more aware of the widening within-country inequalities and “blame” this trend on economic openness.

In sum: The G20 -- stalled by “competitive cooperation”

The result is, as Dieter (2016: 99) puts it, “superficial cooperation” and “standstill in the G20”. Or, as one could also say, a state of “competitive cooperation”. Everybody recognizes that we are living in deeply integrated ways and that cooperation is essential, but there are multiple paths to most goals. Thus, an important if unspoken aim of international cooperation at present, including cooperation within the context of the G20, could thus be to stay one’s ground and not get pulled over to a less desirable policy path – competitive cooperation. Seen from this perspective, non-committal commitments make sense – at first sight. But, for how long? The existing global challenges will not wait for states to accept that the world has progressed from power politics toward peer politics or, as Nye (2011:217) says, from exercising power not over others “but with other players”, especially in policy fields that present GPG-type policy challenges, affecting all and needing the cooperation of all.

So, where do we go from here?

III. G20’s Future Role: Alternative Models

Consideration of the G20’s future prompts two questions: Is a G20 needed at all? And if so, should it continue in its current role or in a reformed role?

The following discussion suggests support for continuation. As discussed in section I, the world urgently needs effective leadership, particularly on the operational side of international cooperation, to manage the proliferating risks that we face. If the G20 did not to exist, we would need to invent it.

⁵⁷ The comprehensive study on the history of the BEPS Project, Picciotto et al. (2017:3) concludes, among other things, that the OECD has made great efforts to extend the involvement in the BEPS Project to all countries but that this would involve expecting non-G20 countries “to implement recommendations which they had little part in formulating, unless there is an explicit resetting of the agenda to reflect their concerns.” Maybe, it is with this concern in mind that the BRICS would prefer to deepen international cooperation on tax matters in universal international forums, such as the UN. See for the BRICS Heads of Tax Authorities’ statement: <http://idg.receita.fazenda.gov.br/noticias/ascom/2017/julho/receita-federal-participa-de-reuniao-dos-paises-brics/communique-meeting-of-brics-heads-of-tax-authorites.pdf>. See, on G7-BRICS relations within the G20 more generally, Subacchi and Pickford 2015.

⁵⁸ See, Martin 2018; Eurasia Group 2018; Munich Security Conference 2018; and WEF 2018, 2017, 2016.

However, arguing for the G20’s continuation does not imply arguing for “business as usual”—prolonging the current situation of policy stalemate and lack of effectiveness.

But is reform even feasible, considering the “competitive cooperation” mode of operation that appears to prevail today? Furthermore, an obvious urgency is absent, as today’s global systemic risks are not yet at the acute crisis stage that would be a clear prod to action among powerful constituencies such as Wall Street.

This time, the G20’s leadership role would differ from that it assumed in 2008-2009, when it stepped up to restore the global economy, particularly international financial markets, to normalcy. Rather, the challenge is to avoid or ease future risks – and to do so without disrupting current power balances or compromising future policy paths that are still the subject of global debate – while generating clear net-benefits for G20 members and the world at large. Thus, the challenge is to shore up social sustainability itself.

Recommended reform options

Six reform options that could serve the purpose are discussed below and summarized in table 2. Some of the reform steps, notably options 1 and 2, could be taken individually. But for real impact and to take advantage of synergies, all six options should be combined into one reform package.

Table 2. G20 reform options

Reform step \ Option	1	2	3	4	5	6
Adopting a guiding narrative for securing global sustainability	✓					
Aligning the G20 tracks with the notion of sustainability	✓	✓				
Acting as a lead-investor role	✓	✓	✓			
Pushing forward towards the goal	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Engaging the Engagement Groups	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Staying the course: doing what it takes as long as it takes	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Source: Author, based on analysis presented in the paper.

1. Adopting a new G20 narrative: securing global sustainability

This option aims at correcting what appears to be the most critical G20 weakness: the lack of a clear purpose and strategic vision. As discussed in section I, now is the time to focus on implementation: to reassure the global public that someone is on watch to prevent the worst from happening and to help

create a secure foundation for global sustainability. So, the G20's narrative could be "securing global sustainability".

The main storyline to fit this narrative could be that the G20, as a group, will accept joint responsibility for doing what it takes to prevent imminent, first-order risks from materializing (see annex E). It will aim to create conditions to halt the continuing proliferation and clustering of unmet global challenges.

Equipped with such a narrative, G20 Leaders could use their communiqués to describe succinctly and memorably what global sustainability would look like, what are the essential global risks we face and what concrete measures G20 members, individually and collaboratively, will contribute to realizing this ambition (a point to which we will return, when discussing option 3).

2. Aligning the tracks with the notion of sustainability

Sustainability is now well understood to comprise economic, social and environmental dimensions. Thus, the G20 ought to bring its growth and development thinking into alignment with this notion of sustainability. Its structure and functioning should be reorganized accordingly by establishing three main tracks (economic, social and environmental), each to be headed by a "Sous-Sherpa". The three Sous-Sherpas would be expected to arrange joint meetings and report on them to the Head Sherpa (or to the troika of Head Sherpas of the past, current and next host country) responsible for preparing the draft Leaders communiqué.

3. Performing a lead investor role

Assuming that further research confirms the findings of the analysis presented in section I, notably the "premier forum" functions identified there, G20 members would remain firmly committed to follow up on the international obligations they have agreed to undertake. In addition, the G20 members would recognize and agree to remedy the shortfalls of the existing system of international cooperation, including the GPG provision gaps that weaken responses even to policy fields with existential risks. Given their specific strengths and self-interests, individual G20 members could choose to act as realistic and, therefore, 'big thinking' lead-investors for global mission-oriented projects addressing challenges such as the following:

- *Pulling the world back from the brink of unsustainability: Investing in climate change mitigation.* Collaborative interventions by G20 members would seek to enable the international community to halt the momentum toward further climate change and to mitigate its impacts. Effective, efficient and equitable interventions by G20 members would aim to scale up and accelerate contributions from individual state and nonstate actors by providing pooled public finance and other public-policy inputs to implement broadly appealing and credible global incentive mechanisms, as, for example, suggested by Chainey (2017), CGD (2016), EPG (2018), IPCC (2014), and Kaul (2017).
- *Staying ahead of the curve: Preparing to shape the dawning new technological age.* Considerable research and innovation are taking place in the field of superintelligence and in the digitalization of economies and societies. More can be done, however, to expand the roles of national and international policymaking in shaping these processes toward beneficial rather than harmful ends – for all people and countries. The burgeoning literature on this topic offers a wealth of ideas for additional research and policy innovation to be further tested and mainstreamed, including Bostrom (2014), Bostrom et al. (2017), Goldin (2017), GCF (2015 and 2017), OECD (2018), Samans and Davis (2017), Schwab (2016), World Bank Group (2016) and G20 (2016c, 2016d).
- *Seeking a "new normal" of international cooperation.* The proper incentives need to be established for state and nonstate actors to assume some of the responsibility that the G20 is

currently shouldering on an exceptional basis. Incentives should encourage the provision of the global policy inputs needed to ensure adequate provision of GPGs that address today's lingering and emerging global challenges. The G20 could convene worldwide consultations on the elements of a new model of international cooperation appropriate to deal with all the types of global challenges that confront us today, whether they pose first-order or second-order systemic risks (see annex E). To this end, G20 members could offer to finance the work of an independent high-level panel whose final report could be considered by the governing bodies of multilateral organizations and other forums before being submitted to the UN General Assembly for consideration and, if possible, adoption by consensus. The project could thus also lead the work on the other two global mission-oriented projects and that of the G20 Eminent Persons Group on Global Financial Governance⁵⁹ to the culmination point – ushering in a “new normal” of international cooperation

4. Pushing forward toward the goal

Acting as lead investor of global mission-oriented projects does not imply that the G20 would establish any implementation capacity of its own. The Group's involvement in these projects could actually be quite limited. G20 representatives might sit on the projects' governing board. And the Sous-Sherpas and Head Sherpas might be expected to closely follow project implementation based on regular project monitoring and evaluation reports provided to them by the project management and independent assessment teams. Ideally, such reports would be discussed at an annual conference of G20 Sherpas, project managers, experts, and researchers, as well as stakeholders, to assess progress and consider any adjustments in the design of the projects in order to move forward and achieve the projects' missions. And to do so in an effective and efficient way would, of course, require (what is currently not available): a roadmap for project implementation placed into a map of the wider policymaking context such as a comprehensive roadmap for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

5. Engaging the Engagement Groups

Clearly, options 1–4 call for a review of the G20's relationship with its Engagement Groups. Currently, the G20 very much serves as a platform for these groups to showcase, advocate and lobby for their particular concerns and, thereby, contribute to the wide-ranging medley of issues usually covered in final Summit communiqués. This relationship should be reversed. In the future, the G20 should seek to persuade and motivate the Engagement Groups to engage in fostering outreach from the global mission-oriented projects into the world to all actor groups to help ensure that project ideas and resources can flow to where they can best be used and to collect and offer feedback about lessons learned and results achieved. In this way, the G20 could avoid two problems that now restrict its effectiveness: the continuous change in the fractured nature of its agenda; and the resultant lack of tangible results that it can claim as its achievements.

6. Staying the course: doing whatever it takes for as long as it takes

Acting as lead-investor (reform option 3) would require credible, contractual commitments. And this would mean that the G20 might also have to rethink the current practice of encouraging the host country to put its individual stamp on the annual G20 agenda. G20 members have multiple other venues and opportunities for advancing national preferences and priorities. When meeting as the G20, the members could enhance the effectiveness and legitimacy of the G20 as an organization by focussing on their collective achievements and the responsibilities they assume in the global public interest. To accomplish at the project level the shift from rhetoric (stating goals) to action (realizing

⁵⁹ For the Panel's Terms of Reference, see <http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/g20-epg-terms-of-reference.pdf/>

intended outcomes and actually making a difference), the G20 members would need to be willing to do whatever it takes for as long as it takes to reach the intended policy outcome.

This is not such a difficult commitment when considering that the alternative might be global catastrophe and chaos. It is likely to be cheaper and more effective to take decisive corrective action rather than waiting until disaster strikes and high-probability, high-impact risks materialize. Acting decisively and pre-emptively may also be a sound investment, if done in a participatory way, by motivating more bottom-up initiatives. Allowing challenges to remain unresolved and to assume ever more threatening proportions has long frustrated bottom-up providers, whose expectations have been thwarted for decades as provision gaps remain. The lack of global public policy incentives has spawned demands for protectionism and retreat from globalization, which if allowed full sway will make matters worse for all – including the G20 members.

Operational advantages and implications

As noted, reform options 1 and 2 could be adopted even without options 3–6, but their impact on G20 effectiveness would be marginal. Only adoption of the complete reform package will bring about major change by significantly improving both the efficiency and the impact of G20 operations. The four most important advantages:

- The global mission-oriented project approach would allow the G20 to pursue a systematically identified, multiyear operational agenda aimed at contributing key missing elements to global growth and development processes and, thereby, improve the overall effectiveness of processes such as implementation of the 2030 Agenda.
- Importantly, clearly defining the specificity of its role and presenting a persuasive and credible narrative, the G20 would signal that it respects the mandates of other organizations and seeks to work through and together with them in the mission-oriented projects. As Paul Martin, an early architect of the G20, remarked: “The G20 was brought into being so that international cooperation would reflect the needs of a changing world. That cooperation begins with the strengthening of the institutions created to make globalization work. This should be a G20 priority.” (Martin 2015:4)
- This project approach will also contribute to rationalizing the G20 work streams and outputs and thereby sharpen its role-specificity.
- By acting as lead investors for global mission-oriented projects (whose implementation would be outsourced to top-level providers of project management services, including the World Bank Group or a consortium of multilateral development banks), G20 Leaders could thin out their crowded agenda, giving them more time to focus on issues that warrant their attention and thus enabling them to achieve greater impact.

Turning then to the operational implications, a first step to consider would be to place G20 review and reform on the G20 agenda. As a start, informal consultations on this issue could be held at an upcoming Sherpa meeting.

However, G20 reform is not only a matter for the G20 members to consider. It is a matter for all, who participate in G20 processes – the tens of thousands of people circling the globe each year to prepare for and participate in summit meetings. It would be desirable for them, too, to pause and rethink their engagement along the lines suggested as reform option 5 above.

An operational message that comes out loud and clear from the analysis in this section is also that the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the role of the G20 in this process is a matter that concerns public policymakers across the board, in the North and the South; and, therefore, it is not only a question to be left primarily to a “Southern-oriented development group” to consider. Certainly, the development of developing countries deserves high priority. But, the implementation of the 2030 Agenda concerns us all and deserves and needs Leaders’ attention because it requires a coherent, multi-level/sector/actor approach.

And, as discussed in Section II (when considering the constraints to G20 effectiveness residing in the global context), T20 participants bear a special responsibility for re-examining the current structure and functioning of the G20 process. A study they could perhaps undertake is to follow up on the work that Mazzucato and others have done on global mission-oriented projects⁶⁰ and examine the experience gained with this type of project especially from the perspective of the “provision gap closing” projects suggested here and the specific global public-policy challenges they might pose.⁶¹ The aim would be to provide robust advice to policymakers for them to see feasible steps forward, so that we may soon have an answer to the question raised by Nicholas Stern in his (2015) book on *Why Are We Waiting?* Why are we satisfied with moving slowly— rather than identifying well-designed interventions in the most critical high-priority policy fields so that “political tipping points could be reached and big changes could happen surprisingly quickly” (Stern *ibid*: 325).

The most important and, thus, perhaps the first operational implication to address by both, the G20 members themselves and all other participants in the process, would be to answer the basic question: “Why a G20?” As the G20 now functions, it provides no significant added value to international cooperation in tackling global concerns and achieving global sustainability. Yet the G20 member countries include the world’s most important and systemically relevant advanced and emerging market economies. They continue to affect what happens in the world, including what happens to global sustainability. And, together, they have the financial, technological and human capacities to achieve global sustainability and create a solid platform for implementation of the 2030 Agenda. In other words, they have a special responsibility and the capacity to act.

So, why not transform the G20 from yet another duplicative rhetorical platform to an effective platform for true innovation – demonstrating how international cooperation could function more effectively?

In sum: The future G20 role – de-risking change to foster global progress

When considering the positive change that the combined adoption of the six recommended reform options could bring about, it is difficult to imagine that G20 itself would be interested in continuing to pursue the “business as usual” path or opt to introduce just some institutional adjustments on the fringes, such as reform options 1 and 2. A bolder reorientation towards performing the role of lead investor in global-mission oriented projects designed to secure global sustainability would better serve the global interest and the G20 members’ self-interests, however different they may be.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the role of the G20 in implementing the 2030 Agenda. As the G20’s self-declared ambition is to be “the premier forum of international economic cooperation”, section I identified six functions that such a premier forum could be expected to undertake. In assessing the G20’s performance against this ambition and in light of these six functions, section II found that the

⁶⁰ See, on this point, again footnote 11 above.

⁶¹ Such a study could also cover global programs such as the G20-initiated *Global Infrastructure Connectivity Alliance* hosted by the World Bank or the Global Environment Facility and other global mechanisms.

G20 fails on all six counts. But the world urgently needs global leadership that is willing and able to act to achieve the many as yet unmet goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda. Accordingly, section III suggested six steps to transform the G20 from a forum for rhetorical aspirations to a forum for action. The world’s powerful states could pool their resources and become lead investors in global mission-oriented projects to secure a sustainable foundation on which to build a world for all – current and future generations.

The Leaders G20 was created in 2008. There is perhaps no better 10th anniversary gift that the G20 members could give themselves and the world this year than to reorient their role in a way that enables and empowers the world to advance meaningfully towards this shared future, notwithstanding other conflicts and tensions between them.

Annexes

Annex A. An introduction to the G20

The Group of Twenty (G20) is a forum of the world’s major economies that seeks to develop policies to address the most pressing global challenges. It was founded in 1999 as an informal ministerial-level forum to facilitate dialogue among the finance ministers and central bank governors of its member states on issues of global economic growth and financial stability.

The G20 is made up of 19 countries and the European Union. The 19 countries are Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

In 2008, in the midst of the 2007–2008 global financial crisis, the forum was elevated from ministerial-level meetings to meetings at the level of heads of state or government. The European Union is represented by the President of the European Commission. The heads of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the United Nations are regular special invitees. In addition, the annual chair can invite further special guests, depending, for example, on the items on the agenda.

The G20 has no permanent secretariat; the presidency or chair of the group rotates annually among the member states. The country that takes on the presidency hosts the annual Leaders’ Summit and related preparatory meetings, develops the agenda and helps build consensus on the agenda items among members. To ensure continuity, the host country works closely with the previous and following year’s chairs. Together, they are known as the Troika.

The work of the G20 is generally divided into two tracks: the Finance Track, which focuses on economic and financial issues, and the Sherpa Track, which deals with all the other issues that the G20 might address.

To draw on perspectives and expertise beyond its members, the G20 maintains links with seven Engagement Groups, which meet in tandem with the G20: Business (B20), Civil Society (C20), Labour (L20), Science (S20), Think Tanks (T20), Women (W20) and Youth (Y20).

Source: Based on “How Does the G20 Work?” at <https://www.g20.org/en/g20/how-it-works/>.

Annex B. Defining global public goods

Global public goods (GPGs) share with other public goods the key property of “publicness” in consumption: being fully or partially nonrival (use by one individual does not reduce availability to others) and nonexcludable (individuals cannot be effectively excluded from use). What distinguishes global public goods from other public goods is the reach of their publicness in consumption, which spans several geographic regions or even the globe as a whole; may reach countries or areas beyond national jurisdictions, with variable levels of impact; and may be of long-term duration, affecting, for better or worse, several generations.

Thus, spanning several regions or the globe is the prerequisite for a good to be defined as a GPG, but its publicness in consumption could potentially comprise three dimensions:

- A *spatial* dimension: being of worldwide span.
- An *impact* dimension: reaching countries and areas beyond national jurisdictions.
- A *temporal* dimension: having long-term effects.

In most cases, global publicness in consumption along any of these three dimensions will not be an innate property of the good but will reflect a policy choice (or the lack thereof).

In addition to being public in consumption, many GPGs, like other public goods, are also public in provision, involving a large number of state and nonstate actors. In fact, GPGs are often complex, multiactor, multisector and multilevel phenomena. Thus it is often difficult, if not impossible, for any individual actor or group, however powerful, to unilaterally provide a GPG. Adequate provision of GPGs, such as climate change mitigation, communicable disease control, financial stability, ocean health, or peace and security, to name just a few, often calls for effective international cooperation.

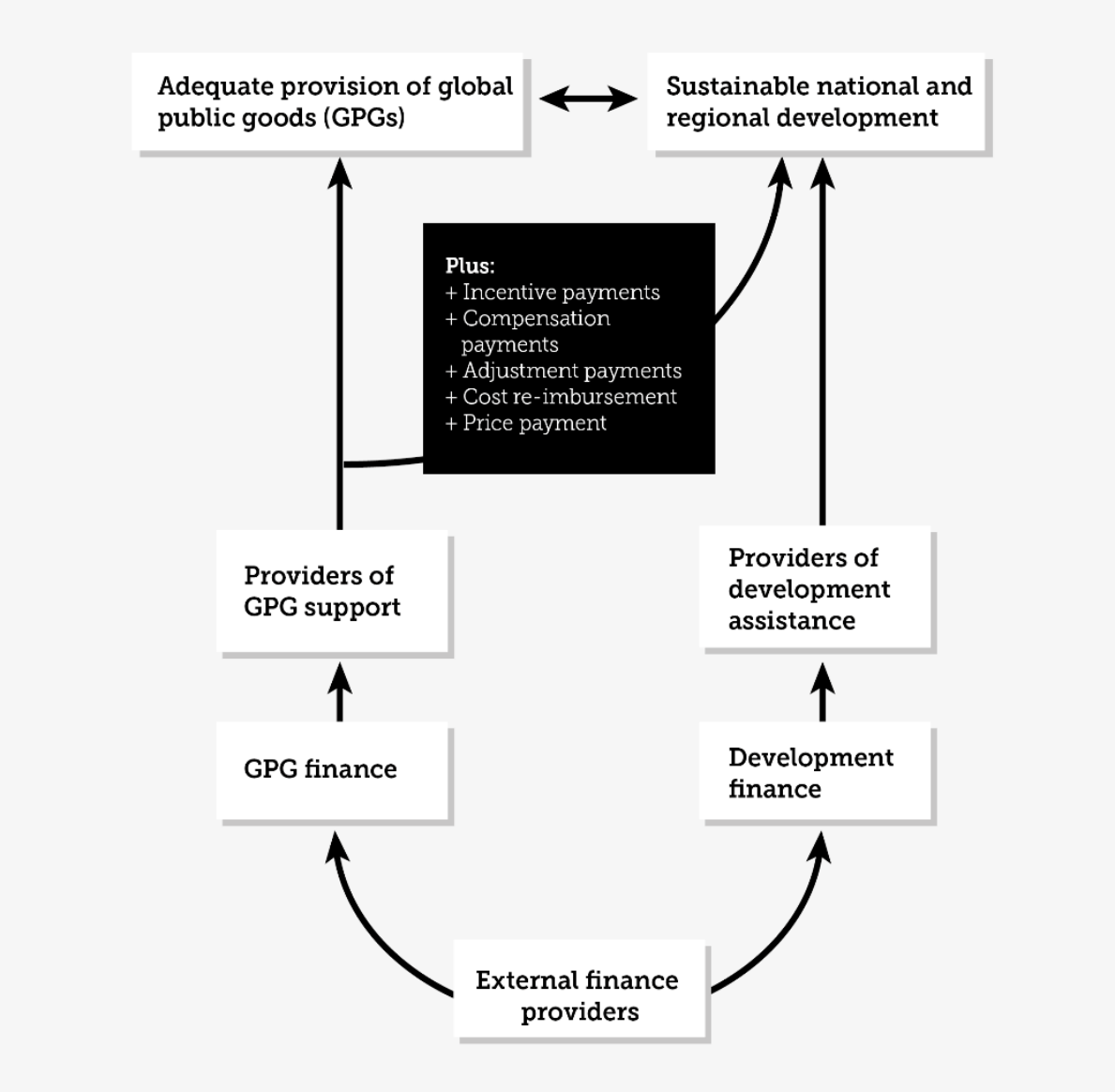
Source: Kaul et al. (2016)

Annex C. Differences and synergies between international cooperation in global public goods provision and development support

Dimension	Global public good provision	Development support
Main rationale	Efficiency considerations, motivated by self-interest or other self-regarding concerns, including sustainability	Supporting developing countries in achieving their nationally determined development goals and international cooperation commitments
Main focus of the intervention	The global public good to be produced	A particular lower or middle-income, fragile or vulnerable developing country
Cooperating parties	Concerned state and nonstate actors from all or several parts of the world plus other actors who could potentially be “best” providers of particular inputs to the global public good to be provided	Rich and poor countries, plus perhaps other development partners such as multilateral development agencies or civil society and private sector entities
Main intended beneficiaries	Oneself and, in the case of mixed-motive or altruistic actors, possibly also future generations and the earth as a whole	Developing countries, especially their poor and vulnerable inhabitants
Links between global public good provision and development support	Effective development, including developing countries’ capacity to contribute to global public good provision in line with global principles, such as the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capacities	Development-compatible provision of global public goods

Source: Author, drawing on the analysis in Kaul (2017).

Annex D. Links between development and financing of global public goods



Source: Kaul 2017.

Annex E. Prioritizing global systemic risks

In *Global Risks Report 2018*, the World Economic Forum argues that “the urgency of facing up to systemic challenges has, if anything intensified amid proliferating indications of uncertainty, instability and fragility. Humanity has become remarkably adept at understanding how to mitigate conventional risks that can be relatively easily isolated and managed with standard risk-management approaches. But we are much less competent when it comes to dealing with complex risks in the interconnected systems that underpin our world.” (WEF 2018:1)

In terms of impact, the systemic risks that could cascade through our increasingly interconnected world and cause “runaway collapse” fall into two main categories.

- *First-order risks.* If they materialize, they would have long-term and perhaps even irreversible consequences of catastrophic proportions. Examples are global warming far beyond the 2° Celsius threshold and aggravated water scarcity.
- *Second-order risks.* If they materialize, they could be controlled in the short to medium term. Financial crises, slowing economic growth in one or several major economies and cyber-attacks fall into this category.

Second-order risks may increase first-order risks. But unless first-order risks are controlled, short- and medium-term second-order risks cannot be managed. To attempt to do so may even be irrelevant. People dying of thirst and starvation on drought-scorched land will not worry about asset price bubbles and exchange rates. Nor will people watching their houses and business being washed away by rising sea levels.

Thus, if the goal is to promote inclusive and sustainable global growth and development, the top global policy priority ought to be to identify policy areas with first-order risks and with approaching critical tipping points that have potentially long-term disastrous consequences for humanity and the planet. Global change and water scarcity appear to be two challenges that are candidates for global mission-oriented projects. Concurrently, second-order risks would need to be dealt with and related backlogs of reform and investment would need to be reduced.

To quote again the *Global Risks Report 2018*, we “have been pushing our planet to the brink and the damage is becoming increasingly clear.” Moreover, the “accelerating pace of change is testing the absorptive capacity of institutions, communities and individuals” (WEF 2018:1) These are unusual times, calling for transformative leadership interventions that can pull us back from the brink and ignite change towards sustainability.

Source: Based on IPCC (2014), Rockström et al. (2014), and (WEF 2018).

Annex F. Selected list of G20 Action Plans and year the plan was adopted

- G20 Action Plan on the 2030 Agenda (2016)
- Hamburg Update: Taking Forward the G20 Action Plan on the 2030 Agenda (2017)
- G20 Hamburg Climate and Energy Action Plan for Growth (2017)
- G20 Action Plan on Food Price Volatility and Agriculture (2011)
- G20 Action Plan on Marine Litter (2017)
- G20 Action Plan on SME Financing (2015)
- G20 Africa Partnership (2017)
- G20 Anti-Corruption Action Plan (2016)
- G20 Blueprint on Innovative Growth (2016)
- G20 Climate and Energy Action Plan for Growth (2017)
- G20 Digital Economy Development and Cooperation Initiative (2016)
- G20 Energy Access Action Plan for Sub-Saharan Africa (2015)
- G20 Energy Access Action Plan for the Asia-Pacific Region (2016)
- G20 Energy Efficiency Action Plan (2014)
- G20 Energy Efficiency Leading Programmeme (2016)
- G20 Entrepreneurship Action Plan (2016)
- G20 Financial Inclusion Action Plan (2010)
- G20 Framework Working Group (2009)
- G20 Global Platform on Inclusive Business (2016)
- G20 Hamburg Action Plan (2017)
- G20 Hangzhou Action Plan or Consensus on an Enhanced Structural Reform Agenda (2016)
- G20 Initiative for Rural Youth Employment (2017)
- G20 Initiative to Promote Quality Apprenticeships (2016)
- G20 Initiative #eSkills4Girls (2017)
- G20 Innovation Action Plan (2016)
- G20 Marine Litter Action Plan (2017)
- G20 MDB Balance Sheet Optimization Action Plan (2015)
- G20 New Industrial Revolution Action Plan (2016)
- G20 Voluntary Action Plan on Renewable Energy (2016)
- G20 Voluntary Collaboration Action Plan on Energy Access (2016)

Source: All plans can be retrieved from the web by entering the title of the plan into a search engine.

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