

Earth System Governance

People, Places, and the Planet

Report on the Roundtable Consultation with 2007 Amsterdam Conference Participants from Developing Countries

26 May 2007, 14.00 – 15.40

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1. Background

The Roundtable Consultation is a side event of the *2007 Amsterdam Conference on the Human Dimensions of Global Environmental Change*. The aim of the consultation is to eventually shape the research agenda of a new long-term international research program within the International Human Dimensions Programme on Global Environmental Change (IHDP). The “Earth System Governance Project” is being developed by a planning group consisting of experts from a variety of countries.

The *2007 Amsterdam Conference* serves as a launch for this program. The Research Project focuses on governance and institutions. This makes it of vital importance for the research effort to take into account the special concerns and interests of developing countries. The purpose of this *Roundtable Consultation with conference participants from developing countries* is to make these concerns and interests a subject of discussion and include them into the research agenda of earth system governance.

The agenda of the Roundtable Consultation is to answer three questions:

- What research areas and themes related to earth system governance are most important for developing countries and need to be prioritized by the new IHDP research initiative?
- What specific expertise can scholars from developing countries contribute to multi-disciplinary earth system governance research?
- How can the participation of scholars from developing countries be strengthened in a future research program on earth system governance at national and global levels?

Five participants of the Roundtable have been invited before the conference to prepare a short statement which will serve to initiate the open discussion among the other participants. Each statement is on one of the five analytical themes, the so called five A’s (Architecture, Agency beyond the State, Adaptive Governance, Accountability, Allocation) of earth system governance.

2. Discussions

Introduction

The Roundtable Consultation is chaired by Agus Sari. Sari is Indonesian and works as Regional Director at Ecorescurities. He was the former chair of the Institutional Dimensions of Global Environmental Change core project of IHDP.

Chair: I would like to welcome everybody. The Roundtable is interesting and focuses on developing countries and their research agenda. I invite the participants to shortly introduce themselves. The Roundtable is attended by 27 participants from 18 countries.

Statements on the five A's

Chair: The agenda of this consultation is to answer three questions which are big issues. I would like to invite 5 people to give a short statement on the five A's of earth system governance. These five A's are also the structure of the conference.

2.1. Architecture

Speaker: Bharat Desai, *Jawaharlal Nehru University*, India

5 I want to provide a glimpse on how the architecture of existing institutions looks like, what the problems are and what principles there are. There are fourteen specialized UN agencies. They have been working before 1972: UNESCO, FAO, the high profile 'big sharks'. The crises could be traced to specialized agencies like ILO, FAO. They are why UNEP could not become specialized agency. Specialized institutions like the Global Environment Facility (GEF) came up in a different time in history. 1992 brought Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD). This was later institutionalized and is a hybrid entity.

10 Multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) are growing, sector specific, complex, one momentum with own mechanisms. They are processes rather than one institution.

15 Important is the role of UN General Assembly. It is interesting that compared to other entities the UN General Assembly is the only 'democratic entity'. All developing countries insisted to have agreements and distribution mechanisms in the UN system. It commanded credibility and legitimacy and accountability. UN General Assembly has taken the lead, initiated conferences, as a conductor of the orchestra. It provided political guidance.

20 Important is the 1999 Töpfer Task Force, which drafted a report. This indicated overlapping resources, and that the UN Headquarters neglect the Nairobi office, the only office in a developing country. Three developments that brought down environmental organizations: No resources; director grounded; and UNEP funds declined.

How do you then bring back UNEP? Options are: Global minister environment forum; Environmental Management Group; greater legitimacy and accountability to UNEP.

5 Important principles are Equity of participation, democratic functioning, and equal participation in function; Common but differentiated responsibilities: means that developing countries are not irresponsible, to ensure that differentiation is accepted; Implementation of multilateral agreements gives problems, developing countries are not lagging behind, but have other problems: capacity, cannot muster delegation; Developing countries should play a role in how laws are developed; otherwise there will be no chance.

2.2. Agency beyond the state

Speaker: Chukwumerije Okereke, *Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research*, United Kingdom

10 Important questions are: Have we structured the agenda so that it will cover the interests of developing countries? What is the nature of Agency beyond the state? How does the nature of the state influence the nature of sub-state agents? Increasing visibility of non-state actors raises fundamental questions on the boundaries between private and public actors. Are there really Agents beyond the state? If so, what relation do they have with the state and amongst each other? In what ways do these forms then dictate nature and operations of Agents beyond the state?

My suspicion: the activities are determined by the relation of the state towards them, as opposed to Western actors. This needs thorough investigations. It might be that they are different actors. On the second question of today: the way in which public and private interact, and the limits of this are determined by structural contracts. What is the contribution of the structure in determining the way that agents are formed, what issues are addressed and how? How does structure provide the source of orientation in which state accommodate non state actors? What is the impact of agency structure on the state? We need to investigate the role of structure, in broad terms. What is effect of talking about state in opposition of governance?

Important is also the process of governance: the techniques, mechanics and tactics.

15 How do these agents get things done, is this different in western countries and developing countries? I suspect that agents in developing countries have loud campaigns. Why? Because we do not have awareness? Because the state sees them as troublemakers? The process is determined by technologies of practices.

20 Power and authority, how are these different from developed countries? The issue of power is neglected. The way that knowledge can be power, that experience can be used in power. What is the role of Shell in Nigeria? Are they influencing policy?

What kinds of contribution can we expect from developing countries? There is a need for developing country expertise, but there is only so much they can do. Developed countries can contribute in developing country research agenda's, also in carrying these out. There has to be some attention for cultural/sociological theories. For example: What is called environmental activism, is not really environmental activism, it is political activism that is 'environmentalised'.

25 How to increase participation? To bring more people to these conferences: change the medium of call for papers. There are a lot of professors in Nigeria without e-mail. Not all universities have e-mail. IHDP should identify ambassadors, divide the world in 5 sectors, and have 2 ambassadors per sections. They can be used to reach academics. We have to realize that being present does not mean participating. They should ask questions; this

should be integrated in the process. They should be able to follow the process. Ambassadors can help qualitative participation. Sponsoring DC scholars to COP meetings, and making sure they deliver, for instance by writing / presenting a paper.

2.3. Adaptive Governance

Speaker: Louis Lebel, *Chiang Mai University*, Thailand

The problem is a scary question; can the governance systems evolve fast enough to meet the challenges of natural changes? What attributes of governance systems foster adaptation, build resilience of social systems? Some governance systems are good at building resilience and adapt; at least in one problem domains. It is an empirical question. One is about governance systems. There are several reasons to think that research from developing countries can help. There is not just one developing country perspective, there is so much heterogeneity, which is good, the variation is huge, and there is more diversity than in the market states, this is exciting for research.

Adaptive governance is important. Countries like Laos cannot buy security. The alternative strategies are interesting, also for developed countries, when suddenly quick access to oil is gone, they could learn from the lessons learned in the South.

On the "How" question: fellowships are good, developing the methods are good, help us with the methods, analytical techniques, how to use Foucault, discourse analysis and so on. Many scholars in developing countries are very involved in politics.

There are lots of reasons for scholars from developing countries also to study the world, not only to study their own country

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2.4. Accountability

Speaker: Aarti Gupta, *Wageningen University*, The Netherlands

Why are the fewest people at the conference panels about accountability and allocation?

Who is interested in researching and advancing this issue? Why wasn't there much discussion at the conference about accountability? What does it mean and who is it an issue for?

What does the word accountability actually mean: being answerable. Why? To prevent the abuse of power. We want to hold entities accountable, to try to limit their autonomy. For whom is it a crucial issue: for the disenfranchised, the Southern perspective. Maybe there is no Southern perspective. You could also have a round table on perspectives from the North.

It is important to hold power accountable. In global context it is a very complex issue. Who is entitled to prevent abuse, who should hold whom accountable?

Legitimacy, democratic nature of global environmental governance – that is where the research has to be on.

How does one ensure accountability? Mostly reference to transparency, this is at the heart of ensuring accountability. There is a gap in research if this will do the job, in holding entities accountable. It needs more attention, for it could have perverse consequences in

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push for transparency, it could increase secrecy. They might stop taking notes or sending e-mails if all this is regulated, this does not increase transparency. There is a call for saying that greater transparency should be researched more. Is information itself not the very site of conflicts?

2.5. Allocation

Speaker: Chukwumerije Okereke, *Tyndall Centre for Climate Change*, United Kingdom

I disagree with Frank Biermann: the word justice and equity works better than Allocation. It has to be a shift away from a normative concept. That departure raises fundamental questions: we run in danger in being comprised in the global neo-liberal agenda.

What ideas of justice are present in the four levels? In these regimes?

What specific contribution has equity made in redefining regimes? Depart from rational?

What are the core ideas of justice in the regime?

When preambles state they are based 'on the principles of equity', what does it mean? It is not reflected in the articles. The principles do not play part in the regimes, they are just rhetoric. Core principles of justice underpin GEG regimes.

Is it possible to identify specific concepts of justice that nations are more drawn to? Are there concepts that are more acceptable in some countries than others? Translate regime theory into practice: a lot is said about justice, but we do not have mechanism to translate this into practical terms.

North-South equity, but also South-South equity is increasingly important. The G77 may be not legitimate anymore, China and India are dominant. Countries don't get a say or vote. The Clean Development Mechanism is supposed to be an equity principle. Is it really equitable? It moved from an equity principle to a marketing mechanism. There are more commonalities between African countries than differences. I reject the contention that we do not have a Southern perspective.

5 Open Discussion

Chair: These statements are provoking. Let me open the Roundtable for your comments.

10 *Gilberto Sarfati, FAAP Rio Branco College, Brazil:* Our countries are different, and we do not know the realities of academics of each country. In Brazil, no one knows about India. Our other Latin American countries – our epistemic ties are not strong. They used to be strong with the Western countries. Our academic dynamic is very different; we cannot talk about a developing country perspective. We can talk about regional perspectives. We should develop governance research in regions; our ties with our neighbours are not strong. You can help us to develop that agenda. In Brazil the WTO is being researched. That is all academic research – it is all about market access. To discuss all the other things is surreal from a Brazilian perspective. We are not really worried about environmental stuff; it is not on top of the agenda. This is European stuff; they don't have any other stuff to worry about!

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Martina Chidiak, University of Buenos Aires, Argentina: About the Southern perspective: it could be easier and more productive to have regional views rather than one Southern view. Latin America in general could be better, but even there are amazing differences. As a teacher of environmental economics, one of the starting points is: the environment is not a rich countries business. The people without access to clean water are the ones to be hit by environmental problems, not the rich people.

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Gilberto Sarfati: I was just showing our reality, but I do agree! My colleagues do not.

Martina Chidiak: For the mainstream, that's really true. There are not many conferences about the environment. But probably those with a wider picture should disseminate this view. This is in line with the questions. I think that from a developing countries perspective, the interesting value in participating is to foster multidisciplinary research. We don't have the funding; this could bring a nice opportunity.

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On question 3: the wording of the program was difficult. It was orientated to social science academics, which don't have an idea about the environment. It was difficult if you were not working on this to see if your research would fit in this. I like the suggestion that also good questions are welcome. There could be rounds of consultations via e-mail, recommending colleagues in other countries. The questions were very well targeted. That would be a relatively cheap medium

On question 2: it could be interesting to research the different development views. I saw the development theories; there is a lot of debate if the theories show what is really going on. Development studies are less fashionable than 20 years ago; the most interesting research is going on in the South. Finding links between many topics would be interesting: environment, development, global and technology, to put these together would be a good idea.

Achala Chandani Abegsekara, Kent University, United Kingdom: On the medium: I was able to come because I was in England. I like the idea of ambassadors, we would be happy to contribute to this. You should consult universities, faculties, and departments. There are many people that would like to contribute, to add value and comments.

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On allocation: I was in the panels; nobody had a proper idea what these words mean. There should be in-depth research on this.

A Roundtable of developed countries on what they think that developed countries should do, what we can contribute, that would be interesting.

Atanu Sarkar, The Energy and Resources Institute TERI, India: Within the developing countries we have a hierarchy in raising issues. Dominant countries take important issues; the small countries are left out. Many issues are about dominant political structures, for instance agricultural subsidies. On the micro level the subsidies are not reaching the smaller farmers, just the larger farmers. The dominant political group decides on the issues, we need more cohesive interactions to have a common platform. The WHO was compelled to make a commission about health, which was a success story; they are raising issues on different political structures. We have to form a more extensive network in the developing countries, to make a common platform to reach a common agenda.

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Bharat Desai: When you look at architecture, there are several sets of organizations working on this. What are the activities that the institutions are taking up? How can we assign, who is taking up what activity at what level? To whom will we assign it?

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Paul Isolo Mukwaya, Makerere University, Uganda: I have a question for Frank Biermann: Is it the quality of the work that is produced that creates the limited number of participants from Africa? In Bali I was the only African, here there are only three. Is it the type of work, doesn't it relate? Or is it a question of language?

Regional themes: IHDP has national commissions. We tried to create an African initiative, but it has died at the airport. There was no communication after Bali anymore.

Achala Chandani Abegsekara: Some people had Visa problems. One participant didn't receive his visa; maybe if you organize conferences in developing countries it would be easier to attend them.

5 *Bharat Desai:* Firstly, the value of something is preamble, it is not a principle. They are processes, complex situations. The list of principles will not be adjusted. Secondly, the group of developing countries has no uniform perspective; of course there are diverse views. What unites them: common colonial past. Coordinator of G77 takes initiative, there are no differences, and Brazil falls in line. Thirdly, the bigger countries dominate the agenda, of course. But other things, there are coalitions, when the COP takes place, a large delegation is coming, but then they are gone, it is just one guy that understands, some countries do very well their homework, it influences it all. It comes from the preparation. Many people do not understand words like 'treaty', 'hard law', and 'soft law'. There is a huge pressure to cope with the role of negotiators.

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15 **Closing**

Frank Biermann, Institute for Environmental Studies (IVM), Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, The Netherlands: This discussion has been useful and very important. Personally I found it the most interesting Roundtable. I understood the interlinkages between the A's, the larger structures and concerns. The A's are important for North and South. I'm distressed that only so few papers are submitted on accountability and on allocation.

On the structure of the Roundtable: what is a developing country? We have taken a pragmatic approach and put all countries together. You are here on invitation, but whom to invite? Do you go for names, or nationalities?

On the papers of this conference: We have ranked the submitted papers, and developing country papers are not rejected more often than papers from developed countries. Sometimes papers are rejected on basis of their subject, and rarely also on basis of style of the writing of the abstract.

On means of attending the conference: funding and visa are sometimes difficult to obtain. As organizers we have only mailing lists to get the word around. You can encourage you colleagues to get on these mailing lists, and to check the websites.

We would like to meet the interests and perspectives of the developing countries.

Agus Sari thanks for participating at the Roundtable and indicates that the report will be available on the website of the Earth System Governance Project.