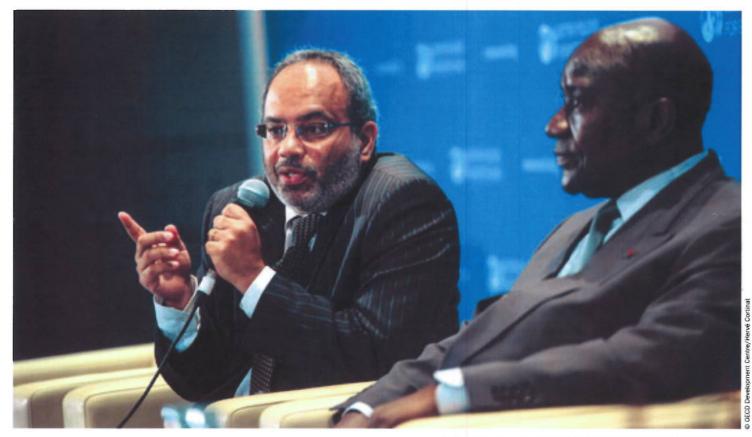# UN Special

Multilatéralisme
Multilateralism

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Challenges to multilateralism

Multilateralism is more complex today than ever before. It remains a necessary challenge that must see an update in the way we conduct diplomacy.

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Over the past two decades, the international order has undergone a qualitative change. As a matter of fact, a new discourse has gained prominence in the international relations theory that emphasizes a rapidly changing global environment characterized by an ever-growing confluence of world-scale challenges.

The challenges that range from widespread poverty and undernourishment, financial and economic crisis, climate change impact, human insecurity, organized crime, drug trafficking and many others are linked in inextricable ways. New technologies and transportation revolution further exert a profound influence on these linkages increasing at the same time a sense of interconnectedness within the human community to unprecedented levels.

Interconnectedness runs counter to our traditional modes of thinking and organization – that are highly compartmentalized. A holistic approach will be needed for an effective response to emerging global challenges.

Megatrends
There are at least five broad areas where important megatrends have become visible in the current political, economic and social landscape including:
1. financial and economic regulatory framework failures,
2. lack of decisive solutions to the climate change issue aggravated by the global spread of consumerist society patterns,
3. transformation of the traditional peacekeeping concept
4. demographic trends, increased mobility, and its impact on identities, and
5. the power of new technologies transforming our life styles and value systems.

First, world financial crises unleashed broader discussions on the need to improve global economic and financial governance systems. Globalization that has been characterized by free markets' ideology and financial deregulation has resulted in growing inequalities, financial speculation, and economic structures with the financial sector dominating over the real economy instead of serving its needs.

The social impact of the three-decade long economic liberalization wave was largely negative. The first decade of the 21st century was perceived as successful given the growth rates in the developing world. It seemed that the MDGs[2] somewhat alleviated the impact of the deregulated markets on social policies and helped to drive the development agenda and poverty reduction efforts.

However, there are many MDGs for which the world is still not on track despite the significant progress made by many countries. In the wave of the crisis, the problems of growing inequalities and rising unemployment have resurfaced on the global agenda challenging the predominant economic model and calling for a stronger State presence in the economy, and more robust national and public policies. The SDGs[3] will be adopted next September in the middle of this negative outlook.

Second, climate change, biodiversity loss and environmental degradation are closely interlinked with issues of economic and social development. Indeed, the predominant economic model has been questioned, and there is a growing realization of a pressing need to include environmental and social dimensions in economic thinking and the measurement of economic performance.

Political commitment on behalf of governments is crucial to making progress in climate change negotiations. However, any political solutions must be complemented by specific and efficient measures aimed at promoting a truly sustainable growth.

The exponential growth of consumerism is currently driven by ever higher aspirations of the upper and middle layers in rich countries, as well as the expanding demand of emerging middle-classes in developing countries, while inequalities continue to grow, and a significant proportion of the world population lives in poverty. Our true ambition should be therefore to create incentives for the profound transformation of attitudes and consumption styles. In this context, education will play a major role.

Third, the UN's peacekeeping work became the focus of increased attention and significant criticisms in the 1990s following the end of the Cold War and an eruption of a high number of conflicts in Africa, but also in Europe and other continents.

However, the situation has changed again and requires a new vision. Compared to the previous decade, we are speaking about the emergence of a new type of conflict. They do not necessarily represent an immediate threat to the national sovereignty of a State.

Carlos Lopes with President Macky Sall, Senegal

A variety of expressions of political instability and low intensity conflicts characterizes the current landscape: from political violence and *coups d'état*, to natural resource conflicts, high levels of crime, terrorism, challenges to governance systems by various non-state actors, and separatism.

The majority of conflicts are intrastate, and politicized; often inextricably intertwined with various criminal activities such as drugs trafficking, human trafficking, money-laundering, financial criminal activities, and use of small arms.

The actors themselves have changed, and their actions are no longer predictable: they tend to have a global narrative discourse with global ideology attempts.

The concept of peacekeeping has evolved from imposing the cease-fire on the two belligerent states, to cover a broad range of activities from civilian protection, support to government-led reconciliation efforts, to countering organized crime. Furthermore, there is an expectation that UN peace operations should adequately support national capacity development in areas of public administration, rule of law, and security.

These developments, together with the evolving international normative framework, offer a window of opportunity for promoting peace, justice and human rights.

Conflict prevention must be prioritized as part of the development agenda, and should include deeper structural measures aimed at addressing political, social and economic fault lines.

Fourth, the demographic geography is rapidly changing. The world's population has now surpassed 7 billion, and is projected to reach 9.6 billion by 2050, with the bulk of the growth taking place in less developed countries and among the poorest populations in urban areas. Currently, 60% of the world population lives in Asia and 15% in Africa. In 2100, 4.6 billion will be living in Asia and 3.6 billion in Africa.

More than half of the world population is urban and it is expected that by 2050 it will reach 69 per cent. Africa's population is projected to increase and to become the second largest after that of Asia.

Linked to these phenomena is an increased mobility. Migration resulted in the transformation of the ethnic composition and the monolithic character of the host societies and the emergence of transmigrants with multi-layered identities. In this area, there is a pressing need to create a solid international migration governance framework to increase the development gains of migration and protect migrants' rights.

Fifth, the spread of ICTs[4] creates unprecedented opportunities for connecting people and providing access to information. They make people around the world ever more aware and concerned about things happening in the parts of the world and multilateral issues in general.

The spread of ICTs and increased access of population to information and communication means already resulted in a formidable expansion of social participation and civic mobilization. ICTs are qualitatively transforming our perceptions, communication, governance and negotiation systems. There is also a need for reflection on how to make better usage of opportunities generated by ICTs to promote more inclusive governance and efficient negotiations' methodology.

Challenges to multilateralism
The global and interconnected character of the 21st century challenges calls for solutions transcending national borders. There is a need for renewed multilateralism that would be based on an integrated approach as opposed to the traditional thematic clustering and isolated handling of the problems, embrace the concept of Global Public Goods, and promote the effective use of partnerships with multiple state and non-state stakeholders. The very notion of sovereignty is currently being affected by these multiple crises, and the renewed multilateralism should first and foremost be conducive to the shaping of more effective and equitable global governance structures.

On the one hand, we are witnessing a global gridlock in multilateral negotiations and understanding of how to tackle different types of crises. The examples of multilateral negotiations that didn't lead to a desired outcome in crucial areas are many, including for example the absence of progress in the Doha round negotiations.

This negotiation deadlock results from a discrepancy between the current forms of the organization of international life dominated by the states-based approach and crucial trends shaping the global society.

Three main areas where the challenges to multilateralism can be identified include concepts, methods and institutions.

First, concepts are becoming volatile eroded by problems of global dimension that have to be handled over national borders. Some examples include national sovereignty versus human rights concerns or international criminal justice decisions, environmental and health problems. We have reached the critical level in so far as international public law is concerned (the number of international conventions having multiplied over a few decades).

Second, negotiation methods and techniques do not capture the complexity of modern society. On the one hand, analogies from IT such as open software mode in terms of organization, contributions, negotiation and decision-taking might be better suited to the modern challenges. The negotiation experience from the scientific and technical communities could provide helpful information in learning how to handle those challenges that are not purely political.

On the other hand, the use of sectoral approaches in practice runs counter to intrinsically transversal concepts such as that of sustainable development.

Third, the existing institutions do not reflect the increasing role of regionalism and the changing balance of power. The Security Council reform is still being discussed after a few decades, and there is a problem of inadequate voting rights of emerging and African economies in the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, despite recent progress. The rapid emergence of new global players such as BRICS[5] has profound implications on negotiations and international governance. Emerging powers are building alliances and common positions in various international fora. African countries increasingly realize that they can better defend their interests when speaking with one voice.

The international governance system is outdated, both in terms of the distribution of power among the states and its essentially state-based nature. As a result, these tensions lead to a major gridlock in all the main negotiation areas.

Multilateralism is indeed more complex today than ever before. ■

[1] Executive Secretary, Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)

[2] Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

[3] Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

[4] Information and Communications Technology (ICT)

[5] Association of five major emerging national economies: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS)