

## **The Peoples' Business in Secret?**

### **Participation of CSOs-Academics-Private Sector in G20 Processes**

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**RATIONALE:** Clearly, no government fully represents all the interests of all of its citizens. Nor does any government perfectly promote the common good within its borders, nor does any collection of governments collaborate perfectly to achieve global common goods. Since these ideals are not possible, then obviously the G20 member governments and the G20 as a group necessarily fall short of representing all people on the planet, and global public good. But for the moment, the G20 is among the best of the forums that exist where people can come together to seek common solutions to global problems, most notably global financial instability.

Given these limitations, it behooves the G20 member states to listen to outside organizations such as academics, civil society, businesses, and labor unions. These and similar groups are expressions of Freedom of Speech, Right of Assembly, and Right of Petition, as framed in the US Bill of Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They bring to the G20 the global marketplace of ideas.

Even as ideally governments represent the common interests of their citizens and work to promote the common good, so too these non-governmental organizations also have ideal-types that promote core values such as: the voices, perspectives and interests of the poorest; ethics and integrity; innovation; technical excellence; and the promotion and protection of common goods such as biodiversity and clean air and water.

Right of first place in any consultations should be given to those who facilitate the participation of the poor, those who are voiceless in virtually every society. NGOs and academics working for development and human rights are associated with this goal; likewise many religious organizations and labor unions promote the rights of workers to receive adequate income and health and safety protection.

A second primary interest are those groups who address protection of global public goods, such as the environmental groups and those working for global financial stability.

In these areas, non-governmental organizations can contribute pragmatic experience, and the freedom to explore innovative solutions. The two economic groups, the for-profit financial and business organizations and the cooperatives and labor unions, can more readily implement reforms to address the financial and economic crises, by creating decent work, which is the most effective dynamo for eradicating poverty. Such groups can be more nimble and responsive than heavy bureaucratic machinery of government.

While ideal-types of non-governmental entities do not exist in the real world, nonetheless, the G20 can benefit from engaging with those who are committed to work in these fields. Regrettably there will be a cost of separating wheat from chaff, as in any other human endeavor: not every business is profitable, universities are of uneven merit, civil society organization can be self-serving sloganeers. However, the effort at consultation must be undertaken, and the possible rewards are substantial.

Again reverting to the framework of Rights of Free Speech, Assembly, and Petition of the citizens, corresponding responsibilities of Governments are to meet with, to listen, and to respond to their own citizens as well as to those who are most vulnerable and who lack their own governments to represent their interests within the G20. Several recommendations flow from this analysis.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**1. Each G20 country should meet regularly before and after biannual summits with academic, civil society, business, financial and labor unions:** ideally the head of state/government him/herself should meet with these delegations. If that is not always possible, then the Sherpa should consult regularly with such groups. Failing that, a specially designated Sherpa, who is NOT lowest on totem pole, should be the point person for meaningful and regular consultations.

- These can be joint meetings, or more perhaps more profitably, meetings organized by issue group.
- All meetings will be minuted by the G20 member, so follow up can be documented as to what happened with the specific requests/agenda items that arose during the consultations, and thereby complete the feedback loops.

**2. Ensure local groups, especially of poor people in poor countries, even without internet access and English facility, can speak for themselves:** e.g.,

- G20 member governments should allocate among themselves the non-member countries and invite participation with those non-G20 governments and organizations. Each G20 member should also be gracious in responding to requests for meetings with non-G20 organizations.

**3. The general public is entitled to know what is happening,** even with targeted discussions with the various interest groups.

- G20 agendas and background papers should be made public, through the internet and all forms of public media. Feedback should be encouraged, e.g., through internet sites.
- Public hearings, such as those held by US national agencies, can be held around the country to encourage public input on national and international level. These hearings should enjoy CSPAN style gavel-to-gavel coverage, and be disseminated through the internet and all public media.

- Prior to G20 acceptance of any proposal, there must be *ex ante* assessments of such proposal's likely impacts on poor people, the real economy, and the environment.

CONCLUSION: Implementing these recommendations will yield G20 meetings that are enriched with broader and deeper perspective, and G20 decisions will benefit from enhanced legitimacy.