

Comment: Diversity in the G20

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Diversity in the G20 can be categorized in three characteristics: membership, task, and experience. The members of the G20 span all six continents and are at different stages of development. The tasks that the G20 faces are more complex and multi-sectoral than in the past. Finally, diversity itself is accepted as a norm within the G20. Thus, the solutions agreed at the G20 in regards to the financial crisis have so far displayed a flexible, framework approach, within which the members of the G20 are allowed to choose concrete measures rather than be forced to accept a single (Western) model.

This tells us that diversity can be a source of creativity and innovation for the G20, which can lead to new options and possibilities in dealing with global issues. Given the complexity of the tasks at hand and the new power distribution, the members of the G20 will find it difficult to stay bound by one or two coalitions based on alliance, like-mindedness, and/or the regional proximity. They will be more inclined to make and break coalitions over issues in pursuit of practical gains.

Diversity and the varied positions of countries over issues will make it easier for the G20 countries to make trade-offs and compromises. Such diversity will contribute to enhancing the effectiveness of the G20 in decision-making on global issues despite being a relatively large group. As the G20's effectiveness in decision-making increases, the legitimacy of G20 will be reinforced too.

Nonetheless, it should be noted that insomuch as diversity has benefits, it has pitfalls too. Realizing the benefits of diversity will depend on how well the pitfalls of diversity are avoided.

Among other things, diversity particularly in the composition of the membership has the risk of hindering consensus-building within the G20, and thereby, hurting the G20's effectiveness and legitimacy as a global decision-making body. The member countries of the G20 have differences not only in political and economic development but also in experience with global rule-making, which makes it challenging for the member countries to set common goals for action. Diversity did not pose any issues in the past three G20 meetings as countries were under the extraordinary circumstance of an unprecedented global recession. However, as the sense of urgency subsides with time, difficulty in consensus-building posed by diversity may loom larger.

Diversity can be a positive force if it is embraced at the stage of implementing agreements made at G20. If the members of the G20 are allowed to experiment with implementation based on their individual needs, it may have the effect of strengthening

their commitment to those agreements. However, diversity at the stage of implementation makes sense still when it is guided by common goals. Common goals are essential to making the individual actions of G20 members compatible and harmonious at the end. Without a common base to lead the G20, diversity within the G20 will lead to nowhere and may even fall prey to free riding and poor implementation. The success or failure of the G20 as a global steering committee will depend partly on sharing goals. This means that given the diversity within the G20, serious efforts should be made toward ensuring that the member countries of the G20 share goals for global challenges.

In a nutshell, although diversity within the G20 may serve an intrinsic value, it may prove to be a challenge in making actual use of it.