

POLICY NETWORKS

How Global Solution Networks are Reshaping Global Decision-Making

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Multi-stakeholder Policy networks offer an alternative policy development paradigm that can help address some of the challenges besetting governments. Indeed, with a superior capacity for organizational networking and knowledge creation, Policy networks are emerging as the leading organizational form for enabling greater innovation, agility and citizen participation in policy-making.



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Idea in Brief

Part of a series on GSN's 10 types of global solution networks* this report presents the case that emerging Policy networks have the potential to trigger significant changes in the way policies pertaining to global issues are designed and implemented around the world. Here we present two multi-stakeholder efforts to advance new policies to grapple with the challenges of rapid urbanization.

Habitat Jam, an early example, was a collaboration of the Canadian government, IBM and UN-HABITAT Programme, brought 39,000 participants from government, business, academia and civil society together for a 72-hour facilitated online discussion where they strategized around how to provide access to clean water and sanitation, boost environmental sustainability, and improve local governance in the world's rapidly growing metropolitan regions.

Our Urban Future is a current collaborative forecasting and policy design network that is leveraging scenario planning and civic engagement to create policy recommendations for a more resilient and sustainable urban future. Both initiatives yield lessons into how technology-enabled Policy networks can support global problem solving approaches that integrate policy development and implementation into a seamless and flexible practice of continuous engagement, improvement and innovation that engages diverse stakeholders and reaches across national borders.

Rethinking Global Decision-Making

In a representative democracy, the public participates in governance primarily through voting. Rarely do elected officials seek the expertise of private citizens in making specific decisions about policy. Yet officials in government are not always in possession of all the information necessary to make a decision in the public interest, nor do they always possess the time or the know-how to evaluate the information they have. In global public policy exercises, the gap between citizens and decision makers is even wider. Indeed, there is increasingly a case to be made that global public policy dialogues should be held internationally, allowing ordinary citizens an opportunity to feed into global decision-making.

* The foundation research for the Global Solution Networks program identifies 10 types of global solution networks, of which 'Policy Networks' is one type. Each of the other nine will be expanded upon as part of the GSN program research deliverables. For details, see the GSN Research Framework at www.gsnnetworks.org.



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Indeed, three powerful forces are putting pressure on government officials to loosen their monopoly on the policy-making process. First, rising citizen expectations for involvement in and greater ownership of “their democracy” need to be met to avoid—and help mitigate—growing citizen disengagement from the democratic process. Second, markets, civil society and citizens are harnessing digital technologies to establish robust, far-reaching networks to influence policy—or even make their own—outside of and disconnected from government. And third, global economic, political and societal forces are wresting control over many policy issues and processes from national governments. The result is a fundamental disconnect between traditional policy processes and the socio-economic environment that national policies are supposed to address.

With globalization as the overarching backdrop, policy-makers are confronting an era of unprecedented volatility as the rules of engagement for citizens, business and government change. Individual governments increasingly realize that they no longer have sufficient scope, resources, information or internal competencies to respond effectively to the policy needs of a complex and fast-changing global environment. Policy-makers understand that they must now seek out new partners and participants to help identify problems and create innovative policy solutions. Yet government-led policy-making is, for the most part, still a top-down broadcast model in which a select group of experts with access to privileged information discuss policy options and communicate decisions to the public via mass media.

The Rise of Policy Networks

Fortunately, multi-stakeholder Policy networks offer an alternative policy development paradigm that can help address some of the challenges besetting governments. Indeed, with a superior capacity for organizational networking and knowledge creation, multi-stakeholder Policy networks are emerging as the leading organizational form for enabling greater innovation, agility and citizen participation in policy-making.

Policy networks are Internet-enabled networks of participants that contribute a broad range of skills, experiences, perspectives and resources to constitute an effective policy-making unit. Depending on the issue, Policy networks draw participants widely from governments, international organizations, businesses and industry associations, think tanks, academic institutions, civil society organizations such as NGOs, associations, and religious groups, and the general public. The core function is to enable governments to move from static top-down models of policy development to agile networks that leverage and harness the capacity of a broader, more representative group.

This examination of Policy networks argues that there is a pressing need for both experimentation and the start of fundamental innovation required to



make the shift to more collaborative policy development models. Yet, one thorny challenge for the new model for solving global challenges is that multi-stakeholder Policy networks have power, but not formal power. In other words, they can't enact new laws or send human rights violators to jail. They can't raise taxes to finance a big project or intervene militarily in a crisis. Nor can they automatically claim the same legitimacy as members of Congress or parliament who have been elected by citizens through a democratic process. These formal powers are reserved for nation states and their governments. Even international institutions like the IMF, the UN or the G20 must, to varying degrees, defer to the power of their national benefactors.

Given this reality, what can global solution networks really contribute to international policy development and global decision-making? Can they help pull the levers of state power so that massive financial and other resources can be brought to bear on global problems? Or put it another way. What if a government or an international organization wanted to tap the power of networks to address an international issue? How could it provide a platform for individuals, no matter their background, to join in and debate the future, and in the process set the agenda for a more granular group of experts and decision makers? And how would this change the role of national political representatives and policy-makers that are so accustomed to holding the reins of power?

In 2006, the Canadian Government, through its Minister of Labour and Housing, Joe Fontana, asked precisely these questions. In particular, it set out to use the global reach of the Internet to organize a global discussion called Habitat Jam that could surface new ideas and innovations to help address the world's most challenging urban issues—a discussion that would not only involve esteemed global experts but also allow people who would never have an opportunity to discuss the issues to actually have a voice. Although Habitat Jam occurred some time ago, it remains arguably the best example of a multi-stakeholder effort to involve marginalized communities in developing nations in a policy conversation that could directly impact their well-being.

Seven years later, the Evergreen Foundation joined forces with the World Bank, the World Economic Forum, the UNEP and a coalition of municipalities to lead a three-phase collaborative effort to reimagine the future of urban development and establish a blueprint for sustainable urban living—in many ways following in the footsteps of Habitat Jam. By deploying more advanced forecasting technologies, however, the Our Urban Future project breaks new ground by creating a data-driven decision-making process with the potential to shape policy development 50 years into the future. Both the Our Urban Future project and the Canadian government and its partners have established world-class Policy networks and demonstrated the benefits of adopting a thoroughly digital policy development process.



Habitat Jam: A Digital Brainstorm on Urban Sustainability

The notion that the Canadian government would consult with individuals and stakeholders on a global basis using the Internet represented a big change for the conventional policy community. After all, in most countries and most international organizations, policymaking is a top-down process and it conforms to national boundaries. Politicians study issues, seek counsel from a select group of advisors, deliberate and enact laws on the population's behalf. Most citizens are on the periphery, playing no role other than casting a ballot every few years.

Fontana envisioned a different kind of democratic experiment all together. Partnering with IBM and the UN Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT), the Canadian Government decided to take the conversation about urban sustainability issues to the streets on a global scale. The idea was to bring thousands of participants from government, business, academia and civil society together for a 72 hour facilitated online discussion where they could strategize around how to provide access to clean water and sanitation, boost environmental sustainability and improve local governance in the world's rapidly growing metropolitan regions.



Traffic congestion is among the issues discussed by participants in Habitat Jam.¹



“The fact that thousands were willing to wait patiently in line, sometimes for hours, to contribute to this debate has been a profoundly moving experience for me,” she said. “The debate on slums has moved from the academic world to the streets of cities such as Nairobi, Dakar, Cape Town, Mumbai, Rio, Lima and Manila, and this shift is a powerful signal to world leaders on the need for concerted action.”

The engagement process, a digital brainstorm, was modeled after an event IBM first held in 2001, called an Innovation Jam, where IBM brought together its employees worldwide to explore solutions to global problems.² In 2006, the same event was even more successful, bringing together one hundred and fifty thousand employees and dozens of thought leaders online to brainstorm new areas of opportunity for IBM in sectors such as health care, transportation and energy. CEO Sam Palmisano believed so strongly in the concept that he committed up to \$100 million to develop the ideas with the most social and economic potential.³

The World Urban Forum Secretariat didn't have that kind of money to throw at urban sustainability initiatives, but through the courage and support of hundreds of organizations and individuals from around the world, the Habitat Jam broke down the barriers of language, literacy, disability, poverty, war and the digital divide to enable over 39,000 people from 158 countries to begin a conversation that some say will change the world.⁴

The diversity of the 39,000 was impressive. Slum-dwellers participated alongside government ministers, who participated alongside school children who participated alongside leading academics. The conversation ranged across issues of transportation, clean water, governance, poverty and other issues of importance to people living in cities—especially those who are poor. Mrs. Anna Tibaijuka, the former Executive Director of UN-HABITAT and currently the Minister for Human Settlements, Housing and Urban Affairs in Tanzania, remarked on what a breakthrough this outreach effort represents. “The fact that thousands were willing to wait patiently in line, sometimes for hours, to contribute to this debate has been a profoundly moving experience for me,” she said. “The debate on slums has moved from the academic world to the streets of cities such as Nairobi, Dakar, Cape Town, Mumbai, Rio, Lima and Manila, and this shift is a powerful signal to world leaders on the need for concerted action.”⁵

As perhaps one of the largest public consultation exercises ever attempted, the event proved that it is possible to reach out to thousands to discuss and deliberate about ideas that might be the source of new and more effective policies and services. Indeed, these loosely distributed networks can coalesce to provide focused advice from those most affected by an issue, or those in the best position to take action. This pioneering experiment was grounded in the belief that this would be the fastest way to innovation. The goal of the Jam was to get all participants working on the most pressing problems of urban sustainability from cities around the world. Six unique forums framed the most critical issues—improving the lives of people living in slums; sustainable access to water; environmental sustainability; finance and governance; safety and security; and, finally, humanity—the future of our cities. The invitation to participate was open to anyone who had something to say about the cities in which they lived.

According to Fontana, “It was an unbelievable learning experience...This was not a policy conference anymore. It was a gathering of practitioners from civil society and the private sector exploring these questions: What things have worked? What have we learned? What mistakes have we made? How do



“ *This was not a policy conference anymore. It was a gathering of practitioners from civil society and the private sector exploring these questions: What things have worked? What have we learned? What mistakes have we made? How do we do things better?*”

we do things better?”⁶ The Habitat Jam was successful in leveraging global networks to bring forward the experience and voices of people who would have never been able to attend the World Urban Forum. Their ‘actionable ideas’ were the starting point for the conference, designed to build networks that would carry their ideas into implementation through improved policies and services—at a global, national, and community level. What is remarkable is the number of the actionable ideas from the Jam. More than 4,000 pages of discussion were captured, 600 ideas generated, and 70 actionable ideas researched and summarized in a workbook for the meeting held in Vancouver in June 2006.⁷

Habitat Jam also received a largely positive review from its participants, a sample of whom were surveyed after the event.

- 69% of almost 1,400 survey respondents said they were satisfied with their overall Habitat JAM experience.
- 91% agreed that that the Habitat JAM brought together people who might otherwise never be able to share ideas/information.
- 79% agreed that the Habitat JAM is a valuable preparatory event for World Urban Forums.
- 44% of respondents said the JAM made them more likely to attend WUF.⁸

Although the official meetings are now long over, the spirit of Habitat Jam lives on. Bill Tipton, project manager for Hewlett Packard and contributing author at the Global Dialogue Center, wrote about what it meant to him, as a blind person, to participate in the Habitat Jam: “This is so exciting it makes my hair stand up on end to see and talk with so many people with disabilities on-line.”⁹ Bill has gone on to lead an on-going dialogue with 70 disabled people from slums around the globe. He helps to raise money that is used to directly provide services in these communities. Habitat Jam has also inspired the creation of other collaborative Policy networks focused on urban sustainability issues including the Our Urban Future project, a multi-stakeholder policy network that will map out future scenarios for global urban development and create policy recommendations for a more resilient and sustainable urban future.

Collaborative Forecasting with the Our Urban Future Project

Habitat Jam emphasized a mix of online discussion and face-to-face consultation, and one of its strengths lay in the ability of the network to provide disenfranchised communities with an opportunity to participate in

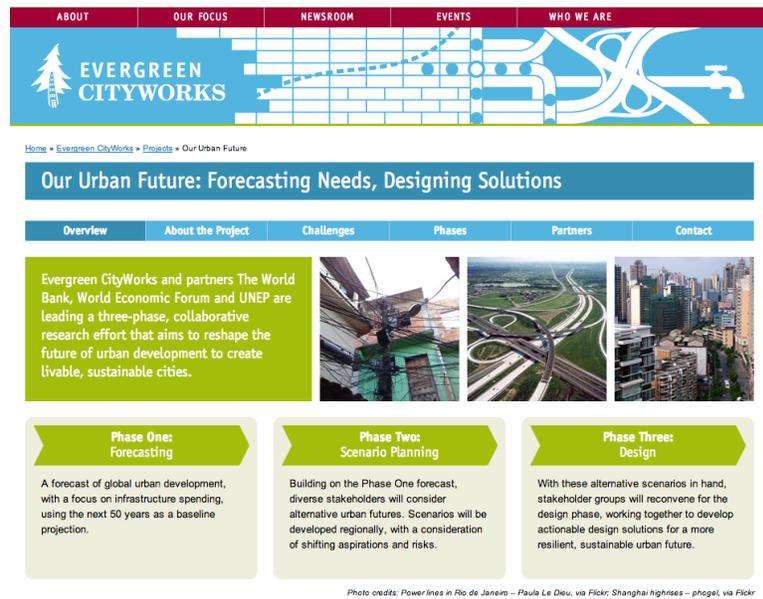


“Imagine a scenario planning exercise where thousands of connected participants could tap into a vast pool of shared data and adjust decision variables on the fly to see how their choices might impact real people in the future. Stakeholders could forecast, for example, whether investments in primary education for girls would yield better poverty alleviation outcomes than, say, investments in reducing the digital divide.”

a conversation from which they would otherwise have been marginalized. However, the policy development tools established since then allow for a much richer dialogue where future scenarios can be visualized and policy options not only discussed, but also evaluated using real data. Imagine a scenario planning exercise where thousands of connected participants could tap into a vast pool of shared data and adjust decision variables on the fly to see how their choices might impact real people in the future. Stakeholders could forecast, for example, whether investments in primary education for girls would yield better poverty alleviation outcomes than, say, investments in reducing the digital divide. Or, in the efforts to tackle climate change, imagine if scientists, policy-makers, environmentalists, investors and ordinary citizens could access comparable CO₂ emission data for all industrial facilities and other human activities such as logging, farming, fishing or mining. And not only access it, but measure, in precise detail, the impact of those activities on our climate in the same way companies apply financial metrics to their investment decisions to understand the bottom line impact. Such possibilities are no longer as far-fetched as they sound.

In 2013, the Evergreen Foundation teamed up with the World Bank, World Economic Forum, UNEP and hundreds of partners worldwide to create a global policy network called the Our Urban Future project that leverages a unique form of collaborative forecasting and policy design.¹⁰ One particularly innovative element of the project includes the use of a dynamic forecasting engine built on an open-platform model that permits users to adjust key variables—for example, the rate of urbanization in Southeast Asia, or investments in transportation infrastructure in Central America—in order to examine the impacts of alternative urban investment scenarios on urbanization challenges. Participants will have access to data on historical patterns, trends and planned expenditures in six key sectors, including transportation, energy, water, waste, buildings and technology. The model will permit a number of “straight-line” forecasts over a 50-year time horizon, allowing stakeholder groups and individual citizens to evaluate their preferred urban investment strategies against various political, social, financial and physical design considerations—a process normally reserved for expert policy modelers.





Our Urban Future, a project of the multi-stakeholder policy network Evergreen Cityworks , will design solutions for a more sustainable urban future.¹¹

Like Habitat Jam, online tools are only part of the Our Urban Future exercise. The scenario planning phase will be complemented by a broad public outreach program that includes extensive crowdsourcing and civic engagement. Additional face-to-face scenario planning exercises will be undertaken in Toronto, New York, London, Singapore, Delhi, Nairobi and Shanghai in order to harvest local innovation and catalyze communities around the goal of reimagining (and rebuilding) cities for sustainability. Participants will form into multi-stakeholder teams representing municipalities, industry, non-profits, academia and government. Their job will be to generate visions for the future—visions that are regionally specific, contextual, granular and connected to local conditions. The expectation is that the shared pool of local visions will help surface larger patterns that will be useful in building a global vision for urban infrastructure. And finally, to make all of this real, a network of “change-labs” will be set up where ideas can be piloted locally, further refined and then propagated internationally if successful.

Reflecting on one of the early stakeholder meetings, Evergreen Foundation Executive Director Geoff Cape noted that the need for cross-jurisdictional, multi-stakeholder collaboration on the urban agenda is finally being recognized. “Two big ideas that emerged quickly in the program were: A profound lack of vision and values guiding leaders influencing the larger urbanization agenda, and a gap in opportunities for cities to come together, like the United Nations, to share strategies and support work between cities,” he said.¹² “Nation-states are not investing in urban infrastructure strategies such as transportation, water, waste, energy and information and communications technology,” he continued, and to make matters worse this unfortunate dearth of leadership comes at a time when the vast majority of



the world's population is either living in or migrating to major urban centers. Cape argues that the urgency of the urban challenge requires “leaps” rather than incremental evolution, and furthermore that only multi-stakeholder networks can deliver the innovative ideas and capabilities that cities require.¹³

Our Urban Future is still a work-in-progress, but these varied ingredients, strategies and tools position the project to become a major global, collaborative and comprehensive effort for forecasting the future of urbanization and designing effective policies in collaboration with thousands of individuals.

Harnessing Global Policy Networks

Habitat Jam resulted in 600 proposals and over 70 actionable ideas for urban sustainability. Our Urban Future is on course to develop an even richer set of outputs, including detailed 50-year forecasts, scenarios and policy recommendations. But apart from these impressive targets, there are other less obvious benefits of large-scale online consultations. First and foremost, the broader participation enabled through digital brainstorming leads to better ideas and perhaps a greater diversity of ideas as well. Greater inclusion in the decision-making process, in turn, generates a greater sense of ownership when it comes to implementing the results. The digital brainstorming process facilitates “organizational memory,” leaving a permanent, searchable record of what might otherwise have been water cooler conversations and thus provides a foundation for subsequent discussions. It also dispenses with the old model of atomized input and central processing—think “suggestion box”—in favor of a more collaborative model with tools that enable the creation, learning, shaping, sharing and tracking of group knowledge as the process unfolds. In other words, brainstorming is conversations that open up a space for deliberation, analysis and perhaps even compromise among multiple stakeholders. And though existing brainstorming platforms don't yet offer this, future iterations could include advanced tools that enable citizens to track most decision making processes and see how their contributions have been (or are being) taken into account.

Could Habitat Jam and emerging Policy networks like the Our Urban Future project represent early examples of a new model of international policy development and even a nascent form of global democracy? More and more of these digital conversations are helping to set agendas that may not have originally seemed significant to national governments. Global dialogue and research into climate change, economic polarization, food security and AIDS in Africa are current examples of transnational multi-stakeholder conversations that are shaping the political agendas of states and



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international organizations. They have achieved standing on governmental agendas primarily as a result of widespread public concern—from rockstars to citizens to public officials to not-for-profits and to those directly affected.

Local has increasingly become global. And while this global interconnectedness is not necessarily new, what is new is the amount of information and ease of access to it for today’s information seekers, while Wikipedia, YouTube and Twitter provide the tools for a truly global network of citizen problem-solvers to emerge. Fortunately, social networks and collaboration platforms make the process of engaging citizens in problem solving easier and less costly than ever before. As with Habitat Jam, international institutions can post background information on the Web and use online video conferencing to bring in expert testimony. Web-enabled forums can enable discussion and debate amongst hundreds, thousands, and even millions of geographically-dispersed participants. Wikis provide a platform for collaborative editing of policy documents, while social networking technologies can connect citizens and organizations with common goals and interests.

The promise of technology-enabled Policy networks is that digital engagement will support global problem solving approaches that integrate policy development and implementation into a seamless and flexible practice of continuous engagement, improvement and innovation that can reach across national borders. Depending on the issue, emerging problem-solving networks will draw participants from governments, international organizations, businesses and industry associations, think tanks, academic institutions, civil society organizations such as NGOs, associations, religious groups and the general public. In doing so, they will better connect ordinary citizens to networks and institutions where conversations are happening and help build greater legitimacy for resulting decisions and projects.

Who Does What in the Policy Network

There is a wide range of institutions and organizations in society that currently contribute to policy development. In traditional policy settings, these participants added value to the policy-making process through different channels, at different stages of the process, with different means and ends, and with varying levels of effectiveness. Building new Policy networks is a means by which policy-makers and network leaders can bring greater structure, complementarity and coherence to the contributions of a disparate group of participants.

Positing new roles and responsibilities for participants in a policy network is an important step in transforming the policy-making process. In doing so, policy-makers and network leaders need to question the



enduring validity of the traditional roles of various policy contributors, identify new contributors and think creatively about shifting responsibilities from one class of participants to another. Governments, for example, do not have to be the lead participant in Policy networks. In many cases, governments should be content with being bystanders—or mere participants—as citizens and other institutions and organizations in society leverage their capacity to develop policy.

Policy Contributors	Traditional Role	Policy Network Role
Citizens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passive onlookers in the policy-making process, citizens vote every few years to provide government with a new policy mandate. • In some cases, citizens are randomly selected for polling and participation in focus groups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaged citizens will take advantage of new online tools to track and participate in policy development for issues that interest or affect them. • Developing civic competencies will mean creating and sustaining public spaces in which citizen relationships and competence can flourish.
Politicians	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Politicians lead the process of formulating specific policy proposals, shepherding them through legislative scrutiny and defending them in the public eye. • When in opposition, or as members of a minority party, politicians play a key role in interpreting and critiquing new policy proposals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Politicians will exploit new technologies to build stronger relationships with their constituents, becoming facilitators of political discourse and citizen engagement. • Politicians will play an important role in disseminating resources and information to constituents, moderating discussions and channeling citizen input into the policy-making process. • Politicians will need to complement their skills in political strategy and communications with skills in listening, mediating, consensus-building and public outreach.



<p>Public servants</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public servants support the development of policy by selecting, ordering and presenting evidence and analysis on which policy decisions are based. • Public servants lead policy implementation and manage the government bodies that oversee and enforce policy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public servants will play a leading role in establishing new processes for capturing and disseminating data and knowledge within Policy networks and to the public at large. • Public servants will be crucial links in the feedback loop that will enable greater policy responsiveness and innovation.
<p>Political parties</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political parties draw together policy positions on a full range of issues under a single political platform and play a role interpreting and publicizing policy issues. • Political parties have also traditionally served as forums for grassroots participation in the development of policy platforms and as training grounds for new political leaders. • This role in policy development, however, has been eclipsed by an electoral/communications role, in which new technologies are deployed to raise money, organize campaigners and broadcast political messages. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy networks present an imperative for political parties to reinvigorate their role in policy development or lose their relevance in the world of politics. • Political parties could be disintermediated by direct communications and interaction among citizens, interest groups, politicians and public servants. • A shift from “marketing” and communications to citizen engagement and political organizing could enable political parties to form their own Policy networks. • In countries where two party systems dominate, the Internet could enable niche and regional parties to raise their profile and ultimately lead to greater diversity in ideas and political platforms.
<p>Thought leaders: academics, think tanks, policy research groups and consultants</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thought leaders have traditionally been both trusted policy advisors and devoted critics of government policy. • Thought leaders work in tandem with policy-makers to provide original research and analysis for policy development. • Thought leaders play an important role in critiquing political institutions and imagining alternative models. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In addition to providing new research and ideas, the most important role for thought leaders will be “knowledge brokerage” — interpreting social, economic and technological change and providing grounding in relevant academic disciplines to enable policy-makers to understand complex policy evidence. • Thought leaders will increasingly be called upon to give expert testimony for citizen juries, to be neutral moderators in online discussions and to lead multi-disciplinary learning communities that form around policy issues.



<p>Industry and professional associations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industry and professional associations lobby on behalf of the collective interests of industries and professional groups. These bodies expend a great deal of resources to research, develop and present policy proposals that would strengthen the performance of their industry to government decision-makers. • Policy-makers looking for in-depth industry information or feedback on policy development frequently consult industry associations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both individual corporations and broad industry associations will become direct partners in the policy-making process, playing a vital role in setting agendas and negotiating outcomes. • The specialized technical expertise of corporate decision-makers and industry associations will help develop tools for predicting the impacts of policy options on a given industry and enable governments to make wise and informed policy choices. • Increasingly, the private sector will also take on a broader role in policy implementation, particularly in the delivery of government services.
<p>Civil society organizations:</p> <p>Civic associations, trade unions, NGOs & advocacy networks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civil society organizations frequently play a watchdog role by scrutinizing and critiquing policy and assembling and distributing alternative policies and points-of-view. • Direct involvement or influence in policy-making has generally been limited to a select group of well-resourced NGOs with access to decision-makers. • These groups can provide specialized inputs and often represent interests or constituencies that are not included in the political process. The causes, however, are not always noble, and some civil society organizations lobby for the rights of a few over the wellbeing of the majority. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better access to information and the ability to communicate rapidly and inexpensively has led to an explosive growth of civic organizations with the potential to influence policy-making. • Governments are finding that civil society organizations can be important partners in the renewal of local politics, the democratization of global decision-making and the implementation of solutions. • Single-issue coalitions will need to consider the broader public interest when pursuing their objectives. • Policy-focused NGOs and advocacy networks will need to become more transparent and tackle issues of representation and accountability in an effort to build credibility as legitimate policy actors.



Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The media are major agenda setters and framers of issues.• The media play an important role in democracies by providing a (mostly) independent point of view on policy, scrutinizing the policy-making process and asking questions to hold politicians accountable in the public eye.• This role is being compromised however, by growing horizontal and vertical concentration of media and by a bias in favor of personalities, events and soundbites.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• With an increasingly global, pervasive and participatory media, governments are under mounting pressure to be seen to be doing something in reaction to the day's events.• Policy-makers often feel compelled to develop short-term or symbolic solutions to problems that require more fundamental solutions.• In a more positive light, the media can provide a neutral context for policy debates and virtual town hall meetings.• Good journalists can also provide deeper political analysis than the evening news and leverage their superior resources to help simplify complex and drawn-out policy documents for the public.
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The Future of Collaborative Policy Development

Online communities have already demonstrated their potential to leverage considerable human knowledge and expertise and rapidly build capacity.¹⁴ At the same time it is now recognized that online collaborations have the potential to trigger and shape significant changes in the way future societies will function. Extrapolation of the present exponential growth leads to scenarios where very large percentages of populations could, if equipped with the right tools, simultaneously voice opinions and views on major and minor societal challenges, and thereby accelerate the transition to much more inclusive and participative global solution networks.

By 2020, there will no longer be barriers to citizen and business participation in decision making, according to recent research conducted on policy modeling tools and techniques for the European Commission.¹⁵ Advanced tools—possibly building on gaming and augmented reality technologies—will enable citizens to track the totality of decision making processes and see how their contributions have been (or are being) taken into account. Current linguistic and cultural barriers will have been largely overcome through use of semantic-based cooperation platforms. Opinion mining, visualization and modeling tools will allow stakeholders to forecast virtual reality based outcomes and scenarios that will help to shape, guide and form public opinion. And so long as the processes and tools to establish trust and authenticity are robust enough to prevent manipulation, the outcomes



of such consultative processes should be faster, more legitimate and more efficient in terms of revising policy and making decisions.

Of course, technology alone is not enough; governments, international organizations and GSNs must begin to develop new participatory practices that exploit the available tools. Present government processes (local, regional, national and international) develop laws and regulations, interpret and define societal norms and deliver societal support services. Their legitimacy is derived through democratic processes combined with a requirement of transparency and accountability. In a world that is increasingly using digital communication and borderless interaction, traditional roles and responsibilities of public administrations will be subject to considerable change and classical boundaries between citizens and their governments are blurring. The balance of power between governments, societal actors and the population will have to adapt to these challenging new possibilities. The same will be true for the governance models, process flows, and analytical tools with which to properly understand, interpret, visualize and harness the forces that could be unleashed by a more participatory and interactive model of global decision making.

Implications for Network Leaders

Regardless of the engagement tools deployed, it has become clear that NGOs, governments, companies and international organizations can no longer act as isolated decision-making units in a world where complex trans-boundary issues will overwhelm their capacity to develop meaningful responses in a timely manner. Participating in global Policy networks will help equip all stakeholders with the external ideas, skills and resources they will need to coordinate their efforts across jurisdictions and sectors. And the expanding toolkit of engagement tools means that a lack of technology is no longer a valid excuse to exclude relevant stakeholders from the conversation.

However, while multi-stakeholder Policy networks hold great promise and are already having a profound impact on the world, they pose a number of difficult questions too. Will these networks lack legitimacy because they were not democratically elected? In whose interests do they act? To whom are they accountable? The United Nations may have growing inadequacies as a vehicle for global cooperation, but it functions as a representative and legitimate body and its delegates are accountable to the national governments of which the UN is composed. As multi-stakeholder networks claim larger roles in governance, national leaders and governments will need to find ways to respond and participate in these discussions. They will face choices about whether to remain reactive or whether to find new ways of entering the conversation in proactive and productive ways that lead to better policy, services and outcomes. Habitat Jam brings powerful



testimony to bear in pursuing the latter and provides a potential blueprint for the creation of participative forums, made legitimate through their transparency and membership, and made vital by their ability to funnel ideas and innovative solutions to those in positions to make them happen.

Engaging regular people and experts using the Internet seems a straightforward way to both promote democratic engagement in global solution networks and draw in expertise and new ideas to public policy. But there are some unique challenges in applying large-scale collaborative methods to policy development. On one hand, the evidence suggests that creating an open, nonhierarchical space for ideas focused on change taps incredible energy. But it also creates a major commitment to action when thousands of involved minds come together to set an agenda. While some stakeholders may embrace this new culture of deliberation, others may express reticence. For example, governments tend to emphasize hierarchy and debate behind closed doors in a culture that is often skeptical of new ideas. Global problem solvers must work to reconcile diverse organizational cultures in order to fully realize the potential for global solution networks to add ingenuity, legitimacy and momentum to the work of public policy. The following are some key implications for policymakers and other participants in Policy networks.

Digital brainstorming is not about gathering opinions—it's about assembling insight and capability. When it comes to collaborative policymaking and digital engagement, the idea is not merely for governments, international organizations or GSNs to understand what citizens think should happen; public opinion polls can do that. But what polls don't capture is the wisdom and insight that a nation can collectively offer through online brainstorming and discussion. Social networks and technologies are making the process of engaging citizens in policy-making easier and less costly than ever.

Inclusive processes are key to fostering legitimacy. Finding ways to foster genuine inclusiveness—regardless of social, cultural, religious or economic barriers—is one of the key challenges for multi-stakeholder dialogues and Policy networks. For example, Habitat Jam was designed to provide a voice to those who were living in the conditions up for discussion at the World Urban Forum. Many of them—especially rural villagers and slum dwellers—have little to no access to the Internet, except through rudimentary mobile phones that don't support advanced applications. The digital divide was thus a very real barrier to inclusiveness, and threatened the legitimacy of the project. To solve the problem, more than 400 civil society organizations were enlisted to connect with the communities that deserved to be heard. Internet kiosks were set up in slums and villages, where people could come to have their suggestions transcribed onto the Jam website. Public meetings were held to discuss the issues. Cybercafes became hubs for community input into the process. One deaf man in Kenya even brought his own translator to ensure that his ideas could connect with global leaders.

Marketing by network is key to driving high participation rates. People move people to become part of something like a Digital Brainstorm. Habitat



Jam's success in drawing in so many participants was critically linked to how it worked with and resourced civil society organizations close to the people they were trying to reach. Finding those who can draw in the right kind of participants, and asking them to assist in creating the conversation is an important strategy for marketing digital brainstorms. Working this way has spillover effects when it comes time for making change after the event, since many groups will already be champions of the brainstorm, and presumably, its results. Reservoirs of goodwill can make a massive difference for implementing a shared agenda, especially among more loosely connected global solution networks consisting of multiple governments, businesses, civil society organizations and individuals.

Assign responsibility for driving change, mark achievements and report regularly on progress. When a policy network steps up to take on the change agenda and invites external discussion and participation, responsibility must be assigned for making progress. In networked environments like Habitat Jam and Our Urban Future, influential stakeholders can be asked to take the lead on specific actions. Marking achievements publicly can help maintain momentum and drive stakeholder commitment to the process. Being clear about near and long term goals and achievements creates transparency about what is happening and when. Such transparency fosters trust thanks to the accountability these reports create between the drivers of change and the participants that contributed to setting the agenda.

Collaborative policymaking needn't place undue strain on public officials or GSN leaders. With a collaborative process, some of the burden of collecting, sorting, analyzing and drafting is shifted to the public, leaving public officials in a position to steer and referee the process. An opportunity space opens up for deliberation, reflection and perhaps even compromise among multiple stakeholders. Here's how New York University professor and GovLab founder Beth Noveck puts it:

“In a collaborative government, public participation is not pro forma. Though the recommendations made by private citizens are not binding, they are taken as serious contributions to the decision-making process. At the same time, collaboration assumes that stakeholders are qualified to make useful contributions to the subject- or industry-specific work of the agency. As such, a government agency that solicits public feedback employs a system to evaluate the input of the self-selecting private citizen. Only it is not the government agency that initially evaluates public feedback. Initially, ratings and recommendations remain in the hands of private citizens. Their recommendations are vetted by groups ancillary to the government agency. These groups comprise the very individuals who have volunteered their expertise in the first place. This alleviates some of the burden that participation outside of organizational boundaries creates for government officials.”¹⁶



Governments and GSN leaders must be prepared to cede some control.

Many politicians and international bureaucrats would genuinely like to reduce the democratic deficit at the international level and strengthen representative processes. The reality is that getting to genuine citizen engagement is hard—it entails a truly massive shift in the culture of international organizations and networks and the apparatus of decision-making. Giles Gherson, senior civil servant for the Government of Ontario speaks for all level of government, from local to global, when he says, “If we’re going to be getting into the wiki world and engaging citizens and having real authentic conversations with them, then it’s probably going to have to be a very different culture. We’re going to have to cede a lot of control over that conversation.”¹⁷ Indeed, the promise of participatory policy making is that of a continuous circle of policy innovation and adaptation that integrates the knowledge and experience of a broad range of stakeholders in government, business, and civil society.

In the Policy networks of the future, decision-making will be the product of consultation and collaboration within networks that assemble around relevant political issues. Governments will have to abandon their monopoly over the policy process in favor of participatory models that invite input—and ownership—at all stages of development, from problem definition, to analysis, to identifying strategic options and making decisions.

Principles of representation and accountability must be extended to the global level. International digital brainstorms like Habitat Jam and scenario planning networks like Our Urban Future have the potential to trigger and shape significant changes in the way future societies will function. They signal the degree to which we are moving into an era in which the power and authority of international organizations, and the legitimacy of global decision making, will become ever more dependent upon interactive democracy. But, leaders of international Policy networks and GSNs must ensure that digitally enabled citizen engagement does not merely amplify the voices of organized interest groups that are already heard in policy-making.

Some of the challenges for Policy networks include:

- addressing social and political divides,
- ensuring there is an explicit relationship between citizen input and policy outcomes, and
- providing trusted public space where participants of all political persuasions will engage in policy deliberation.

Policy networks are an antidote to simplistic surveys that pose either/or or limited multiple-choice questions. More substantive deliberative models such as citizen juries, online consultations, deliberative polling and virtual question periods are leading options for broadening participation and impact. Governments that can solve these challenges and integrate a broad array of stakeholders into their policy formulation process will be pioneers in implementing an approach to policy development that is truly fit for the twenty-first century.

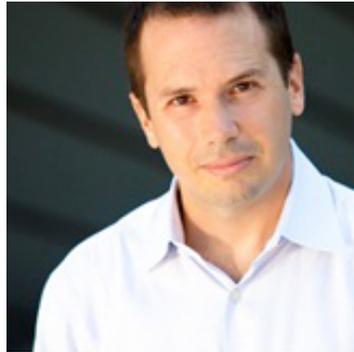


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About the Author



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Ten Types of Global Solution Networks