Trade, foreign policy, diplomacy and health

Global Governance

Governance refers to the different ways that organizations, institutions, businesses, and governments manage their affairs. Governance is the act of governing, and thus involves the application of laws and regulations, but also of customs, ethical standards and norms. Good governance means that affairs are managed well, not that the laws, regulations or norms are themselves necessarily “good”.

Global governance refers to the way in which global affairs are managed. As there is no global government, global governance typically involves a range of actors including states, as well as regional and international organizations. However, a single organization may nominally be given the lead role on an issue, for example the World Trade Organization in world trade affairs. Thus global governance is thought to be an international process of consensus-forming which generates guidelines and agreements that affect national governments and international corporations. Examples of such consensus would include WHO policies on health issues.

Critics argue that global governance mechanisms support the neo-liberal ideology of globalization and reduce the role of the state (and thus its sovereignty) to that of an adjusting body for the implementation of international policies. Some argue that, as a result, the interests of the poorest people and nations will be ignored unless they have a direct impact on the global economy.

Global health governance is the application of the “rules” - both legally binding and customary - which relate to the global management of health issues. The “rules” include international law relating to public health, as well as so-called “soft law” and norms and expectations.

Three key ‘gaps’ are referred to in governance discussions:

- The jurisdictional gap, between the increasing need for global governance in many areas - such as health - and the lack of an authority with the power, or jurisdiction, to take action.
- The incentive gap, between the need for international cooperation and the motivation to undertake it. The incentive gap is said to be closing as globalization provides increasing impetus for countries to cooperate. However, there are concerns that, as Africa lags further behind economically, its influence on global governance processes will diminish.
- The participation gap, which refers to the fact that international cooperation remains primarily the affair of governments, leaving civil
society groups on the fringes of policy-making. On the other hand, globalization of communication is facilitating the development of global civil society movements.

See also:

InterGovernmental Organizations