

Article

Global Problem-Solving Approaches: The Crucial Role of China and the Group of Rising Powers

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Abstract

It is becoming increasingly apparent that global challenges can only be solved by developing and implementing international networks which are not only as large as possible, but often also transnational in nature. This applies, inter alia, to security- and climate protection-related topics. There is little point in setting CO²-related global targets without including China, for example, as the rising powers have evinced tremendous increases in emissions in recent years. Rising powers have a significant potential to shape global problem-solving approaches, something which differs significantly from traditional discourses relating to medium-sized powers. Like other attempts at country classification, the term rising powers is controversial, competing partly with designations including emerging economies, middle-income countries, medium-sized powers or regional powers. The continuing definitional controversy is justified, going hand in hand, as it does, with core underlying concepts and assumptions about international relations.

Keywords

Rising powers, China, Global Problem-solving, 2030 Agenda, BRICS

Introduction: The need for global problem-solving capacity

Long-term global structural upheaval and acute crises (terrorism by the 'Islamic State' / IS, vast refugee and migration movements, etc.) are placing all stakeholders involved in the current phase of international relations under immense pressure to act. This applies equally to China, Europe, stakeholders outside Europe, to developing regions and regions in which progress has been registered. In addition, it has an impact on all policy areas, such as security, environment, health care and traditional foreign policy and development cooperation.

As far as global structural upheaval is concerned, the economic and, in many cases,

social progress observed in a series of developing countries in recent decades has been extremely rapid. China plays a prominent role in this influential trend. The country's size and significance are formative in many respects. This applies both to domestic development-related progress, within China itself - the successful fight against poverty deserves special mention here -, and to the role played by China in international relations and South-South cooperation.

However, this trend can also be observed in other large-scale national economies including Brazil, India and Turkey, which are expanding their respective global roles at a considerable rate, and have, in many instances, been successful in significantly reducing poverty. Various smaller and medium-sized economies such as Rwanda, Ghana and Bangladesh have also recorded dynamic development over the course of several years. As a result, international debates now include references to the "rise of the South" and to global convergence processes. The growing relevance of China, further rising powers and other developing countries and the power shifts in global governance structures are becoming visible in the shape of more recent, pertinent networks such as the group of the 20 most important industrial and emerging countries (G20) and the coalition formed by Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS).

Identifying global problem-solving approaches is a complex task (Janus, Klingebiel & Paulo 2014; Klingebiel & Paulo 2015; Klingebiel & Paulo 2016). This requires effective transnational collaborative relationships between various stakeholder groups, as there is either a lack of international institutions and regimes equipped to deal with major problem areas, e.g. a global investment regime, or the latter do not have at their disposal sufficient problem-solving capacities independent of nation states, e.g. a global climate policy. Problem-solving approaches are also becoming increasingly convoluted due to the need to involve a plethora of different stakeholders. Innovations rest, critically, on the ability to connect and manage these stakeholders (at a sub-national level, transnational stakeholders such as companies, etc.). Governmental club approaches constitute the expression of a growing diversity of stakeholder constellations and forms, as well as changing global power structures.

The world's community can only implement the global transformation towards sustainability on the basis of the paradigmatic programmes agreed on by all governments in 2015 if a new form of transnational cooperation - which explicitly surpasses inter-governmental or international relations - is established: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is founded on a far-reaching, global social contract. The realisation of this global policy of a common good faces major challenges, because the global system is characterised by numerous obstacles and impediments to cooperation. The dynamic conditions of the current renaissance of traditional power politics, on the one hand, and the barriers to cooperation result-

ing from the transition to an as yet undefined multipolar system without Western dominance should be noted in this context. The specific role played by China should be cited once more at this juncture. On the other hand, influential factors beyond the sphere of statehood are becoming increasingly conspicuous; this applies, for instance, to the proliferation and denationalisation of stakeholders (e.g. transnational enterprises) and to the relevance of knowledge-based influencing factors for cooperation.

Transnational cooperation and the 2030 Agenda

The consequences of these trends on the conditions for the success of transnational cooperation for a global policy are complex and contradictory. While the growing problem-related pressure is driving the relevant stakeholders to develop innovative approaches to cooperation within specific spheres of activity, e.g. in global climate policy, geopolitical rivalries and global economic distribution conflicts in other areas, e.g. in terms of the world trade order, are hampering cooperative solutions. Innovative and effective cooperation patterns both external to and within development cooperation, which permit and promote a global orientation towards the common good, are indispensable here.

The new global development agenda, adopted by heads of state and government in September 2015 under the aegis of the United Nations, is a milestone for a global policy of a common good. This superseded the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were resolved in 2000. Overall, 17 goals (Sustainable Development Goals/SDGs) are being pursued henceforth within the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The new agenda underscores the fact that the goals in question will continue to include development policy content in future, but that they will also considerably surpass this:

- *Universal and transformative character:* In terms of its aspirations, the agenda aims to exceed a list of objectives related to developing regions. With this, it is also oriented towards affluent, industrialised countries (and the challenges they face, as regards inequality or ecologically unsustainable production and consumption patterns, for example). The agenda is designed to systematically promote change (transformative character), striving for the reform of economic and political decision-making processes, for instance.
- *Six core elements:* The agenda concentrates its attention on six core elements: (1) a dignified life (which includes, in particular, an end to poverty and the reduction of inequality), (2) human beings: securing a healthy life and inclusiveness, (3) wealth, (4) protection of the planetary ecosystem, (5)

justice to promote peaceful societies and functional institutions, (6) partnership for global solidarity for the benefit of sustainable development.

- *Seventeen goals:* The 17 goals comprise a total of 169 indicators or specific activities, making the agenda considerably broader and more ambitious than the MDGs.
- *Role of development cooperation:* Development cooperation funds remain important as far as achieving the goals is concerned. Development approaches need to be more effective and target-oriented, and promote the use of additional resources.

Overall, the agenda no longer constitutes a purely development policy mandate. The extent to which this will result in disparities in terms of implementation (if the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries implement larger-scale reforms “at home”, for example), remains to be seen. China attaches great importance to the agenda, and will also align its international development cooperation activities to the SDGs.

Rising powers: Definitions and concepts

Like other attempts at country classification, the term rising powers is controversial, competing partly with designations including emerging economies, middle-income countries, medium-sized powers or regional powers (see e.g. Paul 2016; Scholvin 2014; Manicom & Reeves 2014). The continuing definitional controversy is justified, going hand in hand, as it does, with core underlying concepts and assumptions about international relations (IR). For the purposes of the present paper, finding a suitable term to describe the dynamic of country types and their demarcation from traditional country classifications is paramount (Paul 2016).

In this respect, past IR discourse has been shaped by the following time-honoured debates, according to which the international system is dominated by one or a few superpowers and, in parts, by further big powers. Depending on the school of theory to which one adheres, there were, or are, various ways of classifying countries and the options for controlling the same above and beyond this very small group of states. Traditional realist approaches, developed by Hans Morgenthau (1963) or Kenneth Waltz (1979), for instance, would describe the medium-sized powers as a category beneath the super- and big powers in the hierarchy of nations, which are unable to trigger processes of change of any great import within international relations. According to this view, medium-sized powers are not proactive, but reactive stakeholders within the international system.

States in the sense of liberal, neoliberal or institutionalist theories, including, in particular, those developed by Robert Keohane (1984), Joseph Nye (1990) and

Stephen Krasner (1983), display a different profile. According to these concepts, medium-sized powers certainly are able to shape international relations, be it via niche diplomacy, norm-setting roles, the use and expansion of multilateral channels or the establishment of international regimes to pursue rule-making within specific policy domains.

It goes without saying that these two briefly-outlined tendencies naturally do not encompass all schools of thought. Here, it is initially merely important to demonstrate that the new and dynamic medium-sized powers constitute a new type of power which differs significantly from the aforementioned earlier discourses. In this respect, the term rising powers creates a meaningful distinction to and demarcation from medium-sized powers such as Australia and Canada, which continue to exist and which are also subjected to a new set of circumstances (Cooper 2013).

Broadly speaking, states which have predominantly experienced a dynamic economic development in the last two decades, which make a pronounced claim to the shaping of the international system, be this primarily at a regional or at a global level, and whose claim is fundamentally accepted by other stakeholders, should, in the sense of the present paper, be described as rising powers. In addition, countries falling into this category are anxious to pursue group interests as rising powers on a global scale by means of new associations (Paul 2016; Prys 2012; Flemes 2009).

According to this characterization China, India, Brazil, and to a certain extent, Russia, form the core of a group identity of this nature. These countries are joined by Argentina, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria, Turkey, South Africa and South Korea.

Despite the aforementioned similarities, the heterogeneity of such a group is naturally undeniable. The vast absolute economic powers of China in comparison with those of South Africa, for example, or the populations of the two countries display enormous differences alone. In terms of economic potential, a ratio of 27:1 exists between the two countries, while the population ratio is 25:1¹.

Interestingly, a plethora of new “country clubs”, such as BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa), IBSA (India, Brazil and South Africa) and MITKA (Mexico, Indonesia, Turkey, Korea and Australia) have formed in recent years, which are based on similarly implicit understandings. The rising powers group is also a significant element of a comparatively new club model, together with the traditional G7/G8 (group of 7/8), namely the G20 (group of 20).

At this juncture, it is important to outline two aspects of these dynamic club

¹ Several calculations regarding data for 2015, based on: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sn.html>, viewed on 21.06.2016.

concepts: firstly, the question of whether new club approaches are in the process of emerging which do not display similarities with a canon of joint democratic governance values merely coincidentally, but whether these clubs are striving to pursue external policies which are oriented in line with democratic norms. In this respect, several observers anticipate that IBSA and MITKA will display potential (Husar 2016); however, such an intention is virtually impossible to confirm as far as the policies actually promoted by these clubs are concerned. In addition, the internal democratic model, particularly in the case of Turkey, is currently under pressure², with the result that it appears less plausible for this country to systematically promote a foreign relations policy aligned to democratic values.

A second aspect is the new-found heterogeneity of these clubs, and the permeability in terms of their membership structure. As far as membership is concerned, these clubs do not exclusively include rising powers from the global South. On the contrary, the examples of Russia and Australia demonstrate that a former superpower and a traditional middle-sized power can certainly find a place within the collective strategic promotion of interests³.

Conclusions: Rising powers as global stakeholders

Against this background, it is possible to draw two conclusions from the rising powers debate. On the one hand, it must be stressed that rising powers have a significant potential to shape processes and trigger change, something which differs significantly from traditional discourses relating to medium-sized powers (Klingebiel & Xiaoyun 2015). This sphere of influence is related to shifts in political influence, as the comparative authority of the remaining superpower, the USA, is experiencing ever greater restrictions, and big and traditional medium-sized powers are also suffering a relative loss of importance. At the same time, the power potential of rising powers - as far as China's foreign exchange reserves are concerned, for example, or Turkey's role in the Near and Middle East crisis zones, is increasing.

On the other, it is becoming increasingly apparent that global challenges can only be solved by developing and implementing international networks which are not only as large as possible, but often also transnational in nature. This applies, inter alia, to security- and climate protection-related topics. There is little point in setting CO²-related global targets without including China, for example, as the *rising powers* have evinced tremendous increases in emissions in recent years

² <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/04/12/turkey-has-given-up-on-democracy-outside-its-borders-too/>, viewed on 21.06.2016.

³ At this point, it should also be noted that the membership structures in some of the old club formats are undergoing significant changes. This applies, above all, to the rigorous shifts in membership of the OECD, which no longer constitutes an unadulterated group of Western industrial nations by any means, taking the comparatively new members South Korea and Chile as examples.

(Schellnhuber et al. 2011).

Rising powers have the strong incentive that their roles as global or at least regional stakeholders are acknowledged (Manicom & Reeves 2014; Paul 2016). At the same time, the discussion regarding the question of which norms and standards could be applied by this group of countries as far as their contribution to a global common good, or, more specifically, to the provision of transnational collective goods is concerned, requires further elaboration. In recent years, a debate around whether the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities” (CBDR) could serve as a road map has developed (Pauw et al. 2014; Besharati 2013). This principle, which derives from the environment economy, would, if only abstractly, determine a fundamental shared responsibility of rising powers in the solving of global problems, yet simultaneously recognise the differing capacities available in terms of addressing these topics, particularly as far as the OECD world is concerned. With a few notable exceptions, intergovernmental negotiations have been unable to draw on such a principle as a point of reference to date. A more detailed examination of the principles surrounding the international involvement of this country group is still pending.

Bio

Dr. Stephan Klingebiel is Department Head (Bilateral and Multilateral Development Policy) of the German Development Institute (Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik / DIE). Before he joined DIE in 1993 he was researcher at the University of Duisburg (Institute for Development and Peace) where he also obtained his PhD (1998). From 2007 to 2011 he was director of KfW Development Bank office in Kigali, Rwanda dealing with development cooperation issues. Since 2011 Stephan Klingebiel is a regular Visiting Professor at Stanford University (Bing Overseas Studies Program, Cape Town) and since 2014 a visiting lecturer at Philipps University Marburg.

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