



Institutionalising Global Deliberation: Who, When, Where, For What?

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📌 The Next Step for Global Deliberation?

Global deliberation has sprung from the pages of academic papers and the imagination of advocates and activists to a practicable reality with a powerful promise. Not long ago, we witnessed the world's first global citizens' assembly. In 2021, the Global Assembly on the Climate and Ecological Crisis brought together 100 people from around the world selected through a global civic lottery to learn and deliberate on how humanity can address the climate emergency in a fair and effective way. The outcome of this process was a People's Declaration on the Future of Planet Earth, presented at United Nations COP26 climate conference in November 2021 (see www.globalassembly.org).

The Global Assembly was a proof of concept for a new governance model at the global level. As such, it succeeded in showing that global, multilingual, online deliberation was possible despite many barriers. It scaled up previous experiences in multinational deliberation (see www.wvviews.org), increasing the organisational complexity and experimenting with geographic sortition, simultaneous deliberation in multiple languages, and a decentralised delivery network. The Global Assembly further proved that lay citizens can directly take part in the global governance of complex and urgent problems.

Future iterations of global deliberation should move beyond testing and prototyping and towards establishing clear goals in terms of impact. This was a central demand from both stakeholders and assembly members in the 2021 Global Assembly (Curato et al 2023). And impact is tied to institutionalisation: legally binding regulations, embeddedness in the public administration, clear procedures towards specified outcomes, are some of the factors that generate clear pathways toward when and how the results of deliberation should or must be considered by decision-makers (c.f. LATINNO Final Report 2021).

Institutionalising global deliberation comprises the incorporation of representative deliberative processes at the global scale beyond one-off initiatives, and linking them to political-institutional decision-making (c.f. OECD 2021). How exactly could and should that happen? What factors should be taken into account by conveners and deliverers of global citizens' assemblies?

Below we unpack some of the factors, actors, and dimensions that can play a role in institutionalising global deliberation. Concrete answers to these questions will vary depending on the political problem, policy area, and agents involved in the assembly. These questions also invite critical reflection on how to democratise the field and practice of global citizens' assemblies.



Who?

Who convenes the global citizens' assembly and sets its agenda will determine many aspects of the design and deliberative experience, including: what stakeholders will be involved, how participants will be selected, how decisions will be reached, and, naturally, what remit or question will assembly members discuss.

But who are legitimate initiators of global deliberation? What is the source of their legitimacy, and to whom are they accountable?

Future global assemblies may build on the bottom-up experience of previous cases, often initiated by civil society organisations, deliberative democracy scholars and activists, and professional service providers. A technical paper prepared for the Global Citizens' Assembly Network (GloCAN) found that it is civil society groups that showed the most trust and interest in institutionalising global climate assemblies because they recognise the value of amplifying the voices of everyday citizens in global governance (see Simangan and Pram 2024). A second technical paper further emphasised that stakeholders in global deliberation expect diversity and representation in convening and delivery bodies, including local partner organisations, gender parity, and representation of most affected groups (Ross et al 2023). Our ongoing research at GloCAN further highlights the importance of co-designing the assembly, including agenda-setting, expert selection, and programme design, among others.

Further reflection is needed on the mandate, role, and responsibilities of such initiators. What are the implications if a global deliberative forum is convened by experienced, and therefore also partial, experts and practitioners? Who

should have the final say over process design? And how can they meaningfully engage with other groups and movements active in the respective policy area that the assembly is meant to tackle?

Alternative pathways to institutionalisation may begin in a top-down manner, by initiative of formal international organisations or forums. This was the case, for example, of the United Nation's UN75 Global Conversation in 2020 (see www.un75.online). This particular form of institutionalisation comes with a different baggage: the remit, norms, and conditions of deliberation will be predetermined by the commissioning body, potentially leaving little room for deliverers and participants to co-create the process. In a third GloCAN technical paper on agenda setting, authors find that commissioners usually prefer citizen input in process design, but often fail to effectively enable it due to time and resource constraints (Malkin et al 2023).

In addition, existing institutions are missing incentives to cede decision-making power over difficult, often polarising issues to a citizen-led body. Such cession would also create both conceptual and political tensions within their own representative mandates, as in the case of Nation-State emissaries that act in international forums (e.g. the United Nations). How would accountability mechanisms then play out between these bodies, their constituencies, and global citizens' assemblies? In turn, who would organisers and deliverers of global citizens' assemblies be accountable to?

Finally, who are legitimate decision-makers over global 'wicked' problems? Who effectively holds the power of reaching and enforcing public policy decisions at the global level, and who are veto players in the respective policy field? Existing international organisations have shown time and time again their constraints in leading global



governance in a world where Nation-State sovereignty is the norm and where countries and regimes have little incentive to cede power or accept transnational jurisdiction. Identifying and engaging those players will determine the extent of faculties delegated, ceded, or reclaimed by global citizens' assemblies.

When?

At what point in global governance can deliberative forums provide the most effective way of engaging citizens?

Following schematized models of the public policy cycle, global deliberation may support global governance in (1) problem identification and definition, (2) formulation of policy options to tackle that problem, (3) decision-making among those policy options, (4) leading or overseeing the implementation of the chosen policy, (5) monitoring that implementation and systematising learnings, or (6) multiple or all of those stages.

Conveners will need to determine the best moment (or combination of moments) along the policy cycle to institutionalise deliberation, depending on the concrete goals and remit of the global forum, its 'docking' with power holders or embeddedness in institutions, and the (re)distribution of political responsibilities.

In addition, global citizens' assemblies can also help inform the public and support the connection between formal international governance infrastructures and the public sphere. But how can a global citizens' assembly create that link with the public, and who should bear that role? Should assembly members be tasked as ambassadors of the assembly, of the remit, of specific policy options? Should cultural engagement be built into the design of the

global citizens' assembly in order to create a public conversation beyond the walls of the assembly?

The Global Assembly, for instance, experimented with decentralised, self-organised Community Assemblies across the globe, and engaged artists and activists in leading alternative forms of information dissemination and reflection through a 'Cultural Wave' (see <https://globalassembly.org/community-assemblies>). Conveners and implementers should carefully consider existing evidence and open questions about the possible relationship between formal and informal institutions, citizen intermediation and activism, and public trust - not only at the global level, but also in connection with local communities (e.g. Luis and Veloso, 2023).

Where?

What role will global citizens' assemblies play vis a vis existing or future global governance institutions? How are power and change defined at the global level?

The institutionalisation of global citizens' assemblies will inevitably grapple with these questions. The remit, agents, and policy area will present different maps of power, while there are also established power-holders at the global level (see <https://leadersforglobalassemblies.earth/the-letter>).

So far, local citizens' assemblies have been most frequently linked to legislative bodies (c.f. OECD 2020, 2021). At the national level, citizens' assemblies have operated in connection with both the legislative and executive branches in multiple ways, including connecting assemblies to parliamentary committees, convening citizens' assemblies and submitting their decisions to referenda, or allowing citizen initiatives to trigger assemblies, among others.



At the international level, there are both global governance and coordination bodies (such as the United Nations) and spaces dedicated to concrete policy problems (such as the World Economic Forum or the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change). Some existing proposals have already advanced ideas on how to link global deliberation to those international governance bodies - but through electoral-representative processes (c.f. Lopez-Carlos, Dahl and Groff 2020, Falk and Strauss 2001). How will global citizens' assemblies relate to these bodies?

Administrative infrastructures beyond political-institutional mandates also bear consideration. How will global citizens' assemblies relate to the bureaucratic apparatus at international organisations? What competences, languages, and capacities must be developed on both sides for effective and meaningful collaboration?

Alternatively, global citizens' assemblies may develop 'outside' of global governance institutions - as autonomous, civil society-led spaces for agenda-setting, consensus-building, and creating ties among social actors across the world. This is the case, for instance, of the World Social Forum, a bottom-up effort to counterweight the global economic powers in Davos and voice the needs of global civil society.

While operating entirely outside governmental spaces, mass deliberation can still become a social institution if it can create an established forum with clear rules of access and operation, defined aims and scope, and concrete expected outcomes. Yet, such a form of non-partisan, non-governmental institutionalisation faces challenges to connect the civic sphere, national governments, and international organisations. How can civil society-led global deliberation effectively reach decision-makers, influence policy-making, or transform institutions of global governance? Should that remain their goal?

For what?

What purpose should the global citizens' assembly fulfil? What process design and institutional linkage may be best suited for its concrete goals and remit?

Global citizens' assemblies can be designed as consultative bodies, convened as one-off initiatives, for instance in parallel to global events (such as COPs) or to one time summits (such as the Summit for Democracy). In those cases, they may seek to address a concrete policy question, issue a recommendation, or bear influence over a specific political proposal, decision, or outcome. This was the case of the 2021 Global Assembly, which presented its final Declaration at COP26 in Glasgow.

Alternatively, global deliberation may take place through a permanent body or a series of regularly organised assemblies. In that case, they may fulfil a regular advisory role to existing political, administrative, or cooperation bodies. For example, this is the case of the proposed Chamber of Civil Society with an advisory role to the UN General Assembly (c.f. Lopez-Carlos et al 2020).

Finally, the assembly could also potentially operate as a body with binding powers - where the citizens' decisions become mandatory for political and administrative decision-makers. Evidence at the local, regional, and national level so far demonstrates that there is a link between binding mandates and actual policy outcomes, though the evidence is sparse (c.f. LATINNO Final Report 2021). How could such a mandate be created at the global scale, where international organisations generally lack that form of influence?



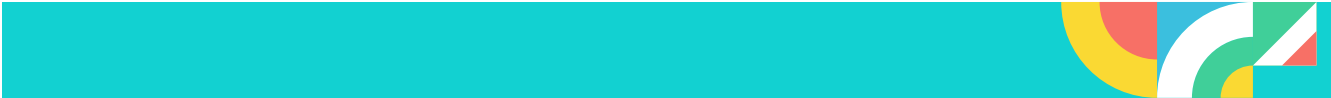
An additional purpose of a global citizens' assembly, operating either within or without the sphere of existing international organisations, may be to expand civic engagement and citizen education - of those participants involved, their communities, and possibly beyond. What would a global citizens' assembly look like if it sought, not to produce decisions and issue recommendations, but to support global social mobilisation?

Outlook

A move towards the institutionalisation of global citizens' assemblies brings with it high expectations: the standardisation of how these forums are convened, designed and implemented; creating comparability across cases, processes, and outcomes; potentially establishing norms and bodies

to enforce those standards; allowing for learning and innovation within those set frameworks; ensuring some degree of consequentiality and accountability; and developing sustainable ways to connect to other active groups, including present and former assembly members. However, the extent to which any of those possibilities can concretise will depend on who, when, where, and for what purpose the global citizens' assembly is meant to take place.

Conveners, funders, and implementers of global deliberation must reflect on these questions to weigh their options to pursue institutionalisation. They should carefully consider the implications of each option - and how those decisions will impact the respective political problem, the policy field at hand, and stakeholders and participants involved in the citizens' assembly.



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