Deliberative Democracy and the Beyond 2015 Campaign Evaluation

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In the evaluation report of the Beyond 2015 campaign, the discussions, dialogue, and negotiations that the campaign generated between the various Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) from across the globe are repeatedly highlighted. However, only once in the report is *deliberation* mentioned (Cardama 2015: 25). This is significant as for deliberative democrats, *deliberation* represents a specific form of dialogue, that is superior to others, if crucial for advancing global democracy, and if effectively cultivated, in a democratic manner, would enable processes such as the Beyond 2015 campaign to achieve the goals of operationalising a transparent and inclusive process more effectively. Here, I will justify its relevance, define deliberation, explain its importance to the goals of Beyond 2015, and conclude by offering suggestions of how Together2030 might move towards being more deliberative.

Over the last few decades deliberative democracy has emerged as a distinct approach to democracy and has become increasingly dominant in academic discussions, but also in practice in local, national, regional, and global governance. With respect to global governance a democratic deficit is repeatedly highlighted, but there is a *deliberation* deficit too (Bohman 2007). Moreover, the case has been made that, while still facing significant barriers, deliberative democracy is more feasible at the global level than other approaches to democracy, such as electoral democracy (Dryzek 2006; Bohman 2007). In sum, identifying an appropriate electoral system is challenging, elections at the global level are unlikely to hold representatives particularly accountable given the size and diversity of the constituencies, and will lead to competition between national interests rather than a focus on universal goods. Importantly, for our focus here, the potential of communication between, and within, NGOs to be deliberative has been hailed (Elstub 2008), including at the global level (Dryzek 2006). Evaluating the extent Beyond 2015 was deliberatively democratic is then highly relevant for the campaign's internal legitimacy and for assessing its contribution to global democracy.

Deliberative democracy is a *talk* based approach to democracy, but particularly favours talk that includes *reasons*. The essence of deliberative democracy is then that we should offer reasons to *justify* our claims. The reasons offered should be ones that all can be reasonably expected to accept, which suggests that they should not be self-interested or partial justifications, but rather focused on public, common, and universal goods, which is why it has such great relevance to the production of global sustainable development goals (SDGs). Deliberative democracy therefore requires *respectful* and *reciprocal* relationships between those involved in the deliberations. This implies that we must *listen* to the reasons offered by others, and we should do so with an *open mind*, and *reflect* accordingly on our own beliefs and preferences in light of these reasons, if we expect others to do the same. If participants do have an open mind, then it is possible that listening to the reasons of others will lead to *opinion change*. This means that *consensus*, on the SDGs in this instance, at least becomes theoretically possible; although given the extent of differing global NGO views and interests, admittedly still remains unlikely. However, a *meta-consensus* where participants at least

understand, recognise, and accept the validity and credibility of the disputed values and beliefs, and reach agreement on the range of disputed choices, is more plausibly achieved through democratic deliberation (Dryzek & Niemeyer 2006). For example, a meta-consensus of this type, would have been extremely useful for dealing with the intense disagreements about partnerships that remained unresolved in Beyond 2015 (Cardama 2015: 10-11). A meta-consensus, achieved through deliberation early in the process, could have provided structure to ongoing disagreements, while also filtering out the less agreeable and defensible views on partnerships. In contrast, in other forms of dialogue, such as negotiation, participants do not attempt to persuade others to change their mind through reasons, but rather to make strategic, and often self-interested concessions, on the views they already hold. Finally, deliberative democrats demand *inclusive* processes whereby all reasons, relevant to the agenda, are included and considered equally.

The contention here is that if deliberation between the NGOs in Beyond 2015 had been promoted, the campaign could have more effectively achieved its goals of delivering a transparent and inclusive process. Let's consider each of these in turn. *Transparency*, in this context, could be defined as the extent of openness of the process to the Beyond 2015 participants, the UN officials, and the broader global public. Deliberative processes would enhance transparency as it would become clearer 'not just what decision was reached, but also the reasons why that decision was reached' (Elstub 2014a: 13). This level of transparency it seems was absent in the operations of the Executive Committee for example (Cardama 2015: 33). *Inclusiveness* relates to political equality of voice and presence, and has external and internal elements. To be externally inclusive, from a deliberative perspective, a process, like Beyond 2015, would need to involve a range of NGOs from all corners of the globe, with a diversity of views and perspectives. A goal which the evaluation considers Beyond 2015 to have, in the main, adequately achieved, despite the lack of inclusion of southern hemisphere NGOs and the dominance of British NGOs, at the start of the process. To be internally inclusive 'from a deliberative perspective there needs to be equal opportunities for all to express their views in a manner acceptable to others, but also for their views to be listened to' (Elstub 2014a: 12), and there is less evidence to suggest Beyond 2015 was inclusive in this respect.

The point then is that if Beyond 2015 was more deliberative it would have been more transparent and inclusive, but that from the evaluation report it is impossible to establish how frequently and extensively deliberatively democratic forms of communication occurred. The quote from the UN Member state representative suggesting that Beyond 2015 presented tempered and unbiased views indicates that some instances of deliberation may have occurred and that this was highly valued (Cardama 2015: 18). However, given that deliberation is only mentioned once, while negotiation is mentioned 34 times, it seems apparent that a focus on deliberation was not a priority for the evaluation, and therefore the likelihood is that it was not a priority for the campaign process either. The features of deliberative democracy, outlined above, are so difficult to achieve in practice. This is particularly the case in a global process, like Beyond 2015, where everyone is geographically dispersed; there are a plethora of views, opinions, ethnicities, identities and religions; inequalities in resources and status between NGOs are present; and language barriers pertain. In these difficult circumstances, 'break outs' of deliberation may well occur spontaneously, but the process, as a whole, is unlikely to approximate the features of deliberative democracy meaningfully by accident.

What then can be done to ensure that Together2030 is more deliberative? The barriers to achieving this are significant and should not be underestimated. Here I limit myself to three crucial and interrelated suggestions: a division of labour needs to be utilised; more deliberative innovations need to be employed, and a deliberative culture needs to be fostered.

Firstly, the Beyond 2015 campaign could be seen as a system, with numerous parts such as the Executive Committee, Participatory Evaluation Meetings, Regional and National structures, the steering committees, National hubs, meetings with government representatives, consultation events, youth dialogues, tribunals, thematic workshops, grassroots organisations, the use of social media, and surrounding social movements. We should not expect all these parts to be able to foster all the deliberative virtues detailed above to the same degree. Some will be more conducive to justification, others more respectful and reciprocal, while others more reflective for example. The architects of the Together2030 campaign should consider deeply the respective deliberative strengths of each component and seek to combine them in a manner that ensures all the aspects of deliberative democracy are co-ordinated across the campaign as a whole. In addition, viewing the campaign as a 'system' can contribute to addressing the challenge of inequality of access mentioned above, as more locations for deliberation can lower the costs of gaining access for subordinate groups.

Secondly, consideration should also be given to introducing more explicitly deliberative processes into the campaign. Mini-publics in particular have been seen as an important democratic innovation by deliberative democrats. They bring together a diverse set of randomly or stratified selected participants, provide them with balanced expert information, and facilitate the discussions to ensure they meet deliberative standards (Elstub 2014b). The use of stratified sampling can ensure that marginalised voices are guaranteed inclusion, addressing some of the inequality issues that plague global civil society. Their increased use in Together2030 could then increase the deliberative capacity of the process overall. Inspiration from World Wide Views (http://wwviews.org/the-world-wide-views-method/) and the Centre for Deliberative Democracy (http://cdd.stanford.edu/dp-locations/europe/eu/) could be taken on how to organise them transnationally to accommodate different languages.

Thirdly, Together2030 should also seek to promote a deliberative culture across all components of the campaign. This is certainly challenging with so many different cultures and operating logics involved in the campaign. Deliberative principles would then need to be at the heart of the campaign approach. As a starting point, in each process and part of the campaign participants could be asked to formulate and comply with deliberatively democratic procedures that would regulate the discussions, which could make those involved feel more obligated to adhere to deliberative principles.

A key recommendation of the evaluation report is for future campaigns to encourage, protect and curate individual and collective reflection, recalculation, creativity and innovative thinking (Cardama 2015: 29). I would wholeheartedly agree, but argue that democratically deliberative processes are essential to achieve this goal legitimately and to enhance the

transparency and inclusivity of future campaigns. This can be achieved if all the different components within the campaign are co-ordinated to promote deliberative virtues across the campaign as a whole, if explicitly deliberative processes are introduced, and a deliberative culture across all the parts is fostered.

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