

Busan OECD 3rd World Forum
Commitments and Conclusion Session. 30-10-09.
Mike Salvaris

This has been an inspiring conference. And if I may say so, *another* inspiring conference. This is the Third Global Forum and each one seems to set the bar a little higher.

In this last session, it's right that we should reflect on the value of the work we've been doing together.

So let me speak for myself. I have worked for thirty years in public policy, and for nearly sixteen of those on the measurement of progress.

In that time, I have been a keen observer of the OECD and a user of its services and data, including its social indicators project in the 1970s and 1980s. And I've been involved with this global project since it started.

So I can speak with some conviction when I say that I believe that 'Measuring the Progress of Societies' is the most important project the OECD has undertaken.

Even more, at this time in global development, it is perhaps the most important policy change project in the world today. Why?

As Joseph Stiglitz has recognised, it is not just a project about statistics. It's about nothing less than changing the basic global paradigm of progress for people and nations, from production to equitable and sustainable wellbeing.

That insight came directly from this project.

And if we can do that, it will be a mighty contribution to the wellbeing of people all over the world.

But we must remember what Albert Einstein told us: 'We cannot solve the major problems of today with the same thinking that created them'. To change the paradigm we need to change our thinking.

That is the essence of this project - to change the culture of progress, the way we think about progress. And in a democracy, that means doing so in the community: in the community of people and the community of ideas.

When this project started, many people thought it an unusual project for the OECD. It is, after all, an organisation of national governments, built around economic development and growth, not network building, community debate or social change.

Yet in only five years it has been a huge success. It has touched and impressed people and organisations, small and large, all over the world. It has become the major international driver of the global movement for change. We need only recall its

influence on the French government and the Stiglitz report, the European Union, the UNDP and the G20. And it has created a virtual global network.

The project has been driven by inspired and imaginative leadership, which has been widely noted and admired. And here I must pay special tribute to Enrico Giovannini and Jon Hall.

I'm sure that this Global Project has created both benefits and burdens for the OECD.

The benefits include recognition and praise, including some from unexpected quarters. The OECD has been seen as taking a real global leadership role, and many national governments and international organisations have endorsed and followed its lead.

The burdens no doubt include huge resource and organisational demands. And also, some new challenges for an organisation of the kind I described: one built around national governments and economic development, and not designed to act as network for community development and public debate or social policy change.

But that is what has happened. It is a reality - a reality both daunting and very exciting.

So we are now at a crucial stage in the project's life, its second phase.

We must not lose momentum. For the OECD this has become more than a single project: it is now an obligation of good corporate citizenship.

Personally, I was delighted to hear resounding commitments from both the Secretary General and the Deputy that the OECD intends to strengthen its support and commitment to this project in the coming years. And I was very taken with the idea of a new slogan 'Going for Progress'.

As an Australian – and you will have noticed that there are quite a few of us here at Busan – I can say that the Global Project has attracted a great deal of attention and support in my country.

But I think we can also take some credit for its early development. Enrico was generous enough to say when he visited Australia last year that part of the inspiration for the project had been the work of our own Australian Bureau of Statistics' on 'Measuring Australia's Progress' which started nine years ago.

And here I would like to say that in Australia we are very proud of our Australian Bureau of Statistics. We regard it as a model national statistical organisation, because it is innovative, it works closely with the community and it is widely respected.

The Global Project has been influential in Australia in a number of ways. We have taken the Istanbul Declaration seriously as a call to action.

Last November, the ABS sponsored a very successful National Conference on 'Working together for an informed society' which led to an Australian Declaration.

Three months ago, we held a national conference on ‘Measuring the progress of Australian communities’ which also produced a declaration and a set of strategic directions for community wellbeing indicators. This will shortly be on the OECD’s website and we hope it may be a helpful model for the global community wellbeing indicator network.

As a good friend of this project, perhaps I may be permitted to offer some direct advice to the OECD about the development of the Global Project in this vital second phase over the next five years.

First, I am pleased that some thought is being given to ‘mainstreaming’ the project within the OECD. Frankly, I think it would be unreasonable for this enormous load to continue to be carried within the Statistics Directorate. And in reality the project has moved well beyond statistics, as the title of this conference itself surely demonstrates: ‘Charting progress, building visions, improving life’.

Secondly, in this next phase we must strengthen and diversify the ownership and involvement of international agencies such as UNDP, the European Commission, the World Bank and other Istanbul signatories, and find new supporters, especially in Asia and Africa.

Thirdly, the OECD should target global economic leadership, including Treasurers and Finance Ministers and prominent economists - and the Stiglitz report has given us a powerful vehicle to do this.

Fourthly, it is crucial that we maintain and build the capacity of the emerging global community network. And one key task is to promote research, knowledge, debate and action about the project and the critical issues it raises: both targeted action research projects and broader knowledge building.

I am very pleased to say that we have taken some concrete steps in this direction here at this Conference yesterday by setting up the basis for a Global Progress Research Network.

The logic of this was simple but compelling. Most of us agree that there must be a stronger underpinning of research and knowledge building and it must be better focused and organised if this global movement is to flourish in the next decade. And there is already quite a large group of committed researchers around the world, many of whom meet quite regularly at conferences like this. So it seemed sensible to formalise this around some agreed structure and tasks.

We have set up an interim international committee and we propose to start by identifying key universities and research centres likely to participate and contribute; and then start to build up a research group or node in each region.

And we have got off to a good start. The new WikiProgress website has agreed to give us some dedicated space which we are tentatively calling ‘WikiProgressResearch’.

So, since you are calling for commitments, I will commit myself to work towards the development of a Global Progress Research Network and find the resources it will need.

My final piece of advice, and it is relevant to the network I've just mentioned, is that the OECD should definitely pursue the idea of setting up a Progress Foundation. This could be the best way to generate funds for education, training, outreach and advocacy, and it will be especially important to support and develop grass roots activity, capacity building, citizen participation, and community debate on this crucial issue that is so important for communities the world over.

Finally, I should like to say to everyone in the OECD: you should be very proud of what you have all collectively accomplished. It has been a magnificent achievement. We still have a long road to travel together, but we can share the load in the sure knowledge that few projects we are likely to work on in our lives will have greater potential to improve the wellbeing of the world's people and build a global community in which progress means equitable and sustainable wellbeing for all its citizens.