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Global Public Goods and the Imperative of Justice

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Abstract:

The purpose of this paper is to undertake an evaluation of both the directly normative as well as the more technocratic issues, which are discussed in the leading literature on global public goods in claiming to provide distributive solutions to the problems raised by these goods. Such an evaluation is based on a thematic critique –which refers primarily to concepts of universality in justice and instrumentalising through market-based approaches –of the manner in which justice can be, and often comes to be, espoused in the literature on global public goods. What has been done is a direct application of policy approaches and deliberate application of various theories of justice to global public goods, by constructing various sub-themes throughout the paper, in order to show how the thematic critique is validated in each of these.

Key words: distributive justice, public goods, cost-benefit analysis, market-based.

Conceptual equivocation

Strongly invested with an amalgam of derivative and innovative conceptual constructions, the approach of global public goods has become as equivocal as the concept of globalization itself, with reference to which it can most commonly be situated. While there are many issues which provide a ground for equivocation in this concept, the cardinal point is to recognize that in the debate on global public goods, "...the contentious issue was not *whether* to produce these goods, but *how to shape and provide them* so that they have positive utility for all." (Albin n.d.). This makes global public goods directly relevant to the question of justice.

One of the significant features of the literature on the global public goods is the equivocal content of its own selfconceptualization vis-à-vis the concepts such as international cooperation, justice, governance and regulation. The argument can, perhaps, best be expressed by citing Bodansky's example of an essay from UNDP's *Providing Global Public Goods*, which clearly shows that, "...the concept does little analytical work. Indeed, if the authors had been asked to contribute an essay...on...global governance or international regimes, they could have contributed much the same piece, only with the phrase 'global public goods' omitted." (Bodansky 2012, 658). Bodansky's argument appears to be premised on the critique that 'global public goods' does not appear have emerged as an independent analytical category or an independent concept, distinct from the concepts such as governance and cooperation.

However, what is significant here is not so much that the concept of global public goods lacks analytical coherence. There are many concepts which are characterized by such, or other kind of, absences. But since we are concerned, here, with the questions of fairness and justice, what is significant is how the current literature treats these absences as value-neutral. mostly -Bodansky's argument also lends itself to that culpability -as technical policy incapability, thereby evading the hidden injustices generated in these seemingly valueneutral absences, and also attests to the manner in which the question of justice has not received independent attention in the literature on global public goods. For instance, if we were to ask why these absences of coherence and independence in global public goods matter, the immediate response, that lends itself as dominant in the current literature on global public goods, is that it matters because there is a need to operationalize global public goods through sound policy prescriptions, achieved through international negotiations. Thus, the emphasis is on instrumentalising these goods, with reference to a system of interests (particularly, those of the states, but there are other constellations of interests too, taken into account), rather than by reference to an economy of just distribution.

Inherent methodological utilitarianism of the original concept:

Beyond referring to how the concept of global public goods owes its genesis to the economic concept of public goods, which every part of the literature has acknowledged, the literature does not expand the significance of this relationship between the two types of goods, and its methodological consequences for the discussion of any normative issue, such as justice. Therefore, before we begin to intervene in the issue of global public goods with the question of justice, it is crucial to review the genesis of the concept itself, through a methodology which does not accept wholesale the manner in which the concept of 'public goods' has come down to us; associated, as it originally was, with the discipline of economics. It is this crucial question of, socially and politically, situating the original methodology that has largely been found wanting in the leading literature on global public goods. This comes out in three ways:

First, Samuelson's theoretical development of the concept of public goods circumscribed the conceptualization of these goods within the categorization of 'non-rival' and 'non-excludable' goods –features that distinguish them from 'private' goods, which are, sometimes rival, and certainly excludable. It was also necessarily located within the paradigm of 'efficiency'; "Samuelson's aim was to determine the optimum mix of public and private goods based on the economic efficiency criterion." (Sankar 2008).

From this, it becomes evident that the concept of public goods is a construction that has emerged out of the framework

of distributive justice, to reconcile the demands of economy and efficiency with those of re-distribution. It is this inherent reference of the re-distributive idea of public goods to the market itself that has largely gone uncontextualised in the leading literature on global public goods. However, once we take stock of this argument, we should be able to see that there is, arguably, a methodological stumbling-block to reconciling public goods with the idea of justice, as the very category of public goods itself is a neo-liberal constructive tool to accommodate the demands of justice within a market framework. The category itself is very much a part of the 'distributive justice' theory.

Second, the 'distributive justice' concept itself, arguably, falls under the category of 'liberal egalitarianism' strand of justice; distributive justice is not an alternative to market mechanisms, but simply a way to correct their working through the plank of re-distribution; the very idea of re-distribution implies a process of review or rectification of a distribution already in place. So we should first accept this omnipresence of market before beginning any discussion on public goods or global public goods as they exist today. That in itself means that we should cease to delude ourselves by counter-posing the question of justice in the context of GPGs to the self-interest of the market mechanism.

Third, the measure of 'externalities' which has come to define public goods should be noted as another methodological way of reinforcing the market-contextual character of this concept. Public goods are characterized as such by the measure of the 'externalities' they exhibit, where the, "...difference between the public and the private benefits is called an externality...because of its substantial externalities, education is a public good." (Kaul, Grunberg and Stern 1999, xx). It is clear that in this kind of a characterisation of public goods – primarily a United Nations characterisation –the definition of the 'public' character of the good is situated with respect to its location in the economy of private goods or individual benefits. Thus, education is a public good, not just simplistically by being non-rival and non-excludable, but also because it has 'substantial externalities', that is, the public benefits of educating an individual far outweighs the private benefits accruing to that individual from the good of education.

It is evident, therefore, that this methodologically implicit associations in the concept of public goods becomes the unquestioned foregrounding of the subsequent concept of global public goods, as well, thereby, leading, at the very outset, to their instrumentalisation, which goes unchallenged, because unnoticed, by the leading literature.

Justice through the lens of cost-benefit analysis of Global Public Goods

Although not directly conceptualised in terms of a cost-benefit analysis, the question of justice, nevertheless, substantially becomes the underlying thread when this kind of an analysis is applied to the issue of the Global Public Goods. It's most effective expression manifests, perhaps, nowhere better than in the standard literature affiliated to United Nations:

> At stake are questions of how to distribute the costs incurred, and the benefits to be derived, from cooperative action to create global public goods or minimize global public bads (Rao 1999).

It is clear that this kind of an emphasis on ensuring the proper economy and distribution of global public goods, within a policy framework, has a direct bearing on the question of justice – both, justice in the context of equity as well as justice in the context of distribution. The emphasis in the debate on global public goods has always been on the fact that one of the main hurdles in their operationalizing is the problem that, unlike public goods which can be enforced by the mechanism of the state, they tend to be under-supplied due to the issue of freeriders, where non-contributing countries take advantage of the good, and the cost incurred.

The current literature, first and foremost, acknowledges this problem, making it contingent to the analysis of global public goods. Therefore, any intervention of justice, in this debate, has to justify and limit itself by constant reference to this kind of a system of interests paradigm, which the dominant literature treats as a characteristic, rather than a handicap of global public goods. At the outset, therefore, both normative questions of justice, as well as, policy prescription in international cooperation are tailored to take into account this 'property' of global public goods, instead of challenging it.

International cooperation as a mode of justice in the provision of GPGs

The dominant literature on global public goods, as it has emerged in the recent years through the initiatives of the U.N more specifically, the United Nations Development Programme -emphasizes the role of international cooperation in realizing the just utilization of global public goods. In the 'policy recommendations' of one of its documents, it advocates that 'justice and fairness are the key' to ensure international cooperation, which, in turn, could operationalize the idea of global public goods (Kaul, Grunberg and Stern 1999, 11). In this scheme of international cooperation, emphasis is placed on goals such as ensuring representativeness in International Organizations, greater recognition of 'regional approaches' and role of developing countries in reaching agreements and supporting the agenda of global public goods through the support of 'a minimal amount of global equality -the eradication of the worst forms of poverty' (Kaul, Grunberg and Stern 1999, 12). What is also emphasized is the fact that such a form of international cooperation can be made effective only if it is adopted as one of the core public policy agendas of the national governments.

Another way of legitimizing the policy discourse of

international cooperation in global public goods has been by juxtaposing it with the market, and emphasizing social justice as a global public good. In this kind of a theorization of justice as a global public good, derived from a historical analysis of the trends in international politics, the imperative of international cooperation is juxtaposed with the imperative of the unhindered functioning of the market. This is because an unhindered functioning of the market is an indisputable recipe for inequality, injustice and, therefore, social unrest. It is shown how the post-war world order was constructed on the basis of a Keynesian consensus on the merits of the welfare state and embedded liberalism, driven by the imperative of preventing conflict through economic instability and leading to compromise of social justice (Kapstein 1999).

This standard view, associated with the United Nations discourse and positing the merits of international cooperation, comes across as an advocacy of universal, desirable values. But two riders need to be noted with regard to this view –

First. it advocates a 'policy' prescription which necessitates some form of transition from public goods to global public goods, or at least, a situation, where the realization of global public goods can only be made effective by some kind of a compromise of public goods. For instance, let us take the very recent example of India's Food Security Bill; the normative status of 'food security' as a global public good cannot, in policy decisions, rival its essential status as a crucial part of national public policy. Yet, with the passage of the Food Security Bill, India now faces considerable hurdles at the WTO, where by flouting the contentious consensus on subsidies. India will be asked to make a number of import concessions for developed countries in order to gain support for its Bill (Livemint 2013). Thus, the global public goods accruing out of global trade stifle the public good of food security. Is not justice, then, severely compromised?

This problem has been formulated in the literature on global public goods. However, it has largely been formulated as

a technocratic policy issue, more or less, in expressed in terms of the fact that one of the problems in the operationalization of global public goods is the fact of 'differential impacts' and different preferences regarding the 'desirability' of these goods (Bodansky 2012, 656). What needs to be noted, however, is also the fact that this is not merely a technocratic issue, but one that is implicated in the question of justice, because of its substantial bearing on the crucial welfare-policy issue of public goods.

Second, it also situates the imperative of justice in global public goods vis-à-vis states. In doing so, it fails to locate who should be the recipients or the beneficiaries of the global public goods; to whom are we doing justice and is justice being done? It is clear that, implicitly intended, the people are assumed to be the final beneficiaries of the scheme of global public goods. But what is missing is the methodological contextualisation of the beneficiaries to ensure the realization of global public goods. Some of the challenges to justice here are:

First, as we have seen in the example above, what are considered global public 'goods' for citizens of one country might amount to global public 'bads' for another set of citizens. Second, should the 'citizens' of nation-states be regarded as the target beneficiaries of development-related global public goods for which international cooperation is encouraged? If that is the case, then the concept of global public goods becomes circumscribed within the paradigm of nation-state, even in international negotiations.

Are global public goods justiciable through the international law?

International law often conceptualises many of its aspects with reference to global public goods. These include the provisions relating to the 'obligations' it owes to the 'international community of states as a whole', when it talks about issues related to global public goods and bads, since they are of 'collective' or 'common interest'; similarly, the issue of global public goods enters, even if implicitly, the discourse of international law, when the latter is involved in discussions relating to issues of 'common concern', such as climate change (Bodansky 2012, 653-654). Global public goods become a mode of legitimation of international law, for, the equivocation in the concept, practically renders its analysis, as already seen, in a manner in which international cooperation and international law come to be opposed to the market mechanism. However, it is not just a relationship of opposition. Global public goods also legitimize international law, in that they are not amenable to provision by the market, especially in the international context, thus leaving the international law and international cooperation as the only modes of provision (Bodansky 2012).

However, given the problems of operationalization surrounding these goods, it is evident that not even international law, weak as it is, can operationalize them. Thus, this leads to a crisis of justice, which is further exacerbated by the fact that international law gains legitimacy through these goods; they also, indirectly therefore, lend credence to the deeply problematic U.N discourse of international cooperation as the mode of provision of these goods. In that sense, international law and cooperation comes to be antithetical to the imperative of justice.

What also creates problems for international law in global public goods is the fact that, often, the 'procedural' adjudicative mechanisms of international law often go against state-grounded and value-laden 'substantive' law definition of these goods, especially given the fact that the manner in which international law is adjudicated by different international courts is itself a substantive process (Nollkaemper 2012).

These grave problems of international law are sought to be addressed by applying the concept of 'legal pluralism', which admits a variety of legal international orders -horizontal institutional variation, vertical governance structures and role of private legal orders - to the problem of global public goods. It argues that we should apply the 'comparative institutional approach' to determine the 'conditions' of operationalization – production and distribution –of global public goods, and choose from these broad alternatives; the comparative institutional approach, by rejecting one single answer, sits well with the legal pluralist insistence that communities rather than hierarchical orders be prioritized in the production of global public goods, and also, solves the problem of governance that arises out of the legal pluralist dilemma (Shaffer 2012).

However, despite best intentions, even the comparative institutional approach, based on legal pluralism, is unable to morally solve the problem of justice. Methodologically, the compromise between institutions and communities raises another form of violation of pluralism itself. It still does not address the question of how justice is to be percolated to individuals in the production of global public goods; the substitution of communities instead of the state on one side of relations in governance, homogenizes the category of the community, and thereby, even the notions of justice eluded and co-opted in such a homogenization.

Instrumentalising global public goods through the production technology theories

One of the other ways of exploring the manner in which the concept of global public goods is instrumentalised within a system of interests, rather than a justice paradigm, in the current literature, is by reviewing how the literature talks about the 'production technologies' deployed in the production of global public goods. The debates on these different types of production technologies are, in their issues of concern, incidentally or deliberately, a reflection of the manner in which the theories of international organization are oriented. Leading theories of international organization –realism and neo-realism, liberal-institutionalism and even, arguably, social constructivism –take the idea of 'motivations'¹, in their construction of aspects of international politics.

The literature on the production technologies of global public goods mirrors this in a very significant way. The 'aggregate effort', 'weakest link' and 'single-best effort' problems (Bodansky 2012), are all, if we review them, based on the 'incentive' structure. Countries, while negotiating on global public goods, will adhere to a certain type of any of these production technologies based on the incentives that may propel them to cooperate in one manner or the other. For instance, in the 'weakest link' problem, Bodansky refers to Scott Barrett's explanation to describe how the countries have the incentive to participate in the weakest link problem, as reneging on agreement by even one country will lead to losses for all others. In all the three types, what determines cooperation are the relative costs and benefits of the participating countries. Is this not akin to realism -in international politics –argument about how states have the incentive to pursue relative, rather than absolute gains of power? Thus, this part of the literature on global public goods appears to have been methodologically extrapolated from international relations, being shaped by similar power calculations. What is worse is the fact that this characterisation of 'production technologies' is taken as being the technical, therefore unproblematically acceptable, part of global public goods. Normative issues are, therefore, buried and accommodated by the details of technicality. This makes it

¹ Concern with the motivations of actors applies to the realist theories in a very explicit way, but it is present in other theories as well. Liberal institutionalism builds on realist foundations and uses the idea of motivations of nations, merely constructed differently, to argue for a reverse position. Even social constructivism, which posits the role of norms in shaping actors' preferences, uses motivations, defined in the sense of benefit accruing by adhering to norms. These theories do not evade the concept of motivations, even though they may locate them with respect to different actors, such as states, INGOs, supranational bureaucracies and other actors.

impossible to contextualise justice in a distributive framework, without, inevitably, grounding it in this kind of an implicit instrumentalism.

Procedural versus 'end-state' debate in global public goods

The well-known debate between procedural and end-state theories of justice, most commonly by the juxtaposition of Robert Nozick's neo-liberal advocation of procedural justice and John Rawls' distributive advocation of end-state justice, forms a central part of any meaningful debate on issues of justice; as such, given its policy importance, the debate needs to be considered in the context of global public goods.

A part of literature on global public goods seeks to apply this debate to the issue of introducing the question of justice in global public goods, by juxtaposing outcomes with international structures. It is argued, by appropriating the Rawlsian idea of 'justice as fairness', that justice can be ensured in international negotiations, which facilitate agreements regarding global public goods, by treating the principle of 'justice as fairness' as pivotal to the realisation of a 'balanced settlement of conflicting claims' (Albin n.d., 8); this constrains the pursuit of unbridled self-interest, and also highlights the, "structural and process dimensions of negotiations. Although never a guarantee for a fair outcome, fairness in the negotiation structure and process does facilitate a more balanced result." (Albin n.d., 8).

The contradictory tenor of this type of an advocation of justice is self-evident. It is clear that 'justice as fairness' is being appropriated to legitimize a procedural conception of justice, to make feasible the policy debates on global public goods, when originally, both these theories are morally inconsistent with each other. More importantly, we should note the implications of such a hybridization of sorts:

First, 'justice as fairness' –based on Rawls's idea that rational, self-interested individuals decide the scheme of 'social cooperation' behind a 'veil of ignorance', in the original position —is clearly a formulation of a 'distributive' theory of justice, in that, despite its co-existence with the market, it advocates that outcomes, fair or end-state outcomes, are more characteristic of justice than the procedures by which these outcomes are determined; the idea is radically opposed to the procedural justice notion that the distribution should not be adjusted to suit a certain pre-determined outcome.

However, the argument posited herein deploys the distributive justice-based theory of 'justice as fairness' to legitimize the neo-liberal rationale of justice –essentially the procedural idea that distribution should not be adjusted to outcomes very simply amounts to the advocation that markets should be allowed to determine distribution according to demand and supply –inherent in the procedural theories; for, it argues that equity and justice in the structures and procedures of international negotiation is more important than the actual outcome, in the debate on global public goods.

Second, this view also reinforces the status-quo -replete with conflicts between market and social justice -notions of justice by advocating justice as a 'macro' concept and 'fairness' as a more localized, 'micro' concept; this leads to the consequence that if there is a conflict between what is widely constructed as 'justice' in global public goods which benefit one set of people in the world and local preferences for another set of goods widely regarded as 'fairness' (Albin n.d., 4), the situation just amounts to an unproblematic conflict between competing conceptions of justice, instead of a radical articulation of injustices suffered by one set of people at the hands of vested interests of another set -very often, this is what takes the form of conflict between global public goods. Very often too, a certain set of vested interests may be perceived in the manner of global public goods; this has, especially been the case with the widely touted benefits of global trade --it becomes problematic, when we introduce the question of justice, to view this as a good, given the fact of marginalization that it creates

in a number of sectors, especially in developing countries.

The local and the global dichotomy: engaging with theories of justice in global public goods

It is well-known that in any analysis of globalization and related issues, the notions of nationality is often juxtaposed with the vaguely defined idea of 'globality', and that, in turn, is also distinguished from the well-defined notion of the 'international', which has been given substantive foundations by the discipline of International Relations. It is clear that the term 'international' certainly connotes and array of competing and negotiating interests, in a matrix which is more akin to 'inter-governmental' rather than the indefinable 'global'. In such theories, therefore, it is, perhaps, a little less problematic to transpose traditional theories of justice, based on the nationstate, to the international context. However, since the term 'global' implies a more organic view of the world beyond the nation-state than mere inter-governmentalism, the theories of justice cannot be transposed to this context.

This is the major problem highlighted by the literature which seeks to contextualize justice through the concept of global public goods. The argument is that the theories of global justice —by leading theorists like Thomas Pogge, Martha Nussbaum, Peter Singer and others —are not easily or fairly applicable to global public goods, as they are structured on traditional theories of justice —such as the Rawlsian contract theory, the ethical theories and the 'human rights' theories which are more individualistic, context-bound and limited by the modalities of the state (Widdows and West-Oram 2013). Therefore, such individual structuration should be abandoned in favour of a more goods-based approach, especially directly centred on 'primary' global public goods.

However, this kind of an argument itself, which seeks to apply global justice to global public goods, is itself, perhaps, unconsciously implicated in the transposition from the national

the global. It assumes that abandonment of the to 'individualistic' will, morally speaking, lead to the collective goods, and global public goods are envisioned as arising out of collective dialectics, thereby beginning from the vision of global justice being an opposition between the national and the global. powerful However. there are alternative conceptualizations of justice which challenge this defence of global public goods:

First, the dominant 'egalitarian cosmopolitanism', which a global extrapolation of the Rawlsian liberal theory, has, indeed, been challenged by using Elizabeth Anderson's critique of this view deploying 'relational egalitarianism' –injustices are significant only in so far as they lead to 'oppressive relationships'; for instance, indirect injustices between two unconnected states would be insignificant as compared to those within a state, where social actors share a relationship (Altman and Wellman 2009). So conservatively radical is this argument that it persuasively makes the case for completely abandoning the rationale of global public goods; for instance, according to this logic we would be able to perceive relative poverty as unjust, but absolute poverty as a phenomenon to which we need apply no rectification of justice and only an optional obligation. The existing theories of global justice and their form of application are inadequately equipped to deal with this liberalconservative extrapolation against global public goods. This is because they perceive global public goods as Rawlsian 'primary' goods in a disaggregated, purely economic-distributive sense. They fail to perceive that in global public goods, it is not just the economic-distributive aspect, but even the social justice aspect that needs to be taken into account. If we do this, we would be able to counter the liberal-conservative advocation of relational justice which undermines the supply of global public goods, by, using Michael Walzer's concept of 'complex equality'²

 $^{^2}$ It is worth noting that Walzer, in his 'Theory of Goods', argues that -conflict is 'endemic' to patterns of mobilization and this, in turn, leads to 'dominance' of particular goods at different points of time. It is these dominant goods,

and highlighting the fact that, in the context of social justice, social goods have a tendency to be interconverted. This gives rise to injustice. Therefore, absolute poverty as a global public bad should not be accommodated through relational justice, as it has implications of injustice in other goods too.

Second, can the idea of 'global' truly be constructed, in the sense of justice, as a sphere free of individual structuration? If we apply Etienne Balibar's radical framework³, which forms an important part of any discussion on global justice and equality, the answer is no. The argument collates the global with the universal, morally, and describes how the 'institution of the universal' is posited as the 'truth', so that it becomes difficult to challenge it 'from inside', in a 'politics of the universal'. We can use this framework to argue that the question of justice in global public goods, or other global issues, itself is such a complex issue that even the perception of justice being done becomes problematic -the fact that even if we are successful. as there are instances, in deploying policy mitigate marginalization, injustice mechanisms to and inequality between global public goods and actors, the central problem remains unresolved, as this very solution which posits a new –apparently equal – global equation itself would give rise, inevitably, to new constructions of the 'universal', based, no doubt on new equations, but, nonetheless, giving rise to new types of dominance. Therefore, the problem of justice, globally, is implicated in the very tendency towards universalising, which is common even to difference-based articulations of the 'global'.

monopolized by certain sections of society, that determine the value of all other goods and leads to injustice in goods. The solution to this would be a system of 'complex equality', whereby justice in different goods is acknowledged and kept separate, rather than being allowed to be determined by the dominant good (Walzer 2004).

³ For more radical debates on this issue, refer to Slavoj Zizek's (Zizek 2005) and Jacques Ranciere's (Ranciere 2004) contextualization of the problem of rights and justice in the global sphere, arising out of the problem of the 'universal'.

Conclusion

Through a thematic critique of the literature on global public goods, this paper attempts to contextualise the question of justice in global public goods, by deploying cardinal concepts, methodological, technical-policy and normative, used in the literature, and showing that the manner in which these concepts are deployed in the literature, as the initial issues to foreground any further debate, itself creates problems for the issue of justice.

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