

Civil society nudges G20

By Murray Proctor

3 July 2014

The recent [C20 meeting](#) in Melbourne marked the final step in the community sector's provision of advice to the forthcoming G20 Leaders' Summit in Brisbane.

The C20 has been a formal part of the G20 agenda building process since Russia hosted the G20 in 2013. Informally it has been a feature since the Toronto G20 meeting in 2010.

Business and trade unions from G20 countries are not left out, they have their own B20 and L20 meetings respectively.

For a new process, the C20 was accorded some respect by Government. Ministers Julie Bishop and Kevin Andrews both addressed the Melbourne event. The meeting's [final communique](#) [pdf] was presented the following day to Australia's Prime Minister.

Well chaired by Tim Costello, the 2014 C20 summit meeting included 80 expert speakers and hundreds of civil society delegates from the countries of the G20. Those present were from a range of organisations, development NGOs and advocacy groups, with a surprisingly strong number of speakers from academic circles. Inevitably the great majority of delegates were Australian.

Links to other processes were provided, notably through the presence of Mike Callaghan (T20) from the Lowy Institute, Sharron Burrow (L20) and by Dr Heather Smith, Australia's G20 Sherpa, on the final afternoon.

The Melbourne meeting grappled with clearly divided views on the virtues and consequences of economic growth. In the end it nodded in the direction of the G20's aim to increase growth by at least two percentage points over the next five years.

The competing call for lower growth or a steady state economy was made, but lacked a convincing analysis of the implications for employment or poverty alleviation.

Not surprisingly, the C20 was running in a very different direction from that of the Australian government on climate. There was overwhelming support for the November G20 Leaders' Summit to include climate change on their agenda.

Those areas of common ground with the broader G20 objectives were on reforming transparency and the appropriate taxation of transnational business.

Major development discussions focused on the need to improve nutrition and food security,

greater financial inclusion and the implications of increasing investment in infrastructure. (Australia's desire to address infrastructure development through its aid program, by identifying bankable projects, was voiced clearly by Minister Bishop in her opening address).

The need for community engagement in the choice and design of infrastructure activities, and the appropriate scale of investment were consistent concerns. Inevitably the downsides of poorly considered infrastructure projects were aired, such as negative social and environmental impacts and transmission of diseases along new transport corridors.

The C20 meeting is now an ongoing part of the wider G20 process, and provides a rare and high level focal point for the civil society voice.

However community groups are aware that they struggle to target their messages. The B20 business community is expected to agree a [crisp two-page paper](#) for consideration, while the C20 participants struggle to bring their more diverse agenda down to a dense five pages.

The degree to which the G20 meeting picks up any of the C20's concerns will be well worth watching.

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Link: <https://devpolicy.org/civil-society-nudges-g20-20140703/>

Date downloaded: 18 April 2024



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