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World champions: inside the competition to reshape global governance

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The New Shape Prize was created to tackle the major risks facing the world today – from climate change to nuclear proliferation. Among the submissions are an overhaul of the UN and encouragement of social entrepreneurs to get involved in social change

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Since it was founded in 1945 – the aftermath of the second world war – the United Nations has done huge amounts to ensure global peace and cooperation. Whether it is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Court of Justice, Unicef or any of the many other laws, funds, agencies, or organisations supported by the 193 countries involved, the UN has underpinned much of the stability of the world as it is today.

But despite these achievements, there are improvements that could be made to global governance, if for no other reason than that the issues most significant in the 21st century – as well as the steps that could be taken to tackle them – are not the same as they were in the 1940s. UN secretary general António Guterres put forward extensive proposals to reform the organisation at the start of his term in January 2017. Some resolutions have now been adopted, such as restructuring the UN pillar on peace and security, but many changes still need to be made.

The Global Challenges Foundation (GCF) was set up by Swedish philanthropist Laszlo Szombatfalvy in 2012 to minimise the “global catastrophic risks” that face humanity today. These risks include climate change, pandemics and weapons of mass destruction.

“[The GCF] is important because it focuses on global governance issues,” says Folke Tersman, chair professor of practical philosophy at Uppsala university in Sweden, and board member of the GCF. “We are actively seeking new ideas that connect with the big problems we face today. It is important we keep the discussions rolling,” he says.

The GCF instituted the New Shape Prize (NSP) in 2016, which asked individuals and organisations from academia, business, civil society and politics to send in inspiring and innovative ideas as to how these risks could be tackled. The GCF library now contains many submissions for the prize, and these proposals include many ideas that consider the United Nations itself.

One of these proposals is Shake it Up: The Case for Reforming the United Nations (A Real Global Governance Model), by Cristián Gimenez Corte. Gimenez Corte is a lawyer, legal scholar and academic from Argentina. He also spent 11 years working in various United Nations agencies, where he saw for himself some of the ways in which he considered the UN was not performing as it should.



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“The UN has a purpose to promote peace and security, but I could see it was not reaching those goals,” he says. He considers one of the significant reasons for this is because the current management structure of the UN has not kept up with the organisation’s changing role: from a diplomatic forum, to an institution that has to implement policies. As a result, it has little real power to deliver those policies. “What I do is try to establish what the problems are, and then I try to explain briefly why the UN is facing these problems and

propose a way forward. That's the purpose of my work," he stresses.

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He submitted his proposal to the NSP in order to get these ideas discussed. "Different people submitted ideas to the prize. [The GCF] created a forum to catalyse all these ideas and eventually bring about actual change. The main goal of the prize was the forum, an independent forum where all these can be discussed," he says.

Gimenez Corte's submission seeks to change those aspects of the UN that are not working and keep those that do; reforming and improving the institution rather than changing it completely. As such, it proposes reform in five specific areas of the UN: management, financing, human resources, accountability and legitimacy. This way, he argues, small and progressive steps can be taken towards improved global governance.

Regarding management, for instance, Gimenez Corte argues that the UN secretariat has increasingly taken on direct management of a whole range of operations. He proposes that the UN's managerial structure be overhauled, and centralised, with executive directors appointed by the secretary general.

Financing of the UN, too, should be looked at differently, with some middle-income countries increasing their contributions, and others capped, so that no single country has the amount of power that comes with substantial financial contributions.

But no progress can be made in this area without buy-in from the UN itself: "Global problems are there but global institutions are not up to the task. [Submissions to the NSP] are highlighting problems, putting them in black and white, showing what would be the way forward," he says.

A very different proposal was submitted by social entrepreneur Nicole Bogott, and entrepreneur and advisor on sustainable development Tobias Straube, both from Germany. Their idea – entitled Social Entrepreneurship and the UN – is for a collaborative innovation platform that allows social entrepreneurs to scale their

ideas towards global impact while providing established stakeholders with the impetus to involve socially innovative ideas.

According to this proposal, individuals anywhere in the world can put forward their opinions as to the most significant challenges in their communities; social entrepreneurs then find solutions to these challenges. The best of these ideas are featured on the platform's website.

The most successful of these ideas are then voted for by a panel including experts and representatives of civil society. The winners of this stage then go forward to a large-scale international final, where they can pitch their ideas to the UN and gain exposure to a whole range of networks and resources.

At the time this proposal was submitted in 2017, Bogott and Matiullah Rahmaty from the Founder Institute in Afghanistan had already set up impACT to start the work. They wanted to provide a reason for people in Afghanistan to stay in the country at a time when the security situation in Kabul often seemed hopeless. As a result, social entrepreneurs from Afghanistan got together to consolidate their ideas; in November 2017, 11 of them went to Berlin for an international networking event on issues around social entrepreneurship and migration.

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Bogott is an advocate for the advantages of social entrepreneurship in many different spheres. "If you have a business, add a social factor; if you are an NGO, why not be more donor-independent?" She believes in pushing for systemic change, networking resources and knowledge. "If we had interchange between smaller entities and larger ones like the UN then I think we can tackle these [large-scale global] challenges," she says.

Bogott and Straube are interested in doing things "upside down": "We have the practice, and then the theory comes out of that," says Straube. That was also the way the proposal developed. They both stress that there is more likely to be enthusiastic involvement when ideas are implemented, if more people are involved at the development stage.

Folke Tersman was a judge for the NSP. "The primary aim of [Laszlo Szombatfalvy] is to simply discover promising new approaches that could eventually be applied or implemented in some way," he says. "Another aim is to bring people together to continue the conversation and use it as a step forward to contribute to better discussion."

Now that the NSP has concluded, with the forum having taken place in May 2018, and winners announced, working groups have been set up to take some of these ideas forward. Some of their proposals will be presented at the Paris Peace Forum in November.

The 73rd session of the UN general assembly ended on 5 October, with many important issues discussed in the light of Guterres' sweeping reforms. The GCF hopes that it can harness the ideas of many people - experts or not - who have the vision to improve on what is already there. "We want people to take things forward regardless," Tersman says.

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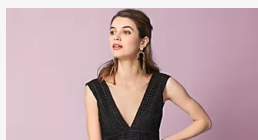
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