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– Michael COHEN, The New School, New York

Image Source: King Abdullah Financial District and the 'Seven Moons' projects from Riyadh Park Mall, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (2020).  
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### From networks to the Global Solutions Dialogue: designing a new space for global solutions

The Global Solutions Dialogues on Intersecting represent a promising step in expanding the dialogue on urgent global issues. Having participated in United-Nations “expert working groups”, World Bank task forces, civil society encounters and debates, and hundreds of meetings discussing “the need for new directions in development” over many years, I was surprised and delighted with the online dialogues organized during the second half of 2020 and which gave birth to this very first volume of the innovative Intersecting series. Two aspects of these dialogues deserve particular attention: the participants and the content of the discussions.

First, the participants represented a notable diversity of origins, disciplines, and institutions from around the globe. Unlike many international events where people “preach to the converted”, it was not at all clear from the convening of

these dialogues who would take the lead and how others would react. Sharing the table has become an increasingly important dimension of global debates. As we New Yorkers say, “If you are not at the table, you’re on the menu”. This important and provocative cautionary note suggests that representation is an essential part of global debates. It is the opposite of “leave no one behind”, which has become a mantra in the global community, even if many “globalists” continue to exclude divergent and critical voices from critical debates.

Secondly, the content of the dialogues was also important, even if some participants took some “predictable” positions reflecting their institutions. Rather than stick to old formulae and time-worn and perhaps stale recommendations, participants were seeking to find the “frontier” in the debate. What was new? How did it relate to current practice? What were the obstacles it would face? And how could political coalitions be organized to overcome those obstacles?

One of these ideas was the proposition that infrastructure, that old dependable sector for spending, did not have to only be justified by invoking its essential role in supporting economic growth, but rather could be viewed as a key instrument in distribution. The phrase “infrastructure for distribution” had a new ring to it, suggesting that participants might see whether trying out new combinations of “development language” might actually provoke some new thinking.

But words are not enough, so the real challenge implied by the Global Solutions Dialogue is to try out these ideas in real situations, in diverse geographies and scales, with different social structures, income levels, and political cultures. Some of these ideas might actually “have legs” and prove to be useful in designing and implementing change. If so, the Global Solutions Dialogue will have been a moment(s) when it was possible to see the outlines of the footprints of the future.

Despite the many obstacles to global communications and building global understanding, the Global Solutions Dialogue has continued to move forward in 2021. A notable event was a two-day international workshop held online by the O.P. Jindal Global University in India together with the Global Solutions Initiative to further explore the meaning of “intersecting”. This fruitful conversation examined the philosophical meanings of intersection, what it means operationally about how institutions at all scales understand problems and work to develop solutions, and also identified intriguing questions for further research. Speakers from Indonesia, which holds the presidency of the G20 for 2022, illustrated how processes of change are by nature integrated, not divided into predefined categories, and they welcomed new ways of framing development challenges for a large and very diverse country. Intersecting is a verb. It is a call to think and to act differently.