

## Profile of Colin Bradford

By Anastasiya Gordiychuk

Colin Bradford was always passionate about making the world a better place, even if it meant working out of the spotlight. He pushed for policies that aimed to create a more sustainable and diversified future for all.

Bradford, a Senior non-resident Fellow at Brookings Institution in Washington and Co-Chair of VISION 20 (V20), has had a long career in international organizations and universities. Before landing at Brookings, he served as a political appointee in the Carter administration during the 1970s and as a presidential appointee in the Clinton administration from 1994 to 1998.

“The positions I’ve taken are more important than the positions I’ve held,” Bradford said in a recent interview over Zoom.

Bradford was a leading force urging the transformation of the G8 to the G20 Leaders’ Summit. And, he played a pivotal role in creating the International Development Goals (IDGs), which built a foundation for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and ultimately led to today’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or the UN’s Agenda 2030.

Antecedents of the global promises can be found back in the 1940s, but until the IDGs were created, there was no mechanism to monitor targets aimed at ending for instance human deprivation. The IDGs were developed gradually between 1996 and 2000 and consisted of five concrete and achievable development goals approved by all OECD members. Before implementing the Millennium Declaration, UN agencies developed the Millennium Declaration Goals, a detailed listing of targets that the members deemed essential to tackle the indignity of poverty. MDGs were a combination of Millennium Declaration Goals and the IGDs and consisted of eight goals to tackle extreme poverty with a target date of 2015. On 25 September 2015, the MDGs were replaced by the 17 SDGs which aim to

foster prosperity for all.

At a World Bank conference in March 2001, with about 300 people in a room, many of whom from developing countries, Bradford decided to take the initiative. When Mark Malloch Brown, the head of the United Nations Development Programme, finished his remarks about the importance of developing a plan for the Millennium Declaration, the room went silent. Everyone understood that before implementing the Millennium Declaration, they needed to finalize the exact development goals.

At that time, the Bretton Woods institutions (BWI), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank wanted to advance the IDGs, while United Nations agencies wanted to pursue the Millennium Declaration, which would have meant two different sets of goals.

Having had the experience of creating the IDGs, which were approved by Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), UN, World Bank and IMF, Bradford boldly proposed the idea to consolidate the two at this March gathering.

“I said, ‘Look, you know better than anybody else, that we cannot appear in front of parliaments with two sets of goals,’” Bradford said. “We need to have the whole system organized around one set.”

He suggested particular steps by which a final agreement on development goals could be reached, such as creating a task force comprising the OECD, the IMF, the World Bank, and the UN, and going through the Millennium Declaration and the IDGs.

“I sat down, and I took a piece of paper and drew a line down the middle, put the declaration goals on one side — the IDGs on the other,” Bradford recalled. He compared the goals and connected the matching ones.

“I walked out of the room while people were talking about what I just said, gave it to somebody and said, ‘Here, take some copies of this, walk back in the room, put it on the desk of everybody in the front row.’”

Before that conference was over, the task force was formed. And that's how Bradford says the MDGs were created.

Looking back at his intervention that helped to generate MDGs, he has important advice for young people who want to be successful.

“Don't give up what you believe in, in order to get to the top,” Bradford said. “Speak! You get to be known for somebody who speaks and has got something to say.”

Recalling his extraordinary career, Bradford emphasizes that people should also pay attention to the work-life balance.

“I don't want to end up being a hero in the public realm and a potter disaster in my private life,” he said.

Throughout his life, Bradford made several decisions that changed his life. He acknowledges that finding a balance is not easy — it takes both courage and understanding of what you need to sacrifice.

Born in Bridgeport, Connecticut, in 1939, he went to Yale to study industrial administration. “My father was a businessman, and it was the only thing I knew about professional life,” Bradford recalled.

While studying at Yale, he took several history courses, which he enjoyed immensely. In his junior year, Bradford came to understand that he was in the wrong major. After talking to his parents, he made a decision to stay a fifth year to study history. Bradford thinks of his education as something that prepared him for his future life.

“Liberal arts education is a luxury,” Bradford said. “It is what gave me the wherewithal to figure out what I was about [to do] with my life.”

Later, influenced by Albert Hirschman's book, *The Strategy of Economic Development*, he applied to Columbia University, from where he received his M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in economics.

Soon after, Bradford was appointed as head of an office on the multilateral development banks in the U.S. Treasury Department. It was exactly what he wanted to do, and he was delighted about it.

“When I got the Ph.D., the whole reason I got it was to serve in government because I thought I needed it to serve,” Bradford said.

One of the things that overshadowed his time in Washington was the work-life balance. He had to work overtime – a lot.

“When I was in the Treasury Department, I felt like I needed to be at home, and when I was at home, I felt like I needed to be in the Treasury Department,” Bradford said.

It was the time when Bradford made another important decision — move from Washington to Connecticut.

“We had two kids and the third on the way, not that most brilliant thing a guy can do is take a 50 per cent salary cut to leave the United States Treasury Department to go work at Yale with the child on the way,” Bradford said.

While for many people leaving Washington in their 40s and taking a salary cut might sound as something weird, Bradford recalls it as one of the best decisions.

“I had done a lot of thinking about this, I went to something called mid-career counselling, spent \$15,000 back in 1977,” he said.

While Bradford left politics, he is still involved in many projects that shape policies and foster cultural diversity. For instance, he is a part of the China-West Dialogue (CWD), conversation series between thought leaders from many different countries aimed at understanding international relations problems and foreign policy issues from culturally different points of view.

“There is a school of thought in all our countries now that would rather hate than understand; would rather be against than for; would rather preach to than listen to people from other countries.”

This cultural issue is something that Bradford is eager to address with the CWD project.

While he took some time off between different endeavours, his family still wants him to have a break. “If these were different times, I would like to let it go, for sure. If this was just a professional endeavour, but it’s not,” Bradford explained.

After finding a work-life balance for himself, Bradford now encourages everyone to start charting their future — not only in terms of career aspirations but also in private life.

“Be aware that there are moments where you have to think hard about the future, think hard about where you want to get; what you want out of life, and be bold enough to really rip yourself out of the ground and do it,” he said.