Jeffrey D. Sachs, an economist, is director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University. He is writing from the G-20 meeting.

The G-20 meeting in London will not end the global economic crisis, but could nudge things at least slightly in a helpful direction. There are no huge breakthroughs in store. There will be likely be some more loans by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, some added financial market regulation, some vague agreement on gradual shifts in voting power in the I.M.F., and a trickle (at most) of help for the world’s poorest people.

We need real policy coordination, not an exercise in communiqué writing.

It adds up to something positive but very modest in comparison with the scale of challenges facing the world. Still, it’s far better that these leaders are talking and making incremental progress, rather than sinking into bitter acrimony, which is, alas, a real possibility at a time of deepening global hardships.

The sad — yet solvable — truth is that the G-20 process still confuses communiqué writing with real policy coordination. We need key officials of the major economies sitting side by side for weeks, even months, hashing out detailed scenarios and global policy options. Instead we get negotiators who focus mainly on the wording of quickly forgotten communiqués, while actual economic policies are set largely in inward-looking national processes.

The G-20 is a huge improvement over the G8 in global representation. Roughly 4 billion people, mainly of middle and high-income countries, are represented in the G-20 process (at least in principle), compared with roughly 1 billion in the G-8. Yet two-and-one-half billion people, and notably the poorest of the poor, are not at the table. They are hungry, squeezed by falling incomes, facing massive joblessness as mining and other projects close, and without a voice heard by the rest of the world. Their absence from London cripples the work of the G-20. Only a united world will be able to solve the world-scale challenges that threaten all of us today.