

Introduction: Developing Global Public Participation

Implementing the “We” in the Future We Want

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The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will succeed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in determining the World’s development agenda from 2015 until 2030.¹ Following the turbulent years building up to the MDGs target date and the 70th anniversary of the United Nations (UN) in 2015, it is increasingly necessary for the UN to demonstrate its ability to provide a productive forum for global issues and live up to the expectations it has helped foster through continuous “commitments.”² Setting the SDGs of the future not only provides an opportunity for the UN to “renew its proven abilities as a

1 Contributing to a post-2015 development agenda that “will build on the foundations laid by the MDGs, complete the unfinished business and respond to new challenges”, UNGA, *Outcome document of the special event to follow up efforts made towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals*, October 2013, A/68/L.4, para. 16.

2 Anna Leach poignantly captures a few global concerns currently dominating international cooperative efforts; “On top of the escalating Ebola crisis, unabating violence in Syria, terror threats from ISIS and the increasingly evident effects of climate change (to name just a handful of concerns), the end of the millennium development goals next year will be an intense period of reflection and future planning.” Anna Leach, *Reflecting on ‘collective failure’: is the United Nations still relevant?*, The Guardian (Global Development Professionals Network), October 2014, www.theguardian.com.

problem-solving entity in global political goods”³ (thus avoiding the branding as another “collective failure”),⁴ but also to break away from the previous MDGs expert-centric and closed agenda setting methodology to realise an “inclusive”, “open” and “cooperative” sustainable development agenda repeatedly promised.⁵

The many references to “inclusiveness” and “openness” in relation to the SDG drafting process can be interpreted as a pledge to take global public participation seriously. It raises questions about what global public participation actually entails, and what it ought to entail. Ultimately, this is about the individual and his or her role within the global community, or at least within the UN.⁶ But compared with a single individual, the UN is, of course, overwhelming in size. Thus individuals might not think much of their role within it. Yet, at the same time more and more individuals are becoming increasingly assertive; they want to take responsibility, and they want to be more actively engaged in the UN’s work.

There are many reasons for many different actors to want global public participation within the work of the UN. In our first article we thus wish to answer why global public participation within the work of the United Nations is important, and how we should go about testing whether particular forms of participation meet the expectations and requirements of *meaningful* public participation. We set out to conclude what global public participation should be.

In the second article we will apply the approach and test adopted in the first article to a case study: the current Sustainable Development Goals negotiations. This second article aims to introduce the reader to the means available for global public participation in formulating the SDGs, and whether these are meaningful input methods. The focus will be on the process up to

3 Georg Kell, *Foreword*, in, UNIDO & UNGC, *Engaging with the Private Sector in the Post-2015 Agenda*, September 2014, p. 3, <https://www.unglobalcompact.org>.

4 Ban Ki-moon, *Secretary-General’s remarks at launch of “Kwibukazo”*, February 2014, <http://www.un.org/sg/statements/index.asp?nid=7491>, in reference to the Syrian atrocities.

5 The OWG Outcome Document highlights the magnitude of repeated commitments and conferences, maintaining commitment to no less than 21 conferences or documents, along with the all-encompassing references “commitments in the outcomes of all the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and environmental fields, [...] with full respect for international law and its principles” OWG SDGs, *Outcome Document – Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals*, 19 July 2014, pp. 1–4, <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/focussdgs.html>.

6 See also Otto Spijkers, ‘Two Futures of Cosmopolitanism,’ *Political Ethics and International Order: Annual Report 43*. Societas Ethica, 2006.

September 2014, which marks the beginning of the intergovernmental negotiations process and the end of the stocktaking stage. Greater attention will be paid to the High Level Panel workstream, which set the groundwork and provided the first meaningful public input into the SDGs agenda. As we have seen previously, it is often the first documents which are followed and elaborated in intergovernmental processes, and are thus of great importance and influence.⁷

⁷ Arron Honniball and Otto Spijkers, *MDGs und SDGs: Lehren aus der öffentlichen Beteiligung an der Ausarbeitung der UN-Entwicklungsziele*, Vereinte Nationen 6/2014.