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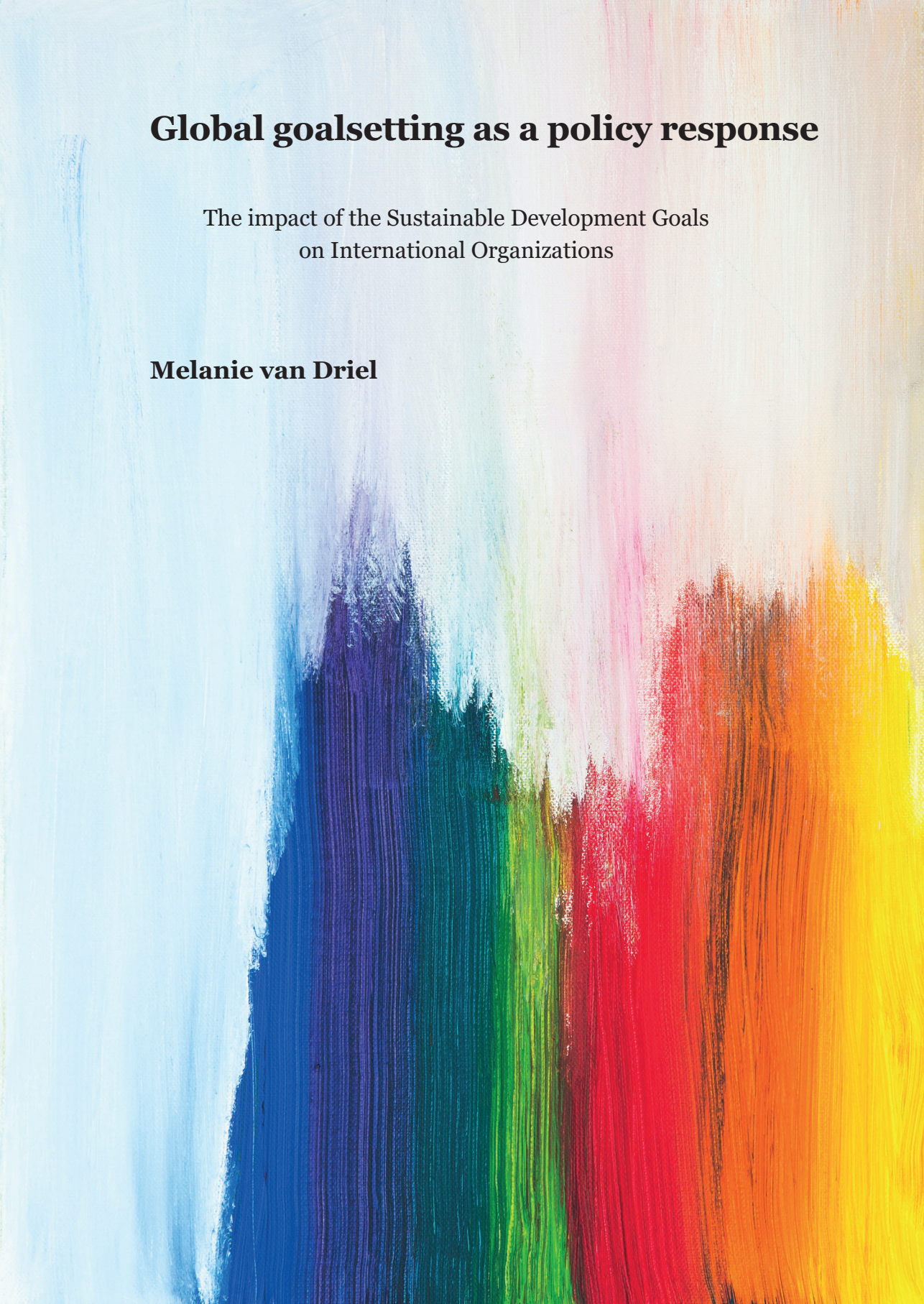
The impact of the Sustainable Development Goals
on International Organizations

Melanie van Driel



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The impact of the Sustainable Development Goals on international organizations

Wereldwijde ontwikkelingsdoelstellingen als beleidsresponse

De impact van de Duurzame Ontwikkelingsdoelstellingen op internationale organisaties (met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

Proefschrift

Ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor aan de
Universiteit Utrecht
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Acknowledgements

When I started my Master at the University of Amsterdam in 2016, I did not envision myself doing a PhD. I was quite insecure about my own abilities. Doing a PhD seemed like something only extremely intelligent people would pursue. However, throughout the program, all my supervisors suggested me to think about it at one point or another. I perceived this as quite a compliment but was unsure if it was something I could realistically pursue.

After a lot of hard work and dedication I ended up obtaining my degree in Political Science Cum Laude. I stayed on as a Research Assistant with my former thesis supervisor, and we published my thesis as a research article.

At that point, I had made up my mind about wanting to pursue a PhD. I took up a job as a lecturer at the Faculty of Governance and Global Affairs at Leiden University and looked for ways to secure some type of funding.

It was at the end of 2018 that I saw the vacancy for PhD researchers within the GlobalGoals project, and I started working on my application. After submission, I soon received the message that due to the great number of applications, it would take longer than expected to pick out candidates that would be invited for an interview. It was noted that overall, there were over 500 applicants for just four positions.

When I heard that this was the case, I knew that it would be difficult to obtain a position, but somehow, I was optimistic. At the time I thought 'someone has to get the position, why couldn't that be me.'

After some time, I got invited, talked to what would become my supervisors, and got a call from Frank offering me one of the positions. I remember it well. It was at the end of a working day at the University of Leiden, and me and two colleagues were the only ones left in the office. I went into one of the cubicles to take the call, and when I came out my colleagues looked at me questioningly. They knew I had applied and were eager to learn about the outcome.

When I told them I had been offered a position, they cheered, and I felt a sense of relief. I had finally found a place where I could get to work and pursue what at the time was my major life dream.

I started working on my thesis in January of 2019. It was not long after finishing my initial thesis proposal and having a 'GO' to continue with my PhD, that the world started to change quite drastically. At the end of 2019, COVID-19 emerged, and in March of 2020 we started to experience a series of measures that would heavily impact my PhD process.

For me, the onset of the pandemic meant that I had to commit fully to conducting my research with tools that I could utilize without having to do any fieldwork or on-site interviews. Of the 91 interviews I conducted for this thesis, I was only able to do one in-person, with a Dutch representative somewhere at a station in The Hague. The other conversations had to be undertaken solely via video calls.

In addition, the pandemic impacted my ability to engage fully with the research community. Research visits, in-person conferences and other face-to-face interactions were difficult if not impossible until 2022. For me, this meant that my first in-person conference as a PhD researcher was the International Studies Association conference in March/April of 2022.

Lastly, the pandemic impacted my ability to fully engage with my colleagues at the Copernicus Institute. I had just started to settle in when the pandemic hit, and it was only towards the end of my PhD that I was able to go to a lot of the regular activities for personnel that were organized at the institute.

Being a 'pandemic' PhD, however, also had some 'advantages.' For example, as most conferences were held fully online throughout this period, I was able to present my work at seven international

conferences, without having to spend the entire GlobalGoals budget. In addition, as the processes related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) also took place digitally throughout this period, we were able to submit and successfully host several online side-events, the most exciting of which was a side-event at the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in 2022.

In addition, as part of the GlobalGoals team, I was in the organizational team of one of the first digital conferences in 2020, fully focused on SDG research. As most platforms and tools that we have now become acquainted with were relatively new at the time, this also allowed me to learn a lot of new skills.

However, I was not one of those PhDs that thrived during the pandemic and was able to focus fully on my PhD in a context 'without any distractions'. I did not experience it in that way at all. As someone who gets a lot of her energy from social interactions, I was quite crushed by the lockdowns we experienced. I felt a great sense of isolation as we were not allowed to work on-site, especially as my partner was deemed an essential worker, and was away throughout the week. After several of my closest friends and family members experienced pandemic related burnouts and health issues, my own mental health also got negatively impacted by the pandemic.

I was very happy therefore, when throughout 2022 we could finally meet in-person again. The last year and a half of my PhD I really felt like a part of the research community, attending the International Studies Association's conference in Nashville, Tennessee, and the Earth System Governance conference in Toronto later that same year. I also enjoyed being able to present my work to the other members of the GlobalGoals team during our team meetings and being able to have in-person meetings with my supervisors. I even went to the 'Copernicus Retreat Days' with all my colleagues from the institute and got to know many of the people at the institute a bit better.

In these acknowledgements, I want to express my sincerest gratitude to a number of people, without whom this thesis would not have been possible. For planting the idea to pursue a PhD, I want to thank all the supervisors that I had during my Master, but especially Prof Dr. John Grin and Dr. Mehdi Amineh. I also want to thank my former colleagues at Leiden University, some of whom wrote the letters of recommendation that helped me obtain a spot within the GlobalGoals project. For their unwavering mental support throughout my PhD, I want to thank my family, especially my mother, Yvonne de Boer, my father, Rob van Driel, my stepmom, Maria van Driel and my sister, Tirza van Driel. I also want to thank my boyfriend Matthijs Baart, who was my rock throughout this process, and my friends, especially Rosanne Schneiders, Amanda Koeleman and Nastia Machina. I also want to thank all my colleagues in the municipal council of Oegstgeest. They always asked me how my PhD was going and kept cheering me on throughout the process.

Without a doubt, I will forever be grateful to Frank Biermann, Marjanneke Vijge and Rakhyun Kim, my team of supervisors. Throughout my entire PhD, I've learned a lot from all of them. And this is not limited to knowledge about research methods and paper formatting.

Throughout the supervision process, I've been able to experience personal growth in a way that I think I would not have been able to experience without the commitment of my supervisors. At the beginning of my PhD, I was very hesitant to share early versions or drafts of my work as I felt insecure about the quality thereof. I often waited longer than I should have to share my work, thereby foregoing some good opportunities to receive feedback, and taking longer than necessary to move beyond some of the challenges I faced. Even though I can imagine this was at times very frustrating for my supervisors, who are used to helping people improve their work, they were always trying to nudge me to share work, even if I thought that it was not developed enough. They always encouraged me to view them as companions throughout the process, and to allow them to help me through it. I think one of the greatest

lessons I learned throughout my PhD was to let go of this sense of perfectionism that I think all PhD students attempt to cling to when they start on their research journeys. After completing my thesis, I now understand that there is no shame in sharing early, incomplete drafts of your work with others for constructive criticism. It does not say anything about you as a person that you have not fully developed your work at the first meeting. It is actually a signal of great personal strength to be vulnerable enough to share early research ideas with people, and to allow them to help you transform your ideas into fully-fledged research.

In addition to helping me let go of my perfectionism, I also want to express my gratitude to my supervisors for their unwavering belief in my capabilities. There were numerous occasions throughout my PhD where I doubted if I was capable enough to complete it. It was in these moments that Frank, Marjanneke and Rak would always express that in their view I could do it, I did not need to worry, and I would figure out the way to deal with whatever challenge I was trying to overcome at a particular moment in time. This to me often helped me to return to my work with a renewed belief in my own capabilities, and the motivation to move forward.

Melanie van Driel

Oegstgeest, 2023

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List of Abbreviations

Agenda 2063	Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
ECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
ESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
ECLAC	United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
ESCWA	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
IAEG-SDGs	Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators
HLPF	High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OIOS	Office of Internal Oversight Services
RCs	Regional Commissions
REDD+	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation
Rio+20	2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development
SCP	Sustainable Consumption and Production
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UN	United Nations
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UN DESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNJU	United Nations Joint Inspection Unit
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
US	United States of America

Vision 2025	ASEAN Community Vision 2025
Vision 2040	ASEAN Community Vision 2040
VLR	Voluntary Local Review
VNR	Voluntary National Review
WHO	World Health Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization
10YFP	10 Year Framework of Programmes for Sustainable Consumption and Production
2030 Agenda	Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Summary

Global governance is highly fragmented, characterized by tens of thousands of international organizations, treaties and regimes with specialized mandates. By agreeing on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, the United Nations General Assembly set 17 global development priorities up to 2030. Ideally, governing through goals might (re-)direct and steer the activities of international organizations along the lines of these priorities. As implementing entities, international organizations can directly influence goal-attainment. As building blocks of the global governance system, they can also steer other actors towards the goals. But the exact effects of the 17 global goals on international organizations are unclear. This thesis therefore investigates how international organizations are impacted by the SDGs. I conducted four in-depth, primarily qualitative case studies, relying on 91 interviews, 374 key documents and numerous other materials, such as webpages and evaluation reports. Each case focuses on and thereby adds knowledge about a different (set of) international organization(s) and a different potential manifestation of impact. I look at impact as changes in organizational behavior, defined through a range of organizational outputs, including (novel) initiatives, policy changes and institutional adjustments. The cases focus on i) intra-organizational change, ii) inter-institutional coordination, iii) (novel) external steering activities and iv) changes in efforts to further institutionalize work. I find that behavioral change is most clearly observed in the external relations of international organizations. International organizations take on novel external steering activities vis-a-vis third parties, establish new coordination initiatives, and are helped in their efforts to strengthen institutionalization. However, I question if this type of activity, thus far, has realized any material impact, for example by increasing efficiency, reducing fragmentation or resolving policy incoherence. I find that intra-organizational behavior does not seem to have changed much due to the SDGs. International organizations can and do utilize the SDG processes strategically, furthering their own interests and claiming alignment without making far-fetching adjustments to their ongoing work. I posit that the key reason for this lack of change is that beyond the setting of 17 goals, little has changed in the overall incentive structure for international organizations. It is therefore unrealistic even to expect transformative action. Furthermore, what transformative action would even entail has never been clearly defined. To utilize the potential of international organizations to realize the priorities of the SDGs, we need more fundamental changes to the environment in which international organizations operate, and a more thorough elaboration of the requirements for organizational alignment, including efforts that should be (de-)prioritized to implement the SDGs.

Samenvatting

Het mondiale Governance landschap is zeer gefragmenteerd en wordt gekenmerkt door tienduizenden internationale organisaties, verdragen en regimes met gespecialiseerde mandaten. Door overeenstemming te bereiken over de duurzame ontwikkelingsdoelstellingen (*Sustainable Development Goals,* de SDGs) in 2015, heeft de Algemene Vergadering van de Verenigde Naties 17 mondiale ontwikkelingsprioriteiten tot 2030 vastgesteld. Als uitvoerende entiteiten kunnen internationale organisaties rechtstreeks invloed uitoefenen op het bereiken van deze doelen. Als bouwstenen van het mondiale Governance systeem kunnen ze ook andere actoren aansporen om deze doelen te bereiken. Dit proefschrift onderzoekt hoe internationale organisaties worden beïnvloed door de duurzame ontwikkelingsdoelstellingen. Ik heb vier diepgaande, voornamelijk kwalitatieve casestudy's uitgevoerd op basis van 91 interviews, 374 primaire documenten en tal van ander materiaal, waaronder webpagina's en evaluatierapporten. Elke casus richt zich op en voegt daardoor kennis toe over een andere (set van) internationale organisatie(s), en een andere mogelijke manifestatie van impact. Ik kijk naar impact als veranderingen in het gedrag van organisaties, gedefinieerd door een scala aan organisatorische output, waaronder (nieuwe) initiatieven, beleidsveranderingen en institutionele aanpassingen. De casussen richten zich op i) intra-organisatorische verandering, ii) inter-institutionele coördinatie, iii) (nieuwe) sturende rollen en iv) impact op inspanningen om werk verder te institutionaliseren. Ik observeer gedragsverandering voornamelijk in de externe relaties van internationale organisaties. Internationale organisaties nemen nieuwe rollen op zich ten opzichte van derden, zetten nieuwe coördinatie-initiatieven op en worden geholpen bij hun inspanningen om institutionalisering te versterken. Ik vraag me echter af of dit soort activiteiten tot nu toe enige materiële impact hebben gehad, bijvoorbeeld door te leiden tot meer efficiëntie, versnippering te verminderen of beleidsincoherentie op te lossen. Ik merk op dat het gedrag binnen internationale organisaties niet veel lijkt te zijn veranderd door de doelstellingen. Internationale organisaties kunnen en zullen de SDG-processen strategisch gebruiken, hun eigen belangen bevorderen en afstemming claimen zonder vergaande aanpassingen aan hun lopende werk te maken. Ik stel dat de belangrijkste reden voor dit gebrek aan verandering is dat er, afgezien van het stellen van 17 doelen, weinig is veranderd in de algemene context waarin internationale organisaties opereren. Het is daarom onrealistisch om transformatie te verwachten. Bovendien is nooit duidelijk gedefinieerd wat transformatie voor internationale organisaties zou moeten inhouden. Om het potentieel van internationale organisaties te benutten om de prioriteiten van de duurzame ontwikkelingsdoelstellingen te realiseren, zullen daarom meer fundamentele veranderingen nodig zijn in de omgeving waarin internationale organisaties opereren, en een meer grondige uitwerking van de vereisten voor organisatorische afstemming, waaronder inspanningen die organisaties moeten (de-)prioriteren om de duurzame ontwikkelingsdoelstellingen te implementeren.

List of publications

Papers included in this thesis

Van Driel, **M**., Biermann, F., Kim, R.E. & Vijge, M.J. (submitted). The Impact of the Sustainable Development Goals on Global Policies on Sustainable Consumption and Production. Submitted to *Globalizations* on August 7th, 2023.

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"Forget green, a 'rainbow recovery' is what we need. The Sustainable Development Goals must be at the core of our national post-COVID recovery plan." Blog written by **Melanie van Driel** and Maya Bogers. Published on the Global Goals project website on July 6th, 2021, https://globalgoalsproject.eu/opinion-piece-rainbow-recovery/.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 The challenging global governance landscape and existing policy responses

Today's global governance is characterized by tens of thousands of international organizations, treaties and regimes (Kim 2020). Scholars see here the emergence of an increasing number of international organizations as a functional response to the increasing number of problems for which the actions of a single state are insufficient and of which the complexity is such that joint action and scale are required (Zürn & Faude 2013). Examples of such problems abound, including climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution above and below water, (between-country) inequalities and the functioning of the global economic architecture (see e.g., Young 1990; Philips 2017; Haas et al. 2021; IPCC 2022). The earth is increasingly recognized as a system which requires concerted action, further illustrated by the introduction of concepts such as that of planetary boundaries, positing a safe operating space for humanity (Rockström et al. 2009; Steffen et al. 2015).

However, the emergence of an increasing number of international organizations, as one set of key actors to deal with these issues, also poses challenges. International organizations are highly specialized, often focused on their particular mandate. Although functional differentiation might be necessary to some extent, scholars have questioned the effectiveness of the high degree of fragmentation in the current global governance system (see Appendix A; Held and Young 2013; Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen & McGee 2013; Kanie 2015; Holzscheiter 2017; Biermann et al. 2020; Bogers et al. 2022b).

International organizations, focused on their own mandate, often engage in siloed work (see Appendix B; Niestroy & Meuleman 2016). Although it is not problematic per se to focus on a particular mandate, over time, increasing the number of organizations has also increased the overlap between mandates (see for example Alter & Meunier 2009; Hofmann 2019; Kranke 2022). This likelihood increases, as many international organizations have also successfully (in-)formally extended their mandates, and the reach of their (managerial) capabilities (Alvarez 2007, 2016).

There is a growing awareness that work in one area can have (negative) spillover effects on others, and that siloed work might lead to unintended consequences. Continued siloed work risks the duplication of and inconsistencies between governance efforts across organizations, the lack of an overall vision, limited attraction and pooling of resources, and thereby limited overall governance capacity (Ivanova & Roy 2007; Alter & Meunier 2009; Keohane & Victor 2011; Holzscheiter et al., 2012; Holzscheiter 2017; Held & Young 2013; Nasiritousi et al. 2020).

These challenges have led to calls for more concerted efforts to solve global issues. However, as institutional design has often resulted from contentious political processes, (re-)arranging the existing global governance landscape is not straightforward (see Appendix A). Several policy responses have started to emerge. Some have attracted increased attention in the recent scholarly literature, including attempts at policy integration or mainstreaming, interplay management, hierarchization, orchestration and most recently governing through global goals (Biermann et al. 2020).

Policy integration, especially the integration of environmental concerns into non-environmental policy areas, has been suggested as a means to overcome policy incoherence and institutional fragmentation (Runhaar et al. 2020; Lafferty & Hovden, 2003; Persson et al. 2018). This policy response has occurred through top-down regulatory instruments as well as bottom-up voluntary incentives. To date, numerous non-environmental international organizations have incorporated environmental principles in their basic legal documents (Tosun & Peters 2018). However, the effects thereof have often remained soft and symbolic, as a gap exists between (high-level policy) documents and practices at the operational level, which necessitates more concrete tools and practices (Jacob et al. 2008; Kivimaa & Mickwitz 2006). Key barriers to overcome include conflicting interests, high-level institutionalization of inadequate organizational structures, routines and practices, and the mismatch between administrative

boundaries and those required to fulfill commitments (Runhaar et al. 2020; Uittenbroek et al. 2014). It has been suggested that the institutions and processes implementing environmental policy integration, including supportive organizational structures and managerial and procedural strategies, are the key to overcome existing implementation deficits, but also remain the least utilized. This indicates an important role for (existing) institutions to realize the impact of this strategy in practice.

Interplay management, or the awareness of interactions between different entities and the preparedness to interfere, has been presented as a means to realize increased synergies and avoid disruptions (Stokke 2020). This policy response has occurred through (de-)centralized coordination, as well as through one-sided adaptation strategies. In practice, interplay management has most often occurred through one-sided responses, where elemental institutions, including international organizations, adjust their activities to those of other entities (Oberthür & Stokke 2011). In practice, it has therefore rarely led to the integrative solutions hoped for that maximize the set of priorities pursued by the institutions involved (Stokke 2020). Here, the rigidity of existing procedures and practices, non-overlapping membership and resistance are mentioned among the issues observed. Interplay-management experiences difficulties leading to such outcomes in a context where some institutional set-ups are underpinned by 'deep-rooted, conflicting priorities' among (powerful) states. This indicates an important role for states to come to coherent sets of priorities that allow international organizations, among others, to meaningfully engage in interplay management.

Hierarchization consists here of efforts to improve the stability, predictability and durability of governance processes and outcomes by (hierarchically) ordering relationships, norms and institutions (Kim et al. 2020). This response might occur through systemization – based on an overarching goal or purpose – (Kotzé & Muzangaza 2018), centralization – based on a recognized authority – or prioritization – ordering issues relative to their perceived importance (Kim et al. 2020). However, it is a far-reaching and controversial policy response, as in world politics, hierarchy often is avoided, and actors often prefer maintaining the status quo. Nevertheless, there are also recent examples of hierarchization, including the establishment of the United Nations Environment Assembly in 2012 and discussions surrounding a Global Pact for the Environment (Aguila & Viñuales 2019; Ivanova 2013). However, hierarchization might have some downsides as well, like rigidity and insufficient flexibility to adjust to changing realities, especially as earth system governance occurs in a context of constant flux (Kim et al. 2020).

Orchestration is a different mechanism. It is a means of indirect governance aiming to coordinate responses where direct governing authority is weak or absent, driven by increased (institutional) complexity and fragmentation (Abbott et al. 2020). This policy response primarily occurs through the enlistment of intermediaries to govern a third set of actors in line with the orchestrator's goals. International organizations have received most attention as potential or actual orchestrators within this literature. The effectiveness of orchestration compared to other modes of governance, however, is difficult to measure, given that it most often arises when other modes are not available (Abbott, Genschel, Snidal & Zangl 2016), can occur by design as actors want to circumvent creating highly formalized institutions (Abbott & Bernstein 2015), and can at times increase the complexity of governance by creating novel entities (Abbott et al. 2020). However, it is considered a mode of governance that, when used alongside other modes, can help navigate the complexity of the current governance landscape.

1.2 Governing through global goals as a policy response

Governing through global goals is an alternative to these approaches. Specifically, governing through goals is a policy response that aims to direct the behavior of the multitude of entities within the global governance system through time-bound aspirational goals that (can) create (numerous) overarching

focus areas (see Appendix B; Fukuda-Parr 2014; Biermann et al. 2017). Over time, this policy response has become (increasingly) characterized by four key characteristics: goals are non-legally binding, are supported by weak institutional arrangements, processes leading to them are meant to be highly inclusive and they provide considerable leeway for implementing entities (Biermann et al. 2017; Appendix B). Although governance through goals emerged throughout the second half of the twentieth century (Fukuda-Parr 2014), research into its political impact has only recently started to emerge.

Governing through goals does contain some of the elements of the policy responses referred to earlier. It has, for example, been posited as a form of hierarchization, namely that of prioritization (Kim et al. 2020). Setting global goals leads to the identification of global priorities (Kim et al. 2020; Biermann et al. 2017) and indicates what actors should mobilize around and direct their scarce resources towards (Young 2017). 'Goal hierarchies', however, have some unique characteristics. Goal hierarchies are relatively flexible, given their timebound nature. They also do not posit goals as normatively superior to non-goals, but simply note them as being more urgent (Kim et al. 2020). These characteristics are said to result from the political nature of goalsetting processes. Goals may help to resolve conflicts or manage trade-offs between lower-ranked objectives. However, this does require a concise set of objectives and clear guidance, which might then enhance the ability and willingness of actors to work together (Kim 2016).

As governing through goals lacks the enforcement mechanisms and resources that often accompany legally binding instruments, governing through goals has also been posited as necessitating (indirect) steering (Appendix B). This feature of governing through goals establishes a potential link, or even de facto link, with orchestration as an implementation strategy (Bernstein 2017).

In 2015, the latest set of global goals, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), were agreed upon (see Figure 1.1); these goals are arguably the most extensive and ambitious set of global goals to date. Although legally binding agreements can and mostly do include time-bound, at times aspirational goals, such as those in the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement, they are reliant on the articulation of rules, and devising compliance mechanisms to induce actors to adjust their behavior. Such goals fall outside of what I consider 'governing through goals' as defined above (Young 2017). The SDGs, as an example of governing through goals defined as such, follow a tradition of non-legally binding goals, like the four UN Development Decades, two Poverty Eradication Decades and most recently the Millennium Development Goals. The expectations of the type of change actors should Introduce to realize the SDGs were considerable. The United Nations proclaimed that 'bold and transformative steps' should be taken, to be able to profoundly improve the lives of all and transform our world for the better (United Nations General Assembly 2015b, 1-2).

Regarding the potential signaling of the SDGs to international organizations, three key elements of the agenda stand out.

Figure 1.1 The Sustainable Development Goals

Source: The United Nations

Firstly, the SDGs include goals related to all dimensions of sustainable development, covering the dimensions of environment, economy and society (United Nations General Assembly 2015b, 1). Whereas previous global goals focused heavily on either the economic, or the economic and the social dimension of development, the SDGs are the first to include a significant focus on issues related to climate and biodiversity (for an overview see Jackson 2022). Most international organizations will therefore see at least a part of their existing mandate reflected in this agenda.

Secondly, the dimensions of sustainable development are meant to be approached holistically, in an integrated manner. The goals are considered integrated and indivisible (United Nations General Assembly 2015b, 1). From the start, the agenda identified policy coherence as a means of implementation (United Nations General Assembly 2015, 27; OECD 2016; de Jong & Vijge 2021). This means that international organizations, to successfully contribute to the agenda, are likely to have to take on a broader scope, set of activities and role than was necessary for previous agendas.

Thirdly, the Agenda 2030 is seen as universal, meaning that it applies to all UN member states and other layers of governance, but also to a broad group of partners, including business and civil society actors (United Nations General Assembly 2015b, 1). This is different from the Millennium Development Goals, which were primarily focused on developing countries (see also Jackson 2022). For international organizations that are meant to implement the agenda, some of their powerful principles are thus now also seen as 'developing' and need to be taken into consideration during implementation. In addition, international organizations are expected to engage in partnerships themselves, in line with SDG 17, which is focused on global partnerships.

The SDGs therefore also align with the policy response of policy integration or mainstreaming (Runhaar et al. 2020). Instead of promoting environmental policy integration, however, the SDGs promote the integration of a comprehensive sustainable development agenda, promoting that actors balance the social, environmental and economic dimensions of sustainable development in their policies through

integrative approaches (Nilsson & Persson 2017; United Nations General Assembly 2015b, 1). The SDGs, by prioritizing and focusing, might also be hypothesized to provide a basis for interplay management. This might include efforts at more centralized coordination or one-sided adaptation. Global goalsetting might remove a previously identified hurdle towards effective interplay management, namely the lack of consensus among (powerful) states about what to prioritize (Stokke 2020).

1.3 Problem statement: the impact on international organizations

As mentioned above, governing through global goals is one of several potential policy responses to effectively deal with complex governance issues in a fragmented global governance landscape. Governance through goals relies on (indirect) *steering* to warrant any real-world effects. If successful, this steering should be observable in behavioral changes in actors, including international organizations, that align with the goals, in this case the 17 SDGs, to contribute to the hoped-for transformative outcomes (see Appendix C).

To differentiate between categories in which actors might exhibit (behavioral) change, scholars posited three potential political effects of global goals: discursive changes, normative changes, and institutional changes (Biermann, Hickmann & Sénit 2022). Discursive changes are described as changes in the way in which actors discuss global issues; normative change is associated with substantial policy change; and institutional change is associated with the creation of novel institutions, but also the potential transformation of existing ones to realize sustainable development.

The scholarly literature thus far has noted that to achieve transformation, global goals should lead international organizations to refocus their priorities, redefine their legitimacy and role (Maupain, 2020), and reformulate short-term vested interests (Kamau et al., 2018).

In 2015, after the adoption of the SDGs, many international organizations committed to the goals. This commitment was welcomed, and considered necessary, given that international organizations' work impacts all policy areas within the SDG framework. Still, international organizations face conflictive incentives (Weaver 2008), often rely on project-based funding (Glemarec & Jenks 2015), operate with an existing set of priorities that often emerged based on member state preferences before the adoption of the SDGs, and face more stick-like incentives for other activities, including legally binding agreements. All these factors affect international organizations.

If the SDGs will lead to behavioral change among international organizations, thus is a key research problem, or knowledge gap, surrounding the impact of governance through global goals as a policy response. As individual entities, international organizations are supposed to implement the goals in their own work, thereby directly contributing to goal-attainment. In addition, as entities within a broader governance landscape, they also engage with, and are supposed to engage even more actively, with third parties and be part of the steering process themselves. They are thus both meant to *be steered* as well as being part of *those steering* within the SDG governing process.

I conceptualized this knowledge gap into the following overarching research question: ***How are international organizations impacted by the SDGs?***

To answer this question, I focus on four sub-questions:

How are international organizations impacted (directly) in their policies and operations by their engagement with the SDGs?

How are the external steering activities by international organizations impacted by the SDGs?

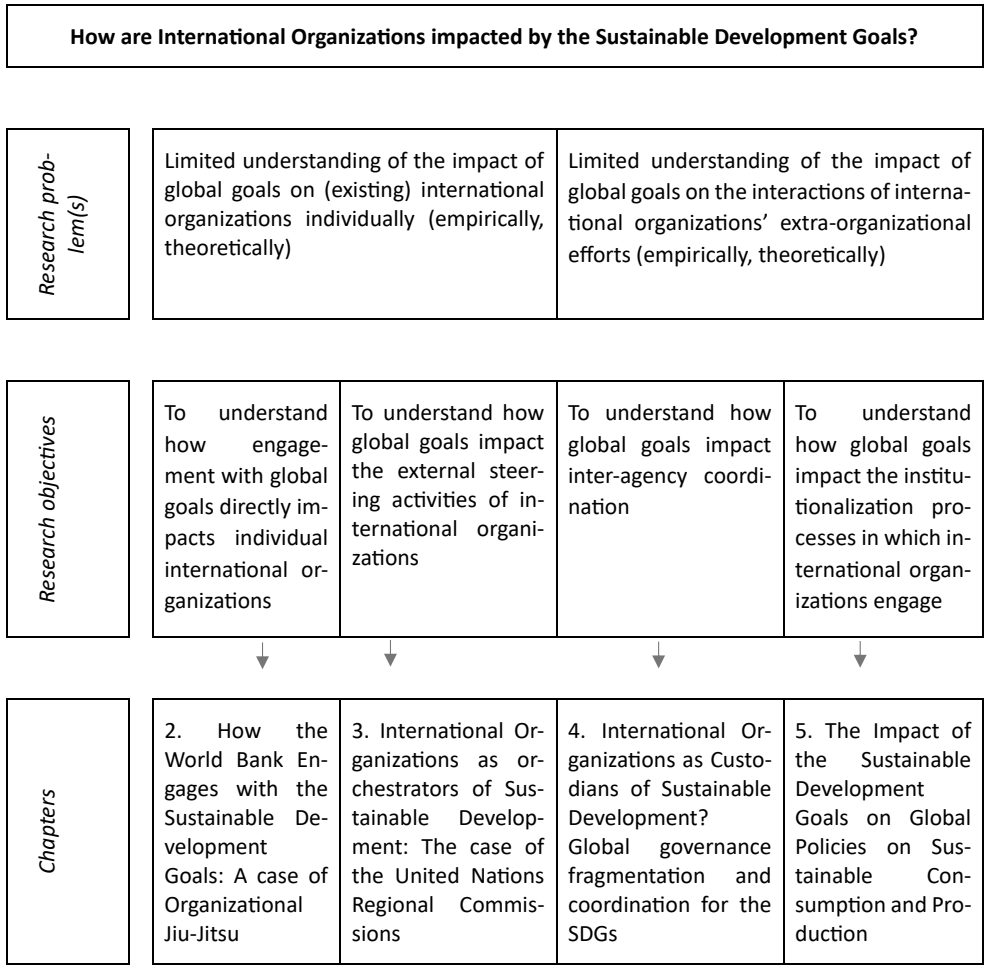
How is inter-agency coordination impacted by the SDGs?

How are broader institutionalization processes in which international organizations are engaged impacted by the SDGs?

The set of analytical chapters of this thesis is designed to investigate these four questions through different cases and research objects (further elaborated on in the Method section below). The chapters aim, firstly, to increase our understanding of the impact of global goals on (existing) international organizations individually, ranging from discourse to policies and institutional set-up. Secondly, I include chapters aiming to increase our understanding of the impact of global goals on the interactions of international organizations, and their role in steering third parties. Here, I consider the extent to which the SDGs inspire more coordination, the uptake of novel external steering activities vis a vis other actors and further institutionalization of emerging policy domains.

Figure 1.1 gives an overview of the key research problems, objectives and chapters that flow from the questions presented above. The two research problems in this scheme and the four research objectives are connected, that is international organizations operate within, and their behavior is influenced by their organizational context, and the interactions between intra- and extra-organizational variables. Rather than being two separate research problems leading to individual chapters, the chapters of this thesis will always touch on both problems but differ in the extent to which they pay attention to them.

Figure 1.2 Outline dissertation: connections between research problems, objectives and chapters



1.4 Theory

In this section I define the key concepts underpinning this thesis, including the SDGs, international organizations and impact. Thereafter, I reflect on the insights provided by the academic literature about the relation between these concepts. This will clarify the research gaps that this thesis focuses on.

1.4.1 Key concepts

The first key concept in this thesis is the policy response of governing through goals which I focus on. As a case of governing through goals, I take a broad view of the SDGs in the analysis. I do not just focus on (a subset of) the 17 goals but consider the full policy cycle of the goals as potentially impactful for international organizations. This includes i) the period of 2012-2015 when actors were negotiating the goals, targets and indicators, ii) the implementation period that started in 2015, as well as iii) recurring

review processes and efforts to evaluate progress (Jann & Wegrich, 2007; Vijge et al., 2020). This approach is in line with my aim to investigate global *goalsetting* as a policy response. In line with the diversity of research objects and case-study approaches taken in this thesis, some chapters focus on each element of this cycle very explicitly (for example Chapter 2 on the World Bank), while it is included but not explicated in the same level of detail in others (for example Chapter 4 on indicator custodianship). Furthermore, to provide an empirical starting point for investigation, in some chapters I focus on the process around specific SDGs (including SDG 10 in Chapter 2, SDG 10 and 3 in Chapter 4 and SDG 12 in Chapter 5), while in other chapters I focus on activities related to the entire set of goals (notably Chapter 3 and the conceptual framework of Chapter 4).

The second key concept in this thesis is that of international organizations. I start from the theoretical viewpoint that international organizations are complex, semi-autonomous entities. They are not just functions of their member states but can be influenced by a number of intra-organizational and extra-organizational variables and their interplay (e.g., Finnemore & Sikkink 2001; Park 2006; Vetterlein, 2007; Alvarez, 2016; Tallberg et al., 2018). It must thus be recognized that the SDGs form one among a broader set of incentives to change behavior presented to international organizations. The recognition of international organizations as inherently complex entities in global governance in which they receive multiple demands, informs this thesis. I combine multiple research objects and cases to explore a range of variables related to organizational behavior (more on this in the Method section below). In some chapters, I strongly focus on meso-level factors – which are relevant when discussing inter-organizational interactions, or the relation between international organizations and third parties -, where in other chapters I zoom in on micro-level factors, which are more clearly explored when focusing on individual entities.

The third key concept is impact, that is, the phenomenon I am interested in. Impact should be differentiated from inputs (the goals themselves) and outcomes (goal-attainment), but more closely resembles the often referred to 'output' category. I therefore define impact as some type of behavioral change on the part of international organizations. As mentioned above, the behavior of international organizations can directly impact outcomes as these entities themselves contribute to implementation of the goals but can also indirectly do so by directing the behavior of third parties. This means that observing impact, in this study, occurs through the study of organizational outputs like initiatives, policy documents, changes in organizational set-up and functioning, but also in changes in external relations. To be able to structure the analysis of these organizational outputs in a meaningful way, I base the case-studies on four theoretical constructs – engagement, coordination, orchestration and institutionalization – that form potential manifestations of behavioral change in practice (see also the section on the Scientific positioning of this research). These constructs touch upon both the intra-organizational dimension of impact, as well as the external relations of international organizations.

I will now expand upon the definitions I use for each of these constructs in this thesis. Importantly, this thesis utilizes these definitions as a starting point, as each of its chapters adds to, conceptualizes and operationalizes these concepts, which is also a key contribution of the present work.

The first construct, that of engagement, relates to impact, as it is focused on the impact of the SDG process on individual international organizations. I define engagement as the way in which an international organization is impacted by the policy cycle of the SDGs. This policy cycle includes the period of 2012-2015 when actors were negotiating the goals, targets and indicators, ii) the implementation period that started in 2015, as well as iii) recurring review processes and efforts (Jann & Wegrich, 2007; Vijge et al., 2020). Engagement includes both the way in which an organization's intra-organizational variables (communication, institutional set-up and country-level engagement) as well as external relations are affected by these processes. Of the constructs used in this thesis, engagement focuses most

explicitly on the intra-organizational impact of the SDGs. This allows me to investigate to what extent we can observe any changes within an organization that might be said to result directly from governing through global goals.

I define coordination as mutual adjustment of behavior between entities (Biermann & Koops 2017, 20). The earlier literature suggests that institutional fragmentation might form a barrier to coordination (F. Biermann et al. 2009; F. Biermann et al. 2020). Evidence suggests that a high degree of governance fragmentation often limits effective coordination among international actors (for an overview see F. Biermann et al. 2020), with numerous undesirable outcomes, from a lack of an overall vision (Barnett et al., 2007) to duplications and inconsistencies (Kanie 2015), scattering of responsibilities, splintered efforts and limited information sharing (Holzscheiter et al., 2012), limitations in attracting funding (Keohane & Victor 2011), limited pooling of resources (Nasiritousi et al., 2020), difficulties in assigning accountability (Ivanova & Roy 2007), and limited governance capacity (Held & Young 2013). The absence of a dominant actor with a managing role has been argued to result in 'counter-productive politicization of coordination efforts' among agencies competing for leadership (Holzscheiter et al., 2012, p. 71). Given that global goalsetting forms a policy response that aims to focus the efforts of actors on a set of global priorities, coordination around these key priorities would constitute a clear impact of global goalsetting on international organizations.

I define orchestration as a form of soft and mostly indirect steering, characterized by a reliance on voluntary recruited intermediaries (Abbott et al. 2015; Pegram 2015). Orchestration is expected to fill governance deficits by complementing existing regimes and approaches (Chan & Amling 2019; Gordon & Johnson 2017; Abbott et al. 2015). Thus far, studies have had difficulties in defining the 'effectiveness' of orchestration, given the indirect links between actors and the goals of the orchestrator. This means that any assessment of the effectiveness of orchestration must take into account the details of the case in question. In the context of the SDGs, it has been noted that these goals require 'orchestration by design', given the characteristics identified above, including their non-legally binding status and weak institutional structures at the global level to ensure implementation (Abbott and Bernstein 2015). Orchestration was thus expected to be both a necessary factor, and consequentially a hoped for impact of governing through goals.

I define institutionalization as a combination of three elements: authority, procedures, and resources. All three elements move policy making on an issue from ad hoc to being more structured and predictable, and hence institutionalized. I formulate this definition based on the existing literature around the topic (a.o., Keohane, 1988; Seckinelgin 2017; Kim et al. 2020; Rhoads 2016; Mueller, M.L. 2010; Reinicke 1997; Quissel and Walt 2016; Bernstein 2000; Betsill et al. 2022). As global goalsetting has been identified as a means to identify 'neglected global issues' (Fukuda-Parr 2014), a potential impact thereof might be to focus efforts of actors in the issue areas covered by global goalsetting. Institutionalization of these issue areas over time as a result of the prioritization thereof, might be a powerful impact of global goalsetting on international organizations, who often form part of, or are the main constituents of institutionalization processes at the global level.

1.4.2 Existing knowledge about the impact of governing-through-goals on international organizations' behavior

This study analyzes the impact of global goals on international organizations, and hence contributes to a yet still limited literature with a similar research interest. For example, the earlier Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have been analyzed by Jolly (2004), who found that the involvement of international organizations, and especially UN agencies, was relevant when assessing the achievement of

goals. In this context, he noted that major economic organizations, including the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Trade Organization (WTO), had generally been 'disinterested' in global goals in the past, but had committed to the MDGs. Such commitment was seen as potentially impactful, as international organizations could increase government interest in a goal by explaining its relevance, place pressure on the need for implementation by advocating behind the scenes and could influence the mobilization of civil society actors. A few other studies on the engagement of international organizations with the MDGs have been conducted since, and direct attention to some (potential) markers of engagement in practice.

These studies on the MDGs indicate that international organizations did not just assist the 'first UN of governments' (Browne 2017) but could influence the content of the goals (Waage et al. 2010; Cornwall & Fujita 2012; Larionova 2020; Nattrass 2014). UNAIDS was able to pressure states to include an MDG on HIV/AIDS by teaming up with grass-roots organizations and influencing strategic international organizations including the World Bank and WTO (Nattrass 2014). More fundamentally, however, was the influence of the international development goals of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD), which had the strategic support of among others the World Bank and IMF and fed into the millennium declaration and subsequently into the MDGs (Waage et al. 2010; Cornwall & Fujita 2012). This again impacted the negotiated outcome. As the international development goals were 'born from a Development Assistance Committee project', they were seen as a one-sided deal favoring the interest of rich countries by developing countries (Larianova 2020, 8-9). Eventually, the inclusion of MDG8 on global partnerships helped gain sufficient support for the framework within the UN General Assembly. It has been argued that by impacting the formulation of the MDGs, (these) international organizations were able to shape many targets along sectoral lines, which allowed the continuation of siloed activity and a fragmented approach during implementation (Waage et al. 2010).

A second insight in the literature is that international organizations differed in the extent to which they integrated the MDGs into their own organizational identity (Jolly 2004; Konstantinov 2009; North 2010) and thereby impacted the extent to which the goals were implemented (Khor 2003; Jolly 2004). For the MDGs, the sectoral focus of many of the targets allowed international organizations to focus on a subset thereof during implementation. In multiple cases, it has been argued that this led to a vicious cycle in which the MDGs not only reflected but reinforced the isolation of international organizations and resulted in uneven progress across targets (Waage et al. 2010). For MDG 8 on partnerships specifically, it was argued soon after its agreement that the 'mainstream neo-liberal ideology of market fundamentalism' embedded in several international organizations – including but not limited to the IMF, World Bank, WTO and the OECD – would continue to form a roadblock to the achievement of the MDGs (Khor 2003). Although some international organizations were responsive to and willing to discuss the human rights framing in the MDGs, others, including the WTO, were eventually noted as 'falling behind' and 'being conservative' in the integration of this frame (Konstantinov 2009). As a result, existing paradigms and rules – for instance the WTO's aid and loan conditionalities – were not re-oriented to implement the MDGs. In some cases, international organizations (successfully) reframed agreed upon goals by adjusting their meaning-in-use, partially to prevent the goals from sparking potential (intra-)organizational discussions. In the case of MDG Target 7.D, which was initially focused on improving the conditions of people living in slums, it has been shown how this target was gradually changed into a 'Cities without Slums' goal (Huchzermeyer 2013). In a study on the global gender and education commitments encapsulated in MDG 3 (North 2010), it was suggested that the willingness of an organization to work on the goal depended on several intra-organizational factors. These included the extent to which an organization is already working on the goal, the perceptiveness of high-level officials to the goal, the extent to which the organizational perception of the topic aligns with that elaborated in the goal, and the extent to which goals can be linked to funding.

Overall, these studies do not make a particularly strong case for the impact of global goals on international organizations. Rather, they indicate that for the MDGs, international organizations were a factor impacting the goals throughout their life cycle. Studies on the MDGs also indicate a few variables, both intra- as well as extra-organizational, that might impact the likelihood of the organizational uptake of goals.

Although the SDGs follow a tradition of global goalsetting, they also have unique characteristics. We therefore cannot assume that earlier observations and trends will continue for this new set of goals. Importantly, the role of international organizations during the negotiations of the SDGs was changed precisely to give member states (as opposed to international organizations) a more direct influence over the negotiated outcome. The process leading up to the SDGs was, partially as a result thereof, more elaborate and inclusive than that of the MDGs (see Dodds et al. 2016; Kamau et al. 2018). It remains the case, however, that for the SDGs as well, international organizations constitute an important implementation partner.

Scholarly expectations about the (potential) impact of the SDGs on the behavior of international organizations, were mixed. There has been some optimism about the idea of a holistic and integrated agenda (see Appendix B; Appendix C). For international organizations, an agenda touching on numerous mandates might present a clear signal to put in the work that commitment to the SDGs requires. However, most scholars tend to be cautious. Scholars note that the SDGs are based on political compromises, which means that some contradictions and tensions between these goals exist and must be addressed during the implementation phase for the goals to have impact (Hickel 2019; Langford 2016; Young 2017). Furthermore, as prioritization devices, it has been argued that the SDGs might not provide a manageable enough set of goals to provide guidance and willingness to actors to achieve them (Underdal & Kim 2017). Furthermore, early studies indicate that the members of international organizations have since the adoption of the agenda indicated that they will de facto prioritize some goals over others during implementation, resulting in somewhat of a mixed signal (Forestier & Kim 2020).

To date, however, we know little about the impact of the SDGs on international organizations. We do have some insights based on a limited number of issue areas (including health, education, labor and the formation of partnerships) and organizations (most focusing on either the International Labor Organization or World Health Organization) that have been studied. These studies indicate that the SDGs might procedurally impact international organizations by emphasizing multistakeholder partnerships (Lauber et al. 2020: Mahajan 2019), might inspire processes of mutual constitution between international organizations during the process of measuring goals (Grek 2020) and could allow and even necessitate actors to reframe their work and thereby redefine or regain their legitimacy and role (Novitz 2020; Maupain 2020; Montesano et al. 2021). Some studies indicate that international organizations might have influenced some goals directly (Birkenkötter 2018; Sommer & Forman-Rabinovici 2020). They also note that international organizations could influence the SDGs through their operational work, for example by selectively focusing on indicators that serve their priorities during implementation (Meurs et al. 2019; Montesano 2023). Organizations could also take up or continue policies that form a roadblock towards goal attainment (James 2019). However, more research is needed into this broad set of goals and the plethora of international organizations that are expected to play a role in their implementation to draw firm conclusions.

We do not yet know if the prioritization presented by the SDGs is a strong enough incentive and comes with sufficient changes in the (organizational) environment in which organizations operate to result in behavioral change. For example, although the 2030 Agenda which encapsulates the SDGs calls for interinstitutional linkages and coordination, international organizations face existing financing structures that require them to show their individual added value to ensure organizational survival. This forms

just one example of the conflicting incentives that often exist, which have at times resulted in some type of hypocrisy, where organizations commit discursively or policy-wise, without being able to implement their obligations (Lipson 2007; Weaver 2008). This thesis therefore aims to contribute to the further exploration of the impact of global goals, and specifically the SDGs, on international organizations.

1.5 The scientific positioning of the research

Before starting to explore the impact of the SDGs on international organizations, it is important to expand upon the approach taken in this thesis. For this purpose, I now expand upon the philosophy of science underpinning it. Given the research question that forms my starting point, which focuses on the impact of a policy response - that of the SDGs - on international organizations, one might assume that this thesis takes a highly positivist approach. This starting point seemingly postulates a point in time (T=0) at which the intervention is absent, after which the intervention itself should be linked to empirically observable, causally traceable effects. Observing these effects can be used to look for information to verify (from a logical positivist approach) or falsify (from a Popperian critical rationalist approach) the idea that governing through goals can serve as a useful policy intervention, and thereby lead to (more or less) generalizable knowledge for political scientists and policymakers considering their options in the future.

However, it is more accurate to describe the philosophy of science underpinning this thesis as somewhat of a pragmatist one, for several reasons (see also Dooremalen et al. 2015: 367-421).

First, this thesis does not start from a primarily empirically informed hypothesis, but rather from the hypothesis that one, from a normative point of view, might hope holds true with a view to solving the world's most pressing societal issues (the societal-value hypothesis, explained below). The second reason is that in order to investigate this societal-value hypothesis, I use existing insights from international relations theory, which provides both a theory-laden and potentially underdetermined starting point for investigation. I thereby inherently take an approach that assumes the co-evolution of theory and empirics throughout the research.

Thirdly, ontologically I acknowledge that the SDGs as a policy intervention are somewhat *in flux* and that both the nature of the intervention itself (global goalsetting) and its effects (changes in behavior) will change throughout the lifespan of the goals. Fourth, epistemologically and methodologically, I posit the object of this research (that is, impact) and the approach taken to investigate it comes with inherent challenges. The research partially relies on research subjects that might at times be (politically) motivated to present a particular, potentially overly positive, account of impact. In the context of the perspectives offered by research subjects, the researcher cannot refrain from acting as somewhat of a judge and jury to give meaning to the research findings, which makes these findings themselves potential topic of (political) debate, despite best efforts at triangulation.

Below I expand upon each of these points.

1.5.1 The societal-value hypothesis: starting with the General Assembly

What one might call the central 'hypothesis' underpinning this thesis, namely that the SDGs might lead to (transformative) behavioral change, is not formulated based on existing empirical evidence convincingly pointing in this direction. Rather, it departs from the notion of the perceived, potential societal value of the goals.

Based on previous sets of global goals, studies that have looked into the overall effects of governing through goals present at best a mixed bag. At the country level, a meta-analysis which I co-authored found that the MDGs had had little effect on many developing countries (Appendix D; Hickmann et al. 2023). The goals that were reached or led to some successes have been noted to have been greatly influenced by factors that are difficult to link causally to governing through goals as a governance mechanism (Andresen & Iguchi 2017; Bernstein 2017). A case in point is the progress towards the eradication of poverty. The reduction in global income poverty was mainly due to a small number of countries experiencing rapid economic growth, including China, India, Indonesia and Vietnam (Lomazzi et al. 2014). Although it cannot be determined that governing through goals did not in any way contribute to China further intensifying its efforts towards poverty reduction, it is also clear that raising the population out of poverty was already a very important policy goal of Chinese officials (Andresen & Iguchi 2017, 172). When it comes to realizing behavioral change, in general, we are thus left with at best some type of agnosticism; we cannot for sure conclude that governing through goals has not had an effect, and some studies do state that goals might have moved funds within certain domains towards particular causes, like the health goal to policies to eradicate HIV/AIDS (Andresen & Iguchi 2017, 172). However, based on the existing evidence, one should hesitate to assume impact.

Based on the few existing studies on *behavioral* impact of governing through goals on international organizations, however, one might even expect the opposite, namely that international organizations, as they have done for the MDGs, will try to steer goals in some way, change them in practice, and potentially even form a roadblock towards goal attainment. However, as these studies are few, and the SDGs have their own unique characteristics, this empirical basis is not solid.

Rather, I start from what might be called the societal-value hypothesis. I take as a point of departure what those who have negotiated and agreed upon the SDGs envisioned as the societal value that the goals might lead to in a best-case scenario. This point is thus the 'transformative potential' that the General Assembly, in their efforts to solve the world's most pressing issues, assigned to the goals. It is the hypothesis one might hope holds true based on the normative assumption of sustainable development as a solution to our current societal issues. My ambition hence is to contribute knowledge to those aiming to solve societies' most pressing issues and contribute to better decision-making in the future.

Furthermore, the SDGs are a particular type of policy intervention with unique characteristics and a rather abstract notion of what it should achieve. Although the conclusions of this thesis will say something about the impact of governing through goals, they build on a particular set of global goals and a particular point in time for a set of international organizations with unique characteristics. I do hope that knowledge from this thesis might help inform future policy decisions, but I do note the need for some caution when it comes to generalization.

1.5.2 The co-evolution of theory and empirics

This societal-value hypothesis, however, presents a unique challenge. This challenge is formed by the rather abstract notion that the SDGs should lead to 'bold' and 'transformative' actions, without necessarily operationalizing what this means in practice.

To overcome this challenge, I use existing (theoretical) constructs as a starting point for observations. These constructs are among those mentioned by scientists as potential means through which governing through global goals might have an impact. In this study they include theories about coordination, orchestration, institutionalization and organizational engagement. They enable a more concrete empirical investigation of the impact of the SDGs on international organizations. However, given the limitations of this thesis, the choice for these constructs is not based on the idea that if one were to observe coordination, orchestration, institutionalization and organizational engagement, the criteria for transformative behavioral change would be met. Rather, in the context of an ill-defined concept – like bold and transformative action – they provide a means for further operationalization.

Using these theoretical constructs as the basis for observations therefore brings with it two realities. Firstly, this approach is inherently underdetermined (Dooremalen et al. 2015: 398). This means that many other theoretical constructs can and have in other studies been linked to the notion of transformation. It is (yet) unknown if the constructs chosen are sufficient or necessary criteria. More fundamentally even, the effectiveness of these constructs themselves is debated. In line with van Fraassen (from a constructivist empiricist point of view), this thesis does not assume the verity of the transformative potential of these constructs: institutionalization, coordination, orchestration, organizational engagement (ibid: 334). Rather, these constructs are included to provide a demarcation for the investigation linked to the existing web of beliefs in international relations, even though they remain disputed within it, in which they are mentioned as potential policy reactions in a fragmented global policy landscape ill-equipped to solve the societal issues of our time.

Secondly, this thesis does not assume neutral observation, given that it clearly takes existing theoretical constructs as a starting point. By utilizing these constructs – coordination, institutionalization, engagement and orchestration -, which are based on a number of assumptions from, among others, (constructivist) institutionalism, I assume that international organizations are important building blocks for global governance. In addition, by focusing on these building blocks through particular theoretical vantage points, I focus on certain aspects of organizational behavior (through the choice of particular policy documents, interview questions and other observational tools) and exclude others.

Although this thesis thus goes against the fundamental notions of classical empiricism, it forms a starting point for investigation which allows for a co-evolution, or bi-directional evolution of theory and observation. The strength of my approach is its focus on different cases by using different theoretical starting points that can all illuminate something about what governing through goals might do in practice. With this approach I not only test the impact of governing through goals, but also try to learn something about the theoretical constructs that remain disputed in International Relations research in turn. In practice, this bidirectionality often requires an abductive method. In most chapters of this thesis, the theoretical constructs are further operationalized based on an initial exploration of the meaning of this construct in the context of global goals, which in turn is used to collect observations.

1.5.3 The policy-intervention as an object in flux

Ontologically, I start from the notion that the policy response that forms the basis of the research itself does not exist as a static entity but as one that remains inherently contested and is designed to evolve depending on the (geographic) context in which it appears.

The SDGs, at face value, are a static set of goals, targets and indicators that might provide a basis for observation. However, where the goals provide abstract prescriptive notions like 'ending poverty' and 'reducing inequality', the targets and indicators do not fully operationalize these notions, as a number thereof themselves lack a target measure. Furthermore, the goals by design are meant to be translated by different governance levels to fit local realities. Looking at the goals as agreed upon by Member States thus does not automatically correspond to the goals as they will appear in practice. Even if I had a good idea of goals that might not, factually, apply to certain countries (like targets on transboundary aquifers that are only relevant for countries that have such entities), I would still not be sure how this translation will be made, given that the goals are political compromises and translation thus also depends on political priorities. Furthermore, existing scientific analyses of the goals themselves indicate that there are some inherent contradictions within the agenda, that will necessitate reconciliation in practice (e.g., Hickel 2019).

Although the attainment of the goals themselves is not the key focus of this thesis, as it is focused on political impacts, this does challenge this research. Here, I especially consider what one might reasonably expect from this policy response when it comes to its impact on international organizations, the main object of study. As the SDGs are based on the integrative notion of sustainable development as well as the contextual notion of translation, this does not lead to clear-cut expectations about the way in which translation should occur for international organizations. The most extreme outcome – both unrealistic and inefficient - would be when international organizations integrate the full set of 17 goals into their work. The other extreme, which seems to defy the notion of transformation, is one where international organizations focus only on those SDGs that connect to their mandate. What 'transformative action' entails in practice, is therefore something that requires some reflection-on-action-in-action, which means an initial investigation of what is occurring, which can then be used to further reflect on the adequacy thereof, and potential future improvements.

1.5.4 The (political) embeddedness of data: the need for expert assessment

Methodologically, although this thesis does share some methods with natural science, there is an important difference. I do not just lack the methodological tools to come to empirically undebatable outcomes, but I always have to play somewhat of a judge and jury of the different perspectives offered.

Epistemologically, I am interested in what is observable, but as mentioned above, there is no objective measure for more or less transformative change, which I posit as something that has to co-evolve with my observations. To make those observations, I am partially dependent on those active in international organizations. Of course, desk research alone leads to a number of policy documents and other published materials that provide a starting point for investigation. However, in most chapters of this thesis, desk research alone does not provide sufficient information about, among others, the relevance and use of such documents within a particular organization. In addition, desk research alone is at times wholly inadequate to gather relevant data, as is for example the case when investigating emerging coordination efforts, which can include highly informal efforts like knowledge sharing that often go unpublished. Furthermore, desk research does not provide sufficient information on agency as it is filled in in practice, for example in the case of institutionalization or orchestration. Furthermore, as I am

interested in the potential for policy change in real world contexts, interview data can also add the necessary context to changes that are or are not introduced publicly.

To gather the information necessary, I am thus partially dependent on information provided by individuals. This opens the investigation to the potential of bias, as this research is conducted in a political context where organizations might consider aligning their work with the SDGs, at least outwardly, as a factor impacting their image, legitimacy, potential funding opportunities and other factors impacting organizational survival. Although I often use interviews in this thesis to triangulate and explore ideas that arise from desk research, at times this type of research also requires further expert assessment when statements seem contradictory, explain earlier observations only partially or are insufficient to come to a full-fledged explanation. This would not be warranted in the context of neo-positivism, where a statement is either fully logical (based on internal logic without a need for observation) or fully factual (based on observations in the outside world) but is unavoidable in the current context. This relates somewhat to the idea that to come to conclusions, one always needs to take a 'conceptual leap' to some extent (Gammelgaard 2017; Klag & Langley 2013).

1.6 Research methods

To be able to investigate impact in practice, the research design of this thesis includes three key design elements. These include i) a case-study approach, ii) diversity in the objects and scales of analysis and iii) a primarily qualitative, in-depth analysis. This design enables an investigation of the link between behavioral change and the introduction of the SDGs through an in-depth analysis of several cases. As the case-studies differ in their research scales and objects, this design allows a broad investigation into what behavioral change means in practice, to what extent it can be linked (causally) to the goals and what mechanisms and conditions enable or deter behavioral change. In Table 1.1 below, I summarize the key theories, methodology and data used for each of the chapters. Below, I expand upon the key three design elements of the research individually.

1.6.1 A case-study approach

Each chapter of this thesis is based on one or more case studies. There are multiple ways to identify case studies, including the unit of analysis, a process under study or an outcome or end product (e.g., Stake 1995; Merriam 2009; Hyett et al. 2014). Each chapter of this thesis focuses on a specific (set of) international organizations as case studies of impact. Chapter 2 focuses on the World Bank; and Chapter 3 on the five United Nations Regional Commissions. Chapter 4 looks at two sets of international organizations, made up of custodian agencies linked to indicators of two SDGs. The first set includes the custodian agencies of SDG 3 on better health and well-being; World Health Organizations, the UN Children's Fund, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division, the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDs, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and the UN Organization on Drugs and Crime. The second set includes the custodian agencies of SDG 10 on reducing inequalities; the World Bank, the International Labour Organization, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the International Monetary Fund, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs Financing for Sustainable Development Office, the International Trade Centre, the International Organization for Migration and two of the organizations included in the previous set: the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. Chapter 5 centers on an emerging network, with the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) as a key coordinating entity. The key rationale for using a case-based approach is that cases allow for a closer look at 'behavioral change' in practice, something that is not yet highly

operationalized within the 2030 Agenda. In this context, case studies allow, among others, a more careful examination of (the interaction effects among) structural and agent-based variables, path dependencies and strategic interactions leading to (the absence of) behavioral change (Bennett & Elman 2007).

However, each case was selected to fit within a design that is based on a key theoretical point of departure. Each organization was selected because there was a reason to expect some type of impact to occur for the construct under study, including coordination, institutionalization, orchestration and engagement. The World Bank was chosen as a likely case of engagement, given its broad mandate and ability to act given its resource base. It also formed an entity likely to impact other actors within and outside of its direct influence, as it has states as clients and is known for its (influential) knowledge products and standards. The World Bank case also is intriguing as past sets of goals did not significantly shape this organization, thereby making it a high potential, but also potentially challenging case.

The United Nations Regional Commissions have been noted by academics as potentially playing an important role with regards to the mechanism of orchestration and have thus been signaled as relevant to investigate. The commissions form a set of yet unexplored UN system entities that might provide novel insights compared to the previously studied High-level Political Forum, and other regional entities that have shallowly been explored. If impact were observed here, it could potentially be of great impact in the context of the SDGs.

The sets of organizations focused on in Chapter 4, when discussing indicator custodianship to explore the impact of the SDGs on inter-agency coordination, were chosen because of their variation on the degree of fragmentation. Indicator custodianship is a novel role that many international organizations have received in the context of the SDGs. It offers an organization the responsibility for the data-collection and aggregation and the reporting on data for one or more indicators that form part of the SDG indicator framework. The sets of indicator custodians were selected on the variable of fragmentation, as this would most clearly allow an investigation of the impact of the SDGs on this variable in this new context.

The network coordinated by UNEP in Chapter 5 forms a likely case for impact, given its temporal connection to the SDG process: I saw an upsurge in institutional activity around 'sustainable consumption and production' in the same year that the SDGs were agreed upon. This means that in terms of timing, those engaged in institutionalizing 'sustainable consumption and production' were in a relatively likely position to be impacted by the SDG process.

Although from the point of view of hypothesis testing, choosing least likely cases of engagement might be attractive, given the scientific starting point of this thesis, I see likely cases as more fruitful. Likely cases can potentially make scientific as well as societal contributions. Choosing cases where at least some empirical manifestation of behavioral change seems likely allows one not only to identify what behavioral change might mean for the cases under study, but can also lead to positive examples which might inspire other actors in the future. Furthermore, whereas a least likely case might prove the strength of an impact in practice – if it can happen here, it can happen anywhere – few theories actually survive such test (Bennet and Elman 2007). Furthermore, in terms of theory-testing, it would also be scientifically powerful if impact remained largely absent in cases where it should be relatively likely. In that sense, I perceive cases where impact seems likely as interesting from both a scientific as well as a societal/policy point of view. Such cases form a test of the strength of impact, can help identify potential conditions and mechanisms that are present or absent in cases where I do or do not note this expected impact, and can thereby help identify potential best practices or necessary changes to existing structures moving forward.

1.6.2 Diversity in objects and scales of analysis

A key facet of this research design is that each chapter has its own object, with different scales of analysis. This diversity allows a focus on different forms through which behavioral change might materialize. For each chapter, I operationalize impact as the potential manifestation of the 'Theories' noted in Table 1.1. When studying the case of the World Bank (Chapter 2), I thus investigate if the SDGs have a notable impact through the lens of organizational engagement. When studying the case of the UN Regional Commissions (Chapter 3), I am investigating if impact of the SDGs is observable through increased efforts of international organizations to take on an orchestrating role. When studying the case of two sets of indicator custodians operating in different institutional set-ups (Chapter 4), I investigate if impact of the SDGs is observable through more coordination. When studying UNEP and the One Planet Network (Chapter 5), I investigate if impact of the SDGs is observable on efforts to institutionalize issue areas. This set-up allows for an investigation of a range of international organizations, as well as a range of potential changes in the behavior of international organizations. As mentioned in the previous section, most case-studies were selected because there was at least some reason to expect at least some behavioral change to be observable.

The diversity of theoretical starting points for each of the chapters also leads to diversity in the scales of analysis in this thesis. Organizational engagement and orchestration are both studied at the level of an international organization, making this organization (and its direct environment) the key level of analysis. When studying institutionalization, however, the level of analysis shifts towards a network of entities with UNEP as a coordinating entity. When studying coordination, finally, the level of analysis shifts towards a comparison between two collections of international organizations. By studying international organizations at the micro (individual) - and meso (networks and collections of entities) level, I am able to study behavioral change from different perspectives, which enriches the analysis.

1.6.3 Qualitative, in-depth analysis based on a range of approaches

To analyze the case studies, I take a qualitative approach, combining document analysis and semi-structured expert interviews. Chapters 3 and 4 both use a qualitative comparative case-study set-up, and Chapter 5 uses a process tracing approach. Chapter 2 forms the clearest mixed-method study of this thesis, as I include a quantitative text analysis of a set of 326 key documents in addition to qualitative document analysis and 23 semi-structured expert interviews. The key rationale for using a primarily qualitative approach is that it allows for an in-depth investigation and thick descriptions of the activities of international organizations accounting for the context of inquiry. Although I thereby explore cases with unique contexts, I balance this with a more general theoretical examination (Gammelgaard 2017). Qualitative analysis, although potentially taking different forms, can deliver explanatory insight, rigor, and reliability, and within International Relations research is especially popular because of its potential for (redirecting) policy (Moravcsik 2014).

For the cases, a qualitative approach, which includes an assessment of the individual policies of international organizations, can help identify 'outputs' that might be linked to the introduction of the SDGs. These can be policy documents and initiatives created to implement the SDGs, but also elements of organizational design. Combining document analysis with expert interviews, furthermore, allows to investigate the extent of a link between outputs and outcomes. Do policy documents agreed upon actually have any meaning within the organization? Are they being implemented? Are they considered important within the organization? Are they likely to be changed or discontinued? Were there any competing ideas that might have provided an alternative path, and why were these not chosen? To summarize, this approach is able to better assess not only to what extent the SDGs might be properly noted

as a key rationale for changes that might be observed through quantitative large-*n* analysis, but also to what extent policies might be expected to turn into practice, and why particular actions are or are not taken. Such an approach can identify not only potentially interesting policy approaches, but also the mechanisms that lead to actors using these in the first place, and the reasons they might have for (not) being able to act upon their own ambitions. This approach can thus help identify conditions, mechanisms and reasons for acting, which can inform policymakers of the future. Table 1.1 Research design per chapter below summarizes the research design per chapter, noting for each chapter which theories, methodologies and data inform it.

Table 1.1 Research design per chapter

Chapter title	**2. How the World Bank Engages with the Sustainable Development Goals: A case of Organizational Jiu-Jitsu**	**3. International Organizations as orchestrators of Sustainable Development: The case of the United Nations Regional Commissions**	**4. International Organizations as Custodians of Sustainable Development? Global governance fragmentation and coordination for the SDGs**	**5. The Impact of the Sustainable Development Goals on Global Policies on Sustainable Consumption and Production**
Theory	Organizational engagement	Orchestration	Coordination	Institutionalization of an emerging regime
Methodology	Mixed-method case-study analysis	Qualitative comparative case-study analysis of five organizations	Qualitative comparative case-study analysis of two sets of organizations (6 and 9 entities)	Explaining outcome process-tracing
Data	23 semi-structured expert interviews 326 key documents for quantitative text analysis (grey literature) Desk study of relevant grey literature (policy documents, evaluations, strategy documents) Relevant webpages	18 semi-structured expert interviews Desk study of relevant grey literature (annual reports, strategy documents, evaluations) Relevant webpages	19 semi-structured exploratory expert interviews 12 semi-structured interviews Grey literature (consultation documents, indicator metadata, policy documents) Relevant webpages	19 semi-structured expert interviews 48 key documents (grey literature, annual reports, independent evaluations, strategy documents) Relevant webpages

1.6.4 Data-collection

As each case comes with its own set of actors, scales of analysis and research objectives, I used a broad range of data sources, combined with a set of semi-structured expert interviews to collect the necessary empirical importation. In all cases, information from multiple sources needed to be combined to come to an assessment of impact for the cases under study. Below, I expand upon both elements in more detail.

Document analysis

To study the impact of the SDGs, I chose four key theoretical starting points, which I operationalize in each chapter into potentially observable categories. Observations were thereafter informed by a broad range of (data-)sources, including hundreds of documents, several databases and a host of webpages and news articles. To filter potentially relevant sources of information, I demarcated the cases in time. All cases consider relevant developments since 2012, when the negotiations of the SDGs started, and included all relevant information published since then. This is in line with the conceptualization of the policy intervention of global goalsetting as a process with multiple phases. As these developments do not occur in a vacuum, I did often read materials published before 2012, although these mostly served as a historical contextualization rather than the object of the analysis.

As all cases included the study of one or more international organizations, nearly all cases rely on reports published by these entities, including Annual Reports, strategies and other knowledge products. In the case of the World Bank, annual reports, recurring knowledge products (flagship reports) and speeches of presidents were inputs for the quantitative text analysis. In the case of the emerging network for Sustainable Consumption and Production, annual Magazines, progress reports, meeting minutes and reporting from a series of consultations formed a key input for the process-tracing approach. Beyond such general publications, I was interested in any documentation directly related to the introduction of the SDGs. In the case of the UN Regional Commissions, for example, this included a pre-SDG publication on the position that these entities envisioned for themselves in the governance of the goals, as well as reporting on their prioritization of the goals after they were agreed upon, and declarations emerging from their regional fora for Sustainable Development, which focus on the evaluation of action on the SDGs.

Beyond publications of the international organizations that I studied, I also relied on documentation from processes in which these entities participated, and several (external) databases that could provide (objective) information about their behavior. For the study on indicator custodianship, this included a number of databases with information about indicator metadata, documents surrounding the (negotiation process of the) Inter-Agency Expert Group on the SDGs and the database of indicator focal points. For the study on the World Bank, this included a number of databases produced by the organization itself, like its organizational indicators of success and its SDG Atlas, but also information about the indicator negotiations.

Although information presented by interviewees was used partially to triangulate what is presented in policy documents (expanded upon in the next section), another source of information important for this purpose was independent evaluation reports. In the case of the World Bank, this included evaluations from its Independent Evaluation Office. In the case of Sustainable Consumption and Production, this included a number of independent evaluations of the 10YFP, and the One Planet Network conducted by different evaluation entities. In the case of the UN Regional Commissions, this included evaluations from the UN's Office of Internal Oversight Services and its Joint Inspections Unit. Although in

some cases, like in that of the World Bank, the unit is not strictly operating outside of the purview of the organization, the reports provide at least a more nuanced, and oftentimes critical view of the activities of the relevant entities than would emerge from people working on these activities within an organization or a document published to report on the progress of an organization. The latter might in a number of cases be biased towards showcasing fruitful developments and place less emphasis on areas where impact is lacking or where action is absent. Including independent evaluation reports thus provided a means to include a more critical perspective on a number of developments.

The operationalization of the theoretical points of departure provided a major guide in the selection of relevant documentation, and within this documentation, a guide for the relevant passages and developments. However, another way to identify relevant documentation included suggestions from actors directly involved in the spheres of activity under investigation, namely the interviewees, upon which I expand below.

Semi-structured expert interviews

In addition to documents, I conducted numerous semi-structured expert interviews. Within the set-up of this research, interviews served as a method of data-collection, but also to triangulate and supplement other findings, like those resulting from desk-research and quantitative text analysis. Overall, I conducted 91 unique semi-structured expert interviews. The average duration of individual interviews was an hour. In several cases, these interviews were followed up with additional requests for clarification, or requests for specific documents or information about initiatives referred to during the interview. Interviewees ranged from staff from a range of international organizations to independent evaluators and representatives from civil society organizations and academia. Most interviews were undertaken with individuals, but in a few cases, interviews were undertaken with more than one individual.

For each study, a list of interview topics was created by operationalizing the key theoretical starting point underpinning the case study. For the study of the World Bank, I divided organizational engagement into several phases based on the formulation of a policy cycle for the SDGs, with interviewees receiving questions about activities undertaken in each phase. For the study of the UN Regional Commissions, interviewees were questioned about activities in three types of orchestration activities. For the study of two sets of indicator custodians, interviewees were questioned about three types of coordination activities. For the study of the emerging institutionalization of Sustainable Consumption and Production, interviewees were questioned about developments within three constitutive elements of institutionalization.

In all cases, operationalization of the theories used in this study required some type of exploratory investigation, like an initial set of interviews, as in the study on indicator custodianship, or desk research, as in most other cases. I thus used an abductive approach when designing the key interview topics, where I started with initial observations to ensure the theories were operationalized in a way that would allow meaningful observations in the empirical context under investigation.

Based on the interview topics, for each study an overall list of questions was created. Interviewees were selected based on their potential ability to answer one or more questions on this list. Finding interviewees thus required substantive investigation into people who might have the relevant knowledge, background and expertise, and a tailor-made list of questions (taken from the larger set) per interviewee. For some studies, selecting relevant interviewees was quite straightforward, as specific individuals were responsible for the behavior that I was interested in. This is the case, for example, for the study of indicator custodianship, where each SDG indicator relies on a ‘focal point’. For this study, indicator focal points were the only actors with the relevant knowledge. For other studies, I

traced individuals who had participated in the processes I was studying (as in the case of the World Bank and the One Planet Network), as well as people with relevant positions (as in most cases people who have a responsibility for SDG-related activities) and used a snowballing technique to find additional interviewees.

To decide the number of interviews, I did not rely on a predetermined number. Instead, the number of interviews undertaken was driven by the research questions formulated. As I started each study with an overarching list of questions resulting from the interview topics identified based on the theory focused on, I could track to what extent additional interviewees were adding to the answering of these questions. It was therefore also possible to note when a point of saturation was reached in individual studies. This saturation occurred when additional interviewees no longer provided novel information or insights. Defining the empirical saturation point, however, is not an exact science. Furthermore, given the sheer size of some of the entities under study, it is possible that different sentiments are present in different parts of the organization that might shed novel light on the questions under study. However, I always relied on individuals most directly involved in the activities I was interested in, with the biggest influence on outcomes and (future) decisions, rather than a larger set of individuals that was not actually engaged in the activities under study.

1.7 Dissertation outline

I will now give a short overview of each chapter of this thesis and how the chapters relate to the key research problems outlined in the previous section.

In Chapter 2, the primary aim is to investigate the potential of the SDGs to steer an international organization, given its intra-organizational set-up and extra-organizational pressures. To investigate this, I define the different phases of the SDG governing process and track the activities of the World Bank, the key case-study, in these different phases. To define how engagement with the SDG process differs from some existing observations of organizational engagement, I posit the idea of organizational jiu-jitsu. This chapter is within this thesis the one most clearly focused on the potential of the SDGs as a global agenda *steering* international organizations.

In Chapter 3, I focus more directly on the role of international organizations as being inspired to *steer* others towards SDG implementation, in this case through the mechanism of orchestration. In this chapter, I focus on a set of UN entities, namely the United Nations Regional Commissions. Utilizing the theoretical framework of orchestration, I study how international organizations, as important building blocks of the global governance system, are (re-)positioning themselves because of the SDGs. I define several potential roles organizations might take in this context and observe those realized in practice.

In Chapter 4, I focus on the impact of a novel role that numerous international organizations have directly received as part of the SDG process, namely that of indicator custodianship, through which they are supposed to steer towards SDG data-collection. I use fragmentation theory to establish how this novel role has created an institutional set-up in which international organizations are expected to operate. I thereafter provide an operationalization of inter-agency coordination to study the impact of this complex system of arrangements in practice. Here the emergence of a new role can be seen as an effort to steer international organizations, but also immediately positions these organizations vis a vis a range of third parties as a steering entity within the process of data-collection. Here, the focus is on the theoretical construct of coordination.

In Chapter 5, I focus on an issue area where international organizations are active but have not yet been able to successfully fill the institutional space surrounding an issue area. Within the emerging

regime complex on sustainable consumption and production, I trace to what extent the agreement on an SDG impacts the potential of international organizations and others to steer towards more institutionalization. I focus here on the extent to which having a global goal allows actors to create a better position to steer an issue area covered by a goal, something that might simultaneously transform these actors.

All combined, these chapters investigate the impact of the SDGs on international organizations, which are supposed to change their own behavior, but also their behavior vis-a-vis other actors to realize the transformative potential of the goals.

In addition to Chapters 2 through 5, which are based on the first-authored papers that informed this thesis, Chapter 6 presents the key conclusions of this thesis, and Chapter 7 offers further reflections and suggestions for future research.

The thesis also includes four key appendices (Appendix A through D), which are referred to at different points in this thesis. These appendices are based on publications I have co-authored throughout my PhD.

Appendix A is based on a book chapter on governance fragmentation and provides an extensive analysis of the existing knowledge on this topic. It has been included since governance fragmentation forms an important part of the setting for the international organizations studied in this thesis and features especially prominently in Chapter 4. The added value of Appendix A is that it provides a broader reflection on the fragmentation literature than was possible in the journal article that informed Chapter 4. I contributed to this chapter by helping to collect the relevant literature for review, partaking in the meta-analysis of the literature and contributing to the writing process and review of the publication.

Appendix B is based on a book chapter on governance through global goals and provides an extensive analysis of the existing knowledge on this topic. It has been included since governance through goals forms the key policy response studied in this thesis. The added value of Appendix B is that it provides a very extensive reflection on the existing literature surrounding this policy response. I contributed to this chapter by helping to collect the relevant literature for review, partaking of the meta-analysis of the literature and contributing to the writing process and review of the publication.

Appendix C is based on a book chapter on the global governance impact of the Sustainable Development Goals. It has been included since it provides a meta-analysis of the most recent literature on the global level impact of the goals. The value of Appendix C is that it provides an overview of global impact, which includes some information on the existing knowledge base on the impact of the goals on international organizations. I contributed to this chapter by discussing the conceptual framework with the author team, helping to collect the relevant literature for review, partaking of the meta-analysis of the literature and contributing to the writing process and review of the publication.

Appendix D is based on a journal article looking into success factors for global goalsetting. It is based on the predecessors of the Sustainable Development Goals, the Millennium Development Goals. The Appendix has been included as it provides additional information about the impact of the Millennium Development Goals, which are referred to at multiple points in this thesis. I contributed to this article by engaging in the joint process of coming to a theoretical approach, partaking of the meta-analysis of the literature and contributing to the writing process and review of the publication.

CHAPTER 2

How the World Bank Engages with the Sustainable Development Goals: A Case of Organizational Jiu-Jitsu

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Abstract

In 2015, the United Nations agreed on 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to mobilize various actors, including international organizations, for a global transformation towards sustainability. The expectation was that international organizations would assist in the implementation of the goals and encourage, support, or coordinate others to work towards their achievement. But have international organizations over the last eight years changed their behavior because of the SDGs? We present an in-depth examination of how the World Bank, an influential international organization with a broad development mandate, has engaged with the SDGs, especially with SDG 10 that seeks to reduce inequalities. Based on a mixed-method approach that included the study of 326 key documents and 23 interviews, we found no evidence of a policy impact of the SDGs on the World Bank. Instead, we conclude that the World Bank's engagement with the SDGs can best be described as "organizational jiu-jitsu", mobilizing the metaphor of the ancient martial art in which an actor uses the force and strength of the opponent to advance one's own position. We argue that the World Bank used the growing momentum of the SDGs to further its strategic objectives without being influenced by the SDGs in turn. The bank engaged with the SDGs selectively; efforts to integrate the goals into organizational practices remained limited; and their inclusion in country-level processes is primarily voluntary. These findings, which may be similar for other powerful international organizations, raise important questions about the ability of global goal setting to realize a transformative impact.

Keywords

Sustainable Development Goals, International Organizations, Organizational Jiu-Jitsu, World Bank, Inequality, SDG 10

2.1 Introduction

International organizations are expected to partake in the governance, promotion and support of the SDGs. Many international organizations already participated in the development of the goals (Cormier 2018) and serve as so-called "custodians" of the SDG indicators that are being developed to measure progress on the goals (van Driel et al., 2022). However, it is still unclear how global goals are used once they have been agreed upon. Notably, how do global goals affect the processes and policies of international organizations. For example, do their internal organizational structures, priorities, and procedures change because of the goals? This question is important for both the theory of international relations and the practice of global sustainability governance; yet little is known about how international organizations engage with the SDGs.

To address this knowledge gap, we conducted a case study of the relationship between the SDGs and one important international organization, the World Bank. The World Bank plays a significant role in global economic governance due to its broad mandate, its vast resource base, its frequent and regular interactions with governments as clients, and its myriad publications and databases (Weaver & Park 2007). In 2020, the World Bank's total commitments amounted to USD 77.1 billion, it had 12,300 full-time staff, and it operated in 145 countries (World Bank 2020). World Bank projects cover a range of areas from building schools to fighting disease, providing water and electricity, and environmental protection, and as such, they are linked to most SDGs.

Among these many links, we focus here on the World Bank's engagement with SDG 10, the goal that aims at reducing inequalities within countries and among countries. Inequality was not covered by the SDGs' predecessors, the Millennium Development Goals. Moreover, prior to the inclusion of inequality in the 2030 Agenda, the World Bank was criticized for not embracing inequality reduction as a goal and for taking instead an instrumental approach to the issue, in which inequality policies were seen as useful as long as they contributed to reducing (extreme) poverty or promoting average economic growth (Saiz & Donald 2017, 1030; Oestreich 2018). Nevertheless, World Bank officials participated in the negotiations for SDG 10, and the bank has stated its ambition to help catalyze the SDGs through "thought leadership, global convening, and country-level uptake" (World Bank Group 2021d).

This raises the question of whether the SDGs, particularly SDG 10 on reducing inequality, have influenced the agenda, communication strategy, organizational set-up and through this the work of the World Bank. We arrive here at a cautious answer. We find that despite calls for transformative steps, the World Bank's engagement with the SDGs can best be characterized as "organizational jiu-jitsu", a concept that we borrow from Japanese martial art, where it describes the act of one combatant using and transforming the strength and power of another to advance its own interests (Hopkins 2015). In political terms, we conceptualize organizational jiu-jitsu as the behavior of an international organization that strategically uses the power of global goals in its favor to reinforce its own policies or interests, while minimizing the chance of being itself reshaped or transformed by these goals. The ways in which organizations limit the need for overall adjustment are likely to affect the room for maneuver of other actors in the (organizational) environment.

I structured this chapter as follows. In Section 2, I assess the research gap on the engagement of international organizations with global goals. In Section 3, I present the methodology. In Section 4, I present the findings. Section 5 discusses the concept of organizational jiu-jitsu, and in Section 6, I conclude.

2.2 International Organizations and Global Goals

Global goals such as the SDGs are unique governance mechanisms, and they need to be seen as such in International Relations theory. The SDGs are, in essence, universal, time-bound and legally nonbinding policy objectives agreed upon by governments. They come close to prescriptive international norms but are generally more specific, and they can be highly ambitious (Jolly 2004; Fukuda-Parr 2014; Vijge et al. 2020). The overarching UN program "2030 Agenda" presented the SDGs in 2015 as a "supremely ambitious and transformative vision" that should be accompanied by "bold and transformative steps" with "scale and ambition" (United Nations General Assembly 2015, 1-3). Scholars noted that the goals had the potential to form overarching and crosscutting norms that integrate social and environmental considerations into new definitions of development (Biermann et al. 2017; Stevens & Kanie 2016). For international organizations, this would require them to refocus their priorities, redefine their legitimacy and role (Maupain 2020), and reformulate short-term vested interests (Kamau et al., 2018).

Many international organizations have committed to the SDGs since 2015. To date, however, studies on the engagement of these organizations with global goals remain scarce (e.g., Grek 2020; Montesano et al. 2021; van Driel et al. 2022). Early studies have focused on implementation, noting the efforts of international organizations to 'cherry-pick' goals (Forestier & Kim 2020; Bogers et al. 2023), to engage in selective mainstreaming (Meurs et al. 2019), or to continue to adopt policies that are barriers to goal attainment (James 2019). However, little is known about the influence of international organizations within the process of governance through goals, and about the influence global goals in turn have on international organizations.

Prior International Relations research can offer some expectations about the engagement of international organizations. The idea of mutual constitution, for instance, helps to understand international organizations as active norm entrepreneurs and at the same time as agencies shaped by external forces (Finnemore & Sikkink 2001; Park 2006; Grek 2020). In this literature, international organizations may resist, adapt to, or reshape norms depending on the configuration of variables. Scholars of historical institutionalism add here that all outcomes may vary and be influenced by temporality, such as the timing and sequence of events that condition and create path dependencies for later events (Keohane 2017; Fioretos 2011).

Because the SDGs have been adopted by global consensus, they could well incentivize behavioral change. From a principal-agent perspective (Nielson & Tierney 2003, 246; Park 2009, 110), however, the SDGs also leave much room for discretion. The principal would be here not a unified entity, because states are still allowed to prioritize some of the 17 goals during implementation (Langford 2016; Young 2017; Forestier & Kim 2020). In general, global goals might be a low priority for international organizations that have many other assignments that are often more binding, have more urgent deliverables and more repercussions in case of inaction. Furthermore, the SDGs, although presented as a holistic agenda, have many internal contradictions that must be addressed in implementation (Hickel 2019). Overall, in a principal-agent perspective, this would leave much room for agency slack, including efforts to minimize efforts to execute the SDGs, or shift policy away from the wishes of (some) principal(s) (Hawkins et al. 2006). Yet principal-agent theory does not give much information about the exact behavior of international organizations that is to be expected.

From a constructivist perspective, international organizations would be influenced by many intra-organizational variables, including their identity, mandate, structure, bureaucratic culture, and leadership (Vetterlein 2007; Park 2012; Tallberg et al., 2018; Park 2006). The uptake of norms in behavioral templates, or scriptwriting, for example, has been argued to depend on struggles within and between the board of directors and staff of international organizations (Kentikelenis & Seabrooke 2017). The breath

of the SDGs, covering nearly all areas of global governance, however, is at odds with international organizations that over time have become highly functionally differentiated and that operate through intra-organizational compromises.

Viewed from the perspective of organizational ecology, it is evident that international organizations operate in a siloed and fragmented governance system with significant resource constraints (Bogers et al. 2022a; b). The speed and degree of SDG implementation would result from calculations about its (potential) impact on organizational survival (Abbott, Green & Keohane 2016). This calculation will partially be shaped by perceived pressure from third parties, including civil society to socialize the SDGs and public sentiment towards the goals. These will be weighed against other external pressures, including those resulting from policy failures, external shocks, and the prevailing intellectual climate, which can all impact SDG uptake.

Within global governance, the SDGs might also be expected to feed into conflicting material and normative pressures (Weaver 2008). The SDGs are promoted as a holistic agenda, but states, through their limited financial contributions and their own cherry-picking, often maintain the incentives for functional differentiation. If pressures of differentiation are internalized in organizational structures, processes and ideologies without being resolved, the result might be the "the organization of hypocrisy" (Lipson 2007); that is, contradictory activities that proliferate in different parts of an organization, or a gap in organizational outputs, such as between talk, decision (discursive commitments, mandate) and action (implementation). Without attention to potential negative trade-offs between goals, selective implementation may undermine rather than support the implementation of the SDGs.

Other studies have shown that international organizations adopt many activities to cope with contradicting internal and external pressures. Among these are shallow norm diffusion (Tallberg et al., 2018), the modification of norms through the creation of benchmarks (Waage et al., 2010; Cornwall & Fujita, 2012; Joshi & O'Dell, 2013; Nattrass 2014), and a focus on norms validated by key actors in their environment (Gutner 2005). Soft management tools such as policy advice, monitoring, reporting, and lending program conditionalities have also been used to (re)shape norms in line with organizational ambitions (Alvarez 2016; Ylönen 2017). To extend their authority and facilitate norm diffusion, some international organizations also use their own knowledge-production to feed into global policy discourses (Zapp 2021). This has facilitated paradigm maintenance by "teaching" specific norms and "judging" compliance (Broome et al., 2018). Organizations also exert influence through close relationships with other organizations or grassroots channels (Linnér 2006; Park 2010; Arias 2015; Grek 2020; Mahajan 2019; Laubber et al., 2020), for instance in attempts of international organizations to change the anticipated decisions in overlapping organizations to prevent rules that might bring negative consequences for their own work (Margulis 2021).

Overall, the review of the theoretical literature in International Relations research shows that there are no clear expectations about the concrete impact of global goals on international organizations, and conversely on the effects of international organizations on the emergence and eventual functioning of global goals. The concrete relations between global goals and international organizations will thus stand at the center of this investigation, with the empirical example of the relationship of the SDGs with the World Bank as one of the largest and most influential international organizations. Before I report on the empirical research, I next present the methodology.

2.3 Methodology

The study of the engagement of the World Bank with the SDGs builds on a mixed-method approach that combines quantitative text analysis, extensive document analysis and semi-structured expert interviews. I study the period from 2012, when the negotiations for the SDGs started, up to 2021. Among the 17 SDGs, I focus on SDG 10 on reducing inequalities, for three reasons. First, reducing inequalities was not covered by the Millennium Development Goals, which makes the determination of novel patterns of engagement easier. Second, the goal of reducing inequalities relates closely to the mandate of the World Bank, making it a most-likely case for engagement for the World Bank. Third, by focusing on a novel case where engagement by the bank seems likely, I can look for patterns of engagement that might be more indirect, subtle, or convoluted in other cases, and can thereby illuminate potential expectations for future research.

I structure the analysis according to key facets of the policy cycle, where actors move from deciding on topics, goals, targets and benchmarks to organizational mainstreaming, implementation, and review processes (Jann & Wegrich, 2007; Vijge et al., 2020). I look at five phases: agenda-setting; discursive uptake; organizational adjustment; country-level processes; and global review processes. Agenda-setting and global reviews are at the UN-level and involve a broad range of actors. The other three phases are internal to an organization, focusing on how global goals interact with organizational communication, set-up, and operational activities. Theoretically, however, all variables might play a role in these phases. For example, pressure from civil society to take up the SDGs in organizational communications might impact discussions on organizational reporting. I now elaborate on each phase individually.

First, agenda-setting describes activities that shape the issues that policymakers focus on (Kingdon 1995). International organizations may be affected by new issues as they are incorporated into global goals, but they may also try to shape the content of these goals and benchmarks by promoting their own objectives on the global agenda. An effective frame can be connected to the values, priorities, and commitments of other actors, has technical credibility, and can be linked to an organization's capacity (Princen 2011). It can also be spread through networks and stakeholders outside of an institution. To analyze agenda-setting, I focus on the negotiations of the SDG goals, targets (2012-2015) and indicators (which lasted until March 2017).

Second, discursive uptake describes attempts to change the language that is used to conceptualize, frame, and ultimately define an issue (Moon 2019). Organizations may adopt the SDGs as a comprehensive agenda but may also prioritize some goals and indicators over others (Meurs et al., 2019), reframe their work or targets after adoption (Birkenkötter 2018; Bentley 2019; James 2019; Meurs et al., 2019; Larionova 2020; Sommer & Forman-Rabinovici 2020), or make superficial references to the goals without changing policies.

Third, organizational adjustment pertains to changes within an organization, which might lead to the incorporation of goals into their organizational identity. Structures, policy settings, and instruments may change, including being extended through layering, adapted to suit new objectives, replaced entirely, or phased out gradually in favor of new methods of operation (Vetterlein & Moschella 2014). Activities might be evaluated against new goals, but may also be subject to (deliberate) strategic ambiguity (Mallard and McGoey 2018). For the analysis of organizational change, I focus on the overall organizational set-up, the means through which work is evaluated (indicators of success) and the means through which work is funded.

Fourth, country-level processes refer to activities of international organizations at the country-level, which can also be extended, adapted, dismantled, or replaced. This category is distinct as managerial processes, including definitions, standards, and procedures for borrowing and reporting; and it can

affect third parties, including state clients that have agreed to a workplan for receiving support (Alvarez 2016; Gutner 2005). Country-level processes can also include grassroots level activities and influence national policy debates (e.g., Linnér 2006). For the analysis, I focus on the so-called Country Partnership Frameworks of the World Bank that guide concrete country programs and projects.

Fifth, global review processes include global monitoring and evaluation. The continuous evaluation of the SDGs allows for network-based engagement of international organizations, which are invited as observers. This engagement allows actors to influence or be influenced by others who push their preferred frames and align adjustments to implementation (Broome et al., 2018; Grek 2020). For the analysis, I focus on the review of SDG 10, which took place in 2019, and the review of the SDG 10 indicators within the overall review of the SDG indicator framework, which took place in 2020.

To get an overall picture of the World Bank's activities, I undertook desk-analysis of documents related to or informative for the organizations' approach to the SDGs, including here strategy documents, evaluation reports, monitoring databases, partnership frameworks, and country-level documents. Thereafter, I conducted 23 semi-structured expert interviews to help identify and supplement developments in all phases of engagement. Interview themes included the prioritization and (factors impacting the) impact of the SDGs at the World Bank.

Of the 23 interviews, 17 were conducted with (former) World Bank staff, most of them from the Poverty and Equity Global Practice or the Development Data (Research) Group. All interviewees worked directly or indirectly on the topic of inequality, including on data-collection, country projects and research. Some of the interviewees also serve in the World Bank as focal points for the SDG 10 indicators. One interviewee conducted negotiations for the SDG indicators. Some interviewees were members of the Independent Evaluation Group, and three were former World Bank officials now active as inequality scholars. In addition, I interviewed five representatives from civil society organizations working on the topic of inequality. Relevant organizations were identified though the open consultations on so-called Grey Indicators that were published around the SDG indicator negotiations and included numerous comments on proposed indicators by civil society organizations (IAEG-SDGs 2015). All organizations were active on the topic of inequality before the launch of the SDGs; provided input during the negotiations; and still engage with the World Bank on the inequality topic.

To study the discursive uptake of the SDGs, I conducted a quantitative text analysis of a set of World Bank documents, presented in Table 2.1, to determine whether, which, and how the SDGs are mentioned in World Bank communication (Hardy et al. 2004). I compiled results from 326 key documents from the World Bank Group Open Knowledge Repository. All documents are consistently available throughout the research period, cover a broad coverage of policies and present an official stance of the World Bank. Furthermore, they are relevant for both internal and external communication.

Table 2.1 Documents used for analysis

Type of documents	**Specification**	**Number of documents**
Speeches of Presidents	James D. Wolfensohn (2000-2005)	11
	Paul Wolfowitz (2005-07)	32
	Robert B. Zoellick (2007-12)	20
	Jim Yong Kim (2012-2019)	94
	David R. Malpass (2019-present)	34
Flagship reports	World Development Report	21
	Global Economic Prospects	32
	Doing Business (2004-2020)	16
	Poverty and Shared Prosperity (2016-2020)	3
Annual Reports	World Bank Annual Report (IBRD and IDA) (2000-2020)	21
	International Finance Corporation (2000-2020)	21
	Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (2000-2020)	21
Total		326

Source: World Bank Open Knowledge Repository 2021.

To be able to place the use of the SDGs in some context, I extended the timeframe for the text analysis to include documents from the era of the Millennium Development goals (starting in 2000). Using Nvivo 12, I first compared overall references to the MDGs and the SDGs between 2000 and 2020. I used both "MDG(s)/SDG(s)" and "Millennium Development Goal(s)/Sustainable Development Goal(s)" as key terms for the text search.[1] For the time cohort of 2000-2005, a limited number of speeches has been made available, and it therefore had fewer documents overall. I then mapped the coverage and prioritization of the SDGs (2016-2020), using "SDG(s)" and "Sustainable Development Goal(s)" as well as the respective goal number as keywords for a frequency search. This frequency analysis informs about the topics for which the organization views the SDGs as relevant, and those SDGs that the World Bank is promoting.

By and large, the findings are applicable to all the organizations that together constitute the World Bank Group, except for the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes. The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the International Development Association

[1] I excluded cases where the acronym followed the full term, or occurrences in the list of abbreviations, the index, the table of content, notes, bibliographies, titles of speeches and instances of "MDG" that referred to Madagascar.

together make up the World Bank and engage in shared annual reporting, but the World Bank Group also includes the International Finance Corporation and the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency. Where relevant I note differences observed between these entities.

2.4 Results

I now present the research results of the World Bank's engagement with SDG 10 during the five phases outlined above, moving from the negotiation of the goals towards discursive uptake, organizational and country level adjustments, and the review of the goals.

2.4.1 Agenda-setting and benchmarking: constructing the global narrative

In the agenda-setting phase, I made two key observations. First, the World Bank significantly influenced the definition of SDG 10 during the negotiations, which minimized the need for later adjustments to comply with the goal. Second, by advocating for the adoption of its own preferred benchmarks, the World Bank ensured that others would evaluate their success based on the bank's own definition of inequality.

While international organizations were formally only observers during the SDG negotiations, in practice they had much space to promote their preferred frames and operationalizations for topics that were not yet defined, including for the goal of reducing inequalities in SDG 10. The emergence of SDG 10 partially relates to the financial crisis (2007-2009) and its aftermath which prompted calls for addressing extreme inequalities in outcomes and wealth concentration at the top of the income distribution (Atkinson 2015). When discussions on the SDGs began in 2012, the Millennium Development Goals were thus criticized for not having a separate goal on inequality. World Bank President Jim Kim, who took office in that year, recognized this changing global context (Interview 5). An internal process within the bank led to the adoption of the concept of Shared Prosperity as one of the World Bank's "Twin Goals" of 2013, with the other one focusing on poverty reduction, aiming to reduce the share of people in extreme poverty to three percent of the global population by 2030 (World Bank Group 2015). The bank defined Shared Prosperity as increasing the income of the bottom 40% of the population in each country (World Bank Group 2015). As a result, reducing inequality, in this definition, had become an integral part of the World Bank's objectives and effectively "broadened its mandate" (Interview 6; Interview 5).

Individuals working on inequality viewed Shared Prosperity as "a compromise solution" (Interview 7), more "palatable" (Interview 2), and "a tentative step" (Interview 5) towards addressing inequality. Shared Prosperity focused on inequalities in income, rather than outcomes, and did not compare the lowest incomes to the highest in a country. Some claimed that Shared Prosperity was not truly about inequality, but rather a way to reframe inclusive poverty reduction, leaving out questions about wealth redistribution from the top (Interview 11). Additionally, it was perceived that "pro-growth" World Bank staff could still argue that Shared Prosperity was "all about growth" (Interview 10) instead of addressing inequality.

Eventually, the bank succeeded in incorporating its goal of Shared Prosperity into SDG 10, according to staff at the World Bank and observers from civil society. Shared Prosperity was a ready-made framework to use, and it left out sensitive political discussions around inequalities of outcome. SDG 10's first target hence became to "by 2030, progressively achieve and sustain income growth of the bottom 40 percent of the population at a rate higher than the national average." The only difference between this goal and the World Bank's own internal goal is the addition of "higher than the national average."

Although there is no hierarchy among SDG targets, in practice, the first target is often seen as the "headline target". In short, the World Bank managed to enter its own framing into the global agenda and to block any possibly more radical global inequality narrative.

In 2015, after the SDGs were launched, the more concrete indicators for the SDGs were negotiated, and civil society representatives noted here a "tension" emerging (Interview 9). The negotiations for indicators were conducted by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on the SDG Indicators, consisting of 27 representatives of national statistical offices, where international agencies acted as observers (IAEG-SDGs 2017). For each indicator, the Inter-Agency and Expert Group tried to designate at least one "custodian agency" that would be responsible for developing the methodology, data collection, data aggregation and later reporting (United Nations Statistical Commission 2017). The initial division of labor resulted in 2017 in several "orphan" indicators for which no agency wanted to take responsibility; the ability of international organizations to decline such indicators, however, put them in an influential position, as they could shape which indicators were seen as potentially viable, and which not.

The division of indicators was primarily based on existing mandates and organizational capacity (van Driel et al. 2022). This allowed the World Bank to establish itself as a data gatekeeper through its broad mandate, staff, budget, and expertise in large-scale data collection. Actors proposing an indicator often had to ensure its acceptance by providing "methodologically mature" sources, which were preferably already collected, to demonstrate their value for global monitoring (Interview 5). The World Bank became formally involved in about 20% of all 231 SDG indicators; it served as the "custodian agency" for 20 of them and was involved in the development and monitoring of another 22 (Serajuddin & Scuriatti 2019).

During the inequality indicator negotiations, it was perceived that World Bank staff considered not only technical issues but also the political implications of turning monitoring practices into policy instruments for the SDGs (Interview 9, Interview 12). A representative from civil society mentioned that the World Bank was "very possessively" striving to have its operationalization of Shared Prosperity as indicator 10.1.1, equating its SDG 10 agenda with the Shared Prosperity agenda, as its inclusion would give the World Bank leeway to "cling to it" (Interview 12). The World Bank was well-positioned to argue for its operationalization, and it did so by pointing to existing databases and working papers for theoretical robustness (Interview 13). Many negotiators saw Shared Prosperity as a seemingly innovative and bold narrative to discuss inequality backed by a powerful actor with some legitimacy (Interview 11). The final indicator thus closely resembled again the bank's own notion of Shared Prosperity, measured now as "the growth rates of household expenditure or income per capita among the bottom forty percent, and the total population" (United Nations Statistics Division 2022a). While these data thus allow to compare the bottom forty percent and the total population, the indicator itself is not focused on the comparison. World Bank officials explained their reluctance to focus on "higher than the national average", as formulated in the first target of SDG 10, by stating that the Shared Prosperity indicator was broader and better fitting the variety of countries they worked in. One employee mentioned:

> *We wanted the goal to be 'higher is always better'. Higher than the national average would mean attaining the goal even with a lack of overall growth, but the bottom forty growing 0.1 percent. We were not going to say that such a country was doing better than one where average growth was eight percent and the bottom grew six. The [Shared Prosperity] goal was not just about inequality, but in the UN discussion they wanted a goal about inequality*. (Interview 13)

World Bank officials also argued that their Shared Prosperity indicator would be clearer. Even though more clear-cut inequality-of-outcome indicators like the Gini and the Palma ratio had already been measured by the World Bank, its officials considered these to be "less viable options" or "too complicated to measure" (Interview 12). Civil society organizations, however, saw the bank's Shared

Prosperity indicator as limiting the room for more innovative benchmarks, as decreasing ambition during the negotiations (Interview 12), and as diminishing the focus on between-country inequality. The indicators of SDG 10 could allow countries to "pick and choose" among indicators with the aim of arguing that inequality was decreasing (Interview 9). When the World Bank became custodian for five of the ten indicators under SDG 10 (United Nations Statistics Division 2021), it could further increase its overall network influence through links to national statistical offices, capacity-building efforts, and other international organizations involved with, or reliant on, their indicators.

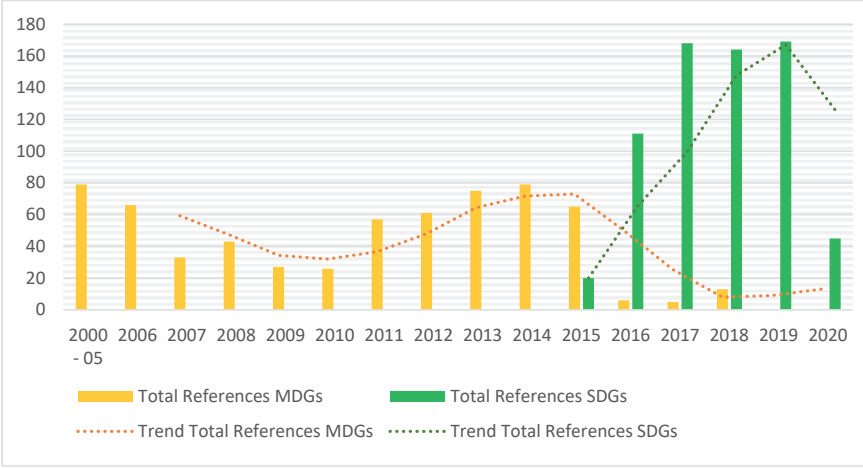
2.4.2 Discursive uptake: the SDG selection within the World Bank

In the following phase of discursive uptake, I made two key observations. First, although the World Bank Group used the SDGs more than the earlier MDGs, they have not become an integral part of its discourse. Second, SDG 10 is among the least used goals by the bank, even though the theme of inequality, one of the bank's Twin Goals, is recognized largely as originally conceptualized by the bank.

Figure 2.1 References per year (2000-2020) – MDGs and SDGsindicates the overall discursive attention given to global goals in key World Bank Group documents. Comparing overall references to the MDGs and SDGs between 2000 and 2020 shows that references to the MDGs fluctuated and decreased when the economic and financial crises started in 2008. In absolute numbers, the SDGs picked up where the MDGs left off, and have a higher starting point. However, the SDGs have not become an enduring integral part of the annual reporting of the World Bank Group. Initially, for the World Bank (IBRD and IDA), a subset of SDG indicators were used to present a regional snapshot for each world region (2016-2019), to evaluate its environmental footprint (2017-2018), and to track the diversity of staff (2016-2020). However, in 2020, in the first report presented during the coronavirus pandemic, most of these key SDG indicators were removed. The Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency included an overview of the SDGs (without targets or indicators) that its projects were supposed to advance between 2017 and 2019. The International Finance Corporation continued to focus on its own development goals (inspired by the MDGs) up to 2017 and published in 2018 a paper on how its work aligned with the SDGs, but it did not go further than using one paragraph in its 2020 annual report to list them, without using this connection. Despite UN-wide calls for the use of the SDGs as blueprints for recovery, the global goals do not appear to serve as a compass for the World Bank.

Rather than using the global goals as an *integral* part of its organizational reporting, the World Bank tends to publish *separate* monitoring reports for such purposes. For the Millennium Development Goals, this separate report was titled *Global Monitoring Report* (World Bank Group and International Monetary Fund 2015). For the SDGs, a series titled *Implementing the 2030 Agenda* was initiated, highlighting not all, but some key initiatives and focus points for the 17 SDGs (World Bank Group 2016). The report was rather short, and SDG 10 on reduced inequality received less than two pages in both the 2017 and 2019 reports.

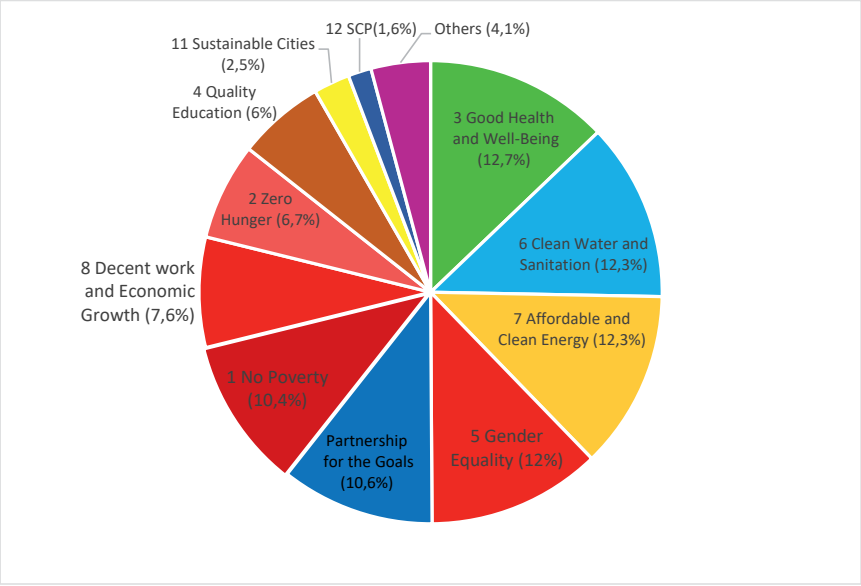
Figure 2.1 References per year (2000-2020) – MDGs and SDGs



Source: based on calculations of the authors

When SDGs are referred to, SDG 10 on inequality is notably rarely mentioned. Figure 2.2, which displays references to individual SDGs, indicates that most references (59,9%) are to a sub-set of only five goals, including SDG 3 (Health), 6 (Water and Sanitation), 7 (Energy), 5 (Gender Equality) and 17 (Partnerships). The World Bank's core mandate, reducing poverty (linked to SDG 1 on Poverty Reduction) and increasing shared prosperity (linked to SDG 10 on Reduced Inequalities), is not reflected therein. These goals take up a sixth (SDG 1, 10,4%) and thirteenth (SDG 10, 1,4%) position. For SDG 10, this means only four goals are cited less often, including the environmental goals of SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 14 (Life below water) and SDG 15 (Life on land), and SDG 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions). Although explaining this overall pattern is beyond the scope of this chapter, it can be noted that SDGs falling in the social and economic dimensions of sustainable development are most often used, and the environmental goals much less. For some social goals, like SDG 5 and SDG 7, the World Bank has a "custodianship" role, which might partially explain the attention. Most others in the top-five are key sectors that World Bank projects aim to contribute to, although most are more primarily associated with other UN agencies, like the World Health Organization for SDG 3, UN Water for SDG 6, and UN Women for SDG 5.

Figure 2.2 Relative attention per SDG (2016-2020) (% of total references)



Source: based on calculations of the authors

To explain the lack of references to SDG 10, World Bank staff refer to the prior success of the bank in setting the (global) inequality agenda long before the SDGs emerged. Following the SDG negotiations, as mentioned above, the World Bank's inequality narrative aligns with several SDG 10 targets, notably with SDG 10.1. Consequently, staff perceive SDG 10 as a non-essential discursive tool. One interviewee mentioned:

> *Despite explicitly mentioning and referring to the SDGs less often than UN staff, our teams' work is closely related to SDG concepts and essence. As long as people pay attention to SDG concepts and objectives, it doesn't really matter if they explicitly refer to the SDGs all the time. For example, me and other colleagues have written documents where we do not explicitly mention the SDGs, but we do explain why the topic is important.* (Interview 14)

To discuss inequality, referring to the shared prosperity goal established by Jim Kim remains a central part of the discourse, even after he was succeeded by David Malpass in 2019. The consequence is that the 'other' dimensions of inequality captured in SDG 10 are thereby not referred to, including discrimination (10.3), migration (10.7), the need for market regulations (10.5) and the need for increased representativeness of financial institutions themselves (10.6), including the World Bank. When SDG 10 is referred to at the target level, it is to target 10.1 and 10.2, which can both be clearly linked to the World Bank's expertise and its own Shared Prosperity goal (World Bank 2016; 2018).

2.4.3 Organizational adjustment: pre-alignment and the Twin Goal filter

In the phase of organizational adjustment, the World Bank's overall set-up has remained virtually unchanged, with its staff arguing that this structure aligns with the SDGs 'by design'. In practice, however, the alignment with SDGs remains selective. Some frameworks to measure performance now include SDG targets and indicators, but most are viewed only instrumentally in pursuit of the Twin Goals.

Funding streams are not differentiated to disclose their contributions to the SDGs, as the organization has set up an alternative funding mechanism that focuses on SDG projects.

The World Bank Group's organizational set-up was altered in 2014, after the Twin Goals were agreed upon, to be comprised of 14 Global Practices and 5 Cross-Cutting Solution Areas. Many of these 'practices' are sectoral and include topics such as water, health or education. To mainstream the SDGs, adjustments to this structure were deemed unnecessary, as it was noted that the 'practices' aligned "almost one to one" with many of the SDGs (World Bank Group 2021d). However, this is not always evident. The agriculture 'practice', for example, has remained unchanged since its inception and does not align with any of the 17 SDGs. The topic of reducing inequalities (SDG 10), despite being taken up in the SDG agenda, only appears as a focus area of the Poverty 'practice' (World Bank Group 2021e). This can make it difficult to mainstream a broader view on inequality, and it institutionalizes the view among World Bank staff that reducing extreme poverty and reducing inequality is essentially the same.

In theory, a separate 'practice' could have been institutionalized to better integrate inequality into this structure, or inequality could have become a new 'cross-cutting solution area'. And yet, using a broad conception of inequality as a 'cross-cutting solution area' might be challenging for the bank, as 71% of staff members surveyed still consider a focus on inequality of opportunity, rather than outcomes, as the best way to promote Shared Prosperity (World Bank 2018). Equality of opportunities seeks to minimize the negative impact of circumstances such as race, gender, social and family background (World Bank 2006) and to focus on better access to for example education and employment opportunities. Equality of outcomes, instead, focuses on deprivation in outcomes, such as in health, education and consumption, and is often associated with the need for redistributive policies. Such redistributive policies, however, and even the need for targeted inequality policies, remain disputed by many World Bank economists who argue that focusing on average growth is more effective (Dollar et al. 2013). The argument of pre-alignment might thus preclude the need for such more profound discussions on broader definitions of inequality.

When it comes to monitoring and evaluation, the World Bank Group's Corporate Scorecards now include a sub-set of SDG indicators. However, the scorecard presents the SDGs in three different 'Tiers', rather than a holistic agenda. The top tier consists of the Twin Goals, operationalized as SDG 1.1.1 (population living below the international poverty line) and a partially defined version of SDG 10.1 (concentrated growth in the bottom 40%) (World Bank Group 2021a). The other monitoring tools of the World Bank, including the World Development Indicators and the SDG-focused SDG Atlas, also include sub-sets of SDG 10 indicators (World Bank 2021). Importantly, however, through the Tier division of the Corporate Scorecard, other SDG goals (insofar as they are included) have become part of Tier 2 and Tier 3, useful in pursuit of the overarching goals of reducing poverty and increasing shared prosperity. This approach seemingly counters the spirit of the SDGs, which the United Nations presented as a holistic and integrated agenda where each goal was considered equally important to reach sustainable development in practice.

2.4.4 Country-level processes: SDG inclusion based on state preferences

At the country level, the World Bank staff uses the concept of pre-alignment, and mechanisms earlier introduced to support the Twin Goals in structuring country-engagement remain unchanged.

According to World Bank staff, country documents align with the SDGs already by design through their focus on the Twin Goals and sustainability (Interview 16). National development strategies, which often integrate the SDGs, provide an additional safeguard for alignment. Keys for International Development Assistance also rely on international commitments like the SDGs. These commitments are integrated

into Country Partnership Frameworks (CPFs), which set priorities for a five-year period. The CPFs are developed through conversations between staff and states, using Systematic Country Diagnostics to identify opportunities and constraints for sustainable poverty reduction and shared prosperity (World Bank Group 2021c). Both the CPFs and Systematic Country Diagnostics were introduced in July 2014 to operationalize the Twin Goals.

Interviewees state that the SDGs are part of a broader set of considerations that can inspire discussions on a country's priorities. The inclusion of SDG 10 indicators in country goals, however, depends on client preferences but can serve as a reminder to officials, particularly in National Statistical Offices, that these data will be reported globally (Interviews 4 and 5). "In some marginal cases", inequality has become a topic of discussion even in countries that may not prioritize it (Interview 5).

However, without systematic measures to ensure the integration of the SDGs, the goals often remain absent. In 2015, the World Bank introduced a post-2015 Development Diagnostic Framework to assess a country's progress towards the SDGs (Gable et al. 2015), but it has not been widely used. The guidelines for country engagement suggest aligning country goals with the SDGs (World Bank Group 2021f), but the need for explicit connections is not emphasized (World Bank Group 2021g).

The connection between the SDGs and the Country Partnership Frameworks is relatively rare (World Bank Group Open Knowledge Repository 2021). Examples of frameworks that have links to the SDGs include Benin's 2019-23 action program and South Africa's 2022-26 framework. However, frameworks for countries like China and India, which represent about a third of the world population, only mention the importance of the SDG framework while not using it to frame their national goals. The framework for Nigeria refers to the SDGs only once. Many other countries mention only generally that the SDGs are integrated into their national development plans. This lack of active links makes it difficult to verify the alignment with the SDGs in practice. As CPFs form the overall framework for consecutive projects and programs at the country level, this does not incentivize the use of the SDGs in practice. In the Nigerian case (2015-2021), for example, no project documents or implementation completion and results reports refer to the SDGs, and only one program document mentions the SDGs as part of the institutional context.

2.4.5 Review processes: influenced by the environment?

For SDG 10, the review of 2019 and the comprehensive indicator review of 2020 facilitated a feedback loop between the World Bank and its organizational environment. However, actors advocating for new approaches are constrained by the World Bank's early efforts to shape the terms of engagement, which precludes discussions about inequality frames sensitive within the organization.

The High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) monitors the global progress of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs (United Nations General Assembly 2012). It focuses on a subset of SDGs and overarching themes, and international organizations, including the World Bank, play a role in preparation and reporting. In 2019, during the review of SDG 10, a preparatory expert meeting was co-led by the World Bank, allowing civil society to discuss the Bank's limited focus on SDG 10 indicators (Interview 12). During the starting presentation, World Bank staff used the Shared Prosperity indicator to claim that as the growth of the bottom forty percent has increased in most countries, inequality was slowly reduced. Civil society actors noted, however, that this presented an overly optimistic perspective on global inequality, as on other indicators progress was lacking, including those covering the voting power of countries within the World Bank and the IMF, and between-country inequality, which is the focus of nearly half the goals' targets (Interview 12). World Bank officials were seen as agreeing with criticisms during discussions, yet without course-correcting thereafter (Interview 9). The outcome document was

noted as an example of the World Bank's wish to be at the steering wheel. Instead of the normal iterative process where all participants offer input, the document was presented as a "*fait accompli*" (Interview 12). However, the report did include reference to some issues pushed for during the meeting, like redistribution and tax policy.

The 2019 review of SDG 10 sparked interest among civil society organizations to use review processes for advocacy around inequality, even among some who had earlier been skeptical of the "SDG project" (Interview 9). The comprehensive review of the SDG indicator framework in 2020 was seen as a subsequent opportunity to improve the link between SDG 10's targets and indicators. Oxfam Novib and the Commitment to Equity Institute capitalized on this window of opportunity, successfully proposing an additional SDG 10 indicator (10.4.2), which measures the redistributive impact of fiscal policies on inequality. World Bank staff saw the eventual adoption of indicator 10.4.2. as a unique case of cooperation among organizations with "different perspectives on inequality" (Interview 1). The World Bank even agreed to become the custodian of this new SDG 10 indicator, as it was one of the few agencies with the necessary resources. Oxfam had long advocated for a more direct focus on (extreme) inequality of outcomes, and the Commitment to Equity Institute had developed new methodology to measure the redistributive impact of fiscal policies on Gini. Both organizations viewed their proposed indicator relevant for target 10.4, which focused on the adoption of "policies, especially fiscal, wage, and social protection policies and the progressive achievement of greater equality". For Oxfam, part of the rationale for proposing the World Bank as a custodian was that it would "help advance the discourse and the conversation at the World Bank – and globally – on inequality, pushing them to think about SDG10 and inequality also in terms of redistribution rather than only about growth of the bottom forty percent" (Interview 11). This indicator choice shows how also other actors were able to impact the bank through the SDG process. However, other important indicators preferred by civil society, like the Palma Ratio, were not actively pushed for because it was believed that they would not receive enough support (Interview 9).

2.5 Discussion: Organizational Jiu-jitsu

This study is among the first to examine the engagement of a major international organization with the SDGs, a set of ambitious but voluntary global goals with a timeline. The findings suggest that the mechanisms at play in this case relate to, but are not fully captured by, existing concepts in International Relations theory.

First, the idea of mutual constitution seems to apply (Finnemore & Sikkink 2001; Park 2006; Grek 2020), as the World Bank was an active participant in the agenda-setting phase of the SDGs. However, in the later phases, I did not find that the World Bank has in turn been influenced by the SDGs. The SDGs have not been integrated into World Bank processes such as annual reporting, country planning or financial reporting. Where the SDGs appear, they are selectively inserted into existing structures, for example Corporate Scorecards or Annual Reports, or introduced through supplementary structures, for example the SDG Fund (see also Forestier & Kim 2020; Meurs et al. 2019). Second, instead of showing organized hypocrisy (Lipson 2007) as a discrepancy between rhetoric and behavior, the World Bank does not significantly incorporate the SDGs in its communication. When the bank mentions the SDGs in its reporting, it openly acknowledges its prioritization of some goals and communicates that it translates the global agenda in a way that harmonizes it with its preexisting organizational objectives. Third, instead of having to establish mechanisms to manage conflicting incentives, as observed in the context of organized hypocrisy (Lipson 2007; Weaver 2008), the World Bank has influenced its external environment to conform with its own existing goals by shaping the new SDG on reducing inequality. The World Bank succeeded in using its internally negotiated policy-script to shape the global policy agenda (Kentikelenis

& Seabrooke 2017), and it avoids becoming entangled in the hypocrisy dilemma from the start, minimizing risks to its external legitimacy (Weaver 2008).

Contrary to these existing International Relations concepts, I argue here that the World Bank's policies can best be described as a type of *organizational jiu-jitsu*, borrowing here a concept from ancient Japanese martial art, where jiu-jitsu describes an actor who seemingly act in harmony with a process, but with a strategic use of countermoves that leverage the other's strength for one's own advantage (Hopkins, 2015). I find "organizational jiu-jitsu" as a phenomenon consistently across different stages of engagement, characterized by three distinct components.

First, organizational jiu-jitsu is characterized by a tendency to *(pre-emptively) limit the required adjustment to mitigate changes in the environment*. In the agenda-setting phase, the World Bank exemplified this by incorporating its own interpretation of inequality into SDG 10. Its activity during this phase connects to the idea of interventions, as the World Bank influenced the SDG negotiations to prevent unwanted policies (Margulis 2020). By doing so, the organization could maintain the use of its own terminology and discourses. To prevent potential disruptions to the organization of work or procedures, the bank argued that these structures and procedures already aligned with the SDGs. In the review phase, the bank's efforts to shape the agenda enabled its officials to sidestep discussions on politically sensitive definitions of inequality that were not aligned with the bank's definition of inequality.

Second, organizational jiu-jitsu involves the *utilization or adaptation of existing managerial tools, as well as the creation of new tools, to shape the terms of engagement for other actors*. During the agenda-setting phase, the World Bank inserted its own benchmarks and indicators into the inequality goal, transforming its standards into global standards for all actors. Here, the organization used its managerial capabilities (Alvarez 2016; Broome et al. 2018) and its knowledge (Zapp 2021). These standards formed the framework for discussions in the review phase, where civil society actors could only argue for additional indicators to be linked to targets. The World Bank's Corporate Scorecard serves as a signaling mechanism to both its staff and external stakeholders, such as states, indicating that the organization considers SDG indicators 1.1 and 10.1 as crucial measures of success. By maintaining its existing organizational structure, the Bank also encouraged civil society actors to collaborate with a single 'Global Practice' that combines the focus on inequality and poverty reduction.

Finally, organizational jiu-jitsu involves *engaging with actors who seek to influence the organizations' behavior in return*. I observed this component during both the agenda-setting and review phases of engagement. However, I found limited evidence of third-party impact on the behavior of the World Bank, implying that the organizational environment of the bank did not significantly shape its actions (Abbott, Green & Keohane 2016). Only during the review phase did I observe a minor impact of civil society actors, but this occurred within an arena significantly shaped by the organization during the agenda-setting phase.

The framework provided by organizational jiu-jitsu thus connects to existing insights from the International Relations literature but is a means to study engagement comprehensively across all phases of engagement. In the case of the World Bank, the impact of jiu-jitsu in the agenda-setting phase facilitated its impact in other phases. However, the specific pathways of jiu-jitsu can vary, depending on the international organization and its environment. In Table 2.2, I highlight the components that emerged in the five phases of engagement (indicated in green). Additionally, I have included other potential dynamics of organizational jiu-jitsu that one might hypothesize.

Table 2.2 The dynamics of organizational jiu-jitsu, and the specific dynamics in the case of the World Bank

		Three components of organizational jiu-jitsu		
		Limiting need for adjustment	**Shaping terms of engagement for others**	**Being subject to efforts of others to inspire change**
Five phases of goal engagement	**Agenda-setting and benchmarking**	Shaping the agenda	Preempting others to set the agenda	Being subject to others shaping the agenda
	Discursive uptake	Paying lip-service to goals aligned with one's own priorities	Influencing others to report selectively	Being forced by others to adopt their reporting methods
	Organizational adjustment	Keeping structures and procedures largely intact	Funneling engagement with external parties through organizational structures that hinder comprehensive lobbying efforts	Being required by others to establish or conform to novel structures and procedures
	Country-level processes	Keeping country-level processes largely intact	Conditioning loans and projects for clients based on organizational interpretation of goals	Being subject to others for elaborate uptake of goals in country-level processes
	Review processes	Focusing on benchmarks that fit existing frames and priorities for monitoring and evaluation	Influencing others to use own frame and priorities for monitoring and evaluation	Being subject to others who determine frames and priorities for monitoring and evaluation

2.6 Conclusion

In this study, I examined the World Bank's engagement with the SDGs, focusing on SDG 10 on reduced inequalities, across five phases of engagement. I found that the bank has used the momentum created by the SDG-process to strengthen its own position, without the SDG-process significantly impacting the World Bank itself. I describe this observed pattern of behavior as "organizational jiu-jitsu". Regarding the engagement with global goals, organizational jiu-jitsu has three specific components: limiting the need for adjustment, shaping the terms of engagement for others, and being subject to the efforts of others to inspire change. Instead of engaging in a process of mutual constitution (Finnemore & Sikkink 2001; Park 2006; Grek 2020) or leading to organizational hypocrisy (Lipson 2007; Weaver 2008) to deal with conflicting environmental incentives, international organizations aim to prevent the emergence of conflicting incentives in the first place and engage selectively thereafter (in line with, e.g., Forestier & Kim 2020; Meurs et al. 2019). I found that the Bank was particularly influential in later phases of engagement, given its efforts to shape the goal itself in the agenda-setting phase.

Organizational jiu-jitsu emerges as a strategy that combines intricate internal incentives and external pressures, ultimately benefiting the organization. I anticipate that multiple international organizations have adopted the practice of jiu-jitsu. The capacity to align global goals with existing organizational priorities enables a focus on these goals during the implementation phase. This approach empowers international organizations to sidestep politically sensitive goals and navigate political compromises inherent in the SDGs, given the ongoing uncertainty surrounding the long-term relevance of individual goals and targets.

Jiu-jitsu might be particularly attractive for well-resourced organizations for which the UN system is not the primary source of legitimacy, such as international financial institutions. Less well-resourced international organizations within the UN system may find it more difficult to push intra-organizational goals onto the global agenda, or to use own internal standards to shape the arena for other actors. Interactions with civil society might in such cases have a more pronounced impact on these international organizations. For smaller UN system entities, jiu-jitsu tactics may be more subtle. However, even for organizations that cannot shape targets in line with their organizational priorities, other forms of jiu-jitsu could be expected.

The widespread use of jiu-jitsu strategies by international organizations might lead to policy outcomes that block the transformative ambitions to achieve the SDGs. Some argue that the World Bank reduced the transformative potential of SDG 10 during the agenda-setting stage (Fukuda-Parr 2019). Moreover, after the agenda-setting phase, I observed only limited steering effects for those parts of the 2030 Agenda that the World Bank could not influence. And yet, whether jiu-jitsu is prevalent in other international organizations still warrants further investigation. Should this be the case, it would imply a significant need for much larger organizational changes to effectively deliver a global sustainability transformation in practice.

Appendix List of interview references

Table 2.3 Dates, names and affiliations of interviewees

Date	Name	Affiliation
1. May 19th 2021	Umar Serajuddin	Manager, Development Data Group, The World Bank
2. May 20th 2021	Interviewee 2	Researcher, Development Research Group, World Bank
3. April 21st 2021	Peter Lanjouw	Professor in Development Economics, School of Business and Economics, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
4. April 30th 2021	Francesco Ferreira	Amartya Sen Professor of Inequality Studies and Director of the Inequalities Institute at the London School of Economics
5. May 29th 2021	Interviewee 5	Senior Economist, Poverty and Equity Global Practice, World Bank
6. April 19th 2021	Gabriel Lara Ibarra	Senior Economist, Poverty and Equity Global Practice, World Bank
7. May 20th 2021	Interviewee 7	Inequality Scholar
8. May 27th 2021	Interviewee 8	Senior Economist, Poverty and Equity Global Practice, World Bank
9. April 20th 2021	Chiara Mariotti**	Senior Policy and Advocacy Officer on development Finance, Eurodad
10. April 21st 2021	Interviewee 10	Senior Staff, World Bank
11. May 28th 2021	Interviewee 11	Oxfam International, Washington DC Office
12. April 8th 2021	Kate Donald	Director of Program, Center for Economic and Social Rights
13. April 5th 2021	Ambar Narayan	Lead Economist, Poverty and Equity Global Practice, World Bank
14. April 26th 2021	Alan Fuchs	Lead Economist, Poverty and Equity Global Practice, World Bank
15. April 26th 2021	Matthew Wai-Poi	Lead Economist for the Poverty and Equity Global Practice of the World Bank
16. May 21st 2021	Interviewee 16	Senior Economist, Poverty and Equity Global Practice, World bank

* All interviewees were speaking in their personal capacity

** Reflecting on experiences during time at Oxfam

CHAPTER 3

The UN Regional Commissions as Orchestrators for the Sustainable Development Goals

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Abstract

In 2015, the United Nations agreed on 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These SDGs are not legally binding and lack strict enforcement mechanisms. International organizations that seek to implement these goals therefore rely on soft tools to influence governments and other actors, which is often described as "orchestration." In this chapter, I focus on regional governance and study the yet-unexplored role of the five UN regional commissions. These commissions seek to link the global ambitions of the SDGs with regional actors, contexts, and priorities. Drawing on extensive document analysis and a series of semi-structured expert interviews, I analyze the orchestration efforts of all five regional commissions, focusing on agenda-setting, coordination, and support. I conclude that instead of a unified orchestrating role, regional commissions play in practice a balancing role for agenda-setting, a sharing role when it comes to coordination, and a conforming role in terms of support.

Keywords

Sustainable Development Goals, United Nations regional commissions, orchestration, agenda-setting, coordination, support, global governance

3.1 Introduction

The SDGs are not legally binding, partially qualitative, lack global enforcement mechanisms, and often require further translation to regional and local realities (Biermann et al. 2017; Vijge et al. 2020; Biermann et al. 2022). International organizations that seek to help implement and to steer actors towards achieving the goals thus need to rely on soft tools of influence, which are often described as "orchestration" (Abbott et al. 2015; Schleifer 2013; Widerberg 2017; Bäckstrand & Kuyper 2017; Chan & Amling 2019; Bendlin 2019; Hickmann et al. 2021). Earlier research focused on the role of the UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) as the global orchestrator for the SDGs, showing here its political conflicts, limited resources and institutional deficiencies (Beisheim & Fritzsche 2022; Qerimi 2022).

This chapter adds to this literature by studying the orchestrating potential of regionally based UN entities, namely the five UN "regional commissions": the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), and the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA).[2] In the multilevel governance of the SDGs, these regional commissions are an important interface between global ambitions and regional realities. Ideally, they should play both 'upward' and 'downward' roles, that is, transmitting the 2030 Agenda downwards while informing global HLPF processes through enlisting participants and formulating recommendations (Abbott & Bernstein 2015). The outcome document of the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development has emphasized the im-portance of such regional mechanisms for follow-up and review, and the regional commissions in turn expressed their ambition to steer regional policy processes (United Nations 2015). Noting the missed opportunities for engagement during the period of the earlier Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the regional commissions have called for a "strong regional dimension to analysis and policy-setting" for the SDGs (Regional Commissions 2013).

And yet, can these regional commissions act as orchestrators in their regions and steer actors towards implementing the SDGs? If so, through what activities does regional orchestration occur, and do the commissions follow a comparable approach? And what is the political impact of their activities? By exploring these central questions, this chapter makes three contributions: (1) I develop a new framework for more fine-grained assessment of orchestration; (2) I offer novel empirical insights on orchestration practices in the context of global goalsetting; and (3) I provide a new understanding of the role of the UN regional commissions in sustainability governance. The chapter proceeds as follows. In section 2, I present the analytical framework and research methods. Section 3 presents the findings, and section 4 concludes.

[2] I could not find studies on this topic based on a SCOPUS search using 'sustainable development goal' or 'SDG' and the names of any of the five UN Regional Commissions. This search was limited to social science and multidisciplinary works published in English between 2015 and 2022.

3.2 Research framework: concepts and methods

3.2.1 Concepts

Orchestration in global governance has been extensively studied for over a decade. It is a form of soft and indirect steering of target actors characterized by a reliance on voluntarily recruited intermediaries (Abbott et al. 2015; Pegram 2015). Orchestration is expected to fill governance deficits by complementing existing regimes and approaches (Chan & Amling 2019; Gordon & Johnson 2017; Abbott et al. 2015). Given their relatively weak formal power base, intergovernmental organizations have been well studied as potential orchestrators, especially regarding the conditions that could lead to orchestration and the criteria to explain successful orchestration (Abbott et al. 2015; Abbot & Hale 2014). However, causal inferences about links between actors and the goals of the orchestrator are mostly indirect. Any assessment of the effectiveness of orchestration must therefore take into account the context of each case.

Orchestration is neither operationalized in the 2030 Agenda nor is there an existing evaluation scheme in the context of the SDGs. To evaluate regional orchestration as regards the SDGs, and drawing on the literature in this field (Abbott et al. 2015, 14-16; Abbott & Bernstein 2015, 228), I propose three types of orchestration activities, namely (1) agenda-setting, (2) coordination, and (3) support. Although these categories are distinct, they are in practice not always mutually exclusive.

(1) Orchestration through agenda-setting is when an orchestrator tries to shape or prioritize the goals of other actors (Abbott et al. 2015). This may occur through providing information about available policy options, nudging towards priorities or strategic decisions that align with the orchestrator's goals, or legitimizing and encouraging external support. For the SDGs, successful agenda-setting would occur if the orchestrator steered actors to align their policies with the 17 goals as an integrated and holistic agenda (United Nations 2015, 63). The alternative would be mere coexistence, where the target actors continue to pursue their existing agendas and priorities. Between these two extremes of full coherence and mere coexistence is a grey area with mixed roles. Cherry-picking, for instance, would describe a situation where an actor promotes action on the SDGs, but only for those goals that it has already prioritized (Forestier & Kim 2020; Heras-Saizarbitoria et al. 2022), as may be the case with some of the carry-overs from the MDGs. An orchestrator could also combine earlier agendas with the new SDG agenda, for example by steering towards those areas that already show some degree of convergence, overlap, or synergy (Nilsson & Weitz 2019).

(2) Orchestration through coordination is when an orchestrator tries to steer the interactions of policy actors towards the joint achievement of the SDGs. Coordination includes initiatives that build trust and a shared culture of cooperation, that improve links between national and global policies, or reduce fragmentation through new institutional structures or policies (Ibid). Orchestration through coordination often involves supporting networks (Klingebiel & Paulo 2015; Nasiritous & Grimm 2022; Pengram 2015). This support can vary from providing legitimacy for an existing network to setting up and resourcing new structures. The orchestrator may become part of a network itself (Henriksen & Ponte 2018; Bendlin 2019), but could also bring others together in a working group or stimulate them to undertake joint activities (van der Lugt & Dingwerth 2015; Abbott et al. 2015).

Here, successful orchestration would be coordination towards a purposeful alignment for coherent SDG implementation (Christensen & LÆgreid 2018; also van Driel et al. 2022). This type of coordination would require both a defined purpose for the coordination effort, and an active role for the orchestrator in shaping interactions towards that purpose (see also Galperina & Kyian 2021, 10). Less successful orchestration would be a platform role, where the objectives are only broadly defined, and the

orchestrator does not set the terms of engagement. To some extent, this platform function has been observed for the HLPF (Beisheim & Fritzsche 2022, 8). Again, there are many gradations where the orchestrator's role can range between successful coordination and offering only a platform (Bäckstrand & Kuyper 2017).

(3) Orchestration through support is when an orchestrator tries to assist intermediaries and target actors through ideational and material resources (Abbott et al. 2015). Such support includes (project) funding, the provision of operational capacity (Mattli & Seddon 2015; Klingebiel & Paulo 2015), information or other knowledge (through shared databases or wider programs), or access to third parties (van der Lugt & Dingwerth 2015). These types of support can be provided through different tools. For example, to support capacity building for the SDGs, the orchestrator could use any technique from training to awareness raising, provision of equipment, strategic planning, or consulting (Lempert 2015). Successful support would help transform the capacity of others to implement a coherent SDG agenda (Sachs et al. 2019, 812). The opposite is mere conformation, where an orchestrator offers support only within existing demands. In between these extremes of transformation and conformation is, for example, when an orchestrator supports only some parts of the agenda by identifying missing capacities, but without leading to a holistic, coherent, and transformative capacity (see Bester 2015).

Overall, even when linking the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda to the orchestration activities defined above, one cannot a priori determine conclusively what success would look like in each of these categories. Rather, it is through the collection of data combined with an expert assessment of what these activities can, or cannot achieve, that I analyze their link to the overarching ambitions of the 2030 Agenda.

3.2.2 Methods

Methodologically, I followed a comparative case study approach to gain meaningful and contextualized observations about the five regional commissions.

First, I analyzed the mandates of the UN regional commissions and their expectations in the context of the SDGs. Documents included resolutions and declarations from the commissions, the UN General Assembly and the UN Economic and Social Council, various terms of reference, annual reports and workplans, as well as reports from the joint office of the regional commissions in New York. I also searched for previous agendas in which the commissions developed regional priorities, as well as parallel regional agendas with a timeline that partially overlaps with that of the SDGs.

Second, I studied substantive documentation on the post-2015 initiatives, agendas, and mechanisms of the regional commissions for the SDGs. I found relevant information in seven databases. These include the SDG portals of all commissions (which convey SDG priorities, assessment tools and knowledge products), the UN Development Account Portal (37 capacity-building projects 2016-2022 on governance and institutions and statistics) and the UN System SDG Implementation Database which includes a survey of each regional commissions' contribution to the 2030 Agenda. In addition, I found information in the documentation of the Regional Fora on Sustainable Development (28 sessions post-2014), evaluation reports of Joint Inspection Unit of the United Nations System (UNJU) and the Office of Internal Oversight Services (19 relevant reports), and recurring reports for each of the five commissions, such as on Regional Collaborative Platforms (pre-2019), Regional Coordination Mechanisms (post-2019) and Financing for Development processes. I also included documentation from Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanisms. I focused on documents that inform on activities since the establishment of the SDGs.

Third, I conducted 18 semi-structured expert interviews between May and December 2022. Interviewees from the regional commissions included officials working in SDG units and those involved in organizing regional fora, sustainable finance mechanisms, capacity building or the integration of regional priorities with the SDGs. Some interviewees were also from organizations working with the regional commissions, including the Regional Commissions New York Office and regional civil society actors.

3.3 Results

I now present the findings about the role of the UN regional commissions as orchestrators for achieving the SDGs in terms of regional agenda-setting, coordination, and support. To start with, initiatives of Regional Commissions often address simultaneously both their direct targets – that is, their member states – and intermediaries that might influence the behavior of these targets, for instance international organizations, civil society, the private sector or regional standard setters. I refer thus often to both targets and intermediaries and explain how the activities of Regional Commissions impact third parties, but also directly affect states.

3.3.1 Agenda-setting

Formally, all regional commissions are committed to steer the regional agendas towards policy coherence for the SDGs (Regional Commissions 2013), that is, the holistic pursuit of the 2030 Agenda. Although no project of a regional commission will focus on all 17 SDGs simultaneously, one would expect that projects address most relevant goals along with their potential trade-offs. In practice, however, regional commissions mostly seek to balance the new global SDG agenda with their earlier regional priorities and agendas. No regional commission has in its founding mandate a reference to sustainability or to the environmental dimension of sustainable development. Their key objective is to "raise the [regional] level of economic activity" (Joint Inspection Unit 2015), which was later interpreted as including sustainable economic development. While the work programs of the regional commissions have been adapted to support all dimensions of sustainable development (ibid, 2), the programs are still not always supported by adequate resources to implement the full SDG agenda (Joint Inspection Unit 2020, 7).

UNECE has presented a set of SDG priorities, which resulted from a mapping and prioritization of its ongoing activities against the goals (UNECE 13 February 2023; Interview 1). These include most of the SDGs, except for SDG 10 (on reduced inequalities), SDG 14 (on life below water), SDG 1 (on poverty reduction), SDG 2 (on hunger) and SDG 4 (on quality education). The social dimension is largely missing as can be expected since unlike ESCWA and ESCAP, ECE does not include the "social" agenda in its name. The commission makes an effort to leverage the existing regional norms towards SDG implementation (Interview 1). This is apparent in the mapping, where each SDG that is emphasized links to one or more guidelines or conventions (UNECE 13 February 2023). Using existing norms to define the agenda affects not only the themes in attention, but also the efforts to mobilize public and private actors to map existing standards against the SDGs (UNECE 9 March 2022). Furthermore, the commission stimulates the integration of the SDGs into its policies. UNECE uses the Environmental Impact Assessments for this purpose. However, the commission has early on recognized that the relevant goals or targets "would [mostly] be environment related" (UNECE 29 August 2017, 6). In practice, early reviews indeed focused mostly on environmental goals, covering only 40-65 of the 169 SDG targets (IISD 2020). The commission also requested that countries mention "relevant" SDGs in their voluntary commitments to the Pan-European Framework for Greening the Economy (UNECE 2016). By focusing on existing activities,

norms, and instruments, the regional commission for Europe is faced with challenges when trying to balance economic and environmental priorities with the social dimension of development.

In the Asia-Pacific region, the regional commission's roadmap on coherent SDG implementation has identified priority areas instead of prioritizing specific SDGs. Third-party consultations have contributed to this roadmap, which aimed to (also) activate third parties, such as UN funds, specialized agencies, and regional organizations, to better support member states (UNESCAP 2017a,7). The roadmap has structured ESCAP's support for the SDGs but has been re-placed in practice by discussions after the Covid-19 pandemic (UNESCAP 2018). ESCAP (14 February 2023) has increasingly emphasized the need to strengthen systems thinking and policy coherence for the SDGs, especially in national planning. Furthermore, the commission collaborates with other regional actors to align their agendas with the SDGs. The ASEAN Community Vision 2025 is an example. To achieve coherence between this regional agenda and the SDGs, and to "efficiently draw on limited resources", a joint initiative was set up between the regional commission, ASEAN and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand to identify complementarities (UNESCAP 2017b). However, certain parts of Vision 2025, such as the Political-Security chapter, were not deemed synergistic with the SDGs. Other regional agendas such as APEC's Vision 2040 are also considering steering towards synergies. The challenge is that regional agendas outside the SDG framework are evolving continually, as exemplified by the new ASEAN Recovery Framework and the ASEAN Vision 2040.

In the African region, ECA seeks to balance the global SDGs with prior regional agendas supported by governments. This particularly holds for Agenda 2063, which the African Un-ion agreed upon just before the launch of the SDGs. Although the executive secretary of ECA stated that the SDGs and Agenda 2063 would "converge" and that it would be easy to infuse the SDGs into the national plans for Agenda 2063 (Lopes 2015), there remains priorities in Agenda 2063 that are not addressed by the SDGs. ECA has developed an online tool and a planning and reporting toolkit to better integrate the two agendas into country plans and activities (Interview 2). In terms of gaps, there are three out of 20 goals in Agenda 2063 that do not correspond with any SDG. These include the goals on the establishment of continental financial and monetary institutions and regional peace and stability, although perhaps these might be caught in a broad definition of SDG 17 (UNECA 2023). In contrast, SDG 12 regarding sustainable consumption and production only has a weak connection to Agenda 2063. Implementing Agenda 2063 and Agenda 2030 simultaneously is believed to have the potential to create mutual gains. However, it remains unclear whether countries are truly focusing on the 'synergies' between these two agendas.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, the regional commission's work focuses on four SDGs: SDG 17 on partnerships, SDG 8 on decent work, SDG 10 on reduced inequalities, and SDG 16 on peace and justice (Joint Inspection Unit 2020). The goals that are least prioritized, are SDG 14 on life below water, SDG 15 on life on land, and SDG 11 on clean water and sanitation. In practice, ECLAC follows its own regional paradigm, called Global Environmental Keynesianism, which promotes multi-dimensional equality as the purpose of development (UNECLAC July 2016 12; UNECLAC July 2016 169). The commission seeks to balance the new SDGs with its earlier focus on equality and place greater emphasis on the environmental dimension of economic development. Additionally, ECLAC aims to balance the SDGs with the sub-regional agenda on the Caribbean. Although the two agendas are complementary with the characteristics of SIDS, they pose slightly different challenges and lack the resources to report on both consistently (Uitto et al. 2017).

In West Asia, ESCWA created a list of SDG priorities in the context of a regional agenda with a timeline that surpasses the SDGs. The commission's Regional Priorities for the SDGs are determined bottom up by linking various governance documents in the region to the 17 SDGs (UNESCWA 15 January 2023).

Here they prioritize SDG 8 (economic growth), SDG 11 (sustainable cities), SDG 5 (gender equality), and SDG 4 (quality education). Until now, the commission has based its work on "Vision 2030" (UNESCWA 2015), which has five priorities based on emerging insights about potentially (un-)successful interventions in the region. Once it was acknowledged that the SDGs could be more ambitious than the regional agenda, the commission developed an SDG-Interlinkages Toolkit to prioritize financing interventions, and it has begun to work on a new regional agenda (UNESCWA 2021). The "Arab Vision 2045" aims to facilitate long-term sustainable development in the region with key objectives like security, justice, innovation, prosperity, diversity, and cultural renewal (UNESCWA 23 March 2022). A mapping of these goals to the 17 SDGs will be published once the first initiatives and projects related to Arab Vision 2045 are validated, and the commission plans to link the review of these agendas (Interview 3). I expect that this vision will eventually strike a balance between global goals and regional priorities.

3.3.2 Coordination

When it comes to SDG coordinating policies, all five UN regional commissions have expanded their efforts. This has been made possible, in part, through the creation of Regional Fora for Sustainable Development and other novel coordination mechanisms facilitated by the reforms of the UN Development System. These commissions bring together a wide range of actors to discuss progress on the SDGs and to share their experiences. However, in terms of coordinating policies among UN entities, it is not always apparent what the ultimate goals are. This is partly due to the ongoing development of coordination mechanisms, which occurs at the same time as the SDGs are being implemented.

The Regional Fora for Sustainable Development, a first coordination mechanism, are said to resemble a "mini-HLPF" in the region; they are seen as a key contribution of the regional commissions towards the SDGs (Interview 8; Interview 4). Historically, these fora evolved from the Regional Implementation Meetings of the earlier Agenda 21 from 1992 and the MDGs from 2000 (Commission on Sustainable Development 2004). Certain regions have established sub-regional forums, including the Latin American and Asia-Pacific Regions. The forums connect with the global review of the SDGs at the HLPF, often through peer-learning sessions centered on the SDGs but sometimes also categorized more broadly (Interview 9; Interview 11). The outcome documents of the regional forums have begun to reference other global processes and events, beyond the review of the SDGs (Interview 2). For example, the seventh African Forum on Sustainable Development prompted some endeavors to secure additional funding for the Congo Basin. These outcomes were carried forth to both the 26th conference of the parties to the UN climate convention in Glasgow and to the HLPF (Interview 8).

The Regional Forums on Sustainable Development have a broader reach for mobilizing actors than their predecessors, which is in line with the wide-ranging nature of the SDGs. The participants now represent many sectors, such as business, civil society, youth, international and regional organizations, academia, parliaments, and local governments (see for example UNECE 14 February 2023). The forums are also leading to rapid innovations in stakeholder engagement (Interview 4). The institutionalization of civil society engagement is especially notable. Civil society engagement mechanisms were set up either in anticipation of or to further streamline participation in the regional forums. These mechanisms are comparable across the five regions in terms of constituencies, objectives, and organizational structure (although the mechanism in West Asia is less institutionalized) (see Appendix A). As for the European mechanism, it has been reported that "its modality mirrors that of the Major Groups and Other Stakeholder mechanism that supports civil society input into the […] the High-Level Political Forum Process" (ECE-RCEM 2022). This mechanism, which is similar to the one in the Asia-Pacific region, is now listed under Major Groups and other Stakeholders of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) (Major Groups and Other Stakeholders Coordination Mechanism 2020; UN DESA 2021). The UN

regional commissions promote regional engagement and facilitate the global recognition of and representation for regional actors.

Another key category of actors mobilized by the Regional Forums on Sustainable Development are UN entities and specialized agencies. In earlier Regional Implementation Meetings and the first Regional Forums, only a small number of UN entities were present depending on the topic being discussed. But due to subsequent reforms of the Regional UN Development System and the increased custodianship responsibilities of many UN entities, they now play a more consistent role in organizing the fora and in preparing voluntary national reviews (Interview 8; Interview 11). Preparations for voluntary national reviews have become comprehensive coordination efforts between UN regional commissions, UN DESA, custodian agencies of the SDG indicators, and region-specific institutions. Preparatory workshops invite countries to share best practices and allow for more in-depth analysis and peer learning than the global workshops and "VNR [Voluntary National Reviews] Labs" (Interview 2; Interview 9).

Regional commissions also work together to organize activities and strive towards consistency across the regional UN system by using Regional Collaborative Platforms. These platforms unite all UN entities addressed by the SDGs in a region (United Nations November 2020). Starting from 2019, every Regional Collaborative Platform creates issue-based coalitions, chaired by relevant UN entities, on the most pressing regional issues (UNESCWA 20 December 2022). It is expected that these coalitions will build partnerships around multiple SDGs (Surasky et al. 2020, 18) and coordinate their cross-sectoral activities. They might do so through interagency guidance notes, common position papers, side events and input at intergovernmental meetings, or operational support. The question has emerged whether the coalitions are vehicles for structural coordination or whether they more closely resemble temporary taskforces for policy-support (Interview 12). While it is still too early to draw conclusions, I have observed relative continuity in the issues addressed, and an increasing cross-regional similarity in the topics focused on. Efforts have been made to better integrate the reporting of these platforms with the Regional Forums on Sustainable Development. However, the reports submitted for this purpose do not link issue-based coalitions to the SDGs consistently (see Africa Regional Collaborative Platform 2022; UNESCWA 12 May 2022; UNESCAP 17 March 2022; UNECLAC 7 March 2022; United Nations Sustainable Development Group 2022).

In sum, the UN regional commissions assist actors in their region to share experiences and jointly review policies for implementing the SDGs. However, they have not yet become firm orchestrators that actively and decisively shape policies and programs by regional actors. One reason for this is that, even though the SDGs are already in place, the institutional structures – including the Regional Fora and the Regional Collaborative Platforms - are still being built.

3.3.3 Support

Many countries have limited capacity to implement the 17 SDGs and their 169 targets and 247 indicators, or even to measure progress. Here I analyze the direct and indirect support provided by the UN regional commissions to their member states. I find that in trying to provide direct support, the UN regional commissions mostly play a conforming rather than a transformative role, because their support is primarily shaped by the demands of governments. However, there is one type of support where regional commissions seem to expand their role and engage with private sector actors, namely finance.

All five commissions have established novel tools to structure their support to their member states and others (Regional Commissions New York Office 2022). Examples include the SDG Rapid Response Facility of ESCAP, which is used for individual and shared support requests, and the SDG Helpdesk, which pro-vides a platform for tools, knowledge products, expertise, good practices, advice, opportunities for

peer-learning, and regional South-South Cooperation. Commissions have also sup-ported the measurement of SDGs by setting targets for indicators that did not have one in the global framework, using a "traffic light" model to indicate progress (Interview 7). Tools also exist to support subsets of (developing) member states, including least developed countries and small island developing states (Interview 5).

In terms of capacity building, most projects follow the historical focus of the regional commissions on capacity-building for economic and social development (OIOS 2017).[3] Of the capacity building projects for statistics, governance and institution building since the onset of the SDGs, the regional commissions mainly provide support for SDG 17 on global partnerships, SDG 16 on peace and strong institutions, and the two SDGs that focus on economic concerns, namely decent work and economic growth (SDG 8) and industry, innovation and infrastructure (SDG 9) (UN DESA 2022). As the SDG (indicators) have led to a further functional differentiation between (custodian) agencies, an existing division of labor provides part of the rationale for the responsibilities for SDG monitoring (Interview 6).

However, the demand-driven approach of the regional commissions also plays a key role here, as the commissions continue to respond to member states' requests. In this context, the commissions support the analysis and improvement of regional and national measurement of the SDGs (e.g., UNECE 2017). However, some initiatives are beginning to emerge that create effective demand for data and to fill policy-data gaps. For example, ESCAP's "Every Policy Is Connected" tool provides a structured approach to formulating inclusive policies and developing comprehensive indicator frameworks for policy monitoring, linking indicators to "issues for action" (Bidarbakhtnia et al. 2019; Interview 7).

The regional commissions also try to move beyond small-scale and sectoral projects. One example is a joint project to build comprehensive statistical capacity, costing USD 11.4 million – while regular projects range from just USD 400.000 to 1 million – that was executed by all regional commissions and five other UN entities between 2016 and 2021 (UN DESA 2022).

Supporting member states to raise finance is an increasingly important type of support, ranging from domestic resource mobilization to third-party financing. SDG bonds, for ex-ample, are being monitored and advised on, and are the subject of workshops organized by the regional commissions (UNECLAC 2020, 2017; UNESCAP 2021; UNECA 26 May 2022). A new standard has even been introduced for public-private partnerships. Previously, several commissions noted that public-private partnerships were challenging and produced mixed results (UNESCWA 2013; UNECLAC 2020; UNECA 2021a). In 2019, all commissions agreed to work more closely together on this issue. UNECE, which has been working on public-private partnerships for a long time, has taken the lead in introducing a format for public-private partnerships for the SDGs that are "People-Proof" public-private partnerships. After disseminating the idea at annual conferences, UNECE launched an evaluation methodology for these partnerships in 2022, after which ECLAC and UNECA expressed their commitment to start implementing this methodology as well (UNECE 2021; UNECE 5 October 2022).

The Covid-19 pandemic led to increased debt for many countries and triggered a global debate on new financial mechanisms (United Nations 20 May 2020). All commissions – except for the one for Europe, given the prevalence of high-income countries in its membership – launched new initiatives, many linked to climate finance (Interview 9). UNECA launched the "Liquidity and Sustainability Facility" in 2021, to mobilize (private) capital, supported by an asset management firm and a collateral

[3] The commissions led or collaborated on 15 of the total of 18 statistical capacity building projects, and 22 out of 25 projects for governance and institution building.

management provider (UNECA 19 May 2022). Its objectives are to support the liquidity of African Sovereign Eurobonds and to incentivize SDG-related investments on the continent (Interview 8).

ESCWA launched the Climate/SDGs Debt Swap–Donor Nexus Initiative, which aims to reduce debt and increase fiscal space for (middle-income) countries (UNESCWA 21 June 2022). This mechanism systematizes debt swaps, which allow creditors to convert debt-serving payments into domestic investment for indebted countries. Debtors thus invest in climate or SDG-related programs, while creditors can claim higher amounts of official development assistance or climate finance without expanding their budgets. The regional commission acts as a liaison between the parties here, and it has set up performance indicators focused on the SDGs where countries are lagging the most to propose, monitor, and evaluate projects (Interview 10).

ECLAC has worked on a debt-swap strategy since 2016, currently called the Debt for Climate Adaptation Swap and Caribbean Resilience Fund (UNECLAC 21 April 2016). This fund aims to reduce the debt and fiscal constraints for investments in green industries, stimulate growth, promote economic transformation and expand fiscal space for public investments, such as for the SDGs (UNECLAC February 2022). Lastly, ESCAP seeks to create interaction between debtors and creditors, with a focus on the small island states of the Pacific (UNESCAP May 25th, 2022). To date, this has been done through a Regional Debt Conference rather than a more permanent instrument (UNESCAP 5 April 2022). In sum, the overall orchestrating role of regional commissions in terms of supporting member states is likely to expand, mainly through these novel instruments for financial support.

3.4 Conclusions

Based on the detailed empirical analysis, I conclude that all UN regional commissions have expanded their activities in order to work towards achieving the SDGs. In addition to their traditional economic focus, they increasingly address also the environmental and social dimensions of sustainable development. They all have mobilized new actors, in particular through the follow-up and review instruments of the regional fora; and they have set standards for SDG implementation by providing (financial) support through reporting guidelines, performance indicators and other management tools.

However, there are also important limitations, and regional commissions face many challenges. Their limited resources force them to prioritize; the various priorities in the region only partially overlap with the SDGs; UN reforms are still underway in the implementation of the agenda; and all commissions must consider the priorities of other UN entities, member states, and global actors in their work.

There are many similarities between the orchestrating role of the regional commissions, especially when considering their coordination efforts. However, there are also differences. They differ in the hurdles they face in moving towards a coherent SDG approach. For in-stance, the systems approach of ESCAP differs from the approaches of UNECE, which is bound more by its organizational structure and legally binding agreements, such as on environment protection. Parallel agendas also impact regions differently. For example, in regions with many middle-income and high-income countries, the financial support and coordination mechanisms of the UN system are less prominent as steering tools.

Overall, the expanded activities of the UN regional commissions align with broader trends towards SDG implementation through multilevel governance, regionalization, and localization (e.g., Suri et al. 2021; Marx et al. 2021). I thus see a potential for this framework for assessing orchestration to be used also for the study of other types of orchestrators, although the operationalization of the categories will always need to be context dependent.

The effect of orchestration activities on SDG attainment, however, remains largely un-known. For instance, the novel financial mechanisms raise questions about their additionality, and the mobilization of business actors needs to be evaluated in terms of their impact on regional power relations (Michaelowa & Namhata 2022). It is also questionable whether the combined follow-up and re-view of multiple agendas creates a more coherent and efficient approach to the SDGs. An-other topic for further investigation is the impact of regional coordination mechanisms on shaping priorities, for example at the level of member state.

Structurally, the role of the regional commissions presents a paradox. On the one hand, I found that there are many parallel agendas and multiple regional priorities, which reflects a common view that the SDGs, while purporting to be a universal agenda, are implemented only after being shaped by pre-existing regional and local priorities. On the other hand, many commissions try to increase the overall coherence of the SDGs, for instance by supporting tools to help countries build comprehensive capacities and not to neglect more politically sensitive issues. Also, even where the SDGs are "regionalized" through regional commissions, their successful initiatives are often diffused across regions, sometimes leading to globally harmonized approaches. Examples include the Regional Collaborative Mechanisms and the standards for "People-First" public private partnerships, both initiated by UNECE. Yet transplanting innovation without ensuring a regional fit is not without risk (Meuleman 2019). Finding the right balance between regional prioritization and resource constraints, on the one hand, and global harmonization and ambition, on the other, will always remain a central challenge for the success of the SDGs as a global policy agenda.

CHAPTER 4

International organizations as 'custodians' of the sustainable development goals? Fragmentation and coordination in sustainability governance

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Abstract

It is widely assumed that the fragmentation of global governance can affect coordination efforts among international institutions and organizations. Yet, the precise relationship between the fragmentation of global governance and the extent to which international organizations coordinate their activities remains underexplored. In this chapter, I offer new empirical evidence derived from the so-called custodianship arrangements in which numerous international organizations have been mandated to coordinate data collection and reporting for 231 indicators of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These complex custodianship arrangements provide a fertile testing ground for theories on the relationship between fragmentation and coordination because the institutional arrangements for each of the 17 SDGs have emerged bottom–up with varying degrees of fragmentation. Through a comparative approach covering 44 custodian agencies and focusing on the most and least fragmented custodianship arrangements, I make three key contributions. First, I offer a novel operationalization of institutional fragmentation and coordination. Second, I present empirical evidence in support of the claim that fragmentation negatively affects coordination. Third, I provide nuances to this claim by identifying factors that affect the strength of this relationship. Based on the analysis, I suggest further steps that might facilitate coordination in global sustainability governance.

Keywords

Global governance, international organizations, Sustainable Development Goals, indicator custodianship, coordination, fragmentation.

4.1 Introduction

In global governance scholarship, a long-standing debate surrounds the impact of governance architectures on governance outcomes (Barnett et al., 2007; Keohane & Victor 2011; De Coninck & Bäckstrand 2011; Young 2012; Kanie 2015; Dauvergne 2018; F. Biermann & Kim, 2020). A key question is the extent to which institutional fragmentation affects the ability of actors to coordinate their activities and realize synergistic governance outcomes (Zürn & Faude 2013). The earlier literature suggests that institutional fragmentation might form a barrier to coordination (F. Biermann et al. 2009; F. Biermann et al. 2020). So far, however, few studies have operationalized these concepts in a way that allows for systematic empirical analysis of their relationships.

Highly fragmented governance architectures are described as patchworks of international organizations with non-hierarchical, overlapping dispersal of rulemaking capacity (Zelli & Asselt 2013). For the purposes of this study, coordination is then defined as mutual adjustment of behavior (Biermann & Koops 2017, 20). I aim here to add to the debate on the relationship between these two concepts by providing a novel operationalization of both. I introduce a new operationalization of fragmentation based on the dimensions of multiplicity and dominance, which results in a gradient rather than a binary measure of fragmentation. To assess coordination, I differentiate between three dimensions that indicate more or less far-reaching coordination.

I apply these concepts to the novel system of 'indicator custodianship' for the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which have been agreed by the United Nations (UN) in 2015 as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Biermann et al. 2017; Vijge et al. 2020). The SDGs cover nearly all areas of global governance and so present the daunting challenge of coordinating the collection, processing, and reporting of data (Kanie 2020). To measure any progress towards achievement of the SDGs, 231 indicators have been agreed, and the UN mandated (as of April 2020) 44 international organizations and programmes to serve as 'custodians' for these indicators. These indicator custodians are expected to develop new methodologies, collect data, allow data aggregation and harmonization, improve national statistical capacity, and provide data for annual SDG reports (United Nations Statistical Commission 2017). Coordination among these custodian agencies is key to ensuring a functioning system of data collection with consistent methodology, streamlined data requests, and efforts at capacity building.

The division of indicators is based largely on the mandates of international organizations, their statistical capacity, and their willingness to accept a custodianship mandate. As I demonstrate later in this article, this division across the SDGs has resulted in 17 custodianship arrangements that vary greatly in their degree of fragmentation. So, the main question becomes: how does the variant degree of fragmentation influence the type and degree of coordination between custodian agencies?

The results demonstrate that institutional arrangements matter for policy outcomes. With SDG indicator custodianship, the division of labor was established without much consideration of how it might affect coordination. The categorization of the arrangements for all 17 SDGs, combined with the insights from the case studies, indicates policy areas that are most likely to face coordination challenges. By identifying variables negatively affecting coordination, I provide additional entry points to facilitate coordination.

I have structured the chapter as follows. The next section sets out the research design, operationalization, and method. I then qualitatively assess the degree of coordination among custodian agencies for the two case studies, followed by a discussion of the theoretical contributions and policy recommendations, and a conclusion.

4.2 Fragmentation and coordination

I define institutional fragmentation as the degree to which a governance architecture is characterized by patchworks of international organizations with non-hierarchical, overlapping dispersal of rulemaking capacity (Zelli & Asselt 2013). High degrees of such fragmentation have been reported, for example, for global governance domains such as finance, security (Held & Young 2013), health (Holzscheiter 2017), and environment and climate (Gupta et al., 2016; Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen & McGee 2013). Less fragmented governance architectures are more centralized or more hierarchically organized with fewer organizations, typically organized around an actor with strong influence (Kim et al., 2020).

Over the past decade, several scholars have studied the impact of fragmentation on the outcomes of governance (Barnett et al., 2007; F. Biermann & Kim 2020; Dauvergne 2018; De Coninck & Bäckstrand 2011; Kanie 2015; Keohane & Victor 2011; Young 2012). One dependent variable in this research has been the degree of coordination between agencies, that is, the mutual adjustment of behavior (Biermann & Koops 2017, 20).

Evidence suggests that a high degree of governance fragmentation often limits effective coordination among international actors (for an overview see F. Biermann et al. 2020), with numerous undesirable outcomes, from a lack of an overall vision (Barnett et al., 2007) to duplications and inconsistencies (Kanie 2015), scattering of responsibilities, splintered efforts and limited information sharing (Holzscheiter et al., 2012), limitations in attracting funding (Keohane & Victor 2011), limited pooling of resources (Nasiritousi et al., 2020), difficulties in assigning accountability (Ivanova & Roy 2007), and limited governance capacity (Held & Young 2013). The absence of a dominant actor with a managing role has been argued to result in 'counter-productive politicization of coordination efforts' among agencies competing for leadership (Holzscheiter et al., 2012, p. 71). This has been observed especially in global environmental governance, an area with an exceptionally high degree of institutional fragmentation (Mitchell et al., 2020). In response, a long-standing policy debate has discussed the advantages and disadvantages of institutional streamlining through a world environment organization or similar agency (Biermann & Bauer 2005, Kim et al., 2020; Vijge 2013).

In the end, how institutional fragmentation and coordination relate to each other also depends on the types of linkages between actors (Keohane & Victor 2011) and their interactions (Oberthür & Gehring 2006). The desirable governance outcomes that some also attach to fragmentation (Acharya 2016; Keohane & Victor 2011; Nasiritousi et al., 2020) are often conditional on such links. There are examples of international organizations that have mutually adjusted their policies without direct interaction (Oberthür & Gehring 2006). However, insights from the substantive focus of the analysis—that is, the realm of global monitoring and evaluation—suggest that, without any interactions, international organizations are likely to use different understandings of concepts, duplicate efforts, and make excessive data requests at the country level (Holzscheiter et al., 2012). Therefore, I expect an inverse relationship between institutional fragmentation and the degree of coordination, that is, I expect that the higher the degree of fragmentation, the lower the degree of coordination.

Existing typologies of fragmentation and coordination, however, lack nuance when one seeks to assess the impact of different degrees of fragmentation on international coordination. For example, some typologies include structures of coordination, differentiated between authoritative, networked, or decentralized (Zürn & Faude 2013); the nature of interactions including synergistic, cooperative, and conflictive coordination (F. Biermann et al. 2009); types of activities that might be coordinated including analytical, normative, or operational (Ivanova & Roy 2007); potential outcomes of coordination including alignment and harmonization; or the level—global, regional, national—at which coordination

occurs (Holzscheiter 2012). Most studies use coordination almost as an afterthought, offering some examples of potential areas for coordination yet without offering a typology that allows for comparison.

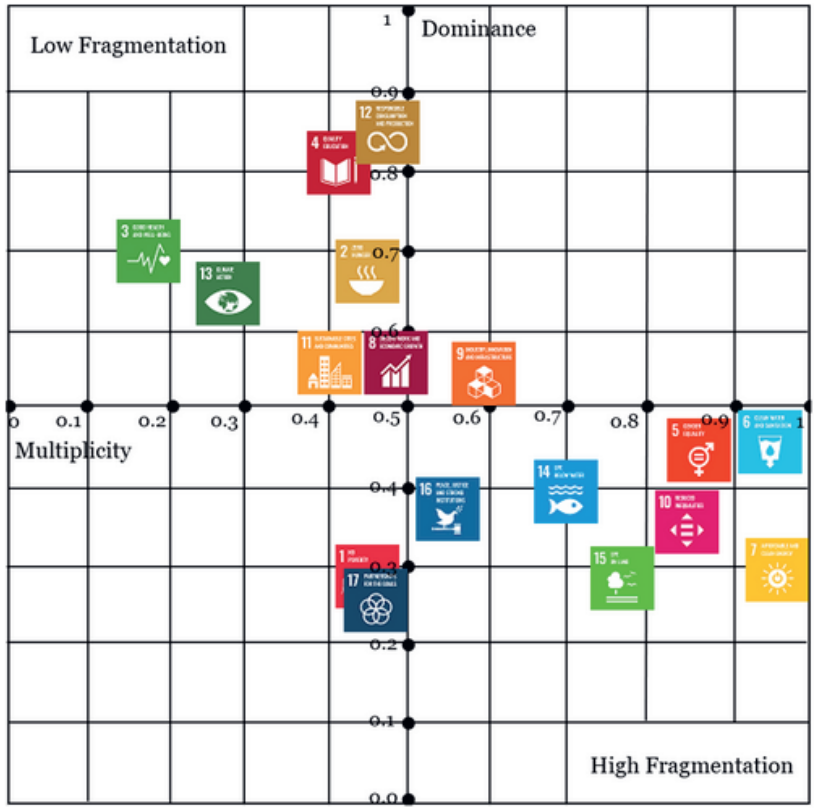
This is what this article seeks to contribute as well, using the empirical case of the 17 custodianship arrangements for the more than 200 SDG indicators. Therefore, I now offer my own, more nuanced operationalization of fragmentation and coordination.

4.2.1 Operationalizing fragmentation

To measure the degree of fragmentation of the 'indicator custodian' arrangements for the SDGs, I operationalize fragmentation along two dimensions: multiplicity and dominance. These dimensions allow us to focus on two major theoretical questions, namely to what extent coordination becomes less likely when more actors are involved, and to what extent a structurally prominent actor fosters coordination. Based on this operationalization, I mapped the degree of fragmentation of the 17 SDG issue areas, using the indicator data by the UN Statistics Division.

Multiplicity reveals the dispersion of indicators over custodian agencies and captures the diversity of actors in the arrangement. To consider variant numbers of indicators across SDGs, I divide the number of custodians by the number of indicators, leading to a score between zero and one (United Nations Statistics Division 2020a; 2020b; including a few indicators without custodians). This is shown on the horizontal axis of Figure 4.1 Indicator custodianships plotted by multiplicity (x-axis) and dominance (y-axis). For example, SDG 7 (on affordable and clean energy) has six custodian agencies for six indicators, resulting in the highest score on the multiplicity metric. The other extreme is SDG 3 (on good health and well-being), where six agencies serve as custodians for 27 indicators.

Figure 4.1 Indicator custodianships plotted by multiplicity (x-axis) and dominance (y-axis)



Derived from UN Statistics Division, April 2020

Dominance indicates the extent to which an institutional arrangement is marked by a major actor. I determined dominance by counting for each SDG the largest number of indicators held by a single agency and dividing this by the total number of indicators, again with a score between zero and one. This is shown on the vertical axis of Figure 4.1. For example, the UN Environment Programme is a custodian for 11 out of the 13 indicators for SDG 12 (on sustainable consumption and production), resulting in the highest score on the dominance metric. The other extreme is SDG 1 on poverty eradication, where the most dominant agency, the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, serves as custodian for only four of 14 indicators.

Based on these dimensions, I categorized the degree of fragmentation of SDG indicator custodianship arrangements in Figure 4.1. a continuum becomes visible after plotting the arrangements. The SDGs in the top left quadrant in Figure 4.1 have both one dominant custodian along with only a few other custodians; I characterized this as low fragmentation. The SDGs in the bottom right quadrant, conversely, have no dominant custodian and high multiplicity. I categorized this as high fragmentation.

Placing the SDGs in other quadrants would be theoretically possible but is apparently not the case in practice. For example, an egalitarian situation where nine indicators are divided among three custodians, with three indicators being the most any custodian has, would place an SDG near the middle of the lower left quadrant. Yet, such an arrangement does not exist. The other extreme, the upper right

quadrant, would occur when many custodian agencies are co-custodian of individual indicators, with one agency being involved with most indicators. Again, empirically such an arrangement does not exist.

Based on this mapping of fragmentation, I studied in detail the degree of coordination among agencies—the dependent variable in this research—under different conditions of institutional fragmentation. I focused on two SDG custodianship arrangements that had especially high or low degrees of fragmentation, that is, SDG 3 on health with a low degree of fragmentation, and SDG 10 on reduced inequalities with a high degree of fragmentation. Despite different institutional arrangements, these SDGs share underlying policy areas captured under the banner of 'well-being' (Waage et al., 2015). In addition, compared with other highly fragmented arrangements with fewer indicators (for example SDG 7), SDG 10 is characterized by a large absolute number of custodian agencies. This makes it an interesting case to study.

4.2.2 Operationalizing coordination

I operationalized coordination, the dependent variable in this research, along three qualitative dimensions: interorganizational knowledge sharing, joint problem solving and conflict resolution, and external knowledge sharing and advocacy. The dimensions are progressive and require increasing commitment and adjustment from the actors involved: devising a joint strategy for problem solving and conflict resolution needs more behavioral adjustment than mere interorganizational knowledge sharing. I developed these three dimensions of coordination based on literature reviews and exploratory interviews with representatives from 16 custodian agencies that have a role in a wide range of SDGs. The operationalization focusses on coordination outputs as opposed to outcomes or impact (Oberthür & Gehring 2006; Stokke 2001), given that it is too early in the SDG trajectory to draw conclusions about the extent to which any interactions have delivered on their promises, including more efficient and effective data management (outcome) in a way that contributes to the attainment of global sustainability (affect).

Interorganizational knowledge sharing is a light form of coordination, mainly through the formation of cognitive networks that can establish trust and inspire further integration with higher levels of commitment and uniformity (R. Biermann 2008; Jordan et al. 2018). Knowledge sharing can be observed for instance in joint interagency platforms. An example is the Technical Cooperation Group on the Indicators for SDG 4, called Education 2030, that involves the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNICEF, the OECD, and the World Bank Group (UNESCO Institute of Statistics 2021).

Joint problem solving and conflict resolution is the second dimension of coordination that I study. It includes joint knowledge production, monitoring systems, strategies, and guidelines. In a well-coordinated setting, actors agree on a problem definition and joint framework for action. This requires shared sensemaking, or 'normative integration', and the buy-in to commit to this shared problem definition (Ivanova & Roy, 2007, 11). Regarding custodians, I analyze here for example the resolution of inconsistencies, overlap, and inefficiencies related to data collection and capacity building. The Integrated Reporting Initiative for SDG 6 on Water, for instance, looks for synergies across UN agencies and aims to harmonize methodologies and requests for data (UN Water 2021).

External knowledge sharing and advocacy is the third dimension. Here, I look at efforts of international organizations to communicate knowledge to a wider public through knowledge hubs or broad engagement with third parties. For example, the Integrated Monitoring Initiative for SDG 6, mentioned above, seeks to integrate external reporting. In the context of the SDGs, the organization of expert meetings and side events during the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development is a novel platform for (external) knowledge sharing and advocacy (see Beisheim 2018).

4.2.3 Data collection and analysis

I conducted a qualitative analysis of the degree of coordination among indicator custodians for SDG 3 (health) and SDG 10 (reduced inequalities). For this purpose, I combined desk research with semi-structured expert interviews. For desk research I relied on the UN Statistics Division's meta-data repository, reports by the UN Statistical Commission, the Inter-Agency Expert Group on the SDGs, reports of the custodian agencies, and the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for Statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This resulted in an initial compilation of initiatives.

I conducted 12 semi-structured interviews to complement the findings. For SDG 3, actors affiliated with five out of six custodian agencies, and for SDG 10 actors affiliated with seven out of nine custodian agencies agreed to partake in the study.[4] Interviews are a suitable method because knowledge of these initiatives is concentrated among individual civil servants who act as indicator focal points. Within their organization, they have the specialized knowledge to participate in these initiatives. These civil servants are publicly listed for each indicator, which allowed us to approach those for the indicators of SDG 3 and SDG 10 specifically (United Nations Statistics Division 2022b). Most organizations had one focal point for a particular SDG, who was sometimes responsible for multiple indicators. For organizations with more than one focal point for a particular SDG, I approached the most senior person, who is often responsible for several indicators for an SDG and oversees activities for indicators for which this person is not the focal point. These interviews helped us to analyze the degree and types of coordination in practice and to discern motives for (non-)involvement of agencies in coordination efforts.

Based on this evidence, I qualitatively evaluated the degree of coordination for each SDG. First, I considered which dimensions of coordination are covered by initiatives organized around SDG 3 and 10. Second, I considered how many custodian agencies initiatives mobilize to adjust their behavior. Lastly, I considered potential contradictions between paper and practice, by using the interview data to determine to what extent initiatives are realizing the dimensions of coordination at which they are aimed. These criteria allow me to compare arrangements. However, as the dimensions of coordination are mostly qualitative, the overall assessment of the degree of coordination required some level of interpretation.

4.3 Results

Comparing the institutional arrangements for SDG 3 (health) and SDG 10 (reduced inequalities), I find substantial differences in their degrees of fragmentation. The arrangement of SDG 3 scores low on multiplicity and high on dominance, with only six custodians for 27 indicators and the World Health Organization (WHO) as a custodian for 20 of these indicators. The arrangement of SDG 10, in contrast, is highly fragmented. Here, 11 indicators are managed by nine custodians, and no agency is structurally dominant. The indicator division is shown in Table 4.1 (United Nations Statistics Division 2020a, 2020b; see also Figure 4.1 below).

[4] Interviewees shared their personal knowledge and perceptions. The inclusion of the three agencies whose affiliates declined our invitation would most likely not have led to a different conclusion of this study. For SDG 10, only unpublished initiatives between the two absentee organizations would have been missed. For both SDGs, relationships between these agencies and the others were identified during the other interviews.

Table 4.1 Indicator custodians for SDG 3 and SDG 10

SDG 3: Good health and well-being		**SDG 10: Reduced inequalities**	
Custodians (6)	**No. of indicators (27)**	**Custodians (9)**	**No. of indicators (11)**
World Health Organization	20	World Bank	4
UN Children's Fund	4	International Labour Organization	2
Population Division of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs	2	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights	1
Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS	1	International Monetary Fund	1
Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development	1	UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs Financing for Development Office	1
UN Organization on Drugs and Crime	1	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development	1
		International Trade Centre	1
		UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division	1
		International Organization for Migration	1

Derived from UN Statistics Division, April 2020

I also find significant differences between coordination for these two SDGs (see Table 4.2 Findings on each dimension of coordination for SDG 3 and SDG 10on the next page): for SDG 3, most emerging initiatives are strongly steered by the WHO, and they cover all three dimensions of coordination. For SDG 10, however, coordination is limited mostly to informal and ad hoc forms of interorganizational knowledge sharing. Coordination in other dimensions is largely absent. I now present these findings in more detail for each of these two SDGs.

Table 4.2 Findings on each dimension of coordination for SDG 3 and SDG 10

	SDG 3	**SDG 10**
(Interorganizational) Knowledge sharing	Both informal as well as more institutionalized initiatives	Only informal, *ad hoc* initiatives
Problem solving and conflict resolution	Global Action Plan and Health Data Collaborative both aim to solve overarching inefficiencies and overlap in health data sphere	No ongoing initiatives
External knowledge sharing and joint advocacy	Global Action Plan working on SDG 3 data hub Several examples of joint advocacy through side-events, presentations of initiatives	Individual data platforms but no joint hub Few to no joint efforts at joint advocacy

4.3.1 Coordination related to SDG 3

All dimensions of coordination are covered by emerging initiatives

I observed the emergence of multiple coordination initiatives for interorganizational knowledge sharing and practical problem solving and conflict resolution around country-level data collection for single indicators under SDG 3. These initiatives focus on the primary functions associated with indicator custodianship. These primary functions include developing a methodology for a specific indicator, stimulating national statistical capacity building to increase the collection of these data, collecting the data, and summarizing the data for annual SDG reports. Most of these efforts are informal and ad hoc and focus on the creation of the yearly SDG report.

Two formalized interagency initiatives related to individual indicators on SDG 3 have emerged as well: the UN Maternal Mortality Inter-Agency Group (for indicator 3.1.1.) and the Inter-Agency Group on Child Mortality Estimation (for indicator 3.2.1.). In addition to the functions mentioned for the more informal coordination efforts for single indicators, these groups also engage in some form of external knowledge sharing, with each group presenting a database with key benchmarks.

Additionally, two initiatives, which I elaborate on below, have emerged to coordinate the health data sphere, with a particular focus on joint problem solving and conflict resolution. I also note initiatives aimed at joined advocacy. Overall, these initiatives depend for their success on the strong and central role of the WHO.

SDG-wide initiatives and joint advocacy are strongly steered by the WHO

The Health Data Collaborative has been the first major new initiative around SDG 3. This initiative now involves four of the six SDG 3 custodians (the WHO, UNAIDS, UNICEF and the OECD) along with other global health-related agencies (Health Data Collaborative 2018a). The WHO stimulated the establishment of this collaborative in 2016, led the development of its operational working plan, and currently hosts the collaborative's secretariat (World Health Organization 2015). After deliverables were

identified collaboratively, between 2016 and early 2019, 12–15 working groups were operational at some point, most of which were co-led by the WHO (Craig R. Burgess, interview 13 August 2020; Mary Mahy, interview 11 August 2020; Health Data Collaborative 2018b). Although the initiative was established for knowledge sharing, problem solving, and conflict resolution, under WHO leadership, the Health Data Collaborative functioned mostly as a mechanism for knowledge sharing (more on this below).

The second major initiative around SDG 3 is the 2019 Global Action Plan for Healthy Lives and Well-being for All. The Global Action Plan is a mechanism for 12 multilateral health-related initiatives and funds to coordinate and align efforts (Rifat Hossain, interview 14 August 2020). These actors include the SDG 3 custodians of UNICEF, UNAIDS, and the WHO (World Health Organization 2019). The UN Secretary General requested the WHO to create the Global Action Plan in collaboration with other agencies. The Global Action Plan has some overlap with the other major initiative around SDG 3. The plan addresses similar issues to those targeted by the Health Data Collaborative, including the prevailing institutional and data fragmentation in the health area. Signatories of the plan committed to a cultural shift towards a more purposeful and systematic collaboration (World Health Organization 2020). The plan started from a joint mapping exercise where agencies identified inefficiencies, overlap, and shared priorities.

Complementary to interorganizational knowledge sharing, conflict resolution, and problem solving, signatories to the Global Action Plan aimed to establish a more systematic form of external knowledge sharing, resembling an SDG 3 data hub. Milestones for 2023 are being identified for more than 50 health-related SDG targets, all to be translated into a dashboard that can be used as a diagnostic tool (World Health Organization 2019). Here I also observe some overlap with initiatives led by the WHO; multiple indicator bases have proliferated outside the Global Action Plan that integrate subsets of the SDG 3 indicators. Examples include the WHO-led Human Reproduction Programme, which includes more than 20 SDG indicators, and the WHO-led Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health (2016–2030).

In addition to these initiatives, the WHO also leads in joint advocacy. In the context of the High-level Political Forum, this happened during the review of SDG 3 and side events that the WHO organized in 2017–2019. Although the expert review on SDG 3 was co-organized by most custodians for SDG 3, which allowed them to engage broadly in knowledge sharing and evaluation, the WHO moderated the session (United Nations SDGs Knowledge Platform 2017a). In 2017, the WHO co-organized an HLPF side event on UHC2030, a partnership advocating universal health coverage that includes UNAIDS, UNICEF, and the OECD (United Nations SDGs Knowledge Platform 2017b). When the 'Every Woman Every Child Strategy for Health' was presented that same year, the WHO and UNAIDS participated in that event, although the strategy is also supported by UNICEF and the OECD (Every Woman Every Child 2017). In 2019, three WHO representatives (and one from UNAIDS) were involved in the presentation of the Global Action Plan, contextualizing it and moderating and participating in the panel. The WHO was clearly positioned as the lead for SDG 3 in these contexts.

In practice, initiatives struggle to realize commitments and partially overlap

The main success of the Health Data Collaborative might be found in the realm of advocacy, indicated by the attention generated by the initial launch, working plan, and global public goods developed by working groups (Craig R. Burgess, interview 13 August 2020). Between late 2018 and late 2019, the initiative ran into challenges, causing a hiatus in its functioning. Meetings were not held, conflicts arose, and members became disgruntled. This was caused by several factors.

First, the WHO secretariat suffered from capacity limitations because of reorganizations, limited funds, and its burdensome technical leadership role. Second, buy-in from custodians and other actors was limited because of the Collaborative's focus on national-level alignment, which required operational work not all partners were interested in. Third, most international civil servants—especially focal points of custodian agencies—had to serve outside their normal mandates. Fourth, although participants agreed on the Collaboratives' mission, they were not reliant on its limited resources, allowing working groups to slowly start operating more independently, or 'disconnect' from the Health Data Collaborative, as this allowed coordination without 'being coordinated' (Craig R. Burgess, interview 13 August 2020). Lastly, the flexible governance structure of the collaborative led to confusion among international agencies, donors, and philanthropic agencies. Some levels of formality and accountability were desired, given the budget involved and deliverables to be concluded.

The WHO then restructured the Health Data Collaborative, beginning with a stakeholder assessment to gain ideas for a more effective governance arrangement. This resulted in a new workplan for 2020–2023 that reflected the WHO's commitment to balancing its own leading role and the perspectives of the different constituencies. The governance structure became more representative, especially through the creation of constituency stakeholder groups. Co-leads for the working groups from these constituencies were actively sought, as most are still staff members from the WHO.

Although some agencies appreciate the added value of the 2019 Global Action Plan, others claim that it completely overlaps with the Health Data Collaborative. Indeed, both initiatives establish a coordination framework without major funding with participation of global level actors that aim to facilitate country-level action. One Global Action Plan working group, co-led by the WHO, even focuses on identifying overlaps and synergies with the Health Data Collaborative (World Health Organization 2020, 25). It is striking that both initiatives are led by the WHO. One interviewee summarized that 'the Global Action Plan initiative appears to overlap with the Health Data Collaborative, but allows WHO to lead the initiative, while still supporting the Health Data Collaborative' (Mary Mahy, interview 11 August 2020).

The Global Action Plan may be seen as a way for the WHO to gain a stronger lead than in the case of the Health Data Collaborative, especially after this initiative ran into governance challenges. In fact, the WHO (co-)leads six of the eight Global Action Plan working groups, participates in all of them, and is responsible for the external knowledge sharing of the Global Action Plan (World Health Organization 2020). Although this division of labor might be adjusted after the evaluation of the initiative in 2023, currently, the WHO clearly steers this initiative. However, it remains to be seen if the envisioned data hub will absorb the multitude of data frameworks. This seems unlikely, as these often relate closely to the core mission of agencies and are used to propose new SDG indicators, sometimes in attempts to acquire additional resources.

Coordination has emerged in the case of low fragmentation of SDG 3

In short, I found that, regarding SDG 3, the low degree of fragmentation among indicator custodians correlates with high degrees of coordination, as I expected based on the literature. There is evidence of substantial knowledge sharing and joint advocacy. SDG-wide initiatives engage in problem solving and conflict resolution, and the Global Action Plan aims to contribute to external knowledge sharing. The WHO plays a pivotal role in steering these activities, which indicates the absence of a leadership struggle that is often observed in more fragmented institutional arrangements.

Despite this high degree of coordination, these efforts still run into challenges. First, the WHO struggled to lead in the Health Data Collaborative because of reorganizations and capacity limitations. Second,

efforts of custodians were complemented with other constituencies within the Collaborative's working groups, including academics, technical institutes, global health institutes, civil society organizations, countries, and the private sector. This situation has resulted in a challenge often expected in more fragmented set-ups: that of generating the buy-in to ensure commitment to problem solving and conflict resolution. Shared problem definitions resulting from initial sensemaking processes were often partly (re-)negotiated in the working groups. This broadening actor base for concrete initiatives can be expected for other SDGs as well, as SDG 17 propagates the formation of partnerships. Third, the WHO lacked the financial resources to compel other agencies to accept perceived losses of autonomy in the interest of even more centralized coordination. Especially for the Health Data Collaborative, this situation decreased the perceived legitimacy of the process, leading to a situation where 'nobody wanted to be coordinated'.

I perceive the inclusion of custodians in coordination efforts as a fourth challenge. In most cases, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime and the Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs have remained absent of larger initiatives. Although agencies do contribute data, knowledge, and expertise to the work of the other agencies, available resources limit their engagement (Karoline Schmid, interview 11 August 2020).[5]

4.3.2 Coordination related to SDG 10

Opportunities for coordination have come and gone

For SDG 10, all interviewees noted some degree of informal interorganizational knowledge sharing between custodian agencies, but there are no formalized initiatives for this purpose. SDG-wide initiatives are largely absent for SDG 10.

One initiative that might have led to increased coordination is the shared UN System Framework for Action that was set up in 2017 through the central document Leaving No One Behind: Equality and Non-Discrimination at the Heart of Sustainable Development. This framework is meant to initiate more policy coordination to better integrate inequalities, discrimination, and equity issues in SDG monitoring, mainly by promoting common methodologies and tools. However, indicator focal points whom I interviewed saw the Leaving No One Behind strategy as a very broad transversal one, especially but not exclusively associated with SDG 10, instead underlying every SDG (Yared Befecadu, interview 18 August 2020; Rosina Gammarano, interview 7 August 2020).

Although the terminology used seemingly touched on joint problem solving and conflict resolution, the framework did not create a coordination mechanism for SDG 10, for example, in the form of custodian-led working groups aimed at tackling commonly identified (data) challenges (United Nations System Chief Board for Coordination 2017a; Civil servant 1, interview 4 August 2020). Two custodians of SDG 10—the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and UN Women—led the Inter-Agency Consultative Group on Inequalities that produced the framework; yet this group is no longer in session (United Nations System Chief Board for Coordination 2017b). The responsibility for evaluating data disaggregation, which was the main data goal of the framework, rests with a subgroup of the Inter-Agency Expert Group on the SDGs, led by national statistical officers, where custodian agencies are merely observers (Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data 2017).

[5] For the Population Division, their status as a Division within a Department is also mentioned as a contributing factor (Karoline Schmid, interview 11 August 2020).

External knowledge sharing for SDG 10 remains limited as well. One example of external knowledge sharing occurred when the World Bank, together with the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, organized the SDG 10 Expert Group Meeting before the 2019 HLPF review (United Nations SDGs Knowledge Platform 2019). The 2019 HLPF had inclusiveness and equality as main themes, and 2019 was the first year SDG 10 was reviewed. Nearly all SDG 10 custodian agencies joined as co-organizers in organizing the Expert Group Meeting (World Bank 2019). However, this meeting was mostly government driven. The role of the World Bank, and their large delegation at the expert meeting, even surprised some custodian agencies. The World Bank's role was deemed out of sync with its high-level focus on growth rather than on inequality (Civil servant 1, interview 4 August 2020). Although the expert meeting brought actors together, it did not result in any subsequent efforts to streamline external knowledge sharing. A dedicated hub for inequality data remains absent, resulting in data dispersed throughout general or very specific databases. A general database is the World Bank's Atlas of Sustainable Development Goals, which provides a graph for a small selection of SDG 10 indicators in a database aiming to showcase all SDGs. Specific databases focus on single targets or indicators, like the set of approximately 90 Migration Governance Indicators that relates to SDG target 10.7 and has been developed by the International Organization for Migration (International Organization for Migration 2020).

The absence of leadership

Leadership was largely absent. For example, during the HLPF review of SDG 10, no custodian took on any public role apart from the general UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. The same had been the case during an earlier 2017 thematic review in the HLPF on the 'multi-dimensions of poverty and inequalities' (United Nations SDGs Knowledge Platform 2017a). Those HLPF side events in 2017–2019 that focused on SDG 10 displayed neither coordination nor leadership for this goal. A few events on single targets or indicators were organized, for example on migration governance indicators organized by the International Organization for Migration (United Nations SDGs Knowledge Platform 17 July, 2019) and two on SDG 10 more broadly (Center for Economic and Social Rights 2019). However, none were jointly organized by the SDG 10 custodians.

Two factors contribute to the absence of leadership. First, key actors around SDG 10 have not supported any agency as a leader for SDG 10. Interviewees do not perceive any single agency as 'the face' of inequality (Civil servant 1, interview 4 August 2020). Inequality is seen as a transversal or cross-cutting issue affecting a wide range of areas and the work of many actors (Yared Befecadu, interview 18 August 2020; Nicolas Fasel, interview 28 July 2020). In this context, 'one custodian becoming the leading agency might not be the best approach since it is a collective effort' (Yared Befecadu, interview 18 August 2020). To advance the non-discrimination and equality agenda, one interviewee mentioned 'all agencies have a role to play, which requires shared responsibility and a sense of ownership, but when everyone is supposed to be co-responsible, there may also be a risk that no-one really is responsible in the end' (Nicolas Fasel, interview 28 July 2020). Another stated that 'there are many agencies that could be leaders, without an obvious choice' (Rosina Gammarano, interview 7 August 2020). To mitigate this risk, 'capacitated leadership' was seen by some as potentially desirable (Nicolas Fasel, interview 28 July 2020).

Second, no actor has posited itself as the leading agency. The World Bank provides data for most indicators on SDG 10 and has a large staff working on 'poverty and shared prosperity' along with a long history of data collection on inequality. However, the Bank, although 'always striving to do more for impact', aims to tackle poverty and inequality as 'twin' issues and perceives its current role 'appropriate' for this purpose (Umar Serajuddin, interview 30 August 2020). The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights—another potential lead agency—is still 'relatively new in this field', in the related

'work of the international statistical and data community' and 'modest given its comparatively limited resources' (Nicolas Fasel, interview 28 July 2020). Also, most custodian agencies here cover only one indicator, while leading more Indicators of other SDGs. The International Labor Organization, for instance, although its work is relevant to many SDGs, focuses its core activities on SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth; Rosina Gammarano, interview, 7 August 2020), and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights leads many indicators under SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions). Resource limitations are mentioned by virtually all custodians as a reason to prioritize. Agencies beyond those active on SDG 10 to take up leadership on inequality are sparse. Although UN-Habitat and the UN Development Programme co-organized work on this topic and organized a side event related to inequality in 2019 (United Nations Social Development Network 2019), UN-Habitat already holds indicators for multiple other SDGs, and the UNDP is steering efforts to reform the UN development system.

Instead of overlapping initiatives—as might arise in a situation of institutional competition—this lack of leadership results in a general lack of initiatives. This could limit the future visibility of the issue area of inequality.

Fragmentation among SDG 10 custodians prevented effective coordination

In sum, regarding SDG 10, I found that the high institutional fragmentation in this issue area correlates with a low degree of coordination among indicator custodians. Again, this supports the expectation derived from the literature. Although I found some knowledge sharing through the yearly production of the SDG report and the pre-HLPF expert review of 2019, there is no coordination beyond this. The lack of a dominant custodian agency to lead coordination best explains this lack of coordination for SDG 10. A fragmented institutional arrangement, like that of SDG 10, where none of the custodians associate themselves primarily with this goal, limits institutional coordination. Additionally, there is no underlying agreement on the necessity to coordinate and no clear direction for later efforts.

These factors are reinforced by the contested nature of inequality as a political issue. Silo-based activities, such as individual reports, strategies, and advocacy, create issue linkages that reframe SDG 10 targets in a way that blurs their emphasis on inequality. The World Bank's focus on interlinkages between SDG 10 and 1, for example, seemingly moves discussions from redistributive inequality—initially associated with target 10.1—towards multidimensional poverty, which reinterprets the reduction in inequality as stimulation of 'inclusive growth'. Efforts of World Bank officials to impose this framing of inequality have been noted since the late 2000s and were observed during the negotiations of SDG 10 (Fukuda-Parr 2019; Saad-Filho 2010). Such reframing complicates efforts towards a more integrated approach to the measurement of inequality, which also includes dimensions such as migration, discrimination, and relationships between countries from the Global South and Global North.

4.4 Conclusion and outlook

Overall, this study contributed new insights into the debate on the impact of global governance fragmentation on policy and programmatic coordination among international institutions, which has been a major research topic for a long time. I developed a multidimensional operationalization of both fragmentation and coordination, which I used to gain novel empirical evidence from the field of SDG indicator custodianship. The comparative analysis of two extreme cases suggests that there is more inter-custodian coordination in institutional arrangements that are less fragmented, and conversely, more fragmented arrangements coincide with a lack of coordination.

Although both arrangements established interorganizational knowledge sharing initiatives, in the less fragmented arrangement these tended to be significantly more institutionalized. In the less fragmented arrangement, initiatives were also established for all dimensions of coordination, whereas in the more fragmented arrangement, only the least demanding type of coordination could be observed. Although SDG 3 profited from leadership of the World Health Organization, the dispersal of responsibility around SDG 10 complicated the realization of the holistic approach the custodians themselves propagated.

I also identified variables that affect the strength of this inverse relationship between fragmentation and coordination. One variable is the steering capacity of a potential leading actor. Because of intra-organizational changes and insufficient capacity, the dominant actor in the case of SDG 3, the WHO itself supported overlapping initiatives. It was therefore unable to prevent inefficiencies, conflicts, lack of buy-in, and the exclusion of actors. Because custodian agencies did not receive additional funding for their tasks and most agencies cannot rely on core funding (Michaelowa 2017), for other less fragmented custodianship arrangements, resource limitations are likely as well. For example, the UN Environment Programme, the custodian for most indicators on SDG 12 (on sustainable consumption and production) but also a relative newcomer in the field of statistics, notes funding challenges as regards its indicators (Jillian Campbell, interview, 1 August 2019). A low degree of fragmentation, therefore, is more likely to lead to strong coordination if the dominant actors have steering or orchestrating capacities (Bernstein 2017), which requires sufficient resources to take on new functions.

A second variable that affects the strength of the Inverse relationship between fragmentation and coordination are the underlying problem structure and level of disagreement about the problem at hand (also Hoppe 2018). Regarding SDG 10, governments still dispute the rationale of addressing inequality, how to define it, and the need for concrete targets. Consequently, no organization was given a leadership role in this area, resulting in custodian agencies associating themselves more closely with other issue areas. Fragmentation then results from, as well as perpetuates, inequality as an unstructured policy problem, as it creates a vacuum in which a lack of leadership complicates streamlining of data collection and monitoring. For countries that prioritize other goals, a fragmented governance architecture might even be a convenient way to avoid accountability, as the object for which they are to be held to account remains ill defined (Kramarz & Park 2016).

Additional research is needed here to study if other goals in a disputed issue area also suffer from challenges to realize effective coordination. The goals on affordable and clean energy (SDG 7) and sustainable production and consumption (SDG 12), with high and low degrees of fragmentation, respectively, might be interesting cases for further comparative study. A limited sense of ownership and identification with the issue area might recur for other SDG areas with high fragmentation. If so, it might become necessary to explore whether appointing and facilitating a leading actor would be possible to orchestrate, steer, or even enforce a more unified approach. For SDG 10, this could lead to the creation of a new UN-based 'program for greater equality' that would serve as this goal's main custodian. Given the results, this would be especially relevant to attempts at problem solving and conflict resolution, as well as external knowledge sharing and joint advocacy.

A third and related important variable is the extent to which additional resources are provided that allow actors to 'jump on the coordination bandwagon'. Access to resources affected coordination in both cases. Broad-based coordination efforts, although sometimes observable, are limited to actors with the resources to join. I therefore assume that the challenges that I observed, such as limited participation of smaller agencies and capacity restrictions for the leading agency, will be common in other areas as well.

Finally, these findings invite reconsideration of the need to better govern the emerging system of custodian agencies. Better coordination can reduce the number of contact points that governments have

to deal with, and the number of data requests received, and it can improve capacity building for national statistical officers, all of which would increase efficiency and effectiveness of data collection. As data are key for the accountability of the SDG framework, this is no luxury. For instance, in 2020 just 19% of data to comprehensively track progress across countries and over time for the SDGs was available (Dang & Serajuddin 2020).

One fruitful direction for future research on better governance is the assessment of the capabilities of potential overarching lead agencies for the system of custodians, which could include the UN Statistics Division, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Inter-Agency Expert Group on the SDGs, or the HLPF. Some have also called for a 'chief statistician' to provide more leadership to the global statistical system (High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for Statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development 2018). Although the potential effectiveness of such a new function in the UN system will depend on the details of its set-up and implementation, it might help overcome persistent problems of institutional fragmentation, and it could provide additional degrees of coordination of the hundreds of indicators that are used to measure progress the Sustainable Development Goals.

Appendix – List of interview references

Table 4.3 Dates, names and affiliations of interviewees

Date	Name	Affiliation
1. August 13th 2020	Craig R. Burgess	World Health Organization
2. August 11th 2020	Mary Mahy	UNAIDS
3. August 14th 2020	Rifat Hossain	World Health Organization
4. August 11th 2020	Karoline Schmid	United Nations Population Division
5. August 18th 2020	Yared Befecadu	International Trade Centre
6. August 7th 2020	Rosina Gammarano	International Labour Organization
7. August 4th 2020	Civil servant 1	UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs
8. July 28th 2020	Nicolas Fasel	OHCHR
9. August 30th 2020	Umar Serajuddin	World Bank
10. August 1st 2019	Jillian Campbell	United Nations Environment Programme

CHAPTER 5

The Impact of the Sustainable Development Goals on Global Policies on Sustainable Consumption and Production

Submitted under the same title to ***Globalizations*** with F. Biermann, R.E. Kim & M.J. Vijge as co-authors on August 7th, 2023.

Abstract

While some of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) benefit from the support of well-established international organizations and regimes, others lack strong institutions in their issue areas. This raises the question of whether the SDGs can contribute to strengthening these less institutionalized areas within global governance. In this chapter I study whether SDG 12, which targets sustainable consumption and production, impacted institutionalization in this policy domain. By analyzing in-depth 49 documents and 19 expert interviews, I traced the institutional development in this area over the ten-year period 2012-2022, focusing on two initiatives, the 10-Year Framework of Programmes for Sustainable Consumption and Production and the One Planet Network. The findings show key mechanisms through which SDGs influence institutionalization processes as well as necessary conditions for this impact. However, while the SDGs seem to offer a temporary impetus to further institutionalization, they do not provide a lasting solution to the challenges of institutionalization.

Keywords

Institutionalization, global goalsetting, SDG 12, sustainable consumption and production, 10 Year Framework of Programmes for Sustainable Consumption and Production, One Planet Network

5.1 Introduction

The SDGs cover almost all areas of human activity, and as a consequence, the global policy domains that these goals address differ vastly in the extent to which they are institutionalized. For example, while SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth has the International Labour Organization as its global institutional anchor, other issue areas rely on multiple institutions with different mandates. Others again have no international organization or regime at the global level to support them.

One important case is the policy domain of achieving sustainable consumption and production (SCP). This domain emerged in 1992 as part of Agenda 21, but its governance has remained weak since (Lorek and Fuchs 2019). Several proposals have been made to strengthen institutionalization in this area, including calls for a "UN Forum" or a UN system-wide global flagship initiative on SCP (SEI and CEEW 2022; Secretariat of the 10YPF on SCP 2018). Negotiations for a global mandate on SCP since 2003 remained unsuccessful until 2012, when a "10-Year Framework of Programmes for SCP" was agreed (United Nations 2012b). The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has since become the coordinating body for this framework, which has also inspired the creation of a global network. And yet, the "10-Year Framework of Programmes for SCP" cannot compare institutionally with major international organizations that support other policy areas, such as health or labor.

The question is whether the SDGs, and here in particular SDG 12 on sustainable consumption and production, have had an impact on the institutionalization of this issue area, and if so, through what mechanisms and under what conditions. Has global goalsetting advanced institutionalization in this policy domain? To trace the impact of the global goals, I combine here an in-depth analysis of 49 key documents with 19 expert interviews. Based on this investigation over the ten-year period 2012-2022, I find that actors working on SCP have strategically used the global goalsetting process to further the institutionalization process in this area. I identify the mechanisms through which this impact occurred, as well as the underlying conditions.

This chapter proceeds as follows. In Section 2 I show the gap in the literature on the relationship between global goalsetting and institutionalization and propose a conceptual framework that consists of three constitutive elements of institutionalization. Section 3 introduces process tracing as the method of enquiry. Section 4 presents the key findings, including the mechanisms and conditions for impact, and in Section 5 I present the conclusions.

5.2 Global Goals and institutionalization

The SDGs follow a tradition of goalsetting by the UN, which includes for example the four Development Decades (1961-2000), the Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997-2006), and the Millennium Development Goals (2000-2015) (Fukuda-Parr 2014). The SDGs (2015-2030) are the most comprehensive and most ambitious set of such goals to date, and they are unique as they cover both high-income and low-income countries.

Earlier research has shown that such processes of global goalsetting can lead to new institutional structures at global, regional, and national levels. These include new global coordinating bodies such as the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (Qerimi 2022), but also national units, departments, and inter-agency collaboration structures (Morita and Masuda 2020; Yunita 2022; Biermann et al. 2022). The first UN Development Decade (1961-1971), for example, coincided with the creation of several international institutions that still exist today, including the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (Stokke 2009, 186; Jackson 2022).

Knowledge on the impact of global goalsetting on existing institutional configurations is also starting to emerge. This research focuses, among others, on (inter-)organizational alignment with the SDGs, and efforts at policy integration to realize the SDGs (e.g., Office of Internal Oversight Service 2019; Rantala et al. 2020; Breitmeier et al. 2021; Watson 2021; Beisheim et al. 2022; Bogers et al. 2022a; Smallwood et al. 2023; van Driel et al. 2022). Thus far, such research indicates that alignment with the SDGs has remained mostly discursive (Beisheim et al. 2022). It has also been shown that international organizations themselves can impact the global goalsetting processes, for example through their involvement in the negotiations of the goals, or through their (selective) intra-organizational engagement with the goals (Fukuda-Parr and McNeill 2019; van Driel et al. 2023).

Existing research has thus shown that global goalsetting might inspire the erection of novel institutions and can impact existing ones. However, studies have yet to investigate the impact of global goalsetting on the institutionalization of issue areas covered by the SDGs. In this chapter, I focus on this question.

Institutionalization can increase the predictability of the engagement between actors by constraining their activities and shaping their expectations, which can increase their joint agency (Keohane, 1988). Such institutionalization can materialize through various entities, which may range from formalized institutions (Seckinelgin 2017; Kim et al. 2020) to inter-organizational cooperation (Rhoads 2016), networks (Mueller, M.L. 2010; Reinicke 1997; Quissel and Walt 2016), negotiations (Bernstein 2000), certification schemes or social movements (Betsill et al. 2022).

Although overly strong institutionalization in some areas is seen as a cause of global policy fragmentation, institutionalization can ensure consistent activity in and attention to an issue area. This is because it creates persistent and connected sets of rules and specific assignments of roles to individuals and groups (e.g., Ivanova and Roy 2007; Biermann et al. 2020; Keohane, 1988). Efforts to institutionalize global norms, for example, have formed a step in their socialization, making them prescriptive for others by embodiment in law, institutions, or public discourse (Risse and Ropp 2007; Bernstein 2000; Lake and Risse 2021). Yet little is known so far about the extent to which global goalsetting, by prioritizing work on certain issue areas, can speed up or otherwise impact the institutionalization of such issue areas, and if so through what mechanisms and under what conditions.

To investigate this impact of global goalsetting on international institutionalization, I draw here on key insights from the international relations literature and advance a conceptual framework that defines institutionalization as a combination of three elements: authority, procedures, and resources. All three elements move policy making on an issue from ad hoc to being more structured and predictable, and hence institutionalized.

First, increases or decreases in institutionalization can be assessed by differences in authority, that is, the quality of the core mandates actors receive or establish in a particular domain. This can be expressed in legal documents, but also through a strategy document, a common agenda, a list of key themes, a mission statement, or a program. Because even highly institutionalized governance structures will have some remaining conflicts about underlying norms, authority is unlikely to amount to full norm convergence (Wiener 2008; Shaffer and Trachtman 2011).

Second, more or less institutionalization can be assessed by the type of procedures, that is, the rules that actors use to shape their interactions. Procedures can cover who is allowed or able to participate, in what way, how decisions are made and how benefits are generated and distributed (Mueller, M.L. 2010). Actors might be held increasingly accountable to such procedures, which can occur through terms of reference, partnership agreements or more formal agreements that indicate the 'rules of the game' for interactions.

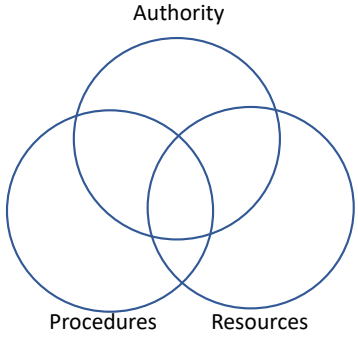
Third, institutionalization can be measured by differences in the availability of resources through which actors exert their authority. Resources can be material, like financial means or human resources, but also ideational, such as normative influence, agenda-setting power, or scientific evidence.

This conceptual framework recognizes that institutionalization can emerge through a number of entities. In (formalized) organizations, predictability might increase as key topics or principles become reflected in cross-organizational policy documents, standard operating procedures, and (in)formal agreements (Rhoads 2016). Within networks, parties can start to understand and accept norms and conventions and can formulate rules governing their interactions through partnership frameworks that establish administrative and governance structures (Mueller, M.L. 2010; Quissel and Walt 2016; but see also Reinicke 1997). Certification schemes, negotiation efforts and social movements can result in field building by establishing an arena that brings actors into routine contact around an at least partially shared project, including ideas about how governance should be carried out (Betsill et al. 2022).

This conceptual framework also recognizes that institutionalization occurs through multiple tools, methods, and processes. These range from formal negotiations to initial strategy documents, policy declarations, increased funding or public laws (Lake and Risse 2021; Bernstein 2000; Keohane 1988, 384).

Figure 5.1 visualizes the relationships among the constitutive elements of institutionalization. These elements are connected, and they might over-lap in practice. Authority and resources might be extended after procedures are agreed that can increase (external) legitimacy. The resources available might inform the breath of the domain around which interaction can take place. Furthermore, the constitutive elements will not necessarily appear in a particular order. Interactions might start around an available set of resources; procedures might occur as the last step when actors are considering (financial) contributions to an effort, and authority might change over time as new actors are allowed to join ongoing efforts.

Figure 5.1 Assessment framework for institutionalization



Based on this conceptual framework, I can deduce that some issue areas covered by an SDG are strongly institutionalized. Two examples are good health and well-being (SDG 3) and decent work (SDG 8), which are well anchored in international organizations (the World Health Organization and the International Labour Organization). Their constitutional documents demarcate their authority and subsequent rules of procedure, conventions and agreements on actor engagement and funding. The

theme of clean water and sanitation (SDG 6) relies on the multi-agency effort of UN Water, while climate action (SDG 13) depends on the 2015 Paris Agreement. For the theme of inequality (SDG 10), however, there is no central actor (see Chapter 2). SDG 12 on sustainable consumption and production is also an issue area that is poorly institutionalized globally. Whether global goalsetting, and the process surrounding SDG 12 especially, had any impact here to advance institutionalization, is the focus of this chapter, assessed around the elements of authority, procedures, and resources.

Overall, multiple impacts of global goalsetting on institutionalization are possible. In line with optimistic views about the transformative potential of the 2030 Agenda, global goalsetting might advance institutionalization by easing constraints for actors involved (Sorensen 2022), by directly leading to novel outcomes (Sorensen 2018), or by steering institutionalization in a particular direction. Alternatively, however, global goalsetting might also restrict institutionalization efforts, which would signal the existence of important, yet unidentified barriers to institutionalization related to this governance mechanism.

5.3 Method

To investigate the impact of SDG 12 on the institutionalization of global policies on sustainable consumption and production, I used process tracing as the method. Process tracing is a within-case analysis of trajectories of change based on qualitative data, where diagnostic evidence is selected and analyzed based on research questions and hypotheses posed by the investigator (Collier 2011).

I took a deductive, explaining-outcome approach (Beach and Pedersen 2019; Patterson et al. 2019). This means that deductively, I based myself on the analytical framework presented in Section 2 to identify and link pieces of evidence about the dependent variable, institutionalization (Collier 2011). As process tracing relies on proper description of a phenomenon (Mahony 2010), I first identified key points in time where activity occurred in the three constitutive elements of institutionalization. I used a timeline of 10 years (2012-2022) that commences with the start of the SDG negotiations and the establishment of the 10 Year Framework of Programmes for SCP (10YFP). The investigation subsequently focused on investigating the impact of one specific factor, namely global goalsetting (and the processes around SDG 12), on the observed outcomes on institutionalization. Looking at the individual moments in time where impact could be observed furthermore allowed me to look for the mechanisms through which impact occurred and identify the necessary conditions for these mechanisms to emerge.

For both purposes, I used a set of 49 key documents of 1,499 pages in total published by the secretariat of the 10YFP and the broader 10YFP/later One Planet Network, along with numerous webpages and articles. Documents include, among others, annual reports/magazines (available for the period of 2012-2017 and the years of 2018 and 2019), yearly reports to the High-Level Political Forum (available yearly between 2014-2022), meeting minutes from the Executive, Programme and Pro-gramme desk meetings (2017-2021) of the network, meetings from the Group of Friends on SCP (2020-2022) and a number of consultative meetings held towards a renewed Global Strategy on SCP (2023-2030). These documents include summaries of discussions about ongoing work, ways to increase impact, and overall updates and opportunities for collaboration.

An additional source of data for the process tracing approach consisted of 19 semi-structured expert interviews. Interviewees included actors in the 10YFP/One Planet Network, including (past) members of its secretariat, participating international organizations, business actors, scholars and thinktanks. I also included actors from the issue area of SCP who are not active in the emerging network structure. These interviewees put the network in perspective and provided an indication of the context in which institutionalization occurs. Interviewees were primarily questioned about the key institutional

developments identified and their perspectives on the most important factors contributing to these developments, including the role of global goalsetting therein. These findings combined in-formed the assessment of the impact of global goalsetting on institutionalization around SCP. Here, I used my assessment per constitutive element to inform a broader assessment of overall impact.

5.4 The impact of global goalsetting on institutionalization

I now elaborate on the impacts observed for the constitutive elements of authority, procedures and resources. I outline the mechanisms through which impact occurred and the conditions that allowed the impact.

5.4.1 Increased authority

I find that SDG 12 has impacted authority as it allowed actors from the 10YFP to fortify, further clarify and eventually ensure the proliferation of a mandate on SCP beyond 2022 (see Table 5.1 below).

The process before the launch of the SDGs, the so-called Marrakech negotiation process on SCP (2003-2011), resulted in the initial agreement of a non-legally binding global mandate on Sustainable Consumption and Production. The Ten-Year Framework (2012-2022) on Programmes for SCP (hereafter 10YFP) was adopted during the Rio+20 Conference and endorsed by the UN General Assembly (2012; United Nations 2012). The 10YFP established a common vision on the domain of SCP. It stated that, "fundamental changes in the way societies produce and consume are indispensable for achieving global sustainable development. All countries should promote sustainable consumption and production patterns, with the developed countries taking the lead and with all countries benefiting from the process, taking into account the Rio principles, including, inter alia, the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities […]. Governments, relevant international organizations, the private sector and all major groups should play an active role in changing unsustainable consumption and production patterns" (United Nations 2012b, 3). It thus identified a domain and a set of actors that would continue to engage in it.

The first Impact of SDG 12 on authority occurred during the SDG negotiations in 2012-2015, when 10YFP actors used this process to fortify their newly established SCP mandate. The 10YFP mandate was as universal and (non-)legally binding as the SDGs. Still, the inclusion of SDG 12 in the 2030 Agenda was seen as furthering the legitimacy and awareness of the 10YFP, since all sorts of frameworks, projects and decisions are adopted by the General Assembly. The SDGs were expected to "gain much more awareness from a public point of view" (Interview 1).[6] 10YFP participants pushed for SCP to be taken up in the SDG framework through the publication of reports (May and June of 2014), and the organization of side-events during the 7th and 11th sessions of the Open Working Group on the SDGs (Secretariat of the 10YPF on SCP 2014). The 10th session of the Open Working Group recognized the 10YFP, and in 2015 SDG 12 became a standalone goal on SCP, of which the 10YFP became the first target. The inclusion of SCP in the SDG framework was evaluated as constituting 'a paradigm shift' for the 10YFP, 'renewing and further enhancing' its mandate, giving it a 'strong socio-political sustainability' (Rouhban 2018, 6).

The second impact of global goalsetting (2017-2018) occurred around the mid-term review of the 10YFP in 2017 when SDG 12 was used to further clarify the existing mandate of the emerging 10YFP

[6] Andrew Schmidt, Former Member of the One Planet Network Secretariat, March 1st, 2023. All interviewees were speaking in their personal capacity.

Network. This mid-term review noted that the 10YFP remained quite abstract and had not led to a clearcut strategy, compass or common roadmap for actors working on the topic (Rouhban 2018, 23). Partners in the 10YFP started to develop a mid-term strategy (2018-2022), not to modify the 10YFP, but to further specify 'a common vision, objectives and strategic principles' for actors working on SCP. In developing the strategy, SDG 12 was highlighted as a 'a key opportunity to leverage' to 'consolidate and enhance the 10YFP's relevance' (Rouhban 2018, 5). SDG 12 was also considered attractive from a communications point of view, as it provided one goal with a manageable number of targets to address and attain (Interview 2).[7] In the finalized One Plan for One Planet (2018-2022) strategy, actors involved in the 10YFP decided to focus on implementing SDG 12. The first strategic objective became to make the 10YFP network 'become an effective SDG 12 implementation mechanism' (The One Planet Network 2018, 2). The 2018 High-level Political Forum for Sustainable Development was used to launch the strategy.

The third Impact of global goalsetting (2020-2022) occurred towards the end of the 10YFP mandate, when 10YFP members utilized SDG 12 to ensure a continued global mandate on SCP, which was scheduled to expire in January of 2023. In 2017, it was already noted that the One Plan One Planet Strategy might allow to 'prepare ground for […] possible [mandate] extension beyond 2022' (Rouhban 2018, 5). To guide the process towards mandate extension, the Group of Friends of SCP', initiated by two Member States of the 10YFP board, brought together other Member States committed to implementing the 10YFP. During the second meeting of the Group (March 2021), the 10YFP Secretariat presented two potential scenarios for mandate extension. The first was to extend the mandate 'to align with the 2030 agenda and maintain the integrity of SDG 12.' The second scenario was the negotiation of a 'new mandate, establishing a framework for multilateral cooperation on SCP.' A majority preferred scenario 1, as scenario 2 would require a yet to be identified intergovernmental body to conduct negotiations, significant time and resources, and could not guarantee an outcome. 10YFP Secretariat members had already considered during the SDG negotiations that in due time, having a goal on SCP might ensure the extension of the 10YFP mandate beyond 2022 (Interview 2). Using the argument that the work on SCP was not yet finished, the mandate of the 10YFP was successfully extended, based on a decision of the General Assembly in 2021 (United Nations 2022a). Mandate extension was followed by a Global Strategy on SCP (2023-2030) presented in the run up to the Stockholm+50 conference, adopted by 10YFP Board on October 19th of 2022 (United Nations 2022b, 3). The Global Strategy specifies how work on SCP will be steered. The strategy still focuses on SDG 12, but the link between SCP and other SDGs is given a much more prominent role, as SCP is now posited as the key factor underpinning the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, and the key to advancing the entire 2030 Agenda.

In sum, although the initial establishment of a mandate on SCP was not linked to the SDGs, I observe three time-periods where impact of global goalsetting can be observed. Actors used the process to fortify an existing mandate (2012-2015), to further clarify an existing mandate (2017-2018), and to ensure the proliferation of a mandate beyond 2022 (2020-2022). Especially for the process towards mandate extension, the existence of a global goal might be deemed especially impactful. It allowed actors to avoid considerable hurdles that other scenarios would have presented.

[7] Charles Arden-Clarke, Former Head of the 10YFP Secretariat, 2. March 20th, 2023

5.4.2 Strengthened procedures

Global goalsetting also had some impact on the procedures in this global governance area. The procedures that emerged before the launch of the SDGs consisted of the establishment not only of the 10YFP Secretariat but also that of a 10YFP Board. The roles introduced consistent of a Board consistent of 10 Member States (United Nations 2013), an inter-agency group consisting of 19 UN-entities (chaired by UNEP and co-chaired by UN DESA), and a group of National (NFPs) and Stakeholder (SFPs) focal points. The Board was tasked with promoting the framework, guiding the 10YFP Secretariat, assisting in securing funding, ensuring reporting and the convening of international and regional meetings. UN representatives were called upon to coordinate to support implementation, increase visibility of the framework, and to enhance information sharing (10YFP Inter-Agency Coordination Group 2016). To structure engagement within the network, six voluntary thematic programmes were thereafter established (2012-2016) to bring together existing initiatives, scaling up and replicating successful policies and generating and supporting new projects in response to priorities and needs as they emerged (ECOSOC 2015a, 6).[8] Any entity supporting the 10YFP could participate. Participants providing resources for implementation became network partners, and those with 'recognized competencies' in an area could position themselves as programme leads. Each programme was governed by a maximum of one lead and three co-leads, a coordination desk and a multi-stakeholder advisory committee of up to 25 organizations. In 2018, over 611 partners engaged with the programmes (ECOSOC 2018, 10).

Impact of SDG 12 and the broader 2030 Agenda is notable around the mid-term evaluation of the 10YFP (2017-2018), when both were referred to as a rationale for the (re-)direction of activities towards reducing fragmentation, promoting a systems perspective and focusing on national level implementation (see Table 5.1 below). The SDGs were noted repeatedly in the lead up to the mid-term strategy that flowed from the evaluation (2018-2022), which saw the 10YFP network being renamed the One Planet Network. SDG 12 itself even became the first strategic priority of the strategy. The mid-term review had noted that the 10YFP should link to the national level 'because SDGs are geared to the national level' (Rouhban 2018, 68). The network has subsequently focused on better understanding national conditions for SCP, establishing stronger communication between NFPs and programs, and establishing tools for countries to identify priority sectors and intervention areas (ECOSOC 2019, 8). The number of countries taking action on SCP and receiving support from/using resources or practices of the network was introduced as a measure of effectiveness (The One Planet Network 2018).

Additionally, a UN Development System report on the SDGs noted that efforts around SDG 12 were "fragmented and piecemeal," providing an impetus for concerted UN System efforts (Dalberg 2017). It was during the review of SDG 12 at the HLPF that UN-entities subsequently presented the One UN for One Planet document (2018, 5), in which they noted that 'the magnitude of the task set out through SDG 12 called for a strengthened and concerted UN System.' The novel role of SDG 'indicator custodianship' was noted as presenting a way to stimulate coordination among agencies (UNEP, FAO, UNESCO, UNWTO), led by the 10YFP Secretariat (UNEP Evaluation Office 2021, 59). The idea to introduce cross-cutting themes to promote a systems approach within the network itself was presented to 'capitalize' on the HLPF and UN Environment Assembly (ECOSOC 2019, 21). Inter-programme collaboration meetings were held, and starting with the cycle of 2018-2019, the network worked on overarching themes to focus network activities (ECOSOC 2019, 21).

[8] The six programmes established included; the Sustainable Public Procurement Programme and Consumer Information Programme (2014), the Sustainable Tourism Programme, Sustainable Lifestyles Programme and Sustainable Buildings and Construction Programme (2015) and the Sustainable Food Systems Programme (2016). Most programmes resulted from the task forces that existed during the Marrakech process.

However, although this 'reorientation' mentions the 2030 Agenda, arguably, the mid-term review itself also warranted some of these changes. Firstly, the review indicated that the network was not properly geared towards national level implementation, which was the eventual aim of the 10YFP. Between 2012 and 2017, most activities had been global (38%) in scope, with national (30%), regional (21%) and local (11%) activities playing a less significant role (ECOSOC 2018, 6). Programmes often lacked a clear entry point at and offering for the country level and had limited time to engage with National Focal Points beyond co-leads or MAC-members. In turn, National Focal Points often lacked the knowledge to engage with (all six) network programmes. The relation between programmes and focal points was therefore often considered weak (UNEP Evaluation Office 2021, 57). Furthermore, only 12 percent of reported network activities had been focused on implementation.

Secondly, the review indicated that UNEP's coordination of the implementation of the 10YFP did not prevent a siloed approach in countries that were implementing SCP policies. In 2019 it was noted that 90 percent of (standalone) SCP policies had been placed within the silo of Environmental Ministries, with only 10 percent being led by Ministries of Economy, Finance, Planning, Trade and Industry or a High-level political body (UNEP Evaluation Office 2021, 109). The economic and social dimensions of sustainable development were not reflected in the targets and impacts of the reported policies. This itself provided a strong argument for a fortified multi-actor approach.

Although I note the redirection of the network as an impact of global goalsetting, these changes might have been explicitly linked to the SDG framework, as SDG 12 was considered a key vehicle to extend the 10YFP mandate. Additionally, an impetus to refer to the SDG framework was created when in 2017 the key reporting venue for the 10YFP was changed from ECOSOC to the HLPF. Although actors might, alternatively, have opted for a strategic direction more closely connected to the (limited) capacities of the network at the time, this would have been a challenging decision, given that a more indirect role like that of a (global) standard-setter, policy-advisor or discussion platform, as opposed to an implementation mechanism, might have been taken into considerations during discussions on the renewal of the 10YFP mandate.

5.4.3 Broadening the resource base

When it comes to the resource base in the area of sustainable consumption and production, I note an increase in activity starting in 2013. After summarizing the processes that were started before any impact of global goalsetting, I note two key types of resources – monitoring indicators and financial mechanisms, where global goalsetting has had an impact.

In 2013, before any impact of the goalsetting process, 10YFP actors started to accumulate existing tools and practices around SCP, which fed into a knowledge management platform, the SCP clearinghouse. In 2017, over 424 initiatives and 438 resources had been collected via this clearinghouse, and over 3,891 members were active on this platform (Rouhban 2018, 28). Analyses of these practices were used to compile National Implementation Toolboxes. A link with the SDGs was established over time, as the clearinghouse has since been renamed twice and is now called the 'SDG 12 hub' (ECOSOC 2015a, 13; UNEP Evaluation Office 2021, 60).

In 2016, I observe the first impact of global goalsetting on resources, as the SDGs served as a source to establish monitoring indicators (see Table 5.1 below for the overview). The SDG framework served as one of the existing frameworks that these indicators built upon. The framework included SDG 12 indicators, but also indicators from other SDGs, including those on climate action (SDG 13), life on land (SDG 15), decent work (SDG 8), industry innovation and infrastructure (SDG 9), partnerships (SDG 17), sustainable cities (SDG 11), education (SDG 4), water (SDG 6), energy (SDG 7) and health (SDG 3). The

framework resulted in indicators spread across the levels of output (i.e., information exchange), outcome (concrete policies and initiatives) and impact (The One Planet Network 2020). In line with the 10YFP, impact was defined as concrete changes in the realm of resource efficiency, environment and human well-being in the context of SCP. Retroactive reporting (2013-2016) for Programmes and governments started in 2017. Reporting indicated that affecting changes in impacts remained a challenge (ECOSOC 2018). Partially as a response to these results, work started on science-based tools to ensure policymakers could further operationalize SCP at the country level. A key example forms the 'SCP Hotspot Analysis tool' launched in March of 2019 which facilitates decision-making based on data from 171 counties (UNEP Evaluation Office 2021).

The second Impact of global goalsetting occurred In the lead-up (2017-2018) to the mid-term strategy One Plan for One Planet (2018-2022), as SDG 12 provided an argument for a novel financing mechanism. In the realm of finance, an initial 10YFP Trust Fund administered by the 10YFP Secretariat had been established in 2014, which received total contributions of USD 14,340,574, and funded 57 projects between 2012 and 2020 (UNEP 2020a). Projects were selected based on 'their potential for replication, scaling-up and alignment to national and regional priorities'. Selected projects included 13,4 % global, 12,2% regional, 34,4% national and 40,2% local activities. Following the evaluation, and as part of the One Plan for One Planet Strategy, a novel fund, called the SDG 12 Multi-Partner Trust Fund was established (UNEP Evaluation Office 2021). This fund was based on a Memorandum of Understanding between a group of UN entities, including UNEP, FAO, UN Habitat, UNWTO, UNOPS and the Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office (UNDP joined the effort shortly thereafter). The steering committee of the fund comprised of high-level representatives of UN Agencies, the Chair of the 10YFP Board and representatives from funding partners. Projects were supposed to focus on countries that were deemed 'SCP ready' and on high-impact sectors and value chains.

The move towards a multi-partner trust fund can be linked to the call to reduce fragmentation noted in the UN Development System report on activities for the SDGs. In this context, the use of Multi-Partner Trust Funds had been suggested by UN officials. SDG 12 provided an anchor, but also a legitimation for a novel financing mechanism. The need for change was apparent from the mid-term evaluation of the 10YFP Trust Fund. This fund had received contributions from a limited group of countries and was able to cover just 2.8 percent of total project proposals received (ECOSOC 2018, 25). Programmes had spent much time on writing proposals for which funding remained absent, which led to members becoming disgruntled, and at times disengaging from the 10YFP network.

Overall, global goalsetting contributed to a monitoring framework on SCP, and provided a means through which a novel funding mechanism could be established. However, as the SDG indicators themselves have been critiqued for failing to provide concrete targets, it remains to be seen to what extent this link will lead to increased accountability among actors. With regards to the SDG 12 multi partner trust fund, it also remains to be seen if connecting to a global agenda, and broadening the actor base, will lead to more financial contributions than those made to the 10YFP Trust Fund.

5.4.4 Mechanisms and conditions for SDG impact

Based on the findings noted in the previous sections, Table 5.1 presents an overview of the results. Overall, I find that SDG 12, and the broader SDG process, was used by 10YFP/One Planet network actors strategically to advance an institutionalization process that had already started in 2012.

I identified key mechanisms through which SDG 12 created the observed impact on institutionalization. I found that global goalsetting was used to fortify, clarify, and extend an existing mandate. For procedures, global goalsetting was utilized to increase the public knowledge of and attention for the issue

area under study, and to rationalize and further legitimate strategic choices for actors working on the topic. As for resources, global goalsetting helped identify key impact indicators and provided an argument for a novel funding mechanism.

For these impacts to occur, three conditions had to be present. First, impact depended on an existent set of mobilized actors willing and able to activate the strategic potential of global goalsetting. Here, the process leading to the 10YFP (2003-2011) was important, as it established interactions between a previously more fragmented set of actors. Second, and relatedly, impact was conditional on a mandated international institution, UNEP, that coordinated the 10YFP (network) (starting in 2012). Third, impact was conditional on foregoing alternative pathways of institutionalization. In 2016, SDG indicators were favored over other potential outcome-oriented indicators. Towards the mid-term strategy (2018-2022), becoming an SDG 12 implementation mechanism that required significant resources was chosen over other (more indirect) roles like that of a (global) standard-setter, policy-advisor or discussion platform for the One Planet Network. In 2020, mandate extension was chosen over the negotiation of a novel (more ambitious) mandate that might have posited clearer outcome-oriented indicators, a move away from self-regulation towards clearer standard-setting from governments, or some other type of radicalization or legalization.

Table 5.1 Overview of results

	Year	Key developments	Impact of global goalsetting	Mechanisms of impact
Authority	2012	Ten-Year Framework on Programmes for Sustainable Consumption and production (2012-2022)	1. 10YFP organizes side-events at and submits reports to OWG-SDGs (2014) 2. 10YFP recognized by Open Working Group on the SDGs (10th session) 3. Standalone SDG on SCP, with 10YFP as first target (2015)	Fortification of an existing mandate
	2018	One Plan for One Planet, mid-term strategy (2018-2022)	1. First objective to become an effective SDG 12 implementation mechanism 2. Presented during HLPF 2018	Further clarification of an existing mandate
	2020	Start of consultative process towards mandate renewal	Aligning with 2030 Agenda and maintaining integrity of SDG 12 presented as one of two potential scenarios for mandate renewal	Ensuring the proliferation of a mandate
	2021	Ten-Year Framework mandate renewal (2023-2030)	Aligning with 2030 Agenda and maintaining integrity of SDG 12 chosen as key scenario for mandate extension	Ensuring the proliferation of a mandate
	2022	Global Strategy on SCP (2023-2030)	SCP positioned as 'key factor underpinning planetary crises and advancing entire 2030 Agenda'	Further clarification of an existing mandate

	Year	Key developments	Impact of global goalsetting	Mechanisms of impact
Procedures	2012-2013	Establishment of roles: Board, Inter-Agency Coordination Group, Focal Points	First global meeting 10YFP held back-to-back with SDG negotiations (14/15 May 2015)	Publicity
	2012-2016	Establishment of venues for interaction: multi-stakeholder Programmes	Several Programmes are launched during HLPF meetings	Publicity
	2017-2018	Repurposing of governance structure	2030 Agenda noted as rationale for national level focus, stronger focus on inter-agency collaboration and a (cross-cutting) systems approach (2018→)	Legitimation for chosen direction
Resources	2013 →	Accumulation of tools and practices		
	2014-2017	10YFP Trust Fund		
	2016-2017	Monitoring framework	Built on indicators from SDG 12, and ten other SDGs	Source for monitoring indicators
	2018	SDG 12 Multi-Partner Trust Fund	Explicitly linked to SDG 12, multi-partner trust funds promoted as tool for the SDGs	Basis for novel funding mechanism
	2019	Science-based policy tool SCP-HAT		

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter investigated whether and how global goalsetting impacted the institutionalization of an underdeveloped issue area in global governance. I focused on the policy domain of sustainable consumption and production, which is targeted specifically by SDG 12.

To analyze institutionalization processes, I developed a framework based on the constitutive elements of authority, procedures and resources. I applied this framework to trace key institutional developments in the issue area of sustainable consumption and production (2012-2022) and study the impact of global goalsetting (especially the process around SDG 12). As an analytical tool, I note the potential of the institutionalization framework to be utilized by others conducting global governance research. The framework is broad enough to encapsulate the activities of different types of entities, focuses on institutionalization as a process, but nevertheless differentiates constitutive elements that allow for concrete observation.

Using this framework in the case of sustainable consumption and production has led to several insights. I found that the institutional impact of global goals is broader than its impact on existing or establishing novel institutional entities. Furthermore, I have identified several mechanisms through which global goalsetting impacts institutionalization, which can feed into future hypotheses. I found that global goalsetting was used to fortify, further clarify and ensure the proliferation of an existing mandate. For procedures, the findings suggest that global goalsetting was utilized to increase the public knowledge of and attention for the issue area under study, and to rationalize and further legitimate strategic choices for actors working on the topic. As for resources, global goalsetting helped identify key impact indicators and provided an argument for a novel funding mechanism.

I also identified the conditions upon which impact depends in this case, which might help explain differentiation in impact across (future) cases. Three conditions helped materialize impact in the present case. First, the emergence of links between fragmented sets of actors, willing and able to utilize the potential of global goalsetting. Second, the existence of an international institution with a clear (coordination) mandate for the issue area. Lastly, the need to forego some alternative pathways of institutionalization. Additionally, impact might have been facilitated by the convergence of the timelines between the institutionalization process and the global goalsetting process, which both took off in the year 2012. More research is needed to see if and if so, how impact materializes for other issue areas, and to what extent these conditions are necessary/sufficient beyond the present case.

Despite the impact of global goalsetting, the issue area of sustainable consumption and production continues to face a number of challenges. The discussion on mandate extension will recur, which requires the One Planet Network to show its effectiveness in impacting country level actions, for which it needs significant resources. This might be challenging, given that the SDG 12 multi-partner trust fund has thus far not led to increased donations. SDG 12 also remains the most underfunded SDG within the UN System. SCP remains a politically sensitive topic, as it touches upon the fundamentals of economic activity, and the behavior of individuals, states and major corporations.

Based on the challenges noted in the case of SCP, I note that although global goalsetting might be used to further institutionalization in the mid-term, it is has not solved some of the long-term, recurring challenges underpinning the institutionalization process in this area. As the SDGs identified a set of global priorities, they did not come up with a set of rules and procedures to guarantee that these will all individually receive the attention and resources necessary to move the needle forward. The novel Global Strategy on SCP (2023-2030) recognizes that to inspire the necessary publicity, momentum,

political will and activity, the 10YF might need to move in line with, but also beyond the 2030 Agenda to build a broader global movement on sustainable consumption and production.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

In this chapter, I present the key findings and related conclusions of this thesis. These are linked to the overarching research problems, questions and sub-questions introduced in Chapter 1. To order the presentation of these findings, I will start with answering each sub-question individually. The answers to these questions are thereafter used to present a number of overarching insights that are used to answer the main research question.

6.1 Findings on the sub-questions of this thesis

As presented in Chapter 1, this thesis studied four sub-questions:

1. How are international organizations impacted by their engagement with the SDGs?

2. How are external steering activities by international organizations impacted by the SDGs?

3. How is inter-agency coordination impacted by the SDGs?

4. How are institutionalization processes in which international organizations are engaged impacted by the SDGs?

I now discuss each question in the following sub-sections in turn.

6.1.1 International organizations can impact all phases of global goal setting

First, I answer how international organizations are impacted by engaging with the SDGs. To answer this question, I analyzed five phases of engagement for international organizations with the policy cycle of the SDGs: agenda-setting, discursive uptake, organizational adjustment, country-level processes, and global review processes. I used a mixed-method approach of quantitative text analysis, desk research and semi-structured expert interviews to study a single case, the engagement with the SDGs of the World Bank. I now discuss my findings and add additional insights from the other case studies, even though these were not primarily aimed at this particular question.

Based on the case study of the World Bank, I found that rather than being a recipient of the SDGs, this international organization had considerable agency in each phase of engagement. A key insight here thus is that international organizations can have a major impact in all phases of engagement, and can be especially impactful when they influence the agenda-setting phase, which influences all subsequent phases.

In the agenda-setting phase, I observed the impact of the organization on the wording of and benchmarks for SDG 10 on reduced inequalities, the focus of my analysis in this sub-study. I could show that to reach impact, international organizations do not need to be an official negotiating partner. International organizations were not able to decide on any of the goals, targets and indicators under negotiation, but they could participate in the meetings leading up to these decisions as observers. As the SDGs included topics, including that of reducing inequalities, which had not been part of previous sets of global goals, this provided a space for international organizations that had been working on these topics to offer their working definitions, benchmarks, and intra-organizational goals.

A key observation from my study of agenda-setting and benchmarking is that a potential consequence of the process might be the *multiplier effect of capacities*. Powerful international organizations with existing capacities were important in a context in which no novel resources were provided for the task of, for example, indicator custodianship. These existing capacities thus influenced outcomes. Especially organizations with strong statistical capacities were in a good position to influence the process, as member states later became reliant on them for the custodianship of these indicators. The World Bank,

an already quite influential organization, was thus able to impact the SDGs and became one of the organizations with the biggest responsibility for the SDG indicators. Other organizations, with less of a history with data-collection have at times taken on new responsibilities, but given the lack of additional resources presented to execute these new roles, actors with existing means were able to take on these new responsibilities more easily, and could thereby use them as a multiplier, extending their reach within the SDG process. Indicator custodianship later increased the influence of these organizations on country-level processes, given their coordinating role for the indicator data.

A key outcome of this process, in addition to the multiplier effect, was that international organizations were able to impact the extent to which other definitions, for example those of civil society actors, were taken into consideration. In the case of SDG 10, for example, benchmarks for inequalities of outcome, proposed among others by Oxfam Novib, were not included.

In the phase of discursive uptake, I found that organizations pick and choose among goals and indicators in their communication, but not always explain the rationale for their choices in the process. The World Bank focused on goals mostly outside of its core mandate, preferring intra-organizational language for the topics of poverty and shared prosperity. Interestingly, success in shaping some goals here decreased the willingness to use the goals as a communication devise thereafter. Notably, the World Bank, in its official reporting, does not present a clear reason for this de facto prioritization beyond a reference to its core mandate.

In the phase of organizational adjustment, I found that several organizational trackers, including indicators of organizational success, had started to include SDG indicators. However, the uptake of these trackers did not lead to any notable changes. The core organizational structure, for example, was not altered to further implementation or consider the holistic nature of the 2030 Agenda. As organizational indicators of success themselves included a sub-set of SDG indicators, relying on these to hold the organization accountable for its implementation of the SDGs is likely to be insufficient. Organizational actors introduced the notion of 'pre-alignment' to make the thus far unverifiable claim that the organization already aligned with the SDGs before their introduction. International organizations might thus lack clear, verifiable data that show that their organization is aligned to the SDGs, and what this means in practice, despite making claims about alignment.

In the phase of country-level processes, I found that organizations can be reluctant to introduce the SDGs in the accountability schemes for country level activities, given the voluntary nature of the goals. In the case investigated, the SDGs were introduced as an optional high-level outcome, but not integrated into country partnership diagnostics or frameworks. Beyond this, it was left up to individual countries to decide to include the goals in their efforts.

In the phase of follow-up and review, I found that international organizations are engaged in the reporting on SDG progress, and in the review of the framework itself. They play a key role in the follow-up and review of the goals. Through their involvement in the expert meetings in the lead-up to the High-level Political Forum, they could impact the narrative around progress for individual SDGs. This is especially true for international organizations that have a great responsibility within the SDG indicator framework (the custodian agencies) as these are involved in the organization of such meetings. Here, the World Bank was found trying to present a more positive narrative about the progress on reducing inequalities than actors from civil society saw as accurate. However, the World Bank also took up some points of critique and worked with some civil society organizations to add a novel indicator to the SDG indicator framework.

I did not, however, observe significant pressure on the World Bank from third parties to increase its own accountability in terms of SDG alignment and implementation. International organizations might

work with civil society actors to 'fill in' gaps in the SDG indicator framework and provide necessary support to their proposals. However, this does require civil society organizations to take over some of the (data-)standards and definitions of the international organization in question.

Based on these findings, I posited the notion of *organizational jiu-jitsu*. I noted this as a way for international organizations to prevent the need for 'organized hypocrisy' or the 'organization of hypocrisy', which would lead to inconsistencies between organizational discourse and activities and would eventually reflect badly on the international organization. By limiting the need for adjustment, shaping the terms of engagement for others and limiting as much as possible the efforts of third parties to inspire change, organizations can largely continue with business as usual. In such a case, the international organization can use the potential of the SDG process, without having to change its own functioning in turn. Through attempts to limit the need for adjustment, they also impact the terms of engagement for other actors, especially from civil society. Although third parties might pressure international organizations to change their behavior to align with the SDGs, this pressure is not always apparent or very strong.

Based on the case study of the World Bank, I conclude that international organizations are not mere recipients of the SDGs but can form an active force in the process and impact other actors. There is a back-and-forth between the process of governing through goals and international organizations, but the impact of the SDGs observed was limited. Future research will have to investigate if it is indeed easiest for international organizations with broad mandates and (independent) resources only closely associated with the UN-system to use the potential of organizational jiu-jitsu and minimize their need to change in response to (sets of) global goals. Although the World Bank is just one case in a broader landscape of international organizations, my focus on the policy cycle of the SDGs directs attention to the parts of the set-up of this policy cycle that would allow a broader set of international organizations to engage in the same type of activities.

In addition to the insights from this case, the other cases studied in this thesis also shed light on how global goals impact individual international organizations. In the case of the institutionalization of sustainable consumption and production, I observe the impact of the 10YFP secretariat, coordinated by UNEP, on the agenda-setting phase of the SDGs, by successfully lobbying for SDG 12. In the case of indicator custodianship, I observe the impact of international organizations on the benchmarking and follow-up and review of the SDGs. This occurred as international organizations could increase the attractiveness for those negotiating to opt for certain indicators. International organizations could also impact the quality and availability of monitoring data through the extent to which they chose to coordinate after becoming indicator custodians. During follow-up and review processes, international organizations that became indicator custodians could impact the narrative surrounding individual SDGs by co-organizing preparatory expert meetings. In the case of the UN Regional Commissions, I observed at least one indicator of organizational jiu-jitsu, with the organizations noting 'alignment' with the SDGs, even though most commissions only mapped their existing activities to the goals, without necessarily changing their intra-organizational set up.

6.1.2 International organizations can take on novel external steering activities because of the SDGs

I now discuss how external steering activities of international organizations are impacted by the SDGs. This question was connected to the second research objective, namely, to understand how global goals impact the external steering activities of international organizations. To answer this question, I proposed three categories of orchestration activities that international organizations might undertake in

the context of the SDGs: agenda-setting, coordination, and support. For each category, I defined the type of role that international organizations might play if they used these categories to support SDG implementation. I thereafter used a comparative case study approach to gain meaningful and contextualized observations about the five UN Regional Commissions, combining extensive document analysis with semi-structured expert interviews. Although there are differences between the entities I observed, I did find several recurring patterns.

First, I found that the international organizations, rather than taking on a coherent, unified orchestration approach, play different roles depending on the orchestration activity under study. As for agenda-setting, promoting the 17 SDGs as an integrated and holistic agenda ran into a number of challenges, with the organizations playing a balancing role in practice to deal with these challenges. The organizations balanced SDG implementation with i) mandates that were historically not focused on a balanced approach to economic, social, and environmental dimensions of development, ii) parallel (existing or emerging) regional agendas only partially synergistic with the 2030 Agenda, and iii) insufficient resources to implement all obligations simultaneously.

For the category of coordination – to ensure joint achievement of the SDGs – I found that international organizations increased and extended their activities significantly, with novel coordination entities being erected and a broader group of actors involved in SDG implementation. For civil society especially, these mechanisms led to a novel pathway to (global) recognition. For international organizations themselves, these novel coordination mechanisms do not just provide a platform to bring other actors together, but also offer a platform to promote their preferred causes, as they can use the platforms to formulate their viewpoints, which can later be taken to other fora. International organizations are trying to learn from each other how to coordinate, but this might not always be done with sufficient knowledge about the aims of the endeavor, and the contextual implementation needed to make it a success in a particular region. Furthermore, especially for coordination entities meant to coordinate the activities of UN entities, although they have certainly brought international organizations into routine contact, it remains unclear what the eventual aims of these activities are, given huge changes to the UN system that were meant to support the implementation of the SDGs, but have only been set up recently.

For the category of support, I found that international organizations have set up structures to deliver SDG related support. However, they take mostly a conforming role, depending on the willingness of those they support for the provision of support, which in practice is focused on a subset of goals, targets, benchmarks, and instruments. Organizations work to increase the demand for support along the full breath of the 2030 Agenda, which mainly occurs through providing information about the potential relevance of currently neglected parts of the agenda. Most importantly, I found that support in helping actors gain funding has significantly increased in the context of the SDGs, providing new roles and tools for international organizations. However, little is known about the effectiveness and additionality thereof.

Based on these insights, I note that in none of the orchestration categories identified, the observed behavior indicates that the organizations could take on a role that would guarantee coherent SDG implementation in their regions. However, I found that the SDGs allowed the organizations to take on broader roles and new types of tasks than in the past. Although this case study includes a specific set of international organizations with a regional focus, the elements I identified that limited the orchestration activities of the Regional Commissions – mandate, resources and parallel agendas – are potentially more widespread among international organizations.

6.1.3 The SDGs increase (inter-agency) coordination, but not uniformly

Here, I discuss how the coordination among international organizations has been affected by the launch of the SDGs in 2015. To answer this question, I developed a novel operationalization of institutional fragmentation and coordination. I then used several databases, documentation, and a series of expert interviews to investigate indicator custodianship arrangements, a phenomenon introduced to manage the data-collection for the SDGs. Below, I extend upon these findings, and add some additional insights gained from the other case studies, although these were not primarily aimed at contributing to this question and research objective.

Here I found that the international organizations that I studied have become part of novel institutional constellations through the SDG process. Importantly, for each SDG, we can now pinpoint a number of international organizations with (joint) responsibilities for particular SDGs.

An important observation is that the constellations that have emerged differ greatly, which also means the starting point for any type of coordination can be very different. For some goals, only a few organizations are responsible, with one organization having a major responsibility. For others, a wide range of organizations is involved. The comparative assessment of two constellations that differed greatly in terms of institutional fragmentation indicates that it can be more difficult for actors in highly fragmented set-ups to engage in coordination efforts. In the less fragmented case, more, and also more far-fetching types of coordination were observed.

Specifically, I found that the fragmented set of organizations for SDG 10 on reduced inequalities did not engage in any coordination except for informal knowledge sharing. By contrast, the less fragmented set of organizations for SDG 3 on better health and well-being engaged in knowledge-sharing, problem solving and conflict resolution as well as external knowledge sharing and joint advocacy. Overall, I thus found that the international organizations that I studied engage in more coordination activities. However, the actor constellation in which international organizations are expected to operate can also significantly impact the type and extent of coordination realized in practice.

I identified several reasons for the lack of coordination in the more fragmented set-up. One reason was the lack of a dominant actor to lead coordination efforts. In addition, many actors had more extensive responsibilities for other goals and did not primarily associate themselves with the more fragmented goal. Lastly, there was no clear agreement on the need and direction for coordination between the actors, and there was enduring contestation about the issue covered by the goal.

Based on the differences in outcomes observed, I concluded that without some outside steering, international organizations will not automatically increase their coordination efforts. Potential solutions I proposed included the creation of a database of coordination efforts that might inspire less resourced and more fragmented constellations; the appointment of a lead for individual SDGs; and an outside entity to govern the system of custodian agencies.

Importantly, for both constellations that I studied, I found that smaller agencies often lack resources to 'jump on the coordination bandwagon'. As no additional resources emerged for this purpose, at least in the context of indicator custodianship, smaller agencies often are in favor of, but might not themselves partake in coordination activities due to resource limitations. This connects to the insight above that organizations with existing capacities and resources could more easily take on novel responsibilities in the context of the SDGs.

In addition to the insights from this case, the other cases also shed light on how global goals impact (inter-organizational) coordination, despite the different research objectives these cases were designed for. In the case of the UN Regional Commissions, multiple novel coordination entities have been erected

with these organizations playing a leading role. The aims of these coordination activities are also focusing on novel areas, like the increased focus on SDG finance mechanisms. In the case of the World Bank, I also observe novel arenas for the organization to interact and coordinate with other actors, as is shown by its interaction with civil society organizations during the SDG (indicator) review process. The case of sustainable consumption and production also leads to some novel insights. This case indicates that for actors working on sustainable consumption and production, the SDG process created opportunities to connect to novel actors and processes.

6.1.4 The SDGs impact institutionalization processes, at least for the mid-term

I now discuss how the SDGs have affected institutionalization processes in which international organizations are engaged. To answer this question, I proposed three elements of institutionalization and analyzed the impact of the SDGs, and SDG 12 especially, on developments around sustainable consumption and production. These elements of institutionalization included the basis for authority, the emergence of procedures and the availability of resources for goal attainment. I used process tracing based on extensive document analysis and a series of expert interviews to identify mechanisms and conditions through which the SDG governing process affected institutionalization. I now discuss these findings and add some additional insights gained from the other case studies.

First, in the case of sustainable consumption and production I found that the SDGs impacted the institutionalization process in each of the constitutive elements, through several mechanisms. The basis of authority was impacted as the SDGs were used to fortify an existing mandate, to further clarify an existing mandate, and to ensure the proliferation of a mandate beyond 2022. The procedures of the emerging network around sustainable consumption and production were impacted as the SDGs were used to increase the publicity for ongoing efforts, but more importantly, to argue for and legitimate several changes in the established direction of the network after its mid-term evaluation. The resources were impacted as the SDGs provided a source for accountability through its monitoring indicators and provided a means to argue for a novel funding mechanism, which was directly linked to SDG 12.

In concluding that the SDGs can further institutionalization, I also identified conditions that allowed this impact. These included the pre-SDG emergence of mobilized and motivated actors, the appointment of a coordinating entity that steered these efforts, and the foregoing of alternative pathways to further the institutionalization process along the way. Examples thereof include the extension of an existing mandate instead of the negotiation of a novel one and the continuation of established procedures despite questions surrounding the effectiveness thereof. In addition, in this case actors profited from the temporal overlap between the institutionalization process and the onset of the SDG negotiations, which might have led here to a strong impact.

Importantly, using the SDG process to further institutionalization seems profitable for the mid-term rather than the long term. In the case investigated, actors will still have to ensure a novel mandate after 2030, for which they will still need to prove the added value of their efforts to convince actors of the added value of their existence.

In addition to the insights from this case, the other cases also shed some light on how global goals impact institutionalization. The introduction of indicator custodianship establishes a joint area of work for international organizations around a specified set of procedures, surrounding a specified set of topics and task descriptions. This has also led to some novel entities. A key example here are the initiatives established by the World Health Organization around SDG 3, that have their own procedures, objectives and funds. In the case of the UN Regional Commissions, the authority of these organizations has been informally extended because of the SDGs, novel coordination entities have led to a host of novel

procedures and their extended role within financing structures (potentially) enlarges their access to means to realize their goals.

6.2 Overall impact of the SDGs on international organizations

The insights presented above result in overarching insights about the impact of the SDGs on international organizations. I now present these along the lines of the two overarching research problems of this thesis introduced in Chapter 1 and shown again in Figure 6.1. These research problems concern the impact of the SDGs on *intra-organizational variables* and on *the external relations* of international organizations. As I mentioned in the introduction, the chapters of this thesis did not strictly address either of these research problems, but differed in the degree to which they illuminated intra-organizational variables and extra-organizational relations.

Before presenting my overarching insights about these two research problems, I need to mention an important overarching insight with implications for the generalizability of my findings across organizations, namely that *international organizations are not equal in their ability to play an active role in the SDG process*. This unequal footing is in my view potentially a very impactful tendency produced by the SDG process. Especially the multiplier effect, whereby international organizations with existing capacities can more easily take up novel obligations and engage in coordination mechanisms, might impact the set-up of the organizational system in the long term. This is a topic that needs to be investigated more closely. This unequal ability implies that the strength of the tendencies identified below will be uneven across the population of international organizations, although the overarching structure of the SDG process leads to the possibility of these tendencies to be widespread.

The next two sub-sections focus on intra- and extra-organizational variables respectively.

Figure 6.1 Overarching Research Problems

Research problem(s)	
Limited understanding of the impact of global goals on (existing) International Organizations individually (empirically, theoretically)	Limited understanding of the impact of global goals on international organizations' external relations (empirically, theoretically)

6.2.1 Limited intra-organizational impact

For intra-organizational variables (Research problem I), I conclude that international organizations' internal organizational structures are likely at best supplemented, rather than changed fundamentally to ensure SDG implementation. By supplementation, I mean that elements of the SDGs are added to existing frameworks, but do not alter work significantly. Although, as some scholars argued, the SDGs might allow and even necessitate actors to reframe their work and redefine or regain their legitimacy and role (Novitz, 2020; Maupain, 2020; Montesano et al. 2021), I did not find many changes when looking at intra-organizational variables.

Instead, I found that international organizations themselves play an active role within the SDG process, impacting the agenda-setting, implementation and review phases. This insight implies that engagement, a key theoretical construct focused on in this thesis, is in reality dialectic in nature. In more extreme cases, of which the World Bank might be one, the direction of impact does not even move from

the goals towards international organizations but is rather exerted by international organizations and impacts the process of governing through goals. A key contribution of this thesis is that by proposing a framework for investigating organizational jiu-jitsu, I offered a way to move beyond the idea of one-directional impact and establish engagement as a complex phenomenon. This finding about engagement is not unexpected, given the experience from the MDG era, but directs attention to the fact that efforts for the SDGs to put states at the steering wheel for this latest set of goals might be less effective than expected. Still, states themselves can later decide to take up only those parts of the agenda that they are in favor of, thereby potentially limiting the impact of the engagement of international organizations at the country level. How one appreciates this finding about engagement overall depends on one's perception about the aim of global goalsetting. When global goals are seen as a means to prioritize a sub-set of the challenges that actors were already working on, the impact of international organizations might not be perceived as problematic. Yet when transformation is sought for, this finding might be perceived as limiting the space for transformative ideas and activities, especially considering the implementation phase.

I conclude that international organizations themselves are important actors that impact governance through goals. My thesis adds clear examples (in addition to earlier studies such as Birkenkötter 2018; Sommer and Forman-Rabinovici 2020) of instances where international organizations, instead of being impacted by global goals, have directly influenced the goals that were adopted. These include SDG 10 on reduced inequalities, influenced by the World Bank, and SDG 12 on sustainable consumption and production, pushed for by 10YFP actors coordinated by the UN Environment Programme. This points towards the continuing influence of international organizations on global goalsetting, even after explicit changes in procedures to limit their involvement. However, the impact of international organizations on the SDGs is less direct than in the case of the Millennium Development Goals, where almost the entire agenda was shaped by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. An important insight here is that the influence of international organizations depends on the design of the process of setting and reviewing global goals.

These conclusions also confirm, and add further evidence to, the influence that international organizations can have on global goals through their operational work, for example by selectively focusing on indicators that serve their priorities during implementation (Meurs et al. 2019). My observations about selective engagement with SDG 10 in the case of the World Bank also resemble Huchzermeyers' (2013) observations about international organizations changing the meaning when using some goals during implementation. The case of the World Bank, where a sub-set of SDG 10 indicators was highlighted and used to inform the narrative of progress, is a case in point. I did not, however, find clear examples of organizations that continue to adopt policies that form a roadblock towards goal attainment (as discussed in James 2019). Yet I found that international organizations pick and choose from the SDGs, be it through actively prioritizing some over others (as in the case of the World Bank) or mapping existing activities to the SDGs, and later claiming organizational alignment (UN Regional Commissions, One Planet Network actors). I also noted that some international organizations run into challenges when attempting to marry existing obligations (like in the case of the UN Regional Commissions) with limited resources. Potential trade-offs between parallel goals often remain unaddressed.

Overall, my insights relate to insights from studies on the MDGs, in as much as I also found that organizations differed in the extent to which they integrated the goals into their own organizational identity (Jolly 2004; Konstantinov 2009; North 2010) and impacted how the goals were implemented (Khor 2003; Jolly 2004). This insight signals, as was noted also for the MDGs (Jolly 2004), that for the SDGs the involvement of international organizations is relevant when assessing the (potential) achievement of goals. However, as my thesis focused on outputs rather than outcomes, and given the multitude of

variables that have affected SDG attainment (including numerous global crises), it would require more extensive analysis to move from my insights to broader conclusions about the impact of international organizations on goal attainment.

Several intra-organizational factors were relevant for the willingness of international organizations to work on the MDGs (North 2010). These included the extent to which an organization was already working on a goal; the perceptiveness of high-level officials to the goal; the extent to which their perception of the topic aligned with that elaborated in the goal; and the extent to which goals could be linked to funding. I did not find evidence that directly contradicted these factors in the case of the SDGs. However, the impact of the SDGs on intra-organizational variables can be difficult to verify given the lack of instructions for these actors and the limited accountability mechanisms introduced for this purpose.

I thus propose three additional, mostly extra-organizational factors that could incentivize intra-organizational behavioral change.

First, international organizations might need a more thorough change in their overall incentive structure, in addition to the establishment of global goals, to change their behavior significantly. A recurring issue noted by interviewees across the cases is the lack of resources to execute novel functions and obligations introduced in the context of the SDG framework. In addition, despite several initiatives related to financing for sustainable development, the overall funding structure of international organizations has not changed significantly. The indicator custodians did not receive additional funds to fulfill their role, leading to cases where they relied on bilateral donors to fulfill their basic role as data-collectors for the SDG indicators. The UN Regional Commissions do not have sufficient funds to fulfill all obligations presented to them, and the One Planet Network implementing SDG 12 struggles to fund the initiatives set up to implement this goal. More generally, international organizations continue to depend largely on project-based funding, with little to no structural funding with which they might implement organizational changes. Here, organizations are also confronted with a lack of stability, as they are attempting to implement the SDGs in a rapidly changing context, including the emergence of a global pandemic, and the onset of war in Ukraine. In the case of the World Bank, the few instances in which the SDGs were included in key organizational documents almost evaporated with the onset of the pandemic. Relatedly, most international organizations are not able to move beyond their existing mandates. Part of this stems from limited resources. In many cases, a lack of support from member states prohibits international organizations from fulfilling their core mandate. Here, the case of sustainable consumption and production is a clear example, with SDG 12 remaining the most underfunded goal. However, broadening an existing mandate can also be difficult, and potentially disputed, given the existing membership structure of these entities, and the functional differentiation among international organizations.

Second, international organizations might need clearer instructions on what 'alignment' with the SDGs means. Possibly this is at least part of the explanation for the cherry-picking and jiu-jitsu behavior identified. The SDGs, as prioritization devices, do not seem to provide enough guidance to actors on how to achieve them (Underdal and Kim 2017). International organizations face a lack of instruction on how they are supposed to fulfill their role in the context of the SDGs. Of course, global goalsetting is, by definition, not meant to establish prescriptive behavioral rules that bind organizations. However, there are elements that can be clarified even in this context. These include the following questions: What are the minimum requirements to 'align' an international organization with the SDGs? If organizations are expected to move beyond their existing mandate, what type of extensions do states prioritize? Are international organizations expected to drop some of their activities to ensure the funding they receive is directed towards SDG attainment? These clarifications can be communicated through guidelines and would not require regulation. A prime reason for this lack of instruction thus far might be the initial

expectations of more funding to implement the SDGs. Given the major financing gap the SDGs currently face, however, having such discussions might be needed. Another reason might be that member states, at the time of the adoption of the SDGs, left this open purposefully, as they themselves did not have clear answers to these questions.

Third, international organizations might need to be held more clearly accountable for changes in their intra-organizational activities to integrate the SDGs. This point relates to a lack of instruction, as one cannot hold actors accountable without clearly elaborating what they should do in the first place. There are some ways in which international organizations report on their activities in the context of the SDGs. For example, there is an online database on implementation of the SDGs by the UN system, where international organizations answer questions about their activities in the context of the SDGs. This database includes questions about the activities that UN system entities have undertaken to implement the SDGs. However, this database is not a systematic in-depth assessment, as it builds on international organizations submitting their responses based on their own interpretation of the questions and is not an outcome of third-party investigations based on consistently defined and operationalized criteria. In addition, a host of organizations working on SDG implementation is not included by the focus on UN system entities. Furthermore, although some questions focus on coordination efforts, these questionnaires do not focus on synergies and trade-offs that might have to be resolved within or between organizations. A report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (2019) focused more on the system of entities, but also relied largely on self-reporting. Importantly, some new initiatives in this context have emerged, but their results are still uncertain.

Without adjustments to some of these extra-organizational variables, as was noted for the MDGs, it is possible that a sectoral focus will be kept in place. It has been argued that this led to a vicious cycle for the MDGs, whereby the goals not only reflected but reinforced the isolation of international organizations and resulted in uneven progress across the targets (Waage et al. 2010). A key cause thereof, also in the case of the SDGs, might be that external conditions allow and at times necessitate international organizations to focus on a subset of targets and indicators during implementation. Research by Bogers et al. (2022a; 2023) seems to confirm the emergence of such a cycle, as they conclude that the increased use of the SDGs by international organizations has not advanced (intra-organizational) policy integration, partially because organizations cherry-pick those goals that best fit their own agenda and interests. An important caveat here is that none of the policy measures suggested, including increased accountability, are likely to be *individually* sufficient to decrease such tendencies. However, accountability forms one measure within a broader set that combined might have significant impact.

6.2.2 Extra-organizational impact, but with unknown consequences

In contrast to the findings about the impact of the SDGs on intra-organizational variables, however, I did find a clearer impact of the SDGs on the external relations of international organizations (Research problem II).

Here I conclude that international organizations' external relations can be significantly altered through the SDG process. This impact mainly consists of novel coordination mechanisms in which international organizations have become involved or which they have themselves established. Additionally, the SDG follow-up and review processes have increased interactions among international organizations and between international organizations and third parties, including civil society actors. Part of the rationale for this increased coordination might also be the emphasis placed on the inclusion of a wide range of actors in SDG implementation, and SDG 17 on partnerships for the goals including some targets on this. In the sphere of coordination, I note that there are structures erected that give some type of direction

and make it easier to hold actors accountable. In the case of the Regional Commissions, for example, the coordination mechanisms have been transplanted partially through the directions of the Regional Commissions New York Office. In the case of indicator custodianship, this is a role established by the Inter-Agency Expert Group on the SDGs, with a relatively clear description of the basic tasks that every custodian should fill in (although here there are also ways to increase clarity). A potential reason for this might be that adding new coordination mechanisms might be less controversial than changing the existing institutional structures underpinning them (related to Vijge 2013, 158; Fraundorfer 2017; Benvenisti and Downs 2007).

This insight implies that for (inter-agency) *coordination,* a key theoretical construct in this thesis, the SDGs might be an impetus. However, we still know little about the impact of these structures on the content of the activities of entities that partake in these efforts. Furthermore, when it comes to *fragmentation* - one rationale for the call for more coordination - it is not clear that these novel structures resolve any issues. If the total number of entities has grown, global goalsetting might inspire a policy spiral as more coordination (meant to deal with fragmentation) leads to novel entities which increase (institutional) fragmentation. It remains to be seen if these novel structures over time lead to even more entities in the global governance landscape, or if they inspire further reforms. In several instances international organizations themselves are able to significantly shape (novel) mechanisms and their overarching aims, which means that these novel interactions might not automatically translate in a need to change intra-organizational activities. Here, however, the SDGs often serve as an ordering mechanism, with actors choosing specific goals or targets to coordinate or shape activities. Still, structural change beyond these entities seems unlikely to occur without significant changes in the overall incentive structures mentioned above. It is, at least currently, not clear if *additional coordination entities* will lead to a simplified or more complex governance landscape. However, it is also important to note that based on the limited set of case studies, it is also too early to conclude that the overall number of entities has increased, decreased or remained stable, as this would require a more comprehensive analysis.

The insights around the external relations of international organizations also imply that in terms of external steering activities, and *orchestration* specifically as a key theoretical construct focused on in this thesis, the SDGs can lead to novel responsibilities. Here, however, as in the case of coordination, it is still too early to determine if, and if so, which gaps orchestration is filling. Initiatives in my case studies focused on synergies rather than trade-offs, had to deal with the complexity of multiple parallel agendas and existing priorities, and could not rely on entities with transformed overall mandates or resource structures. It seems relevant to investigate if orchestration, and coordination, end up being a means for international organizations to fulfill their existing mandate with the aid of novel external relations, or if they expand or add something more fundamentally.

The insights around the external relations of international organizations also imply that in terms of efforts to *institutionalize,* the last theoretical construct focused on in this thesis, the SDGs can advance efforts of international organizations. However, the case studied here was one where a group of previously motivated and mobilized actors joined forces to use the process for this purpose**.** For other areas where this is not the case, like inequality or peace, justice and strong institutions, this effect might be absent. This means that here, also, the actual additionality of the SDGs must be further investigated. It is possible that, as we found in a study on the impact of the MDGs, impacts might be conditional on existent conducive organizational and financial structures (see Appendix D, based on Hickmann et al. 2023).

Overall, the findings on the impact of the SDGs on extra-organizational variables connect to studies that indicated the impact of the SDGs might be procedural, impacting international organizations by

emphasizing multistakeholder partnerships (Lauber et al. 2020: Mahajan, 2019), and inspiring processes of mutual constitution between international organizations during the process of measuring goals (Grek, 2020). However, it remains to be seen if these novel structures lead to any real policy changes, impact intra-organizational variables, and to what extent one can thus truly speak of 'mutual constitution' resulting from such processes. As other studies showed, at least up to 2019, existing networks of international organizations beyond these novel structures do not seem to have been impacted significantly by the SDGs (Bogers et al. 2022b).

CHAPTER 7

Reflections and discussion

In the previous chapter, I presented the key insights of this thesis, and I identified several challenges around governing through global goals. For international organizations, engagement with the SDGs might under existing conditions lead to a focus on synergies rather than an integrated assessment of and plan to deal with potential trade-offs, new coordination entities rather than structural reform, and much space at the organizational and country level to prioritize a subset of goals. One might thus conclude, based on my findings, that 'impact' of the SDGs thus far remains limited compared to the societal-value hypothesis formulated in Chapter 1 of this thesis.

In this chapter I further reflect on these findings. First, I consider the methodological advantages as well as limitations of this thesis and suggest ways through which future researchers might take these limitations into account. Second, I discuss future research directions that might help further research around the impact of global goalsetting on international organizations. Third, I present policy and practical implications of the findings and conclusions of this thesis. Finally, I reflect on the future of global goalsetting, given the conclusions of this thesis and the discussion presented in this chapter.

7.1 Methodological reflections

This thesis relied on a primarily qualitative, in-depth case-study approach. This design enabled me to investigate the link between behavioral change and the introduction of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in a range of cases. As the case-studies differed in their research scales and objects, this design allowed me a broad investigation into what behavioral change means in practice, to what extent it can be linked (causally) to the goals, and what mechanisms and conditions enable or deter behavioral change.

However, this research design has some limitations. First, by choosing an in-depth case-study approach, I could focus only on a few international organizations. I thus cannot be certain to what extent the patterns, mechanisms and conditions that I identified apply in the entire population of international organizations. Further investigations are thus needed. However, as some case studies consisted of sets of organizations, the thesis ended up covering a wide enough number of entities to be able to formulate ideas about potential trends across a wider population of entities. I identified several factors - for example the limited change in the overall incentive structure for international organizations in the context of the SDGs - that are likely to impact all international organizations. Thereby, this thesis moves beyond the insights of the individual case studies and directs attention to challenges in the global governance system that limit the impact of global goalsetting on international organizations. Such an approach allows for purposive sampling, thick description and the identification of seeming patterns.

Second, by combining document analysis with detailed interview data, I could supplement official organizational communication with in-depth insights about what these initiatives entailed in practice. This also allowed me to explore the rationale for (the lack of) specific initiatives. These interviews thus formed a key entry point for exploring the rationale and functioning of initiatives, especially as the onset of a global pandemic limited my ability to conduct on-site observations. For other scholars that are interested in impact, I would certainly advise in favor of this approach, as it uncovers information that is unlikely to be found online, and unlikely to be clear from official documents and policies.

However, when using interviews, I had to rely on the willingness and ability of interviewees to provide the information. Although most interviewees were willing to discuss their experiences, the high employee turnover in international organizations often meant that interviewees could only discuss the most recent developments, without being able to place these in a more long-term perspective. To collect the relevant information, and construct a timeline of events, I therefore often had to trace predecessors that were able to supplement the information provided. However, both interviewees in such a

case are limited in their ability to provide an overall narrative, which then requires my holistic assessment based on the overall information provided.

Furthermore, although employees of international organizations are used to answering questions about their work to researchers, they often have limited time for this purpose. This required me to tailor the interview questions to ensure that they might be answered in the time allotted for the interview. In some cases, a second conversation could be scheduled to answer the questions that remained after this first session, but that was not always the case. At times, I might have been keen to dig deeper into the motivations, developments, and initiatives under study, but I had to work with the data I was able to collect in this context.

In addition, employees of international organizations and members of civil society organizations often have an interest in the way in which their answers are translated into research outputs. One reason is that given the unique expertise they shared with me throughout the research, it was highly likely that their colleagues might identify them even with the appropriate steps towards anonymization. Furthermore, interviewees often wanted to ensure that the point they wanted to make about their organization came across and was not altered in any significant way. Therefore, I was reliant on the approval of the interviewees to use specific quotes. This could at times almost lead to negotiations, with the interviewee presenting alternative formulations of quotes directly taken from the interview. There were also instances where interviewees explicitly noted that information they shared was not meant to be included in the research in any way. Interviewees often shared information using such qualifications when it would give a full picture of how things worked within a particular organization but could not be published without being traceable. This often included information about intra-organizational politics, the positions of member states in particular discussions and their own views on the functioning of certain initiatives. In some cases, I could obtain the same information from another interviewee, thereby limiting the dependence on one single interviewee. However, in other cases I had to exclude some information that I did not obtain consent for. However, overall, this did not limit my ability to present a full-fledged analysis for any of the case-studies.

In most cases, my research questions, theoretical points of departure and topic list for interviews allowed me to identify relevant interviewees relatively quickly. However, I also partially relied on a snowball sampling method. The reason therefore is that based on organizational charts it is not always clear how processes relate and how people interact in practice. This meant that people involved in the processes investigated were often in the best position to name the relevant people to talk to. However, this also means that I was reliant on the interviewees to connect me to the relevant people. Although, as I said above, the willingness of interviewees to assist was often present, I was limited in my ability to cross-check if all relevant people that might be identified were in fact suggested to me by these interviewees.

This relates to the final challenge related to interview data: the challenge of identifying the relevant number of interviewees. To do so, I often relied on the topic guide and the extent to which interviewees had been able to supplement the information collected from official documentation. However, when it came to identifying the rationale for particular initiatives, and the perceptions of staff about these initiatives, it became more difficult to identify a natural saturation point. The reason therefore is that it is not possible to a priori identify the number of viewpoints that might exist in an organization. Given the sheer size of the organizations included in this study, it is impossible to be sure that all potential viewpoints have indeed been identified and taken up. Given this inherent limitation of this approach, I did not focus on collecting all potential viewpoints within the organizations under study, but primarily the viewpoints from people closely involved with or related to the processes under study. Part of the

rationale therefore is that I perceive these insights as particularly valuable, as they are most clearly developed based on intimate knowledge about these processes.

Interviews as a data source thus come with certain limitations. However, interviews do lead to insights into the relevant processes within organizations that might have to be adjusted, and therefore to potential starting points for policy advice. Put differently, a better understanding of the organizations involved allows for a more informed set of suggestions to move forward.

Another limitation of this research is its timeline. The research for this thesis was undertaken between 2019 and 2023. It started only four years after the agreement of the SDGs in 2015 and ended at the mid-point of the 2030 Agenda. My findings thus signal several initial developments but cannot lead to definitive conclusions about the impact of the SDGs on international organizations. It is possible, and in the context of global governance quite likely, that the next seven years will be characterized by the emergence of novel initiatives, policies, and processes to further the implementation of the SDGs. To the extent that these developments impact international organizations, they might lead to a different overall assessment of impact after 2030. However, given the continued scholarship in this area, I do perceive my initial observations to be a potential building block for others moving forward.

The timeline of this research also coincided with several major global crises that likely impacted the ability of the SDGs to impact international organizations. These include the onset of a global pandemic at the end of 2019, and the onset of war on the European continent with the invasion of Ukraine in 2022. It has already become clear that these and other related crises impacted the progress made towards the realization of the SDGs. Virtually all SDGs have been impacted by, for example, large-scale isolation measures that prevented many from going to work or school and soaring inflation and rising energy prices. I also saw the impact of, among others, the global COVID pandemic on some organizations studied. In the case of the World Bank, for example, the trends observed in annual reports before 2020 were somewhat abandoned in favor of a report mainly focused on the impacts of the pandemic. Many organizations, including the UN Regional Commissions, were included in efforts to anticipate the financial consequences of the pandemic. Overall, the pandemic also made it more challenging for international organizations to execute their regular functions, as they had to find novel ways to interact in the face of lockdown measures. This likely diminished the overall impact of the SDGs. However, I did not explicitly include this as a key question. Assessing the impact of the pandemic and other crises on international organizations and their ability to implement the SDGs, goes beyond the scope and purposes of this thesis. I do see it as a relevant topic for future investigations.

7.2 Future research directions

Based on my earlier reflection on the relation between my key research findings and the earlier literature, I now propose a number of key future research avenues.

First, to further investigate the impact of international organizations on all phases of the SDG process, I suggest a focus on the impact of international organizations on policy-coherence during implementation and on their impact on goal-attainment. As noted above, my study did not point directly to policies taken up by international organizations that formed a direct roadblock to goal attainment (James, 2019). However, as this was not a key area of investigation in this thesis, it would be a relevant avenue to explore, as such policies might negatively impact goal attainment. Related to this, my thesis did not focus on the relation between international organizations and goal attainment directly. My focus was on organizational outputs. I would thus suggest that future studies explore the extent to which international organizations impact goal attainment for certain SDGs. This is a daunting task given the great number of variables that might potentially feed into the relation between outputs and outcomes.

To further investigate the finding that international organizations' internal structure is at best supplemented rather than changed fundamentally to ensure SDG implementation, I suggest to investigate additional international organizations, as well as specific targets and indicators. Investigating the engagement with the SDGs of more international organizations, using the five phases of engagement I identified above (Chapter 2), is relevant to explore if there are examples of more profound change resulting from the introduction of the SDGs. If not, this would further solidify this finding. Here, the framework proposed to investigate organizational jiu-jitsu can provide a basis for analysis. If there are cases in which profound changes result from the SDGs, such cases might lead to the identification of conditions for, and mechanisms through which, change might occur. Overall, additional cases can thus explore the generalizability of my insights and use insights from cases where there does seem to be some impact to inform future policymakers. I noted, for example, uneven progress across the SDGs as a potential implication of selective engagement of international organizations with the goals. To explore this more in-depth, further studies could identify to what extent 'neglected' SDG targets and indicators can be linked to inaction of international organizations. An interesting case to explore might be SDG Target 10.6, which aims to 'Ensure enhanced representation and voice for developing countries in decision-making in global international economic and financial institutions in order to deliver more effective, credible, accountable and legitimate institutions.' The key indicator for this target, 'proportion of members and voting rights of developing countries in international organizations', is one that was hoped to have a significant impact on several powerful organizations, including the World Bank and the IMF, which makes this target interesting to investigate.

To further investigate incentives for international organizations, instructions on way to operationalize 'alignment' and accountability for international organizations, I suggest that future research tries to map the relation more systematically between existing incentives and the incentives needed to realize the SDGs. Specifically, I suggest a focus on the existing financing structure of international organizations and existing incentives to coordinate activities.

Some research about incentives for coordination and (system-wide) finance has started to emerge. Thus far, this has mostly been focused on incentives that have been introduced to steer the UN development system. Incentives for coordination here include the introduction of a more empowered Resident Coordinator, and a common framework for the activities of UN entities through UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCF) (OECD 2018). Incentives for system-wide financing include the introduction of a UN Funding Compact that for the first time introduced a 'coordination levy' and stimulated the use of pooled funding mechanisms.

Early studies on these initiatives, however, have questioned the actual impact of the changes introduced. One study noted that unresolved coordination challenges and contested responsibilities remained the twin challenges for the SDGs in this field, as actors can easily 'align' themselves with the SDGs as the 2030 Agenda does not provide specific guidance on defining the quality of development cooperation (Chaturverdi et al. 2021).

The new UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks, to become effective, require a shared risk assessment across agencies, which is difficult in practice as the UN agencies have different mandates and target beneficiaries (Connolly and Mincieli 2019). Although the empowered Resident Coordinator was envisioned to increase accountability for these agencies towards the UNSDCF, UN agencies remain primarily accountable towards their respective headquarters for their individual mandates. Despite the existence of the UNSDCF, agencies, funds and programs continue to lobby with national entities to ensure their areas of work are kept in the framework, without coordinating with each other (Connolly and Roesch 2020). A lack of communication and competition among UN agencies is noted to persist. Another study notes a gap between supposed and actual operations within the UN

Development System (Weinlich et al. 2020). Reporting on shared results towards the Resident Coordinator is furthermore secondarily and largely (informal and) voluntary. Importantly, the role of the Resident Coordinator has also not received sufficient funding, which means that at the country level time meant for programming has been spent on fundraising, further limiting the space to focus on accountability measures (Connolly and Mincieli 2019).

In a context where earmarked funding remains the dominant funding source for most entities (Baumann et al. 2020), it thus needs to be investigated to what extent any change can be observed. Furthermore, even some of the measures introduced under the umbrella of system-wide financial incentives have been questioned. A study on the pooling of funds within the World Bank, for example, has been noted to defer and deflect the momentum for institutional reforms (Barder et al. 2020). Pooled funding in this context was seen as a work-around for existing system defects, rather than a solution.

If cases would emerge of successful organizational adjustment, these might serve as input for an accountability mechanism for international organizations. However, if examples of successful adjustment cannot be identified, recurring challenges might be used to formulate interventions that can be taken up in an 'alignment manual'. Such a manual, however, can only be successful if some of the recurring system-wide disincentives continue to be addressed through reform processes.

To further investigate the extended external relations of international organizations, I have several suggestions. For example, it might be relevant to investigate to what extent the novel entities and structures (for coordination) created in the context of the SDGs have any impact beyond the SDGs. Do SDG-related entities and structures increase the overall influence of international organizations? If so, in what way? Additionally, for the broader global governance context, it is relevant to investigate to what extent novel entities and structures impact power relations between international organizations. Studies might be conducted into which organizations are receiving more extensive responsibilities, what these are used for, and who is missing out on such opportunities. Lastly, investigation is necessary to clarify to what extent novel entities and structures impact power relations between international organizations and third parties. Are international organizations impacting third parties more directly? If so, what type of actors does this concern? Who is not impacted by these activities and why? How can we use the (extended) responsibilities and roles of international organizations to work towards sustainable development outcomes most effectively?

Lastly, to further investigate the unequal abilities of international organizations to play an active role in the SDG process, I suggest an investigation into the extent of the multiplier effect. Is the multiplier effect more widespread throughout the SDG process? For example, do international organizations with existing capabilities also receive more (novel) funding for the SDGs? In addition, I suggest investigation into how the system of international organizations is impacted by SDG processes more broadly. Which entities have profited, and which might have 'fallen behind' by the lack of incentives provided by member states and others for implementation? It might also be relevant to investigate to what extent the lack of a multiplier (organizations with limited capabilities) has necessitated less well-resourced organizations to abandon existing initiatives to be able to implement the SDGs. Do these entities de-prioritize other (non-SDG) responsibilities, or does it lead to more selective engagement for these entities, including cherry-picking behavior, for the SDGs?

Overall, these future research avenues allow a further investigation into the truth value of the insights of this thesis for a broader number of international organizations. In addition, these future research avenues allow a further exploration of some of the key theoretical frameworks proposed and utilized in this study. By investigating additional cases of engagement, organizational jiu-jitsu and the five phases of engagement can further be explored, clarified and added to. By further investigating the external relations of international organizations in the context of the SDGs, studies can build on my

definitions of organizational roles, typology of coordination activities and framework for institutionalization.

In addition, the key insights formulated above can serve as a basis for a more systematic comparison between the impact of global goalsetting on international organizations vis-a-vis some of the other policy responses that I noted in the introduction of this thesis. One might ask to what extent international organizations impact the different phases that might be identified in processes of policy integration, interplay management, hierarchization and orchestration. It can also be investigated to what extent these policy responses lead to a more profound change in the organizational structure of international organizations. It can be investigated if the other policy responses have similar or more far-fetching impacts on the external relations of international organizations and to what extent they lead to the creation of novel entities and structures that extend their reach. Also interesting would be an investigation into the extent to which these (alternative) policy responses come with the abovementioned multiplier effect for powerful organizations. Most importantly and potentially impactful, however, would be to investigate to what extent such responses have been successful in changing the incentive structure for international organizations in any way, if these responses provide a clearer pathway of action for international organizations, and if they are held accountable in any way for their activities. Such a comparison might not lead to any conclusions about which policy response is 'the best' but can indicate strengths and weaknesses in their ability to impact the behavior of international organizations, and thereby global sustainability governance more broadly.

7.3 Policy implications and advice

I now move to the policy implications of this thesis, and my policy advice.

7.3.1 Policy recommendations concerning the engagement of international organizations with global goalsetting

Based on the insights gained from sub-question 1 of this thesis, I see two overarching challenges regarding the engagement of international organizations with global goalsetting.

My first policy recommendation concerns the influence of international organizations on global goalsetting. My work has shown that several international organizations have been able to influence the goals and targets included in the final text of Agenda 2030. International organizations, and especially well-resourced ones, could profit from goalsetting by what I called the 'multiplier effect'. Well-resourced entities with strong capabilities could also become major implementation and monitoring partners. Yet formulating policy advice based on this finding is not straightforward. On the one hand, international organizations, given their expertise in particular subjects, can provide information and other resources during negotiation processes and even during implementation that are difficult to find elsewhere. From this perspective, one might even find it logical that during the negotiation of global goals, international organizations act as observers, granting them close contact to those conducting the negotiations.

However, international organizations sometimes also influence global goalsetting significantly, in a way that member states themselves in the end might not even be content with. The clearest example is the outcome of the MDG negotiations, where the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund significantly influenced the final set of goals. In this thesis, I have shown that the role of international organizations, and especially their responsibility for SDG indicators, impacted the attractiveness of some indicators proposed during the

indicator negotiation process. Here, they might limit the extent to which ideas, indicators and measurements that move away from 'business as usual' are considered.

This leads to two ways forward, based on different ideas about what the aim of global goalsetting should be. For one, global goals might be simply posited as a means to unify actors and serve as an instrument to prioritize policy areas over others, or as a means to prioritize certain topics across policy areas through a unified agenda. In such a case, the role of international organizations might be seen to speed up the process of global goalsetting and implementation, as member states and third parties can profit from the knowledge and resources of international organizations. However, if one perceives instead global goalsetting as a way to not only prioritize but also set novel, even transformative goals, indicators and targets, several changes to the current system are needed. For this purpose, I propose a simple mantra, "Vision, capacity, recruitment".

This mantra is consistent with two key pieces of advice. The first is that to utilize the potential of international organizations without letting them reduce the transformative potential of global goalsetting, member states must be more autonomous in the agenda-setting stage, where they should come up with their vision before letting international organizations advise them. The second piece of advice is to place capacity before recruitment. In the current system, and this is often true of many UN processes, goals are set without guarantees that there will be sufficient capacity for implementation. In the case of the SDGs, the persistent 'SDG funding gap' is a case in point. International organizations with significant capacity then become attractive as orchestrators, coordinators or key actors during implementation. As mentioned above, setting new goals without the provision of capacity, for international organizations with less resources this might mean they have to decide between declining new responsibilities, cutting back on existing projects, or reverting to organized hypocrisy or organizational jiu-jitsu. Only by providing a guarantee about the availability of additional resources can less-resourced international organizations realistically take up novel responsibilities.

The tendency to give well-resourced international organizations more responsibilities, the multiplier effect, might be seen as a way of *de facto* centralization, which has often been called for to reduce global fragmentation. However, the multiplier effect centralizes primarily based on the criteria of capacity. This leaves underexplored if the entity centralized to is indeed functionally the most logical choice for the novel responsibilities it receives, and if this entity will, within the boundaries of its organizational identity, prioritize these novel responsibilities. In addition, although member states by setting a number of goals prioritize some policy goals, they do not clarify which goals are thereby *deprioritized.* It remains, to a certain extent, up to individual organizations during implementation to weigh existing against novel priorities.

Although the mantra "Vision, capacity, recruitment" is quite intuitive, it is easier proposed than executed within the existing global governance system. A very apparent challenge is that the necessary resources for goal-attainment are not always easily calculable. However, this does not need to be a deterrent, as the continuous review processes attached to the SDGs could also present a time and place to review the need for additional resources. To some extent, the Addis Abeba Action Agenda for financing for sustainable development tried to fill in this function in the current SDG system. However, this agenda operated from the start without any guarantee that the necessary resources would be provided, but served more clearly as a mechanism to ask member states and third parties to provide the proper resources after the agenda was set.

A more fundamental implementation challenge for the mantra is that one can hypothesize that it might be easier for states to agree on a shared set of goals if they can do so without at the same time committing to funding obligations. Implementing the mantra might thus decrease the willingness of member states to engage in global goalsetting in the first place. However, arguably, it might not be too

problematic to reduce the number of commitments that lack the resources to be realized, as such commitments might constitute or result in the establishment of 'smokescreens' for inaction, 'empty institutions' or 'empty goals', if one directly relates it to the present case.

An argument against this might be that even goals that do not receive sufficient funding when they are set might inspire activity by third actors or empower civil society actors to some extent. Overall, however, agreeing on fewer goals but with ensuring funding for their realization cannot only help implementation, but can also increase the legitimacy of multilateral cooperation, and potentially increase the willingness to increase future funding and create over time a willingness to act. This seems better than the current situation in which the world is striving to 'resuscitate the SDGs', which does not convey to people worldwide that multilateralism is solving the world's most pressing issues.

Another key challenge for the realization of this mantra is that although member states might be able to formulate a vision without the intervention of international organizations, they often rely on their expertise to carve out the relevant topics. Although an overhaul of this system is not realistic, I see a need to increase the space for innovative and transformative ideas, including those from civil society. By ordering the process to start with a clear vision, and build capacity and find recruits around this vision, the likelihood of transformative ideas might increase. This does require, however, more time and resources during the negotiations to move from novel, transformative ideas to indicators and benchmarks. During the SDG process, many potentially innovative benchmarks were dropped as there were no existing means to measure them. Although this makes sense, once again, from the perspective of global goalsetting as a means of prioritization, it does not make sense from the perspective of innovation and transformation.

The second challenge when it comes to the engagement of international organizations with global goals is that international organizations tend to be selective in their use of and reporting on the SDGs when it comes to their own activities. Here, I see a major opportunity for policymakers to intervene productively. It would be of great value if policymakers clarified to international organizations what 'alignment' means and should look like in practice. For this purpose, an 'SDG alignment manual', or a 'policy-coherence for the SDGs manual' for international organizations, could be a way forward, based partially on best practices of international organizations. Such manuals exist for national level actors; this could form an inspiration, if adjusted to and supplemented with insights from studies on the challenges and opportunities of international organization to align with the SDGs (which I proposed as a future research avenue in the section on scientific impact).

To some extent, the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (2019) has made a start with operationalizing alignment with its report "Evaluation of United Nations entities' preparedness, policy coherence and early results associated with their support to Sustainable Development Goals." However, as mentioned in this report itself, which looked into 30 UN entities, it had several limitations. Most significant is that despite a mixed-method approach, the documented changes reported were assessed in terms of quantity and alignment with the SDGs, but did not include a detailed, qualitative assessment of content (OJOS, 2019: 7). One indicator for alignment, for example, was that 'at least one change to key documents' was made at the time of the evaluation (OJOS, 2019: 7). The concept of organizational jiu-jitsu clarifies that such indicators do not say anything significant about alignment in practice. Furthermore, the positive early results were self-reported, and not independently validated by the office. The criteria used by the study resemble those I presented as the 'phases of engagement' in this study, and indicated some 'best practices', although they do not include the goal-setting phase itself.

It must be noted, however, that the UN Development Group has worked on a framework to orient its technical assistance towards SDG implementation. This framework is known as the Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy support (MAPs) framework, agreed in 2016. As part of this work, the group has

developed a self-paced e-course that officials can follow. This course includes as one of its elements 'how to assess SDG alignment'. It might be interesting to further investigate how the UN Development Group itself teaches SDG 'alignment' to its constituents and trace the effects thereof.

Apart from studying existing initiatives, I suggest the formulation of indicators supplemented with more elaborate, qualitative findings. Currently, international organizations are often 'mandate matching' the SDGs, clarifying how their existing activities contribute to several SDGs. Such behavior can proliferate in an environment with a lack of clarity on the alternative. The alignment and coherence guide should include concrete examples of what an approach that considers all aspects of development looks like in practice *when translated* into organizational processes and country-level engagement. This might include a list of minimum changes to core organizational structures and work processes and the type of data required to be able to verify alignment in practice. It should include, at least in my view, an overview of the way in which the organization has operationalized alignment, being as concrete as possible, the way in which this has been translated into the organization, the way in which the organization aims to balance the dimensions of sustainable development during implementation, the way in which the organization engages with the SDGs when it interacts with member states and third parties, and the indicators that are used within the organizations itself to track intra-organizational alignment with the SDGs. Only in this way can one move beyond notions of 'pre-alignment', the supplementation of existing goals with some SDG indicators and SDG snapshots that mention several flagship projects but lack any accountability on the overall resources used to work on SDG attainment.

Many international organizations already report on a number of these indicators. For example, many organizations submit inputs to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, sometimes even yearly. However, as I have reviewed a multitude of these inputs for the chapters of this thesis, I found that most of these presented overviews of activities undertaken for specific goals, or sub-sets of goals under review in particular years. To report more comprehensively, a format should emerge for this specific purpose. An interesting idea might be to create a *Voluntary International Review*, which international organizations can present during the HLPF, and can discuss with other international organizations. This idea is modeled based on the Voluntary National Reviews that are used by member states. Spotlighting the role of international organizations in this way might help them to overcome any reluctance to prioritize the SDGs, as they will now also be part of the regular accountability processes surrounding them. In addition, doing so might improve the power balance between international organizations and civil society actors in processes of follow-up and review, as civil society actors thereby receive a novel instrument to place pressure on and scrutinize the narrative presented by international organizations during expert reviews.

As numerous international organizations impact SDG attainment through their operational work, monitoring them as a set of actors more directly seems adequate, although it might be challenging in practice. A key challenge to overcome is the existence of parallel obligations. Although I partially tried to address this issue by proposing the "Vision, capacity, recruitment" mantra above, it is still possible that early assessments of the necessary funding will turn out to be inadequate, partially because of changing circumstances. During the MDG period, this included the global economic and financial crisis (2007-2008). In the context of the SDGs, such circumstances included the onset of a global pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This has led to a situation in which many of the goals are off-track, and the financial context for many member states has worsened significantly, with mounting debts impacting their ability to engage in SDG financing. To overcome this challenge, it is important that states also indicate what they are willing to *de-prioritize* to realize the priorities they have set through global goalsetting. This, however, will require far-fetching, potentially highly politicized discussions that member states thus far have not attempted to engage with.

Another key challenge to overcome is the lack of vision on what the *system* of international organizations is supposed to deliver in the context of the SDGs. As mentioned, there are some interesting initiatives in this sphere, including the country-level UNSDCF and studies on UN System-funding streams towards the SDGs and the gaps therein (Dalberg 2017; OECD 2020). However, only by utilizing these initiatives to think more systematically about what international organizations should deliver, and a potential division of labor not based on the multiplier effect, can one carve out a definition of alignment that is realistic given the mandate and capacities (even if supplemented) of different international organizations under review. This was also one of the key recommendations of the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (2019) report identified above. For this purpose, the office recommended a leading role for the department of the UN Secretary General. I would add to this recommendation that what is defined as the system should include more than UN System entities and but also entities loosely associated with or even outside of the UN system (potentially based on OECD categorizations of the 'development system'). I recognize the increased difficulties with holding such entities to account, given their relative autonomy, but note the potential of funding or accountability schemes to serve as an incentive and legitimation. In the case of entities that are relied on by the UN to supplement a lack of funding, more extensive consultations might be required.

If one combines the policy proposals formulated based on these two challenges, one is likely to address some of the underlying incentives that feed into organizational jiu-jitsu, including resource limitations and the existence of parallel priorities.

Policy advice
Challenge 1 (agenda-setting phase): International organizations have a lot of impact, especially in the goalsetting stage: 1. If global goalsetting is seen as pure prioritization, this role of international organizations does not have to be a problem, because international organizations can speed up the process with their knowledge and expertise. 2. If global goalsetting is seen as a quest for transformation, what is needed is to order the process based on the mantra "Vision, capacity, recruitment".
Challenge 2 (discursive uptake, organizational engagement, country-level processes): International organizations are selective in their use of and reporting on the SDGs when it comes to their own activities: 1. Create an 'SDG alignment', or 'policy coherence for the SDGs', manual for international organizations based on best practices and additional scientific insights. 2. Clarify what alignment with the SDGs *at the minimum* should mean when it comes to the intra-organizational variables of international organizations. 3. Clarify what alignment with the SDGs *at the minimum* should mean when it comes to the country-level engagement of international organizations. 4. Introduce the 'Voluntary International Reviews' (based on the voluntary national reviews for states) where international organizations summarize their activities and can discuss and reflect with other organizations (during the HLPF) on how to move forward. 5. Clarify what efforts should be *de-prioritized* to ensure the implementation of global goals (under changing circumstances).

7.3.2 Policy recommendations concerning the external steering roles of international organizations and the SDGs

Based on the insights gained from sub-question 2 of this thesis, I identify four challenges regarding the external steering roles of international organizations.

The first challenge is the inadequacy of the mandates of (some) international organizations. At present, many work plans of international organizations include references to sustainable development, but their official Terms of Reference do not. To enable organizations to promote the SDGs as an integrated and holistic agenda, I therefore advise reassessing the Terms of References of international organizations. Especially the UN Regional Commissions are a case in point, as some of their Terms of References were designed shortly after the second World War. Resolving the growing discrepancy between long-standing mandates on paper and contemporary functional requirements in practice, can help the United Nations to better align with the challenges of the 21st century.

The second challenge for international organizations is that they might be confronted in their attempts to orchestrate member states and third parties with parallel agendas that do not fully align with and can be more binding than the SDGs. Their limited resources often limit the implementation of all these obligations simultaneously, and efforts to explain how trade-offs between parallel obligations are dealt with often remain absent. Some pieces of advice presented in the previous section are likely to address these challenges at least partially. These include the need for member states to clarify what they are willing to *de-prioritize* to fulfill their obligations in the context of the SDGs, and the (future) implementation of the mantra "Vision, capacity, recruitment", which helps to prevent resource limitations and limits the number of parallel obligations. However, even if this advice is implemented, the global

challenges that flow into global goals will always differ to some extent from the full set of challenges that member states, and the regions in which they operate, are facing. A full conversion between global, regional and national agendas is therefore unrealistic. What can and should be better addressed, nevertheless, are instances in which parallel agendas potentially result in trade-offs with the SDG agenda. The activities of the Economic Commission for Africa, for example, provide a good template for the identification of potential trade-offs, as Vision 2063 was mapped against the 2030 Agenda. However, what is now needed is a step beyond the 'mapping mentality' that results in the promotion of synergies. Actors should also reflect on how trade-offs are addressed. The Voluntary Local, National and Regional Reviews presented to the HLPF could provide here a starting point.

The third challenge is that international organizations have become part of novel coordination entities, which increases mutual contacts and offers space for new ideas, but which are not always designed with a clear aim and are not always clearly related to one another. Part of this confusion stems from the introduction of changes to the UN development system after the launch of the SDGs, which are still being implemented. To deal with this challenge, for now, I advise to better relate existing coordination entities to one another. In the case of the UN Regional Commissions, for example, a hopeful development is that the work of the Regional Collaborative Platforms is now reviewed during the Regional Fora for Sustainable Development, which are themselves coordination platforms. More fundamentally, however, I advise any future negotiations of global goals to integrate a discussion on necessary organizational and system changes earlier and more explicitly. It is necessary to clarify how the (UN) system should change to implement goals, and to present an agenda for this purpose that can start being implemented the day of the agreement of the goals. Although individual entities started working on the integration of the SDGs relatively quickly (Appendix C), the first changes to the UN development system related to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda were introduced only in 2017. Although this might be less attractive from the perspective of quick and immediate action, an even better option might be to build a transition period between the agreement of goals and the start of implementation to allow some of the earliest needed organizational/system changes to be enacted.

A fourth challenge is that many international organizations have extended their roles and activities in the context of the 2030 Agenda but might not be able to steer towards coherent SDG implementation. International organizations are especially limited in their ability to support member states and third parties to fully implement the SDGs, given the voluntary nature of their support. It is important to note, however, that in the development landscape, a better link between member state priorities and those strived towards by UN entities is a positive development (Connolly and Mincieli 2019). However, if UN entities increasingly focus solely on development priorities set by member states, without directing attention to potential gaps in proposed national development plans, they might help implement a cherry-picking strategy, instead of using their knowledge and expertise to help a country move toward coherent SDG implementation. To address this challenge, some of my earlier proposals (such as limiting the number of goals, adopting only those with sufficient funds, and deprioritizing some issues) could increase the ability and willingness of member states to focus on (full) SDG implementation.

However, fully addressing the selective calls for support is difficult, as this challenge likely emerges partially from a lack of political will of some member states to implement the full 2030 Agenda. As was mentioned by some of my interviewees, there are member states that are not that keen on implementing some more politically sensitive goals, including, for example, SDG 16 (on peace, justice and strong institutions), SDG 10 (on reducing inequalities) and SDG 12 (on sustainable consumption and production). Beisheim (2023) convincingly unpacked political will as a factor impacting SDG implementation, and argued correctly that political factors should be included during the follow-up and review of the SDG framework.

In addition, to increase the likeliness of implementation, the involvement of and pressure from civil society actors must be further supported and stimulated. The case of the UN Regional Commissions indicates that international organizations, by creating coordination platforms, can and do empower (novel) civil society mechanisms, which might help inspire change. However, given the suppression of civil society actors in many countries that implement the SDGs, this is not a short-term fix but will be a long-term process. In the short term, using nudges, like those presented by ESCAP's 'Every Policy is Connected' tool, that point out the benefits of SDG data-collection for member states, might be the best option to move forward. One must be cautious, however, of countries that might opt-in to data-collection for political purposes. An example might be the use of disaggregated data to pinpoint and further marginalize certain parts of their population.

An area where international organizations are gaining a more important role is support for SDG financing. International organizations are working on numerous instruments, like Climate-SDG Debt Swaps, SDG bonds and SDG-related public-private partnerships. However, it is not always clear how the finance they are able to 'unlock' is aligned with the SDGs, and if it is additional. Here, a manual of some sort could be needed. Furthermore, there must be more accountability for such mechanisms, by ensuring transparent reporting about their inputs, outputs and outcomes. Also, it is important to clarify the roles that different organizations play when it comes to such constructs. The Financing for Sustainable Development office is taking on this role to some extent, as it led the consultations that resulted in some of the latest financial initiatives. The office works on the follow up on the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and advises the intergovernmental follow-up process. However, a more systematic reflection on the implications of these novel mechanisms, who it empowers and disempowers, might be necessary. The lead-up to the Summit of the Future in 2024, where the international financial architecture is discussed, is as a potential venue to advance this conversation.

Policy advice
Challenge 1: There are gaps between the official Terms of References of (UN) organizations, and the more recent functional needs mandate presented to them by the SDGs. 1. To make the UN system fit for the challenges of the 21st century, all UN system mandates should be revised and adjusted, and be based on the notion of sustainable development where the economic, social and environmental dimensions of development are taken into consideration holistically.
Challenge 2: Parallel agendas and lack of resources limit the orchestrating role of international organizations vis-a-vis third parties. 1. Member states should clarify what they are willing to *de-prioritize* to fulfill their obligations in the context of the SDGs. 2. Implementation of the mantra "Vision, capacity, recruitment" for future goals can limit the number of parallel obligations and resource limitations. 3. Actors should move beyond a 'mapping mentality' and focus not just on the synergies of parallel agendas with the SDGs, but also explain how (potential) trade-offs identified can be addressed or mitigated, for example in Voluntary National, Regional and Local Reviews presented to the HLPF.

Challenge 3: International organizations are part of novel coordination entities that are still developed throughout the SDG implementation process.

1. Better relate existing coordination entities to one another, for example by integrating part of their activities or creating facilities for discussion.
2. Discuss and start to integrate necessary organizational changes earlier, by explicitly taking this up as an element to be addressed during the negotiations of global goals.
3. Build a transition period between the agreement of goals and the start of implementation to allow some of the earliest needed transformations to occur.

Challenge 4: International organizations have extended their roles and activities in the context of the 2030 Agenda but are unable to steer towards coherent SDG implementation.

1. To increase the space of international organizations to fully support the 2030 Agenda, it is important to consider the political aspects impacting the implementation of the SDGs during follow-up and review (see also Beisheim 2023).
2. To increase the willingness of member states to fully implement the 2030 Agenda, it is important to stimulate and support the involvement from civil society actors.
3. To increase the willingness of member states to fully implement the 2030 Agenda, international organizations can use nudges, like those presented by ESCAP's 'EpiC' tool, that point out the benefits of specific SDG data for member states.
4. To ensure the quality and additionality of 'novel' SDG finance mechanisms, a more comprehensive overview of these tools and the minimum requirements therefore might be created by the Financing for Sustainable Development Facility
5. SDG finance mechanisms should be part of the broader discussion on the international financial architecture, starting at the Summit of the Future in September 2024.

In short, combining these policy proposals with the proposals presented in the previous section, will help address the most apparent factors that currently limit the success of international organizations in executing their role as orchestrators in the context of the 2030 Agenda.

7.3.3 Policy recommendations concerning inter-agency coordination due to the SDGs

Based on the insights gained from sub-question 3 of this thesis, I identify three challenges surrounding the encouragement of coordination through the SDG governing process.

A first challenge concerns the rather different arrangements in which international organizations are expected to coordinate actors, which often create difficulties for organizations in more fragmented set-ups to move beyond mere knowledge sharing. Part of the reason that fragmented arrangements face difficulties engaging in joint problem-solving and advocacy stems from the lack of prioritization of coordination efforts. Coordination, although seen as potentially decreasing overlap and increasing efficiency, is often executed outside of the regular mandates of, in the case of indicator custodianship for example, the indicator focal points. Especially for smaller international organizations, this limits involvement, also in less fragmented set-ups. My advice based on this challenge would be to fortify the recognition of coordination as a means of implementation, moving it from a 'nice to have' to a 'need to have'. The coordination levy introduced as part of the UN Funding Compact provides an interesting initiative in this direction, which might be built upon. Although the value of coordination is often recognized and referred to, it is not clearly included in the task descriptions and packages of most officials working in international organizations. A case in point is the task description of indicator custodianship, which defines 'main responsibilities for indicator custodians', and thereafter places coordination with other international agencies near the end of a list of 'other responsibilities' (ECOSOC 2015b, 3). Adding

coordination more explicitly to the responsibilities of custodians might address the limited involvement of custodian agencies with limited responsibilities for particular SDGs.

We also lack an overview of the coordination efforts that have emerged. For coordination efforts initiated by indicator custodians, for example, an overview of the nature and content of these initiatives might inform and inspire other custodians. The OECD's (2021) 'Compendium of International Organization's Practices: Working Towards More Effective International Instruments,' which focuses on rule-making practices, might provide an interesting template for such an initiative around coordination efforts. In addition, as UN DESA has done with its 'SDG Good Practices' (2019), there might be a role for the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, to compile good coordination practices. This group might even choose a spotlight initiative that can be awarded during the yearly HLPF sessions. Combined, such initiatives might lead to more systematic promotion of and applause for coordination with(in) the UN.

A second challenge I identified is that (especially for more fragmented institutional arrangements), coordination can be challenging given the lack of a leading entity. For the SDGs, it is unlikely that the HLPF, as the main coordinating entity, will be sufficiently strengthened to take a leading role. As Beisheim (2021) has shown, earlier discussions on extending the mandate of the HLPF were wrought with controversies, making it unlikely that next year, when its functioning will once again be reviewed, one might see a more ambitious mandate emerge. However, it might be possible to guide coordination in other ways, like Abbott and Hale (2014) attempted to do with their 'guide for organizational entrepreneurs' in the field of orchestration.

Beyond good practices, guidelines, and awards, I also suggest appointing a *primus inter pares* for more fragmented arrangements. The aim of this would not be to create a hierarchy, but to clarify responsibility. For the system of indicator custodians, this might offer a solution. In that case, however, member states would also need to establish an actor to steer the system as a whole. UN DESA has already taken on a coordinating role to some extent, including through its role as co-organizer of the Expert Group Meetings that precede the review of individual SDGs during the HLPF, which could be built upon.

A third challenge I identified is that organizations in highly fragmented institutional arrangements can be restricted in coordination efforts due to contestation about the nature of SDGs and about direction of coordination. This challenge is difficult to resolve. Given diverse memberships and mandates of international organizations, it might be too much to expect of them to create coordination mechanisms among themselves to resolve the deep political tensions that underpin some of the SDGs. Although their monitoring and implementation tasks require international organizations to define the meaning of key concepts, it seems problematic from a democratic perspective to let intergovernmental bureaucracies be the key sites for deep-seated political contestation. Rather, I suggest that international organizations should play primarily a signaling role, and to make member states primarily responsible for the provision of much needed clarification to enable organizations to coherently implement the 2030 Agenda.

Policy advice
Challenge 1: International organizations are expected to coordinate, but must do so in very different institutional arrangements. 1. Fortify the recognition of coordination as a means of implementation, include coordination in the task description of, for example, the SDG indicator custodians, attribute time and resources to these types of tasks, especially for smaller agencies that might otherwise refrain from participation. 2. Systematically map existing coordination initiatives (for indicator custodians), potentially based on the template of the OECD Compendium (2021). 3. Applaud effective coordination initiatives, potentially based on UN DESA's SDG Good Practices (2019).
Challenge 2: International organizations can face coordination challenges due to a lack of leadership (especially in more fragmented institutional arrangements). 1. For more fragmented institutional arrangements, appoint a lead entity responsible for leading coordination efforts. 2. For some systems, leadership might include an overarching orchestrator. In the case of indicator custodianship this might include a Chief Statistician or a more central role for UN DESA.
Challenge 3: Organizations in highly fragmented institutional arrangements can be limited to engage in coordination efforts due to contestation about the nature of goals and the rationale and direction of coordination. 1. International organizations should play a signaling function towards member states, directing attention to the sensitivities they experience around, and the inconsistencies they observe in the agenda that impact implementation.

7.3.4 Policy recommendations concerning the impact of the SDGs on institutionalization

Based on the insights from sub-question 4 of this thesis, I identify two challenges surrounding the impact of the SDGs on institutionalization.

The first challenge is that although international organizations can use the SDG process to further the institutionalization of 'neglected' global issues, they will likely only profit from the SDG governing process in the mid-term, by foregoing alternative pathways of institutionalization, rather than cement their initiatives for the long term. At face value, this is not a problem to be addressed as such, as a lack of effort to institutionalize an issue area might signal that this area is not high on the political agenda in the first place. Yet for actors that seek to use the SDG process to further international institutionalization, this would be a temporary rather than a long-term answer. However, this does not necessarily have to be the case. Instead, I advise in this case to utilize the mid-term publicity and legitimation gained through the SDG process to build a broader global movement, like the many political actors in the One Planet Network/10YFP that connect their efforts to SDG 12 while building a global social movement for 'Sustainable Consumption and Production'. Such connections can increase the pressure on policymakers to keep the topic on the agenda beyond the termination of the 2030 Agenda.

A second challenge that I identified is that international organizations hoping to use the SDG process for institutionalization purposes might fail without a previously mobilized and motivated set of actors and a coordinating entity. However, in this thesis I noted several instances in which organizations

working on particular topics doubted the extent to which the SDG process itself could be a good way to further their cause. Here, there might thus be motivated and willing actors, but these actors are not necessarily willing and motivated, but rather hesitant to utilize the SDG process for this purpose. This is the case for actors working in the field of inequality, where several actors were disappointed with the outcome of the negotiation of the targets and indicators of SDG 10. In cases where actors have yet to establish consistent interactions, actors will not be able to capitalize on the potential to utilize the 2030 Agenda as extensively as in the case of the 10YFP. However, it might be possible to use a global goal as an anchor to start this initial unification, even though it might not tick all the boxes in terms of targets and indicators. For SDG 10, actors recognized this potential around the review of the indicator framework, where some interactions started to emerge. However, much work remains to be done in such cases to establish an initial network. Still, using the timeframe of the SDGs to mobilize and motivate actors can help advance the topic in future negotiations.

Policy advice
Challenge 1: International organizations will likely only profit from the SDG governing process in the mid-term, foregoing alternative pathways, rather than cement their initiatives for the long term. 1. Use the mid-term publicity and legitimation that can be gained of the SDG process to build a broader global movement around an issue area, also outside of the 2030 Agenda processes.
Challenge 2: International organizations hoping to use the SDG process for institutionalization purposes might be limited in doing so without a previously mobilized and motivated set of actors and a coordinating entity. 1. Use the SDGs as an initial anchor to build interactions between key actors, which creates a better starting position for future agendas and negotiations.

7.4 Final reflections

In this thesis I took as my theoretical starting point the idea that international organizations are complex, semi-autonomous entities. They are not just functions of member states but can be influenced by a number of intra-organizational and extra-organizational variables and their interplay (e.g., Finnemore & Sikkink 2001; Park 2006; Vetterlein, 2007; Alvarez, 2016; Tallberg et al., 2018). Based on this starting point, I looked at several ways in which the impact of global goalsetting on international organizations might materialize.

The findings of this thesis point to extra-organizational variables that shape the context in which international organizations perform their 'semi-autonomous' role. Importantly, I argue that the SDGs have not been accompanied by sufficient changes in the overall incentive structure for international organizations to allow them to focus on integrated or coherent implementation. Based on this insight, behaviors, like organizational jiu-jitsu, selective implementation and mandate-matching, become possible given the policy space provided to international organizations. However, these activities also flow from structural features of global governance. I do not dispute here that international organizations have agency, but I do think we need to recognize the limitations of international organizations in the current system.

Overall, the limited impact of the SDGs might lead to calls to change the nature of global goalsetting, for example by making the 2030 Agenda more binding (e.g., Biermann et al. 2023; Waltenberg & Droste 2023). However, what seems most important in a context of selective implementation is to ensure that the integrated nature of the goals will be respected and focused on during implementation.

Only by placing the integrated nature of the 2030 Agenda - which seeks to integrate economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainability - at the center of implementation efforts, can we differentiate wanted versus unwanted (consequences of) policies. Given the reliance of social and economic development on the quality of the planetary ecological systems, it makes sense to me to use for this purpose hierarchical models that place planetary boundaries, or an overarching environmental grundnorm (e.g., Kim & Bosselmann 2015; Rockström & Sukhdev 2016) at the center. Combined with some of the policy recommendations presented in the discussion, 'governing through global goals 2.0' might beome more effective, and it might allow for fewer incentives and less space for international organizations to engage in unwanted behavior like cherry-picking, selective implementation, organizational jiu-jitsu, or mandate-matching.

Appendices

APPENDIX A

Governance Fragmentation

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The concept of 'architectures' of global governance is a useful heuristic device to help understand the macro level of institutions and governance mechanisms. With it, one may better grasp the complexity of the myriad treaties and agreements in, for instance, climate and energy governance and compare this with a governance architecture on oceans, biodiversity or chemicals. Such comparisons across institutional architectures and issue areas can reveal, especially, lower or higher degrees of governance fragmentation, which might influence performance of an architecture.

We find governance fragmentation at all levels of political institutions, from local administrations up to national political systems and global governance. Architectures of global governance, however, fundamentally differ from national architectures. Within countries, the rights and responsibilities of political actors and institutions are defined in a written or unwritten constitution that lays down procedures in cases of institutional conflict and normative contestation. While this ideal-type description is rarely matched in reality – with political systems being often marked by constitutional ambiguity, conflict, overlap and crisis – the difference between national and global architectures is evident. Some observers see the Charter of the United Nations as a functional equivalent to national constitutions. But even then, global governance follows logics that differ from national political systems. At the global level, institutional fragmentation is much deeper, and it is ubiquitous.

This fragmentation of global governance stands at the center of this chapter. We start with a conceptualization of governance fragmentation and its relation to concepts such as polycentricity and institutional complexity. We then review the origins of governance fragmentation and its problematization; methodological approaches to studying fragmentation; and the impacts and consequences of fragmentation. We conclude by identifying future research directions in this domain.

Our review is based on a comprehensive study of the literature on governance fragmentation over the last decade. We draw on a Scopus search on all articles published in the subject area of social sciences in 2009–2018 with 'fragmentation' in the title, abstract or keywords, which yielded 6,831 articles. To narrow the scope, we qualitatively scanned the abstracts of these articles and excluded all articles not concerned with governance fragmentation at the global and transnational level. This left us with 242 articles. We then further excluded articles with abstracts where fragmentation did not appear to play a key role in the analysis but was rather context-setting or mentioned without being of further influence. The remaining articles were supplemented for this review with additional studies, such as books, book chapters and a few policy briefs and working papers.

Conceptualization

The academic literature on fragmentation and complexity in global governance dates back to the 1960s and 1970s (Visseren-Hamakers 2015, 2018), with a strong empirical focus on the governance of major planetary systems, such as climate or ocean governance. We find in this debate also different but related terms such as polycentric governance (e.g., Ostrom 2010a, 2010b; Gallemore 2017); interlinkages between institutions and regimes; and institutional complexity and regime complexes. Whereas many of these concepts focus on relations among international organizations and regimes, the concept of fragmentation looks at an entire governance architecture in which institutions interact (Biermann et al. 2009). As such, compared to institutional interlinkages and regime complexes fragmentation has a clear focus on macro-level governance.

As a concept of political analysis, governance fragmentation is used in a variety of ways; there is no generally agreed definition. However, three key characteristics delineate the concept.

(1) First, fragmentation describes the quality of an entity but not an entity or phenomenon itself. Fragmentation, as a concept, cannot be used without reference to an empirical phenomenon that is fragmented. This makes fragmentation different from concepts that describe empirical phenomena, such as regime complexes or institutional interlinkages. Notions of regime complexes and interlinkages refer to units and the relationship between units. Fragmentation, instead, describes the quality of entities. In global politics, fragmentation hence relates as a quality to the concept of governance architecture, which we can assess as being more or less fragmented.

(2) Second, this makes fragmentation an inherently comparable variable. Different governance architectures – for example, in health, trade or climate governance – can be compared as to the degree of fragmentation, which can be higher or lower. The fragmentation of architectures can also be compared over time, allowing for insights into whether architectures became more or less fragmented. This comparability makes fragmentation, as a concept of political analysis, different from regime complexes: a regime complex is an entity that can be described through its parts, such as the various regimes and organizations that comprise it. But regime complexes cannot easily be compared because the comparable quality is missing, unless the analyst wants to assess whether a regime complex became more complex over time or is more complex compared to other regime complexes, which comes close to tautological reasoning. Fragmentation, however, is a variable that we can assess in political research.

(3) Third, the comparability of governance fragmentation makes it a continuous, non-binary concept. Governance architectures are neither fully fragmented nor entirely non-fragmented. Instead, they will always be more, or less, fragmented compared to other architectures, and more or less fragmented than architectures in the past and those in the future. The endpoints of this continuum would be two politically unrealistic ideal types. Extreme fragmentation, on the one hand, would be anarchy without institutions. This would run counter to the very idea of a governance architecture and negate the existence of governance in the first place. Zero fragmentation, on the other hand, would bring about the complete institutional integration of all treaties, actors and organizations, which is hardly realistic at the international level. Related to this, the notion of governance fragmentation does not necessarily entail an unrealistic assumption of a primordial, 'pre-existing world polity or order' that is becoming increasingly fragmented (as some argued, see Zürn and Faude 2013). Instead, governance architectures are always fragmented to some degree – and it is the relative degree of fragmentation that is of interest to the political analyst.

This notion of governance fragmentation as a continuum rather than a binary requires careful categorizations and typologies of different stages and phases of governance fragmentation. As one example, Biermann and colleagues (2009) have proposed a threefold categorization of cooperative, conflictive

and synergistic fragmentation. Furthermore, they use three criteria to differentiate between these three degrees of fragmentation: (a) the degree of institutional nesting and degree of overlaps between decision-making systems; (b) the existence and degree of norm conflicts; and (c) the type of actor constellations (see Table Appendix A).

Table Appendix A Typology of fragmentation of governance architectures

	Synergistic	Cooperative	Conflictive
Institutional nesting	One core institution, with other institutions being closely integrated	Core institution with other institutions that are loosely integrated	Different, largely unrelated institutions
Norm conflicts	Core norms of institutions are integrated	Core norms are not conflicting	Core norms conflict
Actor constellations	All relevant actors support the same institution	Some actors reman outside main institutions, but maintain cooperation	Major actors support different institutions

Source: Biermann et al. 2009

The typology of Biermann and colleagues (2009) has been used in numerous case studies. From 55 case studies that we analyzed in this chapter and that use the above framework, several explicitly include this typology of fragmentation (Orsini 2013; Van de Graaf 2013; Zürn and Faude 2013; Richerzhagen 2014; Velázques Gomar 2016; Well and Carrapatoso 2017; Rana and Pacheco Pardo 2018; Fernández-Blanco, Burns and Giessen 2019). In these studies, we find numerous examples of both cooperative fragmentation and conflictive fragmentation. For example, the climate regime is often analyzed as a prominent case of cooperative fragmentation (Biermann et al. 2009), while the energy security regime has been classified as conflictive (Fernández Carril, García Arrazola and Rubio 2013). Cases of synergistic fragmentation seem to be rather exceptional. The agreement of the Nagoya Protocol under the Convention on Biological Diversity has been described as an example of synergistic fragmentation, as it increases regulatory fragmentation but is still embedded in the framework of the convention. The addition of the protocol to the convention supports the objectives of the convention; the protocol is administered by the same secretariat; and it is financed through the same channels, all of which makes the architecture 'quite synergistic' (Richerzhagen 2014: 149).

Though the above shows that fragmentation of architectures as a whole can be classified as synergistic, cooperative or conflictive, the degree and type of fragmentation can also vary within one architecture. In the case of forest governance, for example, Fernández-Blanco and colleagues (2019) show that while synergistic fragmentation is observed among vague institutional elements (such as the norm of sustainability), more concrete and substantial elements (such as the role of civil society in reaching sustainability) coincide with more conflictive fragmentation.

The typology by Biermann and colleagues (2009) relies on both structural fragmentation – measured by the quantity of relationships between institutions – and functional fragmentation, measured by the quality of relationships between institutions, norms or actors. Most literature on fragmentation seeks to assess functional fragmentation, while a minority focuses on structural fragmentation (e.g., Kim 2013). This is closely related to the prevalence of qualitative analyzes of fragmentation compared to quantitative analyzes (as we discuss below).

Another typology has been brought forward by Zürn and Faude (2013), who differentiate between segmentary fragmentation (between institutions with similar tasks in different regions), stratificatory fragmentation (in a hierarchical sense, like framework convention and protocols) and functional fragmentation (largely a division of labour between, for instance, economic and environmental institutions). The typology by Zürn and Faude (2013) does not contradict but could rather be combined with the typology by Biermann and colleagues (2009). Their notion of stratificatory fragmentation, for instance, comes close to the notion of institutional nesting, which Biermann and colleagues (2009) use to assess degrees of fragmentation. The notion of segmentary and functional fragmentation is similar to discussions about vertical and horizontal fragmentation. Here, horizontal fragmentation refers to fragmentation between different policy domains (Zelli, Gupta and van Asselt 2012), while vertical fragmentation points at fragmentation between different levels of governance (Busch, Gupta and Falkner 2012). While most literature on governance fragmentation focuses on the horizontal dimension, long-standing academic debates in the broader literature on world polity also centre on whether the world becomes more regionally fragmented or more globalized (for overviews, see for example, Beckfield 2010; Gomez and Parigi 2015). Interestingly, though the distinction between horizontal and vertical governance fragmentation is rarely explicitly made in the literature, there seems to be more attention for vertical versus horizontal policy measures to address the negative consequences of fragmentation, for example through policy integration, institutional interlinkages and interplay management.

Importantly, all authors agree that fragmentation is ubiquitous, that it varies among policy areas and governance areas and that it is a variable that can be assessed in comparative research across policy areas and over time. We now review research findings on what explains fragmentation and what its consequences are.

Research Findings

The concept of institutional fragmentation originates in international law, where the first studies about the fragmentation of international law and the overlap and conflicts between international treaties date back to the mid-nineteenth century (Isailovic, Widerberg and Pattberg 2013). In this chapter, however, we focus on the literature in political science and governance studies and on how fragmentation of governance architectures is discussed there. Within political science and international relations research, governance fragmentation has been studied especially in the wider domain of earth system governance, and here both broadly regarding larger structures and more narrowly with reference to specific issues, such as climate or ocean governance.

Unsurprisingly, by far most case studies analyzed the increasingly fragmented, deterritorialized and hybrid architecture of global climate governance. Many studies focus on international climate governance in general (see, for instance Biermann et al. 2009, 2010; Zelli 2011; Zelli et al. 2010; Galaz et al. 2012; Karlsson Vinkhuyzen and McGee 2013; Palmujoki 2013; Dyer 2014; van Asselt 2014; van Asselt and Zelli 2014; Hjerpe and Nasiritousi 2015; Zelli and van Asselt 2015; Aykut 2016; Widerberg, Pattberg and Kristensen 2016; Dorsch and Flachsland 2017; Oh and Matsuoka 2017). Others investigate specific sectors (Hackmann 2012) or specific areas, such as climate finance (Pickering, Betzold and Skovgaard 2017), carbon governance (Biermann 2010; De Coninck and Bäckstrand 2011; Smits 2017), policies of Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) (Gupta, Pistorius and Vijge 2016; Gallemore 2017; Well and Carrapatoso 2017) and short-lived climate pollutants (Zelli, Möller and van Asselt 2017; Yamineva and Kulovesi 2018). Because of this prominence of climate governance in academic debates around fragmentation, many of the examples that we further discuss in this chapter focus on fragmentation in climate governance.

The concept of fragmentation has also been used, however, to describe and analyze governance architectures for other issues, such as forests (Giessen 2013; Orsini 2013; Carleton and Becker 2018; van der Ven, Rothacker and Cashore 2018), biodiversity (Richerzhagen 2014; Velázques Gomar 2016), energy (Ghosh 2011; Fernández Carril, García Arrazola and Rubio 2013; Van de Graaf 2013; Heubaum and Biermann 2015; Guerra 2018), health (Graham 2014; Holzscheiter 2017), oceans (Ekstrom and Crona 2017), international security and finance (Held and Young 2013), the arctic (Humrich 2013; Yamineva and Kulovesi 2018) and counterterrorism, intellectual property and election-monitoring (Pratt 2018). In contrast, we find it surprising that several important issue areas are still understudied despite the high fragmentation of their broader governance architectures, notably agriculture and food (on corporate food governance, see however Clapp 2018; Scott 2018) and fisheries (but see Young 2009; Hollway 2011; Techera and Klein 2011).

While fragmentation is often analyzed as a quality of governance in particular areas (e.g., Pattberg et al. 2014), only few articles use the concept of fragmentation to analyze the interface between different areas, such as between forests, climate and biodiversity (e.g., van Asselt 2012) or between water, energy and food (e.g., Weitz et al. 2017). Similarly, fragmentation is not often used to analyze the interface between entire policy domains such as between trade and the environment (for exceptions, see for example, Young 2009). At these higher levels of analysis, concepts such as institutional interplay, interplay management and regime interaction are more frequently used, even though the broader notion of governance fragmentation might in fact provide more explanatory power.

Fragmentation is most often studied as an independent variable, that is, as a possible explanatory factor for the degree of effectiveness of governance architectures or goal-attainment (Jabbour et al. 2012). Fragmentation is also often seen as a contextual factor that is deemed to complicate governance efforts.

However, even though fragmentation is of key importance in many articles, it is not always sufficiently operationalized with distinguishable criteria for analysis. An exception is the study by Pattberg and colleagues (2014, drawing on Biermann et al. 2009), in which institutional constellations, actor constellations, norm constellations and discourse constellations are used as indicators to empirically measure fragmentation in specific areas. In their effort to map and measure fragmentation, they elaborate a two-step process that includes the mapping of governance architectures based on a set of criteria to demarcate the main actors within an architecture.

Regarding methods, the vast majority of the studies on governance fragmentation are qualitative, usually analyzing multiple sources of data such as scientific literature, grey documents and interviews with experts from government, business or civil society. An in-depth, qualitative lens is indeed suitable to identify norm conflicts, certain types of actor constellations and degrees of institutional nesting. There are also some authors who rely on small-n comparative case-study methods (e.g., Held and Young 2013).

A more limited set of studies draws on quantitative methods to analyze fragmentation. An example is the research of Pratt (2018), who uses a dataset of over 2,000 policy documents to describe patterns of deference – a strategy to cope with jurisdictional conflicts – in three policy areas. As argued above, fragmentation can occur in different degrees and is a non-binary concept that allows for a comparison between architectures where the relative degree of fragmentation is of interest. This provides an opportunity for quantitative assessments of degrees of fragmentation that might prove useful in comparative analyzes. In the current literature, however, only very few attempts have been made to quantify fragmentation or to compare degrees or types of fragmentation across architectures. Among others, the lack of adequate methods and large datasets hampers empirical research that takes such an approach (Kim 2013).

Another methodological challenge in comparative research is that the larger the scale of the governance architectures that are studied, the higher the degree of fragmentation is likely to be (Biermann et al. 2009; Zelli and van Asselt 2013). Fragmentation is evident in more narrowly defined global governance architectures, that is, between parallel policies and regimes in the same issue area such as climate governance or governance of plant genetic resources. On this scale, comparative analyzes of different degrees and types of fragmentation are likely to be most fruitful, though fragmentation is also useful at a higher scale of comparative analysis, for example for entire policy domains such as environment or trade.

One promising and recently introduced method to quantify and comparatively analyze fragmentation is network theory, which has so far mainly been used to analyze links between international organizations (Beckfield 2008, 2010; Gomez and Parigi 2015; Greenhill and Lupu 2017). Network theory can be used to study not only fragmentation but also related concepts such as polycentricity and complexity (e.g., Ahlström and Cornell 2018), and it can be applied as well for analyzes of the structure and dynamics of global governance architectures. Network theory also allows for introducing temporal and diverse comparative components into analyzes, which can help to study the degree of fragmentation over time and between governance areas. Because network theory requires a careful and thorough justification of how the network is composed, it might not be applicable to all aspects of fragmentation.

So far, network analyzes have been done for numerous institutions and actor constellations (for a conceptual discussion, see Pattberg et al. 2014). This approach might be less useful, however, to analyze norm conflicts. Furthermore, the binary character of networks (that is, the identification of either absence or presence of a link between two network components) is not well-suited to reflect the complex nature and quality of institutional interactions (Kim 2013). Hence, network analyzes are useful to analyze structural fragmentation, which looks into degrees of fragmentation, but not necessarily functional fragmentation, which focuses on the types of fragmentation. This would thus call for mixed-method approaches with complementary qualitative analyzes; but such a combination of approaches has so far been rarely used in the study of governance fragmentation (for an exception, see Orsini 2013).

We now turn to discussing research that studies the emergence and evolution of governance fragmentation, followed by a review of research on the impacts and consequences of fragmentation.

Emergence and Evolution

Empirically, most literature on the fragmentation of global governance addresses issues of earth system governance. This is not surprising, given that earth system governance seems to be much more fragmented than, for example, trade or health governance. Different from these areas, earth system governance is characterized by a multitude of international organizations with related mandates as well as over 1,000 multilateral agreements, many of which have their own independent secretariats. The origins of this broadly fragmented architecture date back to the late 1800s, when the first multilateral agreements on transboundary environmental concerns were signed (Mitchell 2003). It was not until 1972, however, that a specialized international agency was created with environment as its core mandate, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP, now also known as UN Environment). By the time that this programme was created, about 200 multilateral environmental agreements were already in place (Mitchell 2003), and many international organizations existed that had, or later acquired, environment-related mandates.

The establishment of UNEP did not end the increase in fragmentation in this field. One reason is that while UNEP was mandated to coordinate and galvanize actions by other institutions and agencies, it was not given the authority to steer or authoritatively coordinate such actions (Ivanova 2007; Vijge

2013). Time and again, academic literature as well as UN reports (e.g., United Nations 1998, 2006) argue that the earth system governance architecture is becoming increasingly fragmented and that efforts to address this, often in the form of new institutions for coordination, have led to an increase rather than a decrease of fragmentation (Vijge 2013).

Yet, why is the governance of global socio-ecological systems, from climate to biodiversity, so much more fragmented than other governance domains? How can we explain these persistently high degrees of governance fragmentation? Unfortunately, the question has not often been analyzed in depth. As we discuss below, most literature on governance fragmentation focuses on its consequences (treating fragmentation as an independent variable), rather than its causes (treating fragmentation as a dependent variable).

There are some exceptions, though. For example, one long-standing strand in earth system governance research seeks to explain the absence of a core integrating institution such as an international treaty (such as the non-existence of a global forest treaty; see Dimitrov 2005; Dimitrov, Sprinz and DiGiusto 2007) or the absence of a central – or centralizing – organization (such as a world environment organization, which has been called for since the 1970s but is still not in place; see Vijge 2013). In addition, Johnson and Johannes (2012) studied why some environmental regimes integrate – hence reducing fragmentation – while others remain separated. Their main claim is that fear of negative spill-overs – for instance between the climate regime and the ozone regime – provides the strongest incentive for regime integration, while – unexpectedly – possible positive spill-overs do not drive actors to push for regime integration. They drew in their research on cases that differed by the degree of integration, that is, their dependent variable. This gains limited insights on the independent and possibly intermediating variables in these cases, nor does it yield causal explanations.

Especially international legal scholars have engaged for some time with the question of whether fragmentation emerges organically or whether it is rather powerful actors that consciously create a fragmented international legal system to serve their interests (e.g., Koskenniemi and Leino 2002; Benvenisti and Downs 2007; Broude 2013). Regarding the first perspective of organic emergence, Vijge (2013) uses the concept of institutional path-dependency to explain how the global environmental governance architecture has entered a self-reinforcing cycle wherein incremental changes – in the form of the ad hoc and diffused establishment of a set of fragmented institutions – are more likely than actions that would dismantle, change or replace large institutions. Dryzek (2016) has deemed this type of path-dependency as one of the core problems of governance architectures in the Anthropocene. Such an increasingly fragmented architecture coincides with fragmented or even circular policy debates about possible measures that could be taken at the global level to defragment the architecture.

Regarding the second perspective of purposeful fragmentation by interested states, several scholars have argued that neither powerful countries nor major international organizations have a strong interest in substantially transforming the governance architecture in order to defragment it (for an overview, see Vijge 2013). Some authors went a step further by arguing that powerful countries consciously design and maintain a fragmented governance architecture because it serves their interests. For example, Benvenisti and Downs (2007: 595) have argued that powerful states 'maintain and even actively promote fragmentation' because it allows them to maintain some of their power that they fear to lose in a time when hierarchy is increasingly considered illegitimate. Higher degrees of fragmentation would give such states the freedom to make or break rules without negatively affecting the entire system and without being held responsible (Benvenisti and Downs 2007). Paris (2015) even sees a long-term shift in power away from the United States towards emerging countries in the Global South as the core explanation of what he labels the pluralization of global governance, or what we would label in the context of this book as increasing fragmentation. In analyzing the fragmentation of the global

environmental governance architecture, Ivanova and Roy (2007: 50) argue that 'governments deliberately create weak and underfunded international organizations with overlapping and even conflicting mandates' because they are '[f]earful of infringement upon their national sovereignty'. Regarding the forest regime, Dimitrov (2005: 19 and 4) even argues that states establish 'hollow institutions' that function as '"decoys" deliberately designed to pre-empt governance'. Fragmentation that arises from the establishment of such decoy institutions can isolate policy issues for which there is no political will from more important, higher-level political fora. This allows governments to conform to the widely held norm of 'doing at least something' to address earth system concerns yet without taking substantive actions, something that has been termed 'symbolic policymaking' (Dimitrov 2005; Vijge 2013).

In addition, Zürn and Faude (2013) have brought forward a theoretical approach that views fragmentation of governance architectures as a 'functional response to the swelling tide of problems that can be handled best on the international level', drawing on differentiation theory in social science (Zürn and Faude 2013: 123). In this perspective, fragmentation is inevitable and neither positive nor negative per se; rather, it constitutes a political challenge to ensure the fruitful coordination of (increasingly) functionally differentiated governance units at the global level (Zürn and Faude 2013).

Although global governance of trade is generally considered less fragmented than earth system governance, several authors have sought to explain the growing fragmentation of trade governance as well. Here they focus on the increase of bilateral trade agreements, as opposed to multilateral agreements that include most countries. Interestingly, also in this domain, fragmentation through the setting up of bilateral agreements seems to be in the interest of powerful countries and hence supported by them. While in multilateral agreements, developing countries in the Global South may gain power vis-à-vis industrialized countries and cannot anymore be marginalized in negotiations, it is rather the rapidly spreading bilateral agreements that seem to serve the commercial interests of the United States and the European Union (Aggarwal and Evenett 2013; Trommer 2017).

Yet despite all this work in political science and international legal studies, additional comparative studies that take fragmentation as the dependent variable are needed and are an interesting venue for future research.

Impacts and Consequences

In addition, an extensive line of research has focused on the consequences and impacts of governance fragmentation. This literature, however, is still fundamentally divided regarding the overall benefits and downsides of more or less fragmented governance architectures. In part, these different perspectives on whether consequences of fragmentation are overall positive or negative depend on the actual degree of fragmentation in the area that is studied.

Positive effects of fragmentation. Several studies point to the benefits of fragmentation. In cases where smaller sets of actors seek to cooperate while others stay out, it is argued, the resulting fragmentation facilitates quicker, more innovative and more far-reaching decision-making among this highly collaborative but smaller set of actors. This is often referred to as minilateralism. Here, some authors expect that a patchwork of multiple minilateral fora can allow for experimentation with unconventional governance frameworks; enable tailor-made decisions with more specialized accounting or reporting frameworks; and ensure that inaction or stalemates in one decision-making process do not jeopardize others. Minilateralism may also facilitate concessions, funding agreements and the transfer of technology between a small group of actors that would hesitate to commit resources in large multilateral agreements (Bodansky 2002; Zelli, Gupta and van Asselt 2012; Dyer 2014; Dorsch and Flachsland 2017).

In climate governance, for example, the repeated deadlocks in multilateral climate negotiations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (Falkner, Stephen and Vogler 2010) have led to research on the potential of alternative fora and parallel initiatives, including minilateral institutions such as the Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate, as well as transnational markets, public–private partnerships, and other layers and networks of rule- and decision-making. These climate governance initiatives take place outside of, yet are loosely related to, the climate convention (Okereke, Bulkeley and Schroeder 2009; Victor 2009; Biermann 2010; Biermann et al. 2012; Dyer 2014; Falkner 2016). Similarly, Keohane and Victor (2011) and Abbott (2012) have argued for a transnational regime complex, in which the climate convention as a central negotiating forum would offer substantial degrees of flexibility and diversity to allow for a loose complex of (sub-)regimes. To be successful, such mixand-match approaches would need to rely on the principle of subsidiarity to increase self-organization; take into account the site-specific conditions by specifying the preferences, competencies, constraints and interactions of actors; include experimentation and learning at subsidiary levels to test innovations that can later be scaled up; and strengthen the trust across all scales and levels (Dorsch and Flachsland 2017; see also Hackmann 2016 for learning in global environmental governance). However, especially for polycentric systems, robust connections are needed to realize governance with decentralized feedback as one of its main components (Gallemore 2017).

Smaller agreements can be negotiated either by like-minded actors with closely aligned interests, or by actors that otherwise depend on one another, for example in the case of regional agreements (Bodansky 2002; Zelli, Gupta and van Asselt 2012). A fragmented configuration of institutions or decisionmaking processes that are loosely but cooperatively connected may then enable a larger set of actors to access and participate in the multiple co-existing decision-making processes (Zelli, Gupta and van Asselt 2012; Acharya 2016). Fragmentation may thus offer actors – including non-state actors such as business and civil society representatives – the flexibility to freely enter or leave non-confrontational negotiations wherein decisions are made through consensus (Acharya 2016).

Several studies have also investigated the benefits of vertical, as opposed to horizontal, fragmentation. Scholars studying polycentric approaches in climate governance, for example, highlight the potential of multiple bilateral, national and local forums to deliver solutions, as opposed to having one, exclusively globallevel, convention being responsible for crafting solutions. Vertical fragmentation, in the form of a combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches, may offer the potential to exploit co-benefits at multiple decision-making fora and thereby provide incentives for climate action at multiple levels (Dai 2010; Rayner 2010; Hoffmann 2011; Araral 2014; Cole 2015; see also Ostrom 2010b; Galaz et al. 2012; Falkner 2016; Dorsch and Flachsland 2017).

Negative effects of fragmentation. In contrast, several studies emphasize the dangers, downsides and further challenges of strongly fragmented governance architectures.

(1) First, many authors emphasize that smaller institutions cannot function effectively without a broader framework, and hence emphasize the continued relevance of broader, overarching frameworks that bind smaller agreements of only a few countries. As Hafner (2003: 856), for instance, argues, fragmentation 'jeopardizes the credibility, reliability, and, consequently, the authority of international law'. Several studies suggest that in a highly fragmented architecture such as in climate governance, a centralized regime such as the climate convention is necessary to create fair and effective outcomes (Hare et al. 2010; Winkler and Beaumont 2010; Dyer 2014; Dorsch and Flachsland 2017). Also, as Eckersley (2012) points out, creative compromises can only be realized if the diversity among involved member states is enhanced, for instance through the creation of a 'Climate Council' to be constituted based on common but differentiated representation (Eckersley 2012). This could be a way in which minilateralism could relegitimize the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change,

negating the global powershifts that contributed to the slowdown in multilateral negotiations that took place under its purview (Falkner 2016). Pratt (2018) emphasizes here the concept of institutional deference, where deference to other international organizations makes focused rulemaking on sub-issues more likely. Although the concept was used to describe the development of a division of labour within regime complexes, comparable developments might also be apparent or possible within broader governance architectures.

(2) Second, many studies associate governance fragmentation with a lack of coherence, inefficiency or ineffectiveness, and overlapping or even conflicting – and thus potentially counterproductive – policies (Jabbour et al. 2012; Held and Young 2013). Especially in the case of the many agreements resulting from fragmented architectures, Jabbour and colleagues (2012) claim that the multiplicity of obligations can hamper implementation in countries with limited international policy capacity. Looking at different stages of decisionmaking for the policy mechanism called Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+), for example, Gallemore (2017) has claimed that broadly fragmented systems – what they refer to as polycentric systems – comprising the coalitions necessary to raise issues to the agenda create high transaction costs when diverse interests must be realized simultaneously during implementation. This draws attention to questions surrounding the effectiveness of polycentric systems throughout their evolution.

A related issue is that for those engaging in fragmented architectures, it is not always clear where to draw the line in terms of participants, and this might also not be possible. When a patchwork of smaller institutions is in conflict or produces conflicting norms, decisions might become contradictory, thereby inhibiting their implementation (Bodansky 2002; Biermann et al. 2009; Zelli et al. 2010; Falkner 2016). In addition, a fragmented governance architecture is argued to increase the potential of duplication (Held and Young 2013). Countries and other actors can cherry-pick from a fragmented set of agreements and choose to engage only in those decision-making processes that align well with their individual interests, thereby creating 'coalitions of the willing' (Falkner 2016: 87; see also Biermann et al. 2009). The more fragmented a system becomes, the more likely it is that multiple actors are involved and spend unnecessary resources on comparable issues, policy solutions and activities. Moreover, conflictive norms or decisions in a fragmented architecture can obstruct the formation of a common vision, ambition and action and create confusion among actors about the direction that global governance should take (Biermann et al. 2009).

(3) Third, several studies argue that a fragmented patchwork of small-n agreements may not sustain in the long run, either because the smaller agreements do not address – or perhaps even increase – larger-scale institutional barriers, or because they are not accepted by the wider set of actors responsible for their implementation. Held and Young (2013) describe such a case in international finance. They argue that in this area – and also in international security – fragmentation must be seen as the outcome of mal-adaptation. Because established institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank were unable to produce system change in the face of the financial crisis, existing ad hoc, informal institutions – especially the Group of 20 – were de facto changed into small-n platforms wherein major powers devised plans to cope with the issues. The 'agreements' established within the Group of 20, however, did not sustain in the long run, as the venue lacked an administrative structure, enforcement capacity and mandate to execute its orders. After having reached their agreements, the Group of 20 directed their plans to the traditional institutions of the international finance governance architecture in which all countries participate; but such proposals rarely gained full support. Instead, the final compromises often resulted in watered-down, incremental reform proposals.

(4) Fourth, several authors point out that when conflicts among institutions and actors arise, fragmentation disadvantages smaller or less powerful actors, which need larger coalitions and broader

institutions to increase their collective bargaining power vis-à-vis the more powerful actors, such as the United States (Zelli et al. 2010; Biermann 2014). In the case of climate governance, for example, Eckersley (2012) argues against a patchwork of smaller agreements from the angle of substantive and communicative justice, suggesting that such smaller agreements are elitist, procedurally unjust, self-serving and not in line with the justice principles enshrined in the multilateral climate convention. Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen and McGee (2013) argue that minilateral fora have even allowed powerful states to advocate certain discourses around voluntary commitments that have now been taken up by the multilateral climate convention. They further argue that the proliferation of minilateral fora is characterized by a limited participation by state and non-state actors, a fundamental lack of transparency in decision-making and a lack of accountability towards nonparticipants. If some form of (functional) differentiation within a fragmented architecture with complex interdependencies exists in a policy domain, actors may become vulnerable to crosscutting and intersecting independent variables over which they have little control (Cerny and Prichard 2017).

Managing the negative consequences of fragmentation. Finally, how to manage governance fragmentation and especially its negative consequences has received much policy and scholarly attention. Responses to fragmentation include, for instance, the more general embracement of fragmentation (Rayner, Buck and Katila 2010) combined with active policy measures such as orchestration and governance through global goals. Policy measures to reduce fragmentation also include policy integration, interplay management and eventually hierarchization.

Conclusions and Future Directions

While the literature on governance fragmentation is vast and still growing, key gaps remain. These include explanatory analyzes of the relations between different fragmented governance architectures and governance levels (horizontal fragmentation) (Visseren-Hamakers 2018); research on the relation between problem structure and the degree of fragmentation within a specific issue domain; and analyzes of the agency of actors in a fragmented architecture, particularly actors from the Global South (Acharya 2016). More research is also needed that draws on quantitative and mixed-methods approaches to studying governance fragmentation. To analyze structural fragmentation that focuses on the degree of fragmentation, more efforts are needed to quantify fragmentation. For this purpose, the creation of adequate methods and large datasets that facilitate these approaches can be highly beneficiary (Kim 2013. Mixed-method research could analyze structural and functional fragmentation – focusing on both degrees and types of fragmentation – in more detail at the same time.

Future research could also invest in the development of a typology of all potential linkages between entities of a governance architecture. This research could rely on insights from network analysis to continue the inductive work of, for instance, Betsill and colleagues (2015). An example of a less-studied but potentially interesting type of linkage is that of catalytic linkages. These centre around the alteration of the actions of one or more actors to allow third parties to improve the performance of their governance tasks, similar to orchestration. Mapping these and other linkages not only allows scholars to better comprehend existing architectures but could also be used by actors trying to increase cooperation or even synergies within existing structures or trying to reform existing structures.

Additionally, comparative studies that take fragmentation as the dependent variable remain an interesting venue for future research. This would shift research from trying to explain how fragmentation impacts governance effectiveness to causal questions surrounding fragmented global governance architectures. This research can build on the research already undertaken in the field of international law about conscious versus organic emergence (including path-dependency) of fragmentation. However,

as governance architectures often cover entire policy areas, it remains empirically and practically challenging to compare such large areas based on variation of the dependent variable.

Finally, research on governance fragmentation – and the continued strong emphasis on the negative impacts of strong governance fragmentation – reinforces the necessity of more research on possible policy responses and options for structural transformation. The field of earth system governance is unique in its high degrees of governance fragmentation, for a variety of historical and structural reasons, and it remains a major challenge for political science and policy analysis to sketch powerful solutions and transformative trajectories that could lead our societies to more integrative, more effective and more equitable global governance.

A

APPENDIX B

Governance through Global Goals

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In recent years, a relatively new mechanism of global governance has gained prominence: the use of broad global policy goals to orchestrate the activities of governments, international organizations, civil society, the private sector, and eventually all citizens of the world. Global governance through goal setting works through the joint commitment of all governments to collective policy ambitions. These ambitions are then enshrined in the form of multilaterally agreed goals that are not legally binding but come with more specific targets, indicators and time frames, all of which are expected to steer public and private actors collectively into desired trajectories (Kanie & Biermann 2017). While governance through global goal setting has featured in global governance since the second half of the twentieth century, its role has become much stronger in the last two decades (Fukuda-Parr 2014). The Millennium Development Goals, agreed by the United Nations in 2000, were a first attempt at comprehensive global steering through goals. But global goal setting has gained much more importance when the United Nations General Assembly agreed, in 2015, on 17 Sustainable Development Goals to be implemented by 2030.

Like other attempts at global governance through goal setting, the Sustainable Development Goals share four key characteristics (Biermann et al. 2017). First, they are not legally binding and cannot be enforced as law within national or international adjudication. Second, they are marked by weak institutional arrangements that are not supported by international treaty organizations, formal monitoring agencies, strong dispute settlement bodies and the like. Third, they are meant to be highly inclusive, covering all countries and sectors of society. Fourth, they are broadly framed and hence leave much leeway to national implementation and interpretation. While none of these characteristics is specific to this type of governance, the combination of these four characteristics amounts to a unique approach to global governance.

In this chapter, we review recent literature on these four key characteristics of governance through global goals. We first conceptualize governance through goals as a mechanism of global governance. We then delve into key literature around the four main characteristics of governance through goals, with a view to understanding how they affect the performance of governance architectures. We then distil how these characteristics, taken together, can affect governance architectures, for instance by leading to new actor constellations, by galvanizing efforts and by transforming or creating new institutions. Thereafter, we identify future research directions that might help increase understanding of whether and how global goals could effectively deal with the challenges that result from the institutional complexity of global governance architectures.

Conceptualization

We define global goals as internationally agreed non-legally binding policy objectives that are time-bound, measurable and aspirational in nature. Notably, in this definition, we exclude legally binding international legal rules and norms such as those often established through multilateral agreements. We also leave out widely proclaimed aspirations of global civil society and other non-state actors, such as those reflected in transnational private regulations. These goals from nongovernmental bodies do not enjoy the formal support of governments and intergovernmental organizations; they are rather part of the realm of non-state, transnational governance. Furthermore, while we acknowledge that goals have been a feature of global governance since the first United Nations Development Decade in the 1960s, we focus on the more recent, and much more ambitious, global goals, and especially the Sustainable Development Goals from 2015.

The concrete mechanisms through which global goals function are yet to be examined in detail. There is consensus, however, that a key defining feature of governance through goals is that it does not seek

to directly change existing institutional architectures, and that it does not seek to regulate existing institutions or actors by demanding or enforcing behavioral change (see contributions in Kanie & Biermann 2017). Rather, governance through goals relies on non-legally binding global public policy goals, generally negotiated under the purview of intergovernmental institutions and organizations, most notably the United Nations. Such goals are hence largely aspirational, but they are typically endorsed by governments and non-state actors around the world, which could enable them to guide actions and policies at global, national and subnational levels.

Although it is unknown to what extent governance through global goals can really lead to immediate and radical governance transformations, many commentators and supporters expect them to have some impacts, for example by triggering incremental but widespread changes when goals are taken up in national and international policies and programmes. Governance through goals can thus have some influence by setting priorities that shape the international and national allocation of scarce resources, as well as by galvanizing action through specific and time-bound targets with which actors track their progress towards goal achievement (Young 2017). As such, governance through goals can trigger and orchestrate, rather than enforce, some of the policy responses to governance fragmentation and institutional complexity, such as policy integration, interplay management, orchestration and hierarchization.

The effects and effectiveness of governance through goals remain contested, however (see discussion in Kanie et al. 2017). While some observers argue that global goals can have significant impacts (Hajer et al. 2015; Stevens & Kanie 2016), others criticize this governance mechanism for its lack of enforcement and compliance mechanisms. Will the goals be effective in the end? In this chapter, we review the body of social science literature that deals with this question. We are less interested in whether goals are actually implemented but rather in the prior, first step: whether goals have any effects on governance systems and processes, and here in particular on whether goals have the potential to affect entire governance architectures, for example by advancing institutional integration between decision-making systems or reducing norm conflicts. While some observers are optimistic that the Sustainable Development Goals of 2015 will help foster institutional integration at the international level (Le Blanc 2015a), others doubt such claims, arguing that the goals themselves simply reflect the fragmented structure of global governance (Kim 2016). So far, however, there has been little, if any, empirically grounded research on the effects of governance through goals on governance architectures. Therefore, our review attempts here to lay the foundation for new inquiries into this research domain.

Research Findings

We now review recent research findings and conceptual contestations on the four key characteristics of governance through goals mentioned above, namely their non-legally binding nature; the underlying weak institutional arrangements; the inclusiveness of the goal setting process; and the national leeway in the implementation of the goals.

Non-legally Binding Nature

A first key characteristic of governance through goals is that they are not legally binding (Biermann, Kanie & Kim 2017). Both the Millennium Development Goals of 2000 and the Sustainable Development Goals of 2015 were formally established by a non-binding United Nations General Assembly Resolution as part of a broader development agenda. Although some scholars claim that the United Nations General Assembly has quasi-legal competences (Falk 1966), the United Nations Charter clearly deems its

resolutions as being only recommendations, as they are not formally signed and ratified by states. These sets of global goals are hence not part of international law but are essentially political agreements (Kim 2016).

Some scholars have argued, therefore, that goal setting through non-binding agreements is merely a suboptimal, ineffective or even counterproductive strategy. Some even see it as contributing to increasing institutional complexity and fragmentation, with the potential to complicate international cooperation (Elliot 2017). For those global goals that are grounded in international agreements – as is the case with some targets under the Sustainable Development Goals – legal scholars have emphasized the need to create additional mechanisms to ensure that these goals are not just a reflection of but reach further than the existing fragmented and compartmentalized system of international law (Kim 2016: 17; see also Kim & Bosselmann 2015; Underdal & Kim 2017).

Others have questioned the ability of non-binding goal setting to influence a wider political arena and to mobilize societal forces in modern systems of multilevel governance (Bodansky 2016; Young 2017). A non-binding status could potentially limit the compliance-pull and legitimacy of globally agreed goals at the national level, because acceptance can be limited to mere executive approval, without the need for governments to seek domestic legislative approval and formal adoption (Bodansky 2016). For example, domestic courts are not obliged to use the Sustainable Development Goals as a judicial source when resolving disputes.

Furthermore, the non-binding status of global goals might limit the sense of urgency, commitment and acceptance, especially among government officials who are expected to assume key roles in realizing the goals (Young 2017: 43; see also Franck 1990; Raustiala 2005; Bodansky 2016). That governments generally attribute some value to the legal status of agreements is emphasized by the strong disappointment expressed by many governments when the outcome of the 2009 Copenhagen conference of the parties under the climate convention proved to be 'only' a political agreement. Another example is the continued discussion over the legal status of the subsequent 2015 Paris Agreement (Bodansky 2010, 2016). In addition, given the lack of legal standing, internationally it could be unclear how new global goals, such as the Sustainable Development Goals, relate to earlier agendas, agreements and plans. In the case of the Millennium Development Goals, for example, it has been argued that they disrupted ongoing processes for the implementation of the 1990s conference agendas through cherry-picking of issues, the modification of previously agreed targets and the disruption of nascent initiatives (Fukuda-Parr et al. 2014; Langford & Winkler 2014; van der Hoeven 2014).

Yet, while it does seem that lack of legal force limits the effectiveness of global goals, the opposite argument is also found in the literature. Serious questions have been raised, for instance, about the effectiveness of international environmental law (Kim & Bosselmann 2013) and the extent to which it affects state behavior (Goldsmith & Posner 2005). Bodansky (2016) even argued that some merely political agreements – including the 2009 Copenhagen Accord – have had a greater influence on state behavior than legal agreements. Proponents of goal setting add here that its underlying premises differ substantially from those of rulemaking (Young 2017: 34). Whereas rulemaking creates indefinite behavioral prescriptions formulated as requirements and prohibitions for specified actors, goal setting articulates time-bound aspirations, procedures and targets that need to rely on enthusiastic support among a wide range of actors to induce self-governance (Young 2017). The expectation of behavioral constraints that legally binding documents potentially create can even lead to pick-and-choose strategies among countries, resulting in many narrow agreements with only few parties that leave out important countries. The more flexible instrument of goal setting, however – especially when it provides possibilities for the adaptation to national and local realities – might motivate all governments to make at least some contributions on sensitive topics (Zelli et al. 2010). For example, although the reduction

of inequality between and within states was a bone of contention during the negotiations of the Sustainable Development Goals, all countries have in the end agreed to Goal 10 on inequality, including many highly hesitant parties such as the United States (Kamau et al. 2018: 184). This would not have been possible if that goal had been legally binding.

Another dimension of 'bindingness' is the precision with which goals are formulated. Although the Paris Agreement included non-legally binding Nationally Determined Contributions, its provisions are formulated in terms that do not create clear individual obligations (Bodansky 2016: 146). Also its provisions on adaptation and means of implementation lack the precision to create enforceable legal obligations (Bodansky 2016). An increasing number of legal norms and provisions can result in the progressive proliferation of normative ambiguity with little effect, whereas non-legally binding commitments might in some cases be more precise and effective (Victor et al., 1998). This is what some argue could be the case with the nonbinding but sometimes very precise indicators for the Sustainable Development Goals.

Whether global goals as legally non-binding political agreements can have some effect will, hence, depend more on the detail and on additional elements that add alternative dimensions to bindingness that could enhance compliance (Bodansky 2016: 149). An important example is the extent to which accountability mechanisms are in place to support global goals, for instance through systems of transparency and review. In the case of the Sustainable Development Goals, the Voluntary National Reviews provide such a system. Although it will still take more time for all governments to bring forward their Voluntary National Reviews, in the end these reports may have the potential to serve as a detection mechanism for poor performance. This again could raise the reputational cost of non-compliance. In addition, Voluntary National Reviews could help mobilize and empower domestic supporters and increase a sense of urgency among participants. In sum, with these mechanisms in place, the Sustainable Development Goals could have important effects despite their lack of legal standing.

Weak Institutional Arrangements

A second characteristic of governance through global goal setting is that it needs to rely on weak institutional arrangements at the international level. By 'weak' arrangements, we mean that global goals do not rely on legal authority or on a formal status within the United Nations hierarchy. This also implies that they lack significant resources to execute their mandate and the capacity to create norms, resolve disputes and enforce compliance with further rules and regulations.

Generally, weak institutional arrangements are often associated with claims about the ineffectiveness of global governance that comes from inefficiency, the lack of an overall vision, duplication and conflicts between the mandates and activities of organizations, lack of implementation and enforcement and lack of adequate and predictable funding (Lodefalk & Whalley 2002; Elliott 2005; Biermann 2014). Such criticisms often coincide with negative views on governance fragmentation. Many of the discussions regarding the institutional reform of the global architecture for earth system governance, for instance, revolve around an upgrade in authority of existing organizations or the establishment of an authoritative international organization dealing with the environment.

Several authors, however, have framed weak institutional arrangements also as a possible way to deal with governance fragmentation. One such way is known as orchestration, a strategy closely linked to governance through goals. Orchestration relies not on legal authority and enforcement but rather on 'soft modes of influence' (Abbott et al. 2015: 223). Orchestrators gain influence through intermediary organizations and can steer actors in desired directions, typically through 'bottom up, non-confrontational, country-driven and stakeholder-oriented' strategies (Biermann et al. 2017: 27). Despite a lack of

formal authority, orchestrators are believed to be able to exercise leadership, provided that they are considered as legitimate by intermediary and target organizations and that they are the key focal point and expert within their areas, which grants them political weight.

A prime example of orchestration is the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, which is responsible for the institutional oversight in formulating and implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (Persson et al., 2016). The High-level Political Forum was established during the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, replacing the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development that was often seen as a mere 'talk shop' with no authority to make or facilitate formal decisions (Ivanova 2013: 219; see also Bernstein 2017). The High-level Political Forum did not gain much formal authority or resources compared to its predecessor (Abbott & Bernstein 2015).

Yet, despite these shortcomings, some scholars perceive the High-level Political Forum as rather influential. The Forum has been granted legitimacy through a formal resolution on its establishment; it has universal membership, high-level representation and participation of not only United Nations member states but also international organizations and non-state actors. The High-level Political Forum is hence regarded by some as a focal point for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals at the global level. It is a forum within the United Nations General Assembly, which may provide it with some political weight (Abbott & Bernstein 2015; Bernstein 2017). Though this points to a potential for success, the High-level Political Forum is bound to face challenges in exercising leadership within an architecture that is still characterized by fragmentation and partial competition among a plethora of international organizations that all work in the field of sustainable development.

In short, the jury is still out on whether weak institutional arrangements harm or help with the effectiveness of governance. While some see little promise in organizations with weak arrangements, others are more optimistic, provided that the right policy measures – such as purposeful orchestration strategies – are in place.

Inclusiveness

A third characteristic of governance though goals is the inclusion of a plurality of state and non-state actors in both goal formation and goal implementation. We distinguish here between procedural inclusiveness – that is, the openness of the process to a wide range of state and non-state actors – and substantial inclusiveness, which relates to the broad range of targets of a given policy. Both dimensions of inclusiveness are related: procedural inclusiveness can shape substantial inclusiveness, because including a wider range of actors in the setting of goals can favor the establishment of goals with broader objectives.

In global goal setting, the attention to inclusiveness is linked to the search for greater (input) legitimacy in global governance. This, again, relates to the concern of addressing democratic deficits in global governance that result from insufficient participation and accountability (Bäckstrand 2006a; Biermann and Gupta 2011; Keohane 2011; Gellers 2016). Some even see goal-based governance as a way to pursue what they call stakeholder democracy – a type of hybrid governance that responds to the argument that more deliberative input legitimacy results in greater output legitimacy and hence better governance results (Bäckstrand 2006b). Inclusiveness is generally viewed by proponents as a crucial step to more 'reflexive' forms of governance. Reflexivity is seen as a form of resilience and deliberation that embodies the institutional ability to be something else (as opposed to do something else) to effectively deal with changing circumstances (Voß & Kemp 2006; Dryzek 2014; Feindt & Weiland 2018). Also empirically, we observe since the 1990s a participatory turn in global governance that started with the Agenda 21 of 1992 and later evolved into the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, which

led to a shift from 'mere' participation to multistakeholdership. New forms of hybrid governance emerged, including dialogues and public–private partnerships. These play important roles in the governance of sustainability issues (e.g., Glasbergen et al., 2007; Bitzer et al., 2008), regimes (Gupta & Vegelin 2016) and interactions between regimes (Visseren-Hamakers et al., 2011; Visseren-Hamakers & Verkooijen 2013), even though concerns about their actual effectiveness and equity effects remain.

These mechanisms have been criticized, for example, for lack of participation from marginalized groups, insufficient monitoring and reporting and the biased funding that is generated through strong private sector involvement (Bäckstrand 2006a; Biermann et al. 2012; Bäckstrand & Kylsäter 2014). Studies on the failure of some partnerships suggest, for example, the importance of clear links with intergovernmental organizations, as well as the existence of measurable targets, effective leadership and systematic reviews for the reporting and monitoring of targets (Bäckstrand 2006a; Bäckstrand & Kylsäter 2014; Pattberg & Widerberg 2016).

This importance of effectiveness and measurability has informed the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals in 2000: a very concise set of development goals, praised for their clarity and simplicity and hailed as a historic example of global mobilization to achieve important priorities (Sachs 2012; Solberg 2015). And yet, the Millennium Development Goals have also faced sharp criticism with regard to their inclusiveness.

First, the Millennium Development Goals were aimed only at developing countries, with industrialized countries envisaged almost as tutors, reflecting a unidirectional and not very inclusive understanding of development (Deacon 2016). Procedurally, the earlier stages did reflect some inclusiveness, with the United Nations inviting input from non-state actors and eventually publishing 'We the Peoples: The Role of the United Nations in the 21st Century', which included a list of global values and priorities. However, the actual Millennium Declaration, and the extraction of the Millennium Development Goals from it, were largely based on input from the OECD's Development Assistance Committee, thereby attesting to the scarce inclusiveness of a supposedly global goal setting process (Honniball & Spijkers 2014; Chasek et al., 2016). In addition, there has also been criticism about the strong emphasis of the Millennium Development Goals on measurability, which has caused a certain reductionism and may have led to the exclusion or marginalization of crucial qualitative elements of comprehensive development (Fukuda-Parr et al., 2014: 115). At the same time, the partnerships that were established around the Millennium Development Goals were criticized for their weak review mechanisms and performance measurements (Bäckstrand et al., 2012; Bernstein 2017).

Considering these deficits of the Millennium Development Goals, some have described the strong focus of the Sustainable Development Goals on inclusiveness as a transformative moment in development policy (Stevens & Kanie 2016). Unlike other UN goals, the Sustainable Development Goals emerged from a 'mould-breaking' negotiation process that involved the establishment of an Open Working Group, which, in line with the official aim to conduct an 'inclusive and transparent intergovernmental process on sustainable development goals that is open to all stakeholders' (United Nations General Assembly 2012: 63), strived to be as open and inclusive as possible. Unlike most United Nations General Assembly working groups, whose meetings are generally closed to observers and lack official and publicly available records, the Open Working Group pursued the full involvement of stakeholders and the gathering of expertise from civil society, the scientific community and the United Nations system. It actively reduced delegation rigidity and set up a stocktaking process – including meetings with civil society – aimed at providing all negotiators with the same terms of reference and at fostering a high level of cohesion and a common sense of purpose (Chasek & Wagner 2016). In this light, also noting the role played by UN agencies in the UN task force and by the wide consultations with civil society, some scholars have referred to this goal setting as 'global social governance' (Deacon 2016: 118).

Instrumental in the procedural success of the 'largest development dialogue ever held' (Solberg 2015: 61) has also been the experimental use of new technologies – such as the creation of a global questionnaire – in the consultation phase (Sachs 2012; Gellers 2016), with some scholars arguing that the very future of global participation lies in the application of information technologies (Honniball & Spijkers 2014).

Against this rather optimistic backdrop, however, more critical voices have pointed at some weaknesses in the inclusiveness in global goal setting, even with the Sustainable Development Goals. First, there is a difference between inclusive invitation and inclusive participation (that is, actual influence on the final outcomes), with the process leading to the Sustainable Development Goals faring better in the former than in the latter (Deacon 2016; Gellers 2016). Second, the combined emphasis on growth (Gupta & Vegelin 2016) and on nationally determined commitments presents the risk of stifling inclusiveness at the later stages of goal implementation, in that it might incentivize a 'sovereignist' policy-making reversal away from the concern to improve global governance along 'social' lines (Deacon 2016: 129). Third, from a discursive standpoint, it has been pointed out that the Sustainable Development Goals do not constitute a major revolution vis-à-vis the overwhelmingly neoliberal narrative of the Millennium Development Goals. While the Sustainable Development Goals do include more references to Keynesian, feminist and 'world society' sustainability elements, they still retain an emphasis on neoliberal tenets such as economic growth. And they do not, as pointed out by critics, include any strong criticism of the existing global trade and financial architecture (Briant Carant 2017).

National Leeway

A fourth characteristic of governance through goal setting is that it grants much leeway for national choices and preferences. While global goals provide a roadmap of what ought to be done, they remain subject to contestation, negotiation and translation at the national level (Fukuda-Parr 2014).

To start with, this again brings in concerns about the legitimacy, fairness and accountability of national goal implementation. For example, the inclusiveness with which the Sustainable Development Goals have been crafted at the global level would imply that such inclusiveness is also important for the implementation of the goals at national and subnational levels, but this is not always the case. So, the national leeway left in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals might result in less inclusiveness in some countries than was originally envisaged. Second, should global goals be nationally implemented without adaptation to national circumstances, the results could be unfair outcomes (Easterly 2009; Fukuda-Parr 2014) and the omission of important priorities for inclusive and equitable development (Kabeer 2010). If countries with different levels of development are held up to the same measures of performance – as was implicitly the case with the Millennium Development Goals – then the special conditions in the least developed countries would make it very difficult for them to meet the goals (Easterly 2009; Hailu & Tsukada 2011). African countries, for instance, have performed poorly in implementing the Millennium Development Goals despite having made significant progress in that period (Easterly 2009). Furthermore, the translation of the Millennium Declaration into an agenda for action has created a dissonance between the Goals' original intent and their implementation (Fukuda-Parr 2010). The Millennium Development Goals distilled complex development challenges into merely 21 quantitative targets, which affected how development was understood and how decisions were made (Fukuda-Parr 2014). Poverty, for example, was narrowly framed as material deprivation with little attention paid to inequality, and it therefore overlooked the multidimensional, intersectional causes of poverty such as race, gender and ethnicity (Kabeer 2010). Even though the Millennium Development Goals had established a clear and communicable focus, the subsequent measures of progress did not

account for whether such progress was equitable or sustainable (Hill et al., 2010; Hulme 2010; Kabeer 2010).

Third, however, nationally owned strategies for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals might also foster greater accountability at national and other levels, through the development of appropriate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Such mechanisms, including the national Sustainable Development Goals reports and the Voluntary National Reviews, provide important means through which states could reflect, confront and fill institutional gaps towards goal attainment. As a key feature of governance through global goal setting, national leeway encourages self-regulation or self-steering (Fukuda-Parr 2014), the translation and adoption of goals into national policies and institutions (Galli et al. 2018) and more integrated institutional arrangements fit to address cross-sectoral issues and challenges. All of this can affect governance architectures discursively and materially. However, while the Sustainable Development Goals somewhat remedy the shortcomings of the Millennium Development Goals, potential pitfalls remain. As Oran Young aptly states, '[i]t is relatively easy to establish a causal connection between the articulation of goals and the establishment of organizational arrangements to promote their attainment. It is another matter to demonstrate such a connection between goal setting and actual progress toward fulfilling the relevant goals' (Young 2017: 37). Given the politics that animate development policy and practices across scales, there are risks of simplification and selectivity of goals through national implementation (Fukuda-Parr 2016). A recent analysis of Voluntary National Reviews indicates that various efforts are underway to incorporate the Sustainable Development Goals across all levels of governance, from setting up new institutions and engaging with local governments to realigning national plans with the Sustainable Development Goals (Sarwar & Nicolai 2018). Yet very few governments clearly articulate how to execute their respective agendas or how to monitor and evaluate their progress (Sarwar & Nicolai 2018). This may result in 'slippage in ambition and vision' in the processes of moving from goals to targets to indicators, all of which guide the orientation of policies and institutions (Fukuda-Parr & McNeill 2019: 12; see also Merry 2019). A study on Sustainable Development Goal 12 discusses the divergent framings of what sustainable production and consumption means and how to get there, arguing that quantitative indicators are vital to ensure accountability and avoid the continuation of 'green growth' trajectories that overlook planetary boundaries (Gasper et al., 2019). At the same time, quantification may lead to misleading or distorted information with significant policy implications (Merry 2019), leaving the Inter-agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators to adopt a pragmatic approach of 'measuring what we know how to measure', while addressing remaining challenges (Elder & Olsen 2019: 80).

Fourth, the national leeway might foster important learning processes within countries. Institutional integration requires much re-learning and must transpire through a multi-actor, multi-sector and multilevel process, providing new possibilities to engage with different types of knowledge (Meuleman & Niestroy 2015). For instance, the tendency to simplify global goals may be because of genuine operational challenges in formulating and implementing policies, which can reflect the multiplicity of linkages and foster integration among goals (Elder & Olsen 2019). Some indicators for the Sustainable Development Goals are still not based on established methodologies and standards, and some lack the required data for measurement (MacFeely 2019). Additionally, moving from sectoral to integrated approaches to goal implementation and measurement at the national level is challenging, given that many institutional structures are still arranged in silos (Elder & Olsen 2019). In sum, all these processes at the national level can facilitate social learning both within and across institutions, all in order to create policies that respond to local, national and global aspirations (Patel et al. 2017).

Governance through Goals and the Performance of Architectures

We now turn to the final question of whether global goals can affect global governance architectures, and under what circumstances. Drawing on the typology of fragmentation offered by Biermann and colleagues (2009), we assess whether global goals can strengthen institutional integration and reduce overlaps between decision-making systems, limit norm conflicts and influence the type of actor constellations, all possibly leading to less conflictive and more cooperative or synergistic fragmentation.

With regard to institutional integration, since goals are not legally binding and operate through weak institutional arrangements, their contribution to normative and institutional integration in global governance might seem limited. In the same vein, global goals do not offer much detail on how to reach the goals through specific policies or procedures. In the case of the Sustainable Development Goals, it is left to states to develop their own strategy to achieve the goals. Self-steering is encouraged, which results in the development or adaptation of institutional arrangements at the national level by each state's own preference. Though there are clear benefits to this approach, it also implies – at the global level – that a variety of institutions emerges that are not necessarily integrated.

Yet global goals may still contribute to institutional integration despite their lack of formal authority. As goals can play an important role in creating overarching and crosscutting norms (Biermann et al. 2017), they may serve as a key soft law instrument to orchestrate international agreements and institutions (Kim & Bosselmann 2013; Bridgewater et al., 2014). In the case of the Sustainable Development Goals, it has been argued that goals might spur clustering of the agreements within their own area and serve as an overarching set of principles, eventually modifying the application of other norms (Kim 2016). Indeed, it has been observed that the Sustainable Development Goals are already influencing international and national law, for example European trade and investment law (Huck & Kirkin 2018). In this respect, it seems that goals can indeed provide a tool for orchestration through normative guidance; their soft power can lead to more institutional integration in a fragmented system.

A second defining criterion of governance fragmentation is substantial norm conflicts between institutions. Again, global goals may be instrumental here in the creation of overarching norms, as long as broad support for the goals is present. In the case of the Sustainable Development Goals, obtaining such broad support and legitimacy has been pursued by striving for broad inclusiveness in the establishment of the goals. It has been argued that inclusiveness is key to inform deliberative processes in which different participants develop well-informed opinions and 'productive tensions' to drive reflexive reforms (Dryzek & Pickering 2017: 354). This, in turn, could foster the emergence of more flexible and adaptive architectures and facilitate the emergence and consolidation of multilevel and multi-scalar governance solutions that follow principles of institutional variety, polycentricity and analytic deliberation (that is, inclusive dialogues) (Dietz et al. 2003: 1910). In the context of sustainable development, inclusiveness has already been singled out as a key component in the gradual relaxation of strictly sovereigntist multilateralism towards what some see as more sustainable, more participatory and less state-centric formats (Eckersley 2004; Bäckstrand 2006b). Global goals can thus be successful in working towards more synergistic types of fragmentation by reducing norm conflicts, as long as the goals themselves have broad support, which in turn can be achieved by an inclusive goal setting process.

However, even when global goals offer a common vision, normative ambiguity remains. The Sustainable Development Goals, for example, have been criticized for not providing a clear vision on sustainability (Bernstein 2017). It has been argued that vague institutional elements, such as the ambition of achieving sustainability, coincide with synergistic fragmentation, while more concrete and substantive institutional elements that are necessary for the implementation of goals coincide with more conflictive fragmentation (Fernández-Blanco, Burns & Giessen 2019). Indeed, setting goals that are as

numerous and broad as the Sustainable Development Goals is bound to lead to competition for priority (Young 2017). Tension between the goals exists in the form of trade-offs (Langford 2010; Bernstein 2017), and a common global vision on the integration of the goals is lacking (Yamada 2017). Several authors have therefore highlighted the importance of systems to manage priorities (Griggs et al. 2017) and called for prioritization of goals (Spangenberg 2017). Given that goals must consider national circumstances, leaving prioritization and integration to the individual states is a logical choice. However, the adoption of integrated analytical approaches and models at the national level is lagging, posing a considerable risk for continuation of the same 'siloed' approach that has been criticized in the past (Allen et al., 2018), with conflicts remaining between different issue areas.

A third defining criterion of different degrees of fragmentation is overlapping actor constellations. Global goals can, again, help reduce fragmentation. Notably, the introduction of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 brought an unprecedented call for action from a plethora of stakeholders, including civil society, non-governmental organizations and the private sector. The involvement of such a multiplicity of actors at different scales leads to an increasingly polycentric system. Following a recent study by Jordan and colleagues (2018: 19), the effectiveness of such a polycentric system requires the presence of overarching rules or goals 'to provide a means to settle disputes and reduce the level of discord between units to a manageable level'. Especially the private sector is becoming a strong political actor in such polycentric systems, and some UN agencies see its role in achieving sustainable development as indispensable (UNCTAD 2014). The UN Global Compact, for instance, is a key network created to encourage businesses to commit themselves to the Millennium Development Goals, and now the Sustainable Development Goals. So far, almost 10,000 companies have joined the Compact, thereby committing to a set of goals to conduct business that is aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations Global Compact 2019). The Sustainable Development Goals have even been called a 'great gift for business' for giving a clear set of long-term global priorities with which the private sector can align their strategies (Pedersen 2018). In this sense, global goals do offer guidance for a new group of actors to join the global governance system and commit to a same set of behavioral norms at the global level, perhaps steering towards more cooperative or synergistic governance fragmentation.

On the other hand, the involvement of the private sector in governing sustainable development has invoked sharp criticism as well. Large transnational companies, predominantly from Europe and the United States, have been able to represent their sectoral interests during the development of the Sustainable Development Goals (Scheyvens et al., 2016; Weber 2017) and have been given an active role in the formation of public–private partnerships. Yet these public–private partnerships do not always lead to the desired results (Scheyvens et al., 2016). It has also been argued that the private sector is effectively pushing for its own corporate interests (Koehler 2015). Indeed, companies tend to engage with those goals that are most relevant to their own business interests (Abshagen et al., 2018), focusing more on 'doing no harm' than on 'doing good' (van Zanten & van Tulder 2018). Some observe also a lack of attention by business actors for those goals that are predominantly relating to environmental sustainability (Poddar et al., 2019).

Taking all this together, it seems possible that goals offer an overarching set of norms, leading to more normative agreement and institutional integration, be it through soft modes of governance or orchestration. On the other hand, the involvement of particularly powerful private actors and the cherry-picking of goals could also lead to the strengthening of specific complexes around certain goals and not others. This would then result in a more modular global governance architecture, where synergistic fragmentation is present within specific complexes, but cooperative or even conflictive fragmentation is present between complexes.

Conclusions and Future Directions

Global governance through goal setting, as an increasingly influential mechanism of global governance, poses important questions for academic research and policy analysis. For example, we need to better understand how, to what extent and with what effects global goals and their norms are embedded and integrated in existing governance arrangements at global, national and local levels. Also, what further governance reforms are needed to implement and reach the goals at various levels? The concept of orchestration in global governance constitutes an important new research area as well, focusing for example on the extent to which 'powerless' steering may have powerful effects on actors' behavior (see also Abbott et al. 2015).

Another important research question is to what extent and how the rhetoric of integration and policy coherence between the Sustainable Development Goals takes shape in governance arrangements at national and subnational levels. While the Sustainable Development Goals are meant to be indivisible and implemented coherently, unavoidable trade-offs and prioritization between goals need to be dealt with at the national and subnational levels. The question is then how the often-siloed national and subnational governance arrangements give shape to the Sustainable Development Goals, who is involved in prioritizing the goals and whether and how the rhetoric of this process of 'leaving no one behind' is being realized.

As a form of governance through goals, the Sustainable Development Goals show a level of ambition and comprehensiveness that surpasses all other forms of governance through goals. This makes them 'one of the most intriguing new global initiatives in sustainable development and environmental policy' (Biermann et al. 2017: 29). Governance through goals as a mechanism of global governance is not likely to disappear, nor is it likely to become less dominant with the termination of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. It will therefore remain of utmost importance, both for the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals and for any future effort of global goal setting, to continue critical examination of the various effects of global goals at the global, national and subnational levels.

APPENDIX C

Global Governance

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Many observers expected the Sustainable Development Goals to strengthen the institutional architecture of global sustainability governance within the United Nations system and beyond. This ambition was already part of the negotiations of the goals. Here, the United Nations General Assembly had created an 'open working group' of only 30 countries, driven by fears that negotiations with universal participation would not lead to an agreement. However, when over 70 countries wanted to join this group, the United Nations found an innovative way to accommodate them by sharing the 30 seats among 'duos' and 'trios' of countries. In another innovation, the open working group first went through a 'stocktaking' process to create a common understanding of the issues and to create legitimacy among governments and stakeholders (Chasek & Wagner 2016; Dodds et al., 2016; Kamau et al., 2018). However, some studies criticized these negotiations for being 'unpolitical' and brushing over conflicts (Rivera 2017; Thérien & Pouliot 2020).

The academic literature has characterized the 2030 Agenda as 'governing through goals' (Kanie & Biermann 2017: ix). Typical features include a goalsetting process that aims to be broadly inclusive; the non-legally binding nature of the goals; reliance on weak institutional arrangements to promote and implement the goals; and extensive leeway for states or other actors and institutions in responding to the goals (Biermann et al. 2017; Vijge et al. 2020: 256). Some studies argued that goal setting can be impactful and that the Sustainable Development Goals encapsulate 'seeds for transformation' (Stevens & Kanie 2016). Yet, global governance through goals remains a contested strategy (Kanie et al., 2017: 6; Young 2017: 38). Legal scholars emphasize that goals that are aspirational need additional mechanisms to reach beyond the fragmented and compartmentalized system of international law (Kim 2016: 17). In principle, such mechanisms can be found in the other parts of the 2030 Agenda, especially in the sections on the means of implementation and on the follow-up and review.

In this chapter we assess to what extent the literature identifies major changes in global governance – that is, the system of international agencies, programmes and other global actors and institutions – following the launch of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015. We first discuss the range of expectations for global governance arrangements for the goals, considering their stated objectives. We then assess the early performance of governance arrangements in terms of shifts in policy and practice. We focus here on changes within the United Nations system and its interactions with other international institutions and actors since the launch of the goals.

Conceptualization and Methods

This chapter focuses on the goals' impacts on global governance and aims at evaluating their steering effects. While the scholarly literature offers several definitions of global governance, most focus on authoritative and purposeful 'steering', making this a good starting point to evaluate whether the goals have constituted or underpinned governance (Bernstein 2011; Rosenau 1995). In practice, steering here means that an organization, actor or institution, individually or collectively, has adjusted its behavior, policies, programmes or practices by explicitly adopting the goals or by pursuing objectives defined by the goals.

Aspirations and Expectations

Our analysis begins by identifying the governance aspirations mentioned in the 2030 Agenda (Finnemore & Jurkovich 2020) and the expectations raised by scholars and experts, government representatives, stakeholders, and other engaged groups. Based on official documents and early literature from the negotiations and launch period from 2011 to 2017, we identify four areas of aspirational or

expected steering effects (see also Bowen et al. 2017): that the 2030 Agenda and the goals would, first, enhance multilateral leadership and guidance; second, improve system-wide coherence and coordination of global sustainable development policies; third, strengthen the global partnership and the means of implementation; and fourth, strengthen the global level follow-up and review for peer-learning and accountability to citizens. We now outline in more detail these aspirations and expectations, which will be our points of reference for the assessment of the actual steering effects of the goals that follows.

Enhancing Global Political Leadership and Guidance? After the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, governments mandated the newly established High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development to provide 'leadership, guidance and recommendations' for sustainable development (United Nations General Assembly 2013a). While governments gave the forum this far-reaching mandate, its formal status and resources remained limited (Abbott & Bernstein 2015).

Some studies argued that the High-level Political Forum would face shortcomings similar to, or be even weaker than, the institution that it replaced, the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (Strandenaes 2016), or even cautioned that the forum could end up being an 'empty institution' devoid of any influence (Dimitrov 2020: 636). It is widely accepted that despite some early accomplishments, the Commission on Sustainable Development had many shortcomings, such as an inability to attract ministers from economic or social sectors; a rigid sectoral-based agenda that prevented it from addressing new issues; and a weak review mechanism (United Nations General Assembly 2013b). The mandate of the High-level Political Forum aimed to address these weaknesses. Governments also decided to strengthen the forum by having it meet annually under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council and every four years under the auspices of the General Assembly. Some studies argued that the High-level Political Forum could potentially serve as an 'orchestrator' for the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. Contingent upon its focality and legitimacy, the forum could employ a soft and indirect governance strategy by enlisting third-party actors as intermediaries (Abbott & Bernstein 2015; Bernstein 2013, 2017). While debate persisted on the extent to which the weak institutional arrangements would affect the High-level Political Forum's leadership, experts agreed that orchestration would continue to be challenging given the broad array of actors and institutions called upon to implement the 2030 Agenda.

Improving System-Wide Coherence?

The 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals renewed the call for greater coordination and coherence by highlighting the need for a more integrated agenda across the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development (Le Blanc 2015a). Overcoming institutional competition and turf battles has been a persistent challenge within and beyond the United Nations system (Mueller, J. 2010). The literature describes global sustainability governance as a patchwork of international institutions that vary in their character (organizations, regimes and implicit norms), their constituencies (public and private), scope (minilateral to multilateral), and subject matter, from specific policy fields to universal concerns (Biermann et al. 2009: 16). The 2030 Agenda emphasizes the need for system-wide coherence and coordination in global governance in several contexts. It mentions policy and institutional coherence as 'systemic issues', captured for example in target 17.14, to 'enhance policy coherence for sustainable development' (United Nations General Assemby 2015b: 27). It also identifies one of the roles of the High-level Political Forum as promoting system-wide coherence and coordination of sustainable development policies, working with the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, and other bodies and processes (United Nations General Assembly 2015b: paragraph 82) (for institutional integration at the national level).

Potential positive effects noted in some studies include institutional integration (Vijge et al., 2020: 268), the creation of overarching and cross-cutting norms, the institutionalization of the Sustainable Development Goals in soft law instruments, influence on the development of rules and (legal) enforcement (Kanie et al., 2017: 6–8), and the potential to decrease norm conflicts (Vijge et al., 2020: 266). Other studies, however, questioned how far the goals could change the fragmentation of global governance (Kim 2016). This concern has led some studies to call for approaching sectoral issues from a nexus perspective, which could be facilitated by the High-level Political Forum as an integrative global steering body (Boas et al., 2016).

Building a Global Partnership? It was clear that global governance for the Sustainable Development Goals would need to reflect countries' diverse capacities, capabilities and starting positions for implementing the 2030 Agenda. In addition, international rules on finance, trade and technology affect countries differently, leading to asymmetries and inequalities (Ocampo & Gómez-Arteaga 2016). Building on the earlier Millennium Development Goal 8, the 2030 Agenda aspires to revitalize a 'Global Partnership' and define means of implementation. Differences over the nature and scope of development cooperation and the sources of the necessary funding hampered agreement on the key elements of the 'Global Partnership'. Many developing countries advocated for a partnership between developing and industrialized countries, with industrialized countries taking the lead in providing the means of implementation. In addition, developing countries suggested necessary reforms to systemic global issues, for example new or reformed financial, tax, trade and investment architectures (Fukuda-Parr & Muchhala 2020: 7–8). Developing countries also reinforced their demands for greater democratization of global economic governance through increasing the voice and vote of developing countries in international financial institutions.

Many industrialized countries, however, did not see a strong necessity for major institutional reforms. Instead, they emphasized the need to expand domestic sources of financing, increase the role of the private sector, and call on emerging economies in the Global South to shoulder more responsibilities. Their understanding of the 'Global Partnership' went beyond governments and encompassed a wider range of actors, including the explicit endorsement of multi-stakeholder partnerships (Thérien & Pouliot 2020). In addition to official development assistance, developed countries expected financing for the Sustainable Development Goals to include philanthropy, remittances, South–South flows and other official assistance, along with foreign direct investment, resources and investments of all types – including both public and private and both national and international financing.

The 2030 Agenda captures these conflicting aspirations in Sustainable Development Goal 17, as a stand-alone goal, and in the targets on means of implementation contained in the other goals. The Addis Ababa Action Agenda, adopted in 2015 at the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, also addresses the 'means of implementation' for the 2030 Agenda (United Nations General Assembly 2015a). It is expected that national and international aid and development actors play a significant role and that official development assistance increases. However, aid became less important in the overall mix of domestic and international, as well as public and private, flows to fund the Agenda's implementation, with the exception of aid to least developed countries, small island states or highly indebted countries with limited access to other sources of finance. The Agenda also envisages changes in policy areas such as finance, technology, trade or data, monitoring and accountability (United Nations General Assembly 2015b).

While underlining the importance of national implementation, the 2030 Agenda singles out several international institutions. Below, we focus on steering effects on the United Nations development system. Suggesting a need to make it 'fit' for sustainable development, the 2030 Agenda stresses the 'important role and comparative advantage' of a reformed United Nations system for supporting the

achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations General Assembly 2015b: paragraph 46). For this, the United Nations development entities were also expected to do better in terms of leadership and coherence. Several studies expected multilateral development organizations to play a crucial role in implementing the 2030 Agenda, especially as 'leaders of the new "global partnership"' (Kharas & Biau 2015: 12) that could innovate within the development community and build bridges to the private sector (Bhattacharya et al., 2018). In the vision of the 2030 Agenda, multilateral development organizations could coordinate among multiple development actors, support a more coherent approach and provide public goods such as data. The United Nations development system was expected to change its role from funding (that is, mobilizing grants to implement United Nations projects) to financing (that is, bringing together funding flows for a common result) (Bailey 2017). The United Nations was also expected to function as an orchestrator, brokering collective action to support sustainable development in networks of actors whose primary role is not necessarily related to either sustainable development or international cooperation (Paulo & Klingebiel 2016). For all these roles, multilateral organizations would need to complete internal reforms and adapt to changing demands (Browne & Weiss 2014; OECD 2015).

Improving Global Follow-Up and Review? Even before the United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda, several studies offered recommendations on the follow up and review of the Sustainable Development Goals, based on the assessment of strengths and weaknesses of the existing review mechanisms (Beisheim 2014, 2015; Espey et al., 2015; Halle & Wolfe 2015). In the end, the United Nations established a voluntary review mechanism, comprising thematic reviews and Voluntary National Reviews, the latter based on national processes (United Nations General Assembly 2015b: paragraph 74–90). The follow-up and review process aspired to be 'robust, voluntary, effective, participatory, transparent and integrated [to] help countries to maximize and track progress in implementing' the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations General Assembly 2015b: paragraph 72). Governments decided that the High-level Political Forum should have a 'central role in overseeing a network of follow-up and review processes at the global level' (United Nations General Assembly 2015b: paragraph 82). Some negotiators of the 2030 Agenda strongly contested establishing these follow up and review procedures (Beisheim 2014; Dodds et al., 2016; Kamau, Chasek & O'Connor 2018). As a result of many governments resisting more 'prescriptive' reviews, the review procedures ended up being designed to promote merely voluntary peer-learning.

Some governments also contested the role of civil society in the reviews. Some studies viewed the 2012–2015 negotiations of the Sustainable Development Goals as the most recent phase in a long-term trend towards increased civil society participation in global governance (Fox & Stoett 2016). Others, however, were more skeptical of the potential of civil society consultations to democratize global governance (Sénit et al., 2017). The aspirational goal of 'leaving no one behind' fostered some expectations for the inclusion of civil society in monitoring and reviewing the global implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (Strandenaes 2014). Indeed, the 2030 Agenda states that the follow-up and review mechanism 'should be open, inclusive, participatory and transparent for all people and will support the reporting by all relevant stakeholders' (United Nations General Assembly 2015b: paragraph 74d) to 'ensure that no one is left behind' (United Nations General Assembly 2015b: paragraph 72) and 'promote accountability to our citizens' (United Nations General Assembly 2015b: paragraph 73).

Methods

We take these four aspirations and expectations as our points of reference for assessing what the academic and expert literature concludes about the steering effects of the Sustainable Development Goals

in global governance. Our core question is: Did political, economic or societal actors in global governance change their behavior because of the Sustainable Development Goals? We are especially interested in causal pathways that the literature identifies, specifically through normative changes (including adjustments in legislative and regulatory frameworks and policies), institutional changes (including financial incentives and budgets), or discursive changes (including novel concepts and narratives). We limit the scope of our analysis to what the literature says about steering effects at the global level, including horizontal effects across institutional arrangements or governance complexes. While our focus is on the steering effects of Sustainable Development Goals on global governance, these effects must translate into changes and better implementation at other levels to have an impact.

Our assessment is based on a comprehensive analysis of academic and expert studies on the impact of the goals on global governance. We identified academic literature published since 2015 from the Scopus database, using a search string that combined keywords such as 'Sustainable Development Goal*' and 'steer* or governance' and 'global'.[9] This search resulted in a total of 470 publications. To obtain more specific results, we added keywords for the four types of aspirational or expected steering effects outlined above. After scanning all titles, keywords and abstracts, we identified 90 articles as potentially relevant for our chapter. We then complemented the Scopus search with other relevant publications, including grey literature, found through either a snowball approach or drawing on our own expertise. Altogether, we read and analyzed 142 articles and papers that discuss steering effects of the goals on global governance.

In view of the research questions of this assessment, we note that the number of studies with relevant findings is still limited. The few analyses that have been published in academic journals focus on general theory development, the evaluation of single policies or on normative assessments. Other studies of the institutional changes remain largely descriptive. More analysis is hence needed. In the conclusion to this chapter we discuss areas for future research in more detail.

Research Findings and Practical Insights

When the United Nations General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda in 2015, the United Nations had already started to align its work with the Sustainable Development Goals. The speed and range of this uptake is impressive, as documented in an annual survey, the 'United Nations System Sustainable Development Goal Implementation online database' (see also Office of Internal Oversight Services 2019; UNDESA 2020). Harrington (2019) claims that 'three genres of global governance mechanisms [have] changed and adapted to incorporate and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals': first, those created for the goals themselves; second, economic mechanisms; and third, global environmental governance. Building on these initial findings, we now assess the literature that focuses on the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development; the United Nations development system; and global environmental governance. Our focus in each analysis is the four aspirations and expectations for the Sustainable Development Goals outlined above.

[9] Search string (TITLE-ABS-KEY (("sustainable development goal*" OR "SDG*") AND (steer* OR governance) AND (global OR international OR "united AND nations" OR "un") AND (LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR , 2021) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2020) OR LIMIT TO (PUBYEAR, 2019) OR LIMIT TO (PUBYEAR 2018) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2017) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2016) OR LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR, 2015)).

The High-level Political Forum

The High-level Political Forum started to review progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals immediately after their launch. The fact that the High-level Political Forum became the 'home' of the Sustainable Development Goals in the United Nations system is itself an institutional steering effect of the 2030 Agenda. The High-level Political Forum attracts a wide range of participants, including high-level representatives from governments, the United Nations system and stakeholder groups. A 2019 survey found that 78 per cent of respondents agree that the High-level Political Forum has brought together participants with diverse backgrounds (UNDESA 2019a). The literature views the High-level Political Forum as a focal meeting place with a high degree of convening power (Adams 2019; Beisheim 2020a; Hege, Chabason & Barchiche 2020).

Enhancing Global Political Leadership and Guidance? Most studies concur that the formal leadership and guidance emanating from the High-level Political Forum during its first four-year cycle is limited (Beisheim 2018; Beisheim & Bernstein 2020b; Hege et al., 2020; UNDESA 2019b, 2019c). An often-mentioned example is that the outcome document – the pre-negotiated ministerial declarations that are supposed to be adopted at the end of each annual High-level Political Forum – fails to reflect discussions held at the meeting. The document merely reiterates general commitments and challenges without offering much political guidance or measures for follow-up (Beisheim 2018). Studies highlight a significant gap between mandate and expectations, on the one hand, and the forum's actual performance on leadership and guidance, on the other. This gap is notable, given that 83 per cent of respondents to a United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs survey expect the High-level Political Forum ministerial declaration to deliver in this regard (UNDESA 2019a).

Academic studies offer several reasons for this lack of formal leadership. First, the launch of the High-level Political Forum coincided with a period of increasing strain on, and declining commitment to, multilateralism (Hooghe et al., 2019; Morse & Keohane 2014). This is mirrored in many conflicts and an underlying unresolved normative dissent about the forum's mandate and format (Beisheim 2020b). Hege (2018) suggests these general trends have manifested specifically in the inability of the High-level Political Forum since 2018 to adopt the negotiated ministerial declaration by consensus. In 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic also had an impact on the forum, further diminishing its political leadership. As meetings of the Economic and Social Council were held virtually, governments refrained from voting online. The draft declaration could thus not be adopted through a majority vote. Yet, the United Nations Secretary General continues to call for an 'inclusive and networked multilateralism'. For this, policy papers advocate strengthening the High-level Political Forum and turning it into a relevant network node (Beisheim & Fritzsche 2021) or – as a more far-reaching reform option – a powerful Sustainable Development Council (Wieczorek-Zeul et al. 2021, also Biermann 2014).

Second, some studies indicate an unresolved conflict about the status of the High-level Political Forum. The forum could be seen as either the main United Nations forum on sustainable development that has universal membership and, if not takes, at least prepares vital decisions; or it could be seen as a mere platform for informal exchange (Adams 2019; Beisheim 2018, 2020a; Beisheim & Bernstein 2020a). Behind this difference is the deeper divide of governments on the relationship between the High-level Political Forum and the Economic and Social Council, which some member states see as the main United Nations body responsible for follow-up and review (Beisheim 2020a, 2021; Strandenaes 2016). Third, some studies have argued that the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, which provides the secretariat for the High-level Political Forum, lacks resources and autonomy to support a more robust leadership role for the High-level Political Forum and also shows administrative inefficiencies (Janus & Weinlich 2018; Office of Internal Oversight Services 2020; Widerberg & van Laerhoven 2014).

The literature thus suggests that the High-level Political Forum has fallen victim to these conflicts, shortcomings and, most significantly, lack of political will by governments to remove structural barriers to transformative change (see also Fuchs et al., 2020).

Improving System-Wide Coherence? The gap between aspirations and performance is also large regarding system-wide coherence. At the High-level Political Forum, speakers increasingly highlight interlinkages between the Sustainable Development Goals. The recommendations of the 2019 Global Sustainable Development Report have supported this shift in discourse. This report offers a detailed framework for supporting coherence and addressing the synergies and trade-offs by identifying six entry points: human well-being and capabilities; sustainable and just economies; food systems and nutrition patterns; energy decarbonization and universal access; urban and peri-urban development; and global environmental commons. In addition, the 2019 Global Sustainable Development Report lists four levers for transformative change: governance; economy and finance; individual and collective action; and science and technology (Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the Secretary-General 2019).

Yet, some studies criticize the High-level Political Forum's annual focus on a subset of Sustainable Development Goals as too siloed (Amanuma et al. 2019) – despite having an overarching theme chosen for each meeting. Nevertheless, the thematic reviews still lag behind their potential to provide evidence-based analyses on interlinkages and cross-cutting issues, trade-offs and synergies, and gaps (Beisheim & Bernstein 2020a). Above all, several studies find that the High-level Political Forum has failed to promote or produce tangible outputs to achieve policy coherence (Beisheim 2020a; Brimont & Hege 2018; Monkelbaan 2019; UNDESA 2019a). Part of the literature has focused on how to improve policy coherence between the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris climate agreement (Janetschek et al. 2020) or the human rights obligations of governments (Danish Institute for Human Rights 2020; Feiring & König-Reis 2020).

Studies on institutional interplay underline that the joint monitoring of individual goals can help with developing shared normative understandings, even though this is limited by structural factors, and legitimacy struggles continue (Addey 2021; Breitmeier et al. 2021). Some of the forum's reviews can build on existing comprehensive processes, for example for the review of Goal 6 on the joint monitoring of several United Nations agencies on water and sanitation (Beisheim 2018). Preparing for other reviews, however, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs had to set up entirely new coordination processes, for example with ten international organizations for the review of Goal 16 (Beisheim & Fritzsche 2022). The forum's meetings and review processes have also been criticized for not engaging with other processes, such as the Bretton Woods institutions or human rights reviews (De Burca 2019).

Beyond the forum's work, some studies identify substantial efforts to align the United Nations' work with the Sustainable Development Goals (Kapucu & Beaudet 2020; Office of Internal Oversight Services 2019). Another analysis, however, finds that the impact of the Sustainable Development Goals on interagency cooperation has been limited to merely providing a cross-cutting visual and rhetorical tool (Schnitzler et al., 2020).

Building a Global Partnership? Each year, the High-level Political Forum features sessions to review Goal 17 on the Global Partnership, the results of the Financing for Development Forum and the Science, Technology and Innovation Forum, and the situation of countries in special situations such as least developed countries or small island developing states. Some studies find, however, that these sessions do not provide much added value beyond the two original forums (Dano 2019; Obenland 2019). Likewise, countries rarely report on their financing strategies in their Voluntary National Reviews, resulting in limited peer-learning (Committee for Development Policy 2020; Hege et al., 2020). Accordingly, some studies argue that the follow-up and review system of the High-level Political Forum delivers neither

on mutual accountability between donor and developing countries nor on business accountability (Adams 2019; Ocampo & Gómez-Arteaga 2016).

According to its mandate, the High-level Political Forum also aspires to offer a 'platform for partnerships'. To showcase multi-stakeholder partnerships during the High-level Political Forum, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs has launched the 'PX – Partnership Exchange' and the 'Partnerships for SDGs online platform', a global database for self-registering initiatives. Yet, both efforts constitute only a weak 'meta-governance' for multi-stakeholder partnerships for Sustainable Development Goals (Beisheim & Simon 2018). While over 5,000 partnerships and voluntary commitments are registered on the platform, some studies question whether such voluntary bottom-up frameworks will deliver the type of multi-stakeholder partnerships required for true transformations (Beisheim & Ellersiek 2017, 2018; Horan 2019). A case in point is the small number of progress reports in the global registry (174 at the time of writing, with another 1,052 being expected but late and 3,556 more than two years overdue) (see also Bäckstrand et al. 2022). As regards causality, Breitmeier et al. (2021) found that in global food governance one partnership – the Sustainable Food Systems Programme – implemented changes because of new mobilization of knowledge around the Sustainable Development Goals.

In 2019, the United Nations launched a '2030 Agenda Partnership Accelerator', which aims to scale up partnering and have transformational impact. Moreover, leading up to the 2019 'SDG Summit' (that is, the quadrennial High-level Political Forum under the auspices of the United Nations General Assembly), the United Nations launched a new platform for 'SDG Acceleration Actions'. Future research will need to follow the impact of these new initiatives while also engaging with new analytical approaches (Transformative Partnerships 2030, Sondermann & Ulbert 2021).

Improving Global Follow-Up and Review? The Sustainable Development Goals have strongly shaped the work of the United Nations with data. An Interagency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators developed a global indicator framework, adopted in 2017. The Statistical Commission is working to refine the framework, and a whole array of processes has been initiated in support of this work. Building on this framework, the Secretary-General and the Statistical Commission issue annual reports that review progress towards the goals and targets and inform the High-level Political Forum. Studies lament that this data-driven monitoring approach is technocratic and ignores politics, specifically attention to power and structural inequalities (Bexell & Jönsson 2019; Fisher & Fukuda-Parr 2019; Fukuda-Parr & McNeill 2019). The academic literature discusses several additional measurement and data issues.

Overall, the institutional arrangements for the follow-up and review of implementation through the High-level Political Forum remain weak, confirming early criticisms that the 2030 Agenda had a vague and state-centric conception of accountability in terms of 'what agents are held accountable, for what and to whom' (Bexell & Jönsson 2017, 27; Donald & Way 2016). As early as 2016, several governments had opposed strengthening the follow-up and review framework for the Sustainable Development Goals (Beisheim 2016; see United Nations General Assembly 2016). Now studies criticize the quality of both the cross-cutting thematic reviews and the reviews of individual goals (Beisheim 2018; Beisheim & Fritzsche 2022; Hege et al., 2020). National reporting is entirely voluntary. Nevertheless, 176 countries reported so far, some multiple times. In 2016, contestation led governments to limit agreement on 'voluntary reporting guidelines' of the United Nations Secretary-General to being a 'suggested tool' in preparing for the Voluntary National Reviews (United Nations General Assembly 2016: paragraph 9; see also Beisheim 2018). The literature attributes the large variation in the quality of these reviews to this lack of mandatory reporting rules, reluctance to address problems and gaps, and the failure to highlight commitments for truly transformative action (Beisheim 2018; Hege et al., 2020; Kindornay & Gendron 2020; Partners for Review 2019, 2020; Persson et al., 2016). While some studies suggest that

synergies between reporting mechanisms should be strengthened, for example by linking the forum's Voluntary National Reviews to the Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Reviews (Feiring & König-Reis 2020), governments could not agree on such a mandate. Nevertheless, one study highlights that the United Nations human rights mechanisms increasingly engage with specific targets of Sustainable Development Goals in their reviews, even though this practice appears uneven (Jensen 2019). Other studies find that countries' reports tend to prioritize those Sustainable Development Goals that are already part of their national development plans (Forestier & Kim 2020). Research also indicates that the Voluntary National Review processes mainly promote international and horizontal accountability (Bexell & Jönsson 2019), while the development of national, hierarchical accountability would require stronger national processes (Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen et al., 2018).

The High-level Political Forum provides space for interactive debate but its format is not geared towards collecting and documenting recommendations by the speakers. Some studies criticize the limited opportunity for interventions by nonstate actors and marginalized groups and view informal events in parallel to the High-level Political Forum more positively (Beisheim 2018; Grzywnowicz 2020; Sarwar & Nicolai 2018). The so-called Voluntary National Reviews Labs (that is, informal in-depth discussions of those reviews organized by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs), the many side events, and the growing number of special events are all seen as places for more open and honest discussion about successes and failures (Amanuma et al. 2019; Beisheim 2020a; Beisheim & Bernstein 2020a). Accordingly, experts acknowledge that the High-level Political Forum has offered space for peer-learning and exchanging best practices – but whether this affects the implementation of the goals remains unclear.

An interesting new development is the growing number of 'Voluntary Local Reviews'. Since 2017, the High-level Political Forum has featured regular special events on local and regional government action, with mainly cities presenting (Dellas et al. 2018; Ortiz-Moya et al. 2020). Parliaments have also become active at the High-level Political Forum, for example through a Parliamentary Forum organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2020). The existing academic literature, however, focuses on the role of parliaments at the national level (Bexell & Jönsson 2020; Vrieze & Fitsilis 2020).

In sum, the literature finds mostly institutional steering effects of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly the creation of the High-level Political Forum and related institutional innovations, including its convening power, peer-learning opportunities and review functions. The High-level Political Forum has become a focal point for promoting the Sustainable Development Goals throughout the United Nations system, supported by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. However, the leadership, authority and capacity of the forum have remained limited, as has its role in enhancing institutional interplay. The value of the forum lies mainly in informal leadership and guidance, for example through peer-learning.

In terms of discourse, the literature suggests that some principles, such as coherence and 'leave no one behind', have resonated through meetings and activities of the High-level Political Forum and throughout the United Nations system as a result of its relationship to the Economic and Social Council and the United Nations General Assembly. Yet despite the promotion of these discourses and the informal guidance, there is little evidence in the literature that the High-level Political Forum has effectively produced formal normative outputs to foster policy coherence or directly influence the rest of the United Nations system in that regard.

United Nations Development System

Discussions about how the United Nations development system would need to change to accommodate the requirements of the Sustainable Development Goals began well before the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. The United Nations development system consists of 36 United Nations entities that differ in mandates and governance structures, mostly rely on voluntary funding and possesses weak centralized decision-making. From 2014 on, the Economic and Social Council held a series of dialogues to discuss the repositioning of the United Nations development system. Yet, no decisions towards substantial reforms were made. Several studies attributed this lack of change to the traditional conflict between industrialized and developing countries that prevents governments from delegating further authority to the United Nations (Baumann 2017; Dongxiao et al., 2018).

Nonetheless, the United Nations General Assembly firmly established the 2030 Agenda as the overall objective for the whole system, and in May 2018, the Assembly took a series of decisions to better align the United Nations development system's capacities and resources to the 2030 Agenda. Several studies see the 2030 Agenda as the main rationale for these reforms, although some studies also note many pre-2015 grievances that these reforms also aim to address (Browne & Weiss 2021; Dongxiao et al., 2018; Reddy 2018). While a few internal studies describe and assess reform efforts, along with a few external, more policy oriented studies, overall we note a lack of scholarly assessments and especially more theory-led research. The limitations in scholarship suggest the need for more work beyond internal assessments to more generally determine whether changes to the operations of United Nations entities took place because of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Enhancing Global Political Leadership and Guidance? The United Nations General Assembly directed the United Nations development system to propagate global norms and standards, especially the 2030 Agenda. Yet to do so requires not only advocacy but also to incorporate the Sustainable Development Goals in all their operations. The literature highlights ways in which the goals have guided multilateral institutions to align policies. Some studies observe that multilateral development organizations have formally translated the 2030 Agenda into their work programmes, reshaped their policies and operational strategies, created tools to monitor this alignment, and use the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals, their targets and some indicators in country strategies (OECD 2018: 152–67). United Nations entities are described as leading here; most United Nations development strategies at the country-level use the Sustainable Development Goals as a global results framework (OECD & UNDP 2019: 99). As part of the reforms, the United Nations development system as a whole formulates a system-wide strategic document that outlines its collective approach to the 2030 Agenda, defines its roles and commits to principles such as 'leave no one behind' and national ownership (United Nations Sustainable Development Group 2019). An internal assessment shows, however, that the scope and intensity of change varies across the United Nations (Office of Internal Oversight Services 2019).

The 2030 Agenda has also been translated into policy tools. This process, however, has not yet been analyzed in more detail. An interesting yet under researched instrument for advancing the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is the 2016 'Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support' framework. This framework seeks to orient the technical assistance by United Nations entities in support of the national implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. It aims to guide the translation of the goals into national and sub-national plans, budgets and actions, raise public awareness, and establish practices for monitoring and reporting (UNDP 2019). While the framework has been used widely, it is yet to be assessed from a scholarly perspective.

In terms of leadership, the United Nations has strengthened the role of its Resident Coordinators, who now represent the United Nations Secretary-General in a developing country. The coordinator is

accountable to the government for the United Nations' collective support of the goals and expected to act as an impartial convenor and, where possible, orchestrator.

Yet, while internal reports highlight good progress in implementing reforms, it is questionable whether these reforms will fundamentally alter the work of United Nations entities regarding strong multilateral leadership and guidance. Studies highlight structural impediments and point out that limited funding and the lack of robust mandates hamper a shift of United Nations development entities towards providing more integrated policy advice (Hendra & Baumann 2020; OECD 2020). United Nations development entities have also failed to take the principle of universality seriously. The system has paid little attention to measures that support high-income countries in their sustainable development efforts internally or in their development policies (Weinlich & Baumann 2018).

The unclear steering effects of the goals on United Nations development entities might be in line with a broader pattern. A growing number of studies detail the difficulties for the 2030 Agenda to initiate change: Many lament that development finance at a scale that they deem necessary has not been provided (Barua 2020; Kharas 2019). Moreover, the institutional and instrumental overhaul of national and international development actors called for by the universal, integrated and indivisible ambition of the 2030 Agenda, has failed to materialize. Kloke-Lesch (2021: 147), for instance, argues that 'development cooperation actors have responded to the 2030 Agenda mainly by adopting its terminology and using it as a reinforced narrative underpinning and incrementally broadening their pre-existing business models'.

The literature discusses several reasons for this limited influence. First, it is argued that the commitments regarding Goal 17, and the 'means of implementation' more generally, mostly only reaffirm existing commitments and are too vague. The negotiated text makes it difficult to unambiguously identify what concrete changes are needed owing to soft formulations, static indicators and missing data baselines (Berensmann et al. 2015). Second, without any specific guidance on the quality of development cooperation or a universal framework to assess their contributions, development organizations can easily align themselves with the goals rhetorically or in policy pronouncements (Pérez-Pineda & Wehrmann 2021; Rudolph 2017), while the allocation of official development assistance remains motivated by short term strategic interests of economic and political opportunities, not by the priorities of the goals (Mawdsley et al. 2018). Third, some studies argue that the 2030 Agenda does not clearly attribute responsibilities for implementing the goals (Bexell & Jönsson 2017; Cooper & French 2018; Spangenberg 2017). Fourth, new development organizations led by Southern actors increased existing coordination challenges within the heterogeneous system of international development cooperation, which was exacerbated by the unresolved conflict between countries from the Global South and Global North on what development cooperation means and who bears which responsibilities. All these factors together have created coordination challenges when it comes to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (Chaturverdi et al. 2021).

Improving System-Wide Coherence? A key aim of ongoing reforms of the United Nations development system is to strengthen cooperation and coordination among the entities and translate their activities into more coherent support at scale for countries' efforts to implement the goals. This effort includes attempts to overcome the divisions between the activities of the United Nations in peace and security, humanitarian aid, human rights, and sustainable development (Ivanova 2021; Samarasinghe 2021). Measures have included increasing the authority of the Resident Coordinators; enlarging systemic support structures and delinking them from the United Nations Development Programme to make them more independent; and new cooperation mechanisms to better integrate the Regional Economic Commissions with the regional structures of the United Nations (Connolly & Mincieli 2019; Connolly & Roesch 2020; Surasky et al. 2020). The narrative was adjusted to support greater coherence as well.

The United Nations Development Assistance Framework – the programmatic umbrella for all United Nations activities in a developing country – was renamed the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. New detailed guidance on how to formulate such a framework both in terms of process and substance is meant to ensure that the United Nations development assistance follows an integrated and multidimensional programming approach based on the goals and principles such as 'leave no one behind'.

However, several studies indicate a mixed impact of these efforts and persisting obstacles to reaching greater coherence. Some articles argue that the reforms, if fully implemented, would make the United Nations development system a strong partner in pushing for a transformation towards sustainable development (Hendra & Fitzgerald 2021). Others warn of high transaction costs of coordination in a loose system (Sohn & Choi 2019). While overall cautious not to rule out improvements regarding system-wide coherence, still others claim that the reforms have inbuilt limitations, in particular with regard to the governance and funding of the system (Weinlich et al. 2022). As Golding (2021: 231) puts it: 'the inherent constraints of a 75-year-old, fragmented United Nations system, with a long history of building silos and branding, mean that the single biggest challenge remains the alignment of goals, resources, activities, evaluations and reporting back to member states, to donors, and ultimately to taxpayers.' Systemic and structural changes underway are mostly restricted to areas under the purview of the United Nations Secretary-General. They fall short of tackling fragmentation more forcefully, for instance by merging entities or creating a sustainable development board as an overarching governing body (Helgason 2016). The United Nations development system's central authority remains weak, as do mechanisms to ensure coordination between the pillars, from peace and security to human rights and the environment (Gruener & Hammergren 2021; Samarasinghe 2021).

There is a consensus in the literature that the funding patterns at the United Nations are a strong driver for fragmentation: The long-term trend of earmarked funding means that United Nations entities with overlapping mandates compete for scarce resources, both in developing countries as well as globally (Baumann & Weinlich 2021). The reforms address the issue in the 'Funding Compact' where governments pledge to provide more and better-quality funding in return for better accountability, effectiveness and efficiency on the part of the United Nations development system (Weinlich & Jenks 2019). Whether these voluntary commitments will lead to a more appropriately balanced mix of resources needs to be closely studied. Determining the impact of such reforms is especially important since the increasingly earmarked nature of multilateral funding is frequently found to be an impediment to multilateral organizations fully delivering on their potential to implement the 2030 Agenda (Baumann et al., 2020; OECD 2020). Earmarked funding promotes a piecemeal approach that limits flexibility and the ability to target funds where recipients believe they are needed most, and it generally restricts the ability to develop integrated approaches to support transformations (Weinlich et al., 2020). Since donor organizations use the power of their purse to direct activities of multilateral organizations instead of seeking multilateral consensus, earmarked funding also undermines global governance and the legitimacy of multilateral organizations (Barder et al., 2019; Graham 2017; Michaelowa 2017).

Building a Global Partnership? As part of the reforms following the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals, the United Nations has started to assist governments in mobilizing and accessing new funding sources. Activities range from establishing green finance products and other pooled funds that are open to contributions from the private sector, to supporting governments in devising so called integrated national financing frameworks (Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation & United Nations Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office 2018: 112–34). The United Nations also engages in analytical and advocacy work to align the financial system with the 2030 Agenda (UNEP 2018). The United Nations Secretary-General, for instance, has founded the 'Global Investors for Sustainable Development' alliance to enhance the

impact of private investment on sustainable development. There is little scholarly literature that takes stock of these efforts or assesses their effects, although the annual reports of the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation and the United Nations Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office (2020) have showcased several initiatives. There is more interest in multilateral financial organizations and the challenges and potential dangers of using public funds for mobilizing private sector capital (Elder et al., 2018; King et al., 2018; Mawdsley 2018; Walker et al., 2019). Some studies assess the United Nations development system's mixed record in attracting funding for their own activities from the private sector and embarking on partnerships with for-profit companies and philanthropies (Biermann et al. 2020). Some studies, while still underlining the need for increased resources, also raise concerns about the absence of rigorous oversight in line with the United Nations core norms and human rights standards (Adams 2021; Seitz & Martens 2017).

Improving Global Follow-Up and Review? Many entities of the United Nations development system engage in monitoring global progress by acting as 'custodian agencies' for indicators under the Sustainable Development Goals (van Driel et al. 2022; Young 2017). As one study describes, since governments do not automatically provide the necessary funding for these tasks, some indicators initially were unclaimed by any entity, while for others, there was competition (Kapto 2019). The United Nations development system also works towards improving data and data collection on indicators in developing countries and strengthening national statistical capacity. Closer cooperation on data, especially on vulnerable groups, is part of the reforms. Some articles describe successful United Nations efforts to harmonize and establish global data standards, adopted in April 2020, that allow individual entities and the development system as a whole to report its activities against specific goals (Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation & United Nations Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office 2019). One study has highlighted that the reforms strengthened lines of accountability between governments and the United Nations development system (Golding 2021).

In sum, the literature finds a variety of steering effects of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. The United Nations General Assembly prominently anchored the 2030 Agenda as the main purpose of the United Nations development system in its resolutions that provided system-wide guidance and authorized the reform, thereby initiating normative change. Multifaceted institutional changes can also be observed as part of the reform. While the 2030 Agenda provided the key rationale for the reform, many of these changes are seen in the literature as attempts to overcome earlier and longstanding fragmentation problems. While some changes are far-reaching in terms of how the United Nations development system collaborates, they did not include more fundamental steps such as the merger of entities.

The overall impact of the institutional changes also depends on whether governments are able and willing to send coherent signals in the governing bodies and change their funding practices. The literature describes many discursive changes, and the 2030 Agenda offers a new narrative for United Nations agencies towards a more collective approach. Yet it remains questionable how deep these discursive changes go and whether they will override organizational and financial incentives that still drive the system apart and push it towards small-scale interventions instead of integrated approaches at scale.

Global Environmental Governance

Global environmental governance is known to be institutionally fragmented and lacking a central institution such as the International Labour Organization or the World Health Organization in their fields. More than a thousand international environmental treaties create a complex global regulatory framework, each one with their own conferences of the parties as their primary governing body. This

institutional fragmentation of global environmental governance has been discussed in the literature since the 1970s, with reform proposals ranging from better interaction management and the clustering of environmental treaties to the creation of a powerful world environment organization (Biermann & Bauer 2005).

To catalyze and better coordinate environmental activities in the United Nations system, in 1972 governments created the United Nations Environment Programme. The programme is meant 'to be the leading global environmental authority that sets the global environmental agenda, that promotes the coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development within the United Nations system and that serves as an authoritative advocate for the global environment' (UNEP 1997: 55). Its overall political impact has been limited, however, and many other actors, notably the conferences of the parties to the major environmental treaties, still dominate the development of global environmental governance.

The 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development sought to improve global environmental governance (United Nations General Assembly 2012). Among other reforms, governments agreed to upgrade the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme, which had only 58 members, to a more ambitious United Nations Environment Assembly with universal membership. Some scholars expressed hope that the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, agreed three years later, could serve as collective 'headlines' for better connecting the many multilateral environmental agreements (Biermann et al. 2017). The record indicates, however, a more limited impact.

Enhancing Global Political Leadership and Guidance? The key body to provide leadership to implement the Sustainable Development Goals is the High-level Political Forum, discussed above. As for the United Nations Environment Programme, some studies indicate that its influence might have become more limited since the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals, partially because of the integrated nature of the 17 goals and the now wider set of actors, institutions and norms that engage with environmental concerns (Elder & Olsen 2019; McInerney 2017). Others observe a further division of policy concerns in the three components of atmosphere, land and water, as they are distinctly covered in Goal 13 on climate change, Goal 14 on life below water and Goal 15 on life on land (Scholtz & Barnard 2018). Some studies indicate that the United Nations Environment Programme has been unable to fully use the potential of the new United Nations Environment Assembly, now with universal membership, to steer the global environmental agenda in support of the Sustainable Development Goals. Formally, the Assembly is committed to the 2030 Agenda and communicates its messages to the High-level Political Forum (McInerney 2017: 17; Urho et al., 2019: 29). Yet, the Assembly has also become more political. Governments have become more interested in the Assembly, as indicated by an increase of 21 per cent in the number of delegations attending between 2010 and 2017 (Urho et al. 2019: 23). Governments have also assumed more responsibility for introducing resolutions and the number of resolutions has increased; both developments have reduced the role of the secretariat. Consequently, many resolutions are often less aligned with the programme of work of the United Nations Environment Programme, which has raised confusion about ownership and follow-up, including about which Sustainable Development Goals are relevant (Urho et al. 2019: 25). Some studies conclude that the United Nations Environment Programme still faces hurdles to being an anchor institution for the global environment and to steer collective action for the 2030 Agenda (Ivanova 2020a; 2020b: 347).

Improving System-Wide Coherence? Environmental governance has been described as one of the most fragmented domains of global governance (Biermann 2014; Zelli & van Asselt 2013). The Sustainable Development Goals here seem to have had a largely discursive impact. For example, the Environment Management Group, through which the United Nations Environment Programme seeks to coordinate

with 51 multilateral bodies, has now included the 2030 Agenda in its terms of reference and adopted in 2016 a system-wide framework of strategies on environmental issues. The Sustainable Development Goals seem to have inspired the Environment Management Group to move beyond its thematically driven approach, as it now aims to converge agency strategies and strengthen capacity to support the integration of the environment in the implementation of the goals (McInerney 2017: 5; Urho et al. 2019: 43). Starting in 2017, the Environment Management Group organized a series of Nexus Dialogues on thematic and institutional interlinkages between environmental issues, frameworks and agendas in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals. Yet, following the United Nations' own assessment, the group's functioning is 'limited in effectiveness and scope' (United Nations General Assembly 2018: paragraph 81).

Some institutional effects can be found, even though many reforms follow a longer trajectory of increased interaction management and are not a direct effect of the global goals. Many multilateral environmental agreements have taken decisions to strengthen synergies and cooperation through shared approaches and operational tools. An example is the mapping of biodiversity-related conventions to the Aichi Biodiversity Targets in 2016 (Azizi et al., 2019: 460). Some environmental treaties used the Sustainable Development Goals to justify linkages with other sustainability issues and refer to the goals as higher-order priorities. Yet, operational difficulties remain because of diverse memberships and objectives and the often-limited integration between the objectives of multilateral environmental agreements and the Sustainable Development Goals and their targets. For example, Dauvergne (2018) concludes that despite Goal 14 on oceans, global governance of marine plastic pollution remains highly uneven, without strong regulation with binding targets and timelines. Harrould-Kolieb (2020) argues that Goal 14.3, that aims to minimize and address the impacts of ocean acidification, including through enhanced scientific cooperation at all levels, lacks the specificity required to have effect and requires a much stronger governance framework.

The United Nations Environment Programme could play a role in facilitating coherence among international environmental treaties as it aims to focus more strongly on cross-cutting areas in its programmatic cooperation with treaties within and across their thematic clusters. This includes more connections with 'nonenvironmental' development objectives, such as human rights, gender equality, economic growth and employment (UNEP 2020b). Yet the relationship of the United Nations Environment Programme with the hundreds of conferences of the parties to multilateral environmental agreements is still vague; decision-making seems often to continue to operate in silos without an overall strategy or mechanism for cooperation to facilitate system-wide coherence (Chasek & Downie 2021: 302; Urho et al. 2019: 85). The Sustainable Development Goals do not seem to have structurally transformed these global institutional architectures.

Building a 'Global Partnership'? In terms of global partnership, envisioned by the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, no transformative effects are reported in the literature. Funding for environmental programmes has not substantially increased. Many changes in collaboration among countries that have occurred follow the trajectory of international environmental treaties that make up the texture of global environmental governance but have not been directly motivated by the Sustainable Development Goals. For example, the climate convention processes have continued without clear added impact of the Sustainable Development Goal 13, Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

Improving the Global Follow-Up and Review? The United Nations Environment Programme is supposed to provide a central narrative on the environmental dimension of sustainable development for the annual reports that inform the High-level Political Forum, partially because of its role as a 'custodian' in the United Nations system for 26 environment-related indicators that do not fall under a multilateral

environmental agreement. Indeed, there are some efforts to increase information management, for example in two web portals (McInerney 2017: 3; Urho et al. 2019: 12). A 'World Environment Situation Room' is intended to provide a global digital environmental platform underpinned by economic and social data, drawing on private and citizen science (UNEP 2020b: 7). These datasets aim to track progress on multilateral environmental agreements (UNEP 2020b: 30). However, environmental data remains a weak area in implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, with only about 40 per cent country-level data coverage for the 93 environment-related indicators (Campbell et al. 2020: 446).

The 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development also called upon the United Nations Environment Programme to 'ensure active participation of relevant stakeholders' (United Nations General Assembly 2012: paragraph 88). This focus has led to an interpretation of 'partnership' that is more consistent with a focus on broadening the range of actors or multi-stakeholder partnerships than on financing or structural reforms. Changes include more flexibility in accrediting civil society organizations, which led to an increase of 80 per cent in accredited organizations between 2013 and 2018, from 272 to 490 (Urho et al. 2019). Participation in the United Nations Environment Assembly has also increased over time, from 1,200 in the first assembly to 4,450 in the third assembly. However, civil society actors and the private sector are still rather disconnected from decision-making (Urho et al. 2019: 64). In its 2022–2025 Medium-Term Strategy, the United Nations Environment Programme has restated its ambition to increase partnerships, including South–South, North–South and triangular cooperation, as well as cooperation with civil society and science, especially regarding data collection (Campbell et al. 2020; UNEP 2020b).

In sum, the literature shows some adjustments in global environmental governance because of the Sustainable Development Goals, yet with only mixed results. Most changes are discursive, with international organizations, programmes and treaty bodies adopting the language of the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda. The leadership of the High-level Political Forum is also limited in global environmental governance, and the leadership role of the United Nations Environment Programme has not been structurally transformed. The alignment of multilateral environmental agreements has not been drastically affected by the Sustainable Development Goals. The Nexus Dialogues, however, suggest that the Environment Management Group can inspire a more integrated approach, which could be related back to the broader vision of the 2030 Agenda.

As in other areas, so too in global environmental governance is it difficult to analytically separate the steering effects of the Sustainable Development Goals from the broader changes initiated since 2016. Many conferences of the parties to the hundreds of environmental treaties have continued their policy development, with more or less success; yet the impact of the global goals on these treaty bodies remains doubtful and is unlikely to be transformative. Institutional effects related to the Sustainable Development Goals concern data collection, indicator development and the Nexus Dialogues.

Importantly, the relationship between global environmental governance and the Sustainable Development Goals is in many instances bidirectional, that is, the global goals themselves reflect decisions and processes that center on other institutions. Goal 13, Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts, is not much more than a reference to the climate convention and related processes, without adding new ambitions or different targets. In a footnote to Goal 13, the 2030 Agenda explicitly 'acknowledge[s] that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is the primary international, intergovernmental forum for negotiating the global response to climate change'. Bidirectionality is less visible for Goal 14 on oceans and Goal 15 on life on land. But also here, some targets refer to standards from other policy processes or organizations, such as the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission Criteria and Guidelines on the Transfer of Marine Technology.

Finally, we need to conclude also that this area is in need of more research, especially of large-scale comparative assessments of the extent to which norms, standards and decisions by international environmental treaty bodies have been affected by the Sustainable Development Goals beyond mere discursive recognition.

Conclusions and Future Directions

We started this chapter by first identifying four aspirations and expectations for the steering effects of the Sustainable Development Goals at the global level: enhancing global political leadership and guidance; improving system-wide coherence; building a global partnership; and improving global follow-up and review. We examined what the literature says on the degree to which these expectations were met in the operations and performance of the United Nations' work on the Sustainable Development Goals in three areas: the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development; the United Nations development system; and global environmental governance. Here we review the main findings, focusing on whether the literature identified normative, institutional, or discursive changes in line with the four aspirations in each of the three governance arrangements assessed.

Looking across the three arenas, overall we conclude that there is a broad consensus in the literature that the Sustainable Development Goals have had some effects on global governance through their widespread adoption as normative references in policy and programme pronouncements, through establishing new institutions and changing existing institutions, and in a changed discourse within global institutions that now addresses the global challenges targeted by the Sustainable Development Goals. United Nations entities have aligned their work with the Sustainable Development Goals. Moreover, the commitments and principles in the 2030 Agenda, the agreement over the means of implementation, and the framework for a follow-up and review helped to advance alignment processes in the United Nations system.

At the same time, however, the literature does not show compelling evidence or confidence that the Sustainable Development Goals have had any transformative impact on broadening or changing the mandates, practices or resource allocation of international organizations and institutions. While the underpinning governance principles of the Sustainable Development Goals – such as universality, coherence, integration and 'leaving no one behind' – have changed the discourse in multilateral institutions, there is limited evidence of whether these discursive changes have transformed the practice of global sustainable development governance.

In terms of institutional changes, the creation of the High-level Political Forum in 2013 and its reviews of the Sustainable Development Goals from 2016 onwards is evidence of institutional reform in both anticipation of and response to the Sustainable Development Goals. Yet, the leadership and guidance required for actual steering towards substantial transformations has not materialized. The most blatant manifestation of this absence is the outcome documents of the High-level Political Forum, which lack any specific guidance or action plans and do not even reflect the discussions in the forum. Moreover, given the expectations of servicing the 2030 Agenda, the responsible divisions of the United Nations secretariat suffer from weak mandates and limited resources. While the literature identifies several reasons for these weaknesses, the lack of political will among governments is likely to top the list, which reflects wider problems in the multilateral system and also impacted the 2021 negotiations on the review of the forum.

Conversely, the High-level Political Forum provides a platform for peer learning among governments, especially by providing opportunities for interaction with, and among, non-state, local and regional actors. The literature documents a high level of buy-in and participation in follow-up and review, but

also notes a need to enhance the quality of these processes, making them more inclusive, coherent, evaluative, action-oriented and geared to inform future decision- and policymaking. The academic literature has not yet systematically addressed whether and how this peer-learning has led to transformative normative (legislative or policy) changes, at global, national or local levels. More research is needed on the development and uptake of best practices. The 247 presentations of Voluntary National Reviews until 2021 could be seen as an excellent source of data for larger and more systematic empirical analyses of the steering effects of the Sustainable Development Goals through these global reviews. Moreover, there is hardly any research that identifies causal links between processes and changes.

The United Nations development system more broadly also shows evidence, according to the literature, of incorporating the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals discursively in policy pronouncements that translate into institutional and normative changes in how entities support and engage in monitoring the goals, and plan and evaluate their activities. However, many of those reforms and policy initiatives are congruent with broader and longer-term changes in development cooperation, for instance towards greater coherence and the inclusion of the private sector: they cannot be attributed solely to the goals, even though the 2030 Agenda has provided an additional impetus for change. This holds particularly for the wide-ranging reforms initiated in 2018 to strengthen what the United Nations development system can collectively contribute to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. While the literature assesses the reforms as being extensive, it also concludes that they fall short of more fundamental changes (for example, organizational mergers, embracing universality, bridging thematic pillars, or devising new funding structures). This might in the end limit their impact and the role that the United Nations development system can play in pushing for transformations towards sustainable development. Overall, more research is needed to better understand the scope of changes in the United Nations development system and their impact.

In global environmental governance, the United Nations Environment Programme sees itself as the primary forum for promoting implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development. Yet, its leadership has thus far been limited, which some studies attribute to the politicized nature of its decision-making body, the United Nations Environment Assembly. Universal membership and increased participation by civil society and the private sector may have the potential to build a broader global partnership for implementation, but this has not yet expanded to decision-making. The highly polycentric nature of global environmental governance, including the United Nations Environment Programme and the myriad multilateral environmental agreements, continues to limit institutional changes and system-wide coherence.

Taken together, the 2030 Agenda has been heralded as a call for transformation of policymaking and practice of multilateral institutions. Yet there are few academic studies on how international organizations have changed in response. While experts observe institutional and discursive changes that seem aligned with the 2030 Agenda, there is not much scholarly discussion on whether those changes were caused by the agenda or the goals or merely reflect trends already underway. Moreover, while the literature frequently refers to the Sustainable Development Goals as catalysts for reform, it also highlights that the observable changes are not transformational – even though the 2030 Agenda carries the title 'Transforming our World'. Accordingly, many studies see a mismatch between aspirations and outcomes in global governance. Reforms have been modest, and changes have been largely found only in discourses with limited practical effects.

At the same time, assessing the degree of transformation depends on one's expectations for change in relation to other processes: for example, compared to the Millennium Development Goals, institutional changes have been more extensive and rapid. Also, seven years since 2015 is only a short period for major reforms in global governance to take effect. Further empirical work is needed to study the degree

to which United Nations member states will authorize and support agencies to further adjust their mandates and organizational structures. Similarly, such work will need to assess movement toward an integrated approach that stands at the heart of the Sustainable Development Goals by increasing co-operation and coordination with other parts of the United Nations system, and fostering collaboration more broadly with a wide range of actors expected to work with, and within, these entities. Studies should focus on the conflicts and politics that are connected to this. It would be important, for example, to study changes in the role of the major groups and other stakeholders or the role of science in these United Nations processes. More work is also needed to better understand the requirements and conditions under which the United Nations can better position itself to successfully orchestrate partnerships and voluntary initiatives on the global goals.

In short, systematic, theory-informed empirical analyses are now needed for deeper insights about the steering effects of the Sustainable Development Goals on global governance.

APPENDIX D

Succes factors of global goalsetting for sustainable development

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Abstract

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were an important precursor to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Hence, identifying the conditions that made the MDGs successful enhances our understanding of global goalsetting and informs the global endeavor to achieve the SDGs. Drawing on a comprehensive review of 316 articles published between 2009 and 2018, we identify six factors that have enabled or hindered MDG implementation. Our analysis stresses the importance of path dependencies and shows that the MDGs catalyzed changes only for those countries with sufficient resource availability, administrative capacity and economic development, as well as adequate support from external donors. National ownership and NGO pressure bolstered efforts to implement the MDGs. These findings suggest that globally agreed goals do not easily trickle down from the global to the national level. Thus, this article adopts a forward-looking perspective and draws key lessons for the current implementation of the SDGs in developing countries.

Keywords

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, global goalsetting, global governance, MDGs, Millennium Development Goals, SDGs, Sustainable Development Goals

Introduction

At the Millennium Summit in September 2000, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Millennium Declaration as a foundation for the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to be achieved by 2015 (United Nations, 2000). The MDGs entailed a global development agenda centered on poverty reduction, along with a set of other priorities that ranged from universal primary education to a global partnership for development. The adoption of the MDGs is a key example of global goalsetting (Fukuda-Parr 2014; Kanie & Biermann 2017). In 2015, the MDGs were replaced by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), evolving into a core normative programme of the United Nations (United Nations 2015). Whether, to what extent, and how the SDGs will be effective is one of the most critical topics in global politics for sustainable development today.

Accordingly, experiences with the MDGs offer vital lessons for the current global endeavor to achieve the SDGs motivating this chapter to explore what could be learned from their implementation in the period between 2000 and 2015. While the SDGs differ from the MDGs in several respects, the basic logic and general mechanisms underlying these two global goal-setting initiatives are similar (Biermann et al. 2017). Research on the MDGs and especially on the conditions under which they could steer national policymaking provides us, therefore, with crucial indications for the effectiveness of the SDGs. Ultimately, learning from the MDGs can help address major barriers and strengthen important enablers for the success of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the remaining years to attain the goals (Allen et al. 2021).

Hundreds of studies have assessed the overall impact and effects of the MDGs. Some have focused on individual goals, countries, or regions; others have taken a broader perspective and explored several or all of the eight MDGs. As they build on different conceptual frameworks and use different methodological approaches, their conclusions often diverge and place emphasis on a broad range of aspects. A number of scholars have also produced literature reviews pointing to limitations of the MDGs (e.g., Andresen & Iguchi 2017; Fehling et al. 2013; Larionova 2020). However, relatively few of the large total number of studies investigate the different factors that affect how the MDGs generate political changes at domestic level. By examining this specific body of literature on the MDGs, this chapter offers a rigorous assessment of the existing scholarship on national conditions enabling or hindering MDG implementation.

Hence, this study opens the 'black box' of domestic politics and sheds light on the relevance of country-specific factors that determine the success or failure of globally agreed goals. Our review stresses the importance of path dependencies, and underscores that the MDGs had little effect on many developing countries, which simply continued to follow their respective political and economic trajectories. Furthermore, this evaluation of the existing literature shows that the MDGs could foster progress only for those developing countries that had sufficient resource availability, administrative capacity with a certain economic development level, and adequate support from external donors. There is also evidence that in some instances ownership by state leaders and pressure by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) bolstered national efforts to implement the MDGs.

These findings suggest that globally agreed goals do not easily trickle down from the global level of the United Nations to the domestic level and lead to political changes in different national jurisdictions (e.g., Forestier & Kim 2020; Horn & Grugel 2018). Scholars and policymakers therefore need to dedicate more attention to the specific national contexts in which global goals are supposed to work and unfold their effects. This bears important policy implications for global goalsetting as a governance instrument which we spell out in detail at the end of this chapter. In particular, based on the insights from our

literature review, we adopt a forward-looking perspective and draw lessons for the current implementation of the SDGs in developing countries.

The chapter is organized as follows. In the next section, we provide an overview of the MDGs as an example of global goalsetting initiatives. After that, we describe the conceptualization and methodological approach of our study. We then present our main results regarding different hindering and enabling factors for the implementation of the MDGs in national political-administrative systems, before we contextualize our main results and formulate key insights for the debate on how to accelerate SDG implementation in developing countries. Finally, we conclude with some policy recommendations for the current efforts to implement the SDGs and sketch promising research avenues.

The MDGs as a global goalsetting initiative

The MDGs were built upon a variety of earlier experiences of global goalsetting initiatives (Fukuda-Parr 2014). Already in 1961, the United Nations General Assembly had launched the first 'development decade' that set the goal of a minimum growth rate of 5% in aggregate national incomes in developing countries until 1970 (United Nations 1961). Another example is the 1990 World Summit for Children and its Plan of Action, which proclaimed several goals on health, education, nutrition, and human rights to improve the wellbeing of children (United Nations 1990). Over the past two decades, the practice of global goalsetting has gained prominence in ever more areas. The MDGs, agreed upon in 2000, were at that time the most elaborate attempt by the United Nations to guide development policies through globally defined policy goals.

The MDGs comprised an array of developmental goals and targets in eight areas: poverty eradication; education; gender equality; child mortality prevention; maternal health; disease control; environmental protection; and global partnership (United Nations 2001). In both the academic and policy communities, the MDGs spurred much controversy. Some authors highlighted their clarity and praised them as an historic example of a global mobilization for universal social priorities (e.g., Sachs 2012; Solberg 2015). Others criticized the MDGs by stressing their 'money-metric and donor-centric view' (Vandemoortele 2011, 9) and their unidirectional dimension and narrow focus on developing countries, with industrialized countries being deployed almost as their tutors (e.g., Clemens et al. 2007; Deacon 2016; Horner & Hulme 2019; Saith 2006). Still others asserted a lack of stakeholder engagement in formulating the MDGs and the weak review mechanisms to measure performance (Bäckstrand et al. 2012; Bernstein 2017; Chasek et al., 2016).

The SDGs are built on a more wide-ranging approach. They set detailed goals and targets for both developing and industrialized countries and call for change in all countries and in practically all domestic and foreign policies (Biermann et al. 2017; Le Blanc 2015b; Spinazzola & Cavalli 2022). The SDGs also draw on a broader societal basis, with numerous stakeholders having participated in their formulation and in the framing of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Kamau et al., 2018). Unlike their precursor, the SDGs are supported by a periodic review mechanism and performance measures to be carried out under the auspices of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (Abbott & Bernstein 2015; Beisheim 2018). In short, the SDGs address several issues for which the MDGs have been criticized. Notwithstanding these differences, the MDGs and the SDGs build on the same governance logic with a legally non-binding nature. There is hence much that can be learned from evaluating the wealth of scholarly insights on the MDGs for the SDGs and similar future global goalsetting initiatives (Spangenberg 2017; Stevens & Kanie 2016).

In general, many observers claim that, in terms of their overall impact, the MDGs had mixed results (e.g., Fukuda-Parr et al. 2013). While some developing countries made considerable progress in

achieving the MDGs, strong variations exist across goals, regions, and countries (e.g., Agwu 2011; Easterly 2009; Halisçelik & Soytas 2019; McArthur & Rasmussen 2018; Peterson 2010). Due to its enormous economic growth and large population, China has statistically contributed the most to attaining the MDGs in absolute numbers, particularly with regard to MDG 1 (poverty eradication) by lifting almost half a billion people out of extreme poverty (United Nations Development Programme 2015). In contrast, other countries, especially least developed countries, have made only marginal progress if at all. Most fundamentally, the causal link between the MDGs and their attainment at national level is still heavily debated, particularly for China and other emerging economies (e.g., Andresen & Iguchi 2017; Kwon & Kim 2014).

In this chapter, we adopt a different perspective. We are not primarily interested in the achievement of the MDGs as such but instead focus on domestic factors that shaped their implementation in national jurisdictions. By this means, we seek to enhance our understanding of the specific national contexts in which global goals are supposed to generate political changes, shedding light on the potentials and limits of global goalsetting initiatives. The main contribution of this chapter is thus a rigorous assessment of the empirical knowledge on the conditions under which the practice of global goalsetting has tangible effects on national politics to draw lessons for the current implementation of the SDGs. We hence discuss the main results from the literature review in light of the current efforts to implement the SDGs in national public-administrative systems of developing countries.

Conceptualization and methodological approach

To assess the effects of the MDGs on national public-administrative systems, this chapter synthesizes scholarship that deals with factors that supported or constrained the implementation of the MDGs at national level.

Our analytical lens

Measuring the effects of a political actor or an institutional mechanism on implementation processes has for a long time been a major strand in political science literature (e.g., Easton 1965; March 1955). Despite many conceptualizations of how to identify driving factors, no standard solution exists due to various analytical and methodological challenges (Levy 1993; Young 2008). The main difficulty is to attribute any observed change to a certain cause and to delineate this cause from other potential causes. Tackling the challenge of causation, we adopted an interpretive research lens and gathered insights through an in-depth qualitative content analysis of existing scholarly knowledge (Snyder 2019). Our review was guided by a set of commonly agreed principles and guidelines with a clear and transparent procedure for how to analyze the literature and interpret results (Petticrew & Roberts 2008). This approach allowed us to ascertain the effects of the MDGs on national implementation across a wide and diverse body of literature.

In particular, studies rarely recognize unambiguous or even unidirectional causality and hardly ever attribute performance in terms of political changes to the MDGs only. To sharpen our analytical view, we developed a common perception of national MDG implementation, which we defined broadly as changes in national budgets, organizational structures, and actual policies within public administrative systems of developing countries to meet the MDGs (Capano 2009). Hence, we understand MDG implementation as a political process that includes planning, capacity building, and political actions. We deliberately refrained from prescribing involved researchers a rigid review tool to prevent a simple tick-box exercise. This left considerable flexibility for the researchers who reviewed the existing scholarly

studies. Interpretations by analysts hence became an active instrument in the review (Stake 2010). Based on this inductive approach, we identified different factors in the literature which shaped the implementation of the MDGs in national jurisdictions.

Compiling our database

To systematically evaluate success conditions for MDG implementation, we compiled a raw database of in total 1324 scholarly articles 2009 and 2018. We chose this 10-year period because earlier studies are unlikely to offer meaningful insights about the effects of the MDGs on national planning, capacity building, and political actions. Using Scopus as search engine, we included all articles in academic journals that had 'Millennium Development Goal(s)'or the acronym 'MDG(s)'in their titles, abstracts or keywords. Next, we excluded all non-empirical work, such as editorials or commentaries, limiting the database to original research. We then further refined the database stepwise (Card 2015); to studies in the field of social sciences, which we assumed to contain most pertinent insights regarding our focus; to articles in English excluding a small amount of articles in other languages; and to articles that touched upon the MDGs non-superficially (e.g., as a proxy for health or development) and that explicitly dealt with their political effects. This led to an ultimate database with 316 articles.

By means of an in-depth reading of the abstracts of these 316 studies, we selected 92 articles as most relevant for our research purpose. Around 56% of these articles deal with the MDGs as a whole; the remaining 44% focus on one or a few MDGs. Of these, MDG 1 (poverty eradication) is most intensively studied, followed by MDG 2 (education), MDG 7 (environmental protection), 5 (maternal health), MDG 3 (gender equality), MDG 4 (child mortality prevention), MDG 6 (disease control) and MDG 8 (global partnership). The majority of the articles that we included in our final set of studies have a global scope and no country-specific perspective. Of the other studies, about 28% focus on Africa, especially Sub-Saharan Africa;10% on East Asia and the Pacific; 7% on Central Asia and Eastern Europe; 3% on Latin America and the Caribbean; and 2% on South Asia. From the country-specific articles, Kenya, Nigeria, India, and South Africa are most strongly represented in the set of articles.

Qualitative content analysis

After compiling and refining our database, we conducted an in-depth qualitative content analysis of the remaining 92 articles to identify hindering and enabling factors in the implementation of the MDGs at domestic level. We hereby adopted a two-step approach. First, two researchers of our team reviewed all articles from the database that were identified as relevant for our research. In this primary coding process, we designed a general coding guide to enhance intercoder reliability (MacPhail et al. 2016). In a second step, other researchers from our group carried out an independent secondary coding of the same material. In this way, every article that was selected for our collaborative qualitative content analysis was evaluated by at least two researchers to minimize a potential investigator bias (Mayring 2004). This guide used for the secondary step of the qualitative content analysis is available as supplementary material.

Following this in-depth evaluation of the body of literature, we discussed the results from the qualitative content analysis in a structured workshop to ensure that no relevant information had been overlooked and to discuss ambiguities in the coding protocols. While the range of topics dealt with in the pool of reviewed studies is quite broad, the development of a common understanding of national MDG implementation and the design of a general coding guide enabled us to distil the most important findings (Neuendorf 2017; Schreier 2012). The individual observations from the collaborative qualitative content analysis can be seen as mosaic pieces. Taken together, they yield a revealing picture of the

domestic supporting or constraining conditions under which the MDGs have generated political changes in developing countries.

Methodological limitations

As with all studies, our methodological approach has some limitations. First, our focus on publications in English led to an over representation of English-speaking developing countries in the set of evaluated articles. Yet, the factors we identified in these countries arguably do not differ systematically from factors that can be seen in other developing countries. Second, our study was concentrated on domestic factors that support or constrain MDG implementation at national level and we did not investigate any global factors that might have impeded MDG implementation at national level, such as inherent inconsistencies of the MDGs, their overall design, or their quantitative focus (e.g., Liverman 2018; Wisor 2015). Lastly, we have not systematically analyzed the interactions across factors. Such an analysis would have been promising but goes beyond the scope of our study (Guang-Wen et al., 2022; Pham-Truffert et al., 2020). Despite these methodological limitations, our review provides the groundwork for further investigations that delve deeper into national contexts and assess the complex linkages between domestic factors for the implementation of global goal-setting initiatives.

Results: success factors for the implementation of the MDGs

We identified six factors that have affected the implementation of the MDGs in the national contexts of developing countries.

Factor 1: Path dependencies

A first factor we identified is whether the MDGs are in line with the historical political orientation and tradition of a country which we perceive as path dependencies. Governments that share key principles and norms of the Millennium Declaration have it naturally easier to adopt political priorities that are in accordance with the MDGs.

The degree of congruence between the MDGs and national pro-grams is frequently emphasized in the literature as a strong enabler for national implementation (Abbott et al., 2017; Meth 2013; Rao & Seth 2009; Reddy & Kauzya 2015; Yamin & Boulanger 2014). A case in point is MDG 3 on gender equality. While this MDG was controversially discussed among different countries, governments that were already in favor of this goal could introduce policies at almost zero costs and used this MDG as 'tailwind' for their own political strategies (Mashau et al., 2014). Another example is the growth paradigm of emerging economies, such as Brazil, China, India, and Indonesia. For these countries, the MDGs were largely consistent with their political objectives and resonated well with their development philosophy (Hezri 2013; Tandon 2013). Likewise in Bhutan, Nigeria, and Zambia, the MDGs were in accordance with national development strategies, which brought them in a better position to implement the goals and targets (Kelly 2013; Nhema 2010; Ojo et al., 2014).

At the same time, several studies point to the gap between national priorities and the MDGs as a major factor that constrained national implementation (Elkins et al., 2018; Haug & Hella 2013; Hoxhaj et al., 2014; Hulme 2010; Ware 2011). Countries with discriminatory laws against women or other societal groups were less willing to implement measures promoting gender equality and to enact laws or adopt policies for equal opportunities (Christie 2015; Sika 2011). For instance, both India and Nigeria have been identified as countries whose governments had low preferences for MDG 4 on child mortality and

MDG 5 on maternal health, which led to ineffective implementation of these goals (Das 2018; Díaz-Martínez & Gibbons 2014; see also Gore 2010). As another example, MDG 7 on environmental protection was implemented in Albania only rudimentarily because of the lack of pre-existing political preferences in this field (Pici et al., 2014). Moreover, several African governments that preferred protectionist trade measures opposed the MDGs due to the belief that they opened the door for a liberal trade system (Durokifa & Ijeoma 2018; Stocchetti 2016).

In short, governments which had already adopted political strategies that were coherent with the Millennium Declaration readily initiated projects and programmes to implement the MDGs. In contrast, governments whose political priorities did not match with the MDGs remained stuck in their previous trajectories; they did not invest much to comply with the MDGs pointing to limited effects in such cases.

Factor 2: Government ownership

The second factor we recognized is government ownership of the MDGs, here understood as the degree to which the MDGs generated engagement by national policymakers and benefitted from it. Indeed, we found that if state leaders felt ownership of the MDGs and internalized their principles and goals, they put much effort into translating them into national strategies and political programmes.

In our analysis, government ownership has been identified as a factor that can considerably support national implementation of the MDGs (Fukuda-Parr 2010; McCormick 2014; Rao & Seth 2009; Sumner &Tiwari 2009). Some countries, such as Malaysia, Nigeria, and Rwanda, have developed national policy programmes on the basis of the MDGs (Abbott et al., 2017; Akwara et al., 2014; Hezri 2013). State leaders such as the Rwandan president have sought to integrate the MDGs into local cultures (Rwiyereka 2014). Public officials in China, India, Mexico, Indonesia, and Zambia have been keen to present their performance of MDG implementation on the international stage (Evans 2018; Fukuda-Parr 2014). Such ownership and internalization of the MDGs point to ahigh political commitment and strong political sway, even though the eventual political effectiveness is not always ensured.

On the other hand, any lack of ownership of the MDGs by national governments is widely cited as a major constraining factor for MDG implementation (Haug & Hella 2013; Hulme & Scott 2010; Ukachukwu & Iheriohanma 2013). Scholars have shown that many governments of developing countries had little interest in the MDGs and were hence reluctant to translate global goals into national contexts (Fukuda-Parr 2014; Hezri 2013). This applies especially to MDG 7 on environmental protection, which some governments regarded as hampering their chances for economic growth (Meth 2013). Many scholars pointed out that the top-down character of the MDGs and the misfit with national strategies, weak technical prerequisites, and varying donor priorities severely undermined national ownership (Manning et al., 2013). In particular, the conditionality imposed by external funding schemes led in some instances to a negative perception of the MDGs by government elites in the global South (Chung et al., 2018; Evans 2018).

In a nutshell, government ownership has in some cases been crucial for the effective national implementation of the MDGs. Some state leaders had internalized the principles and norms of the Millennium Declaration and tried to take leadership by presenting their MDG records at the international level. Conversely, other governments had only little ownership, which is even further undermined by top-down governance and conditionality imposed by international and bilateral donors.

Factor 3: Pressure from non-governmental organizations

The third factor that we found in the reviewed studies is pressure from NGOs. In countries with an active civil society, NGOs appear to use several strategies to hold governments accountable for the MDGs. Moreover, due to intensified communication and collaboration across borders, the advocacy of NGOs is increasingly transnational.

NGO pressure is shown in the literature as a factor that has to some extent supported the implementation of the MDGs in national contexts (Kelly 2013; Majid et al., 2016; Sen & Mukherjee 2014).Some studies point to NGO protests and campaigns; others mention cooperative strategies of NGOs and their collaboration with private sector firms as well as international organizations to support the implementation of the MDGs (Ilcan & Phillips 2010; Pici et al., 2014). While several scholars highlight the large potential of NGOs to push their governments towards implementing the principles and norms of the Millennium Declaration, few empirical cases of such an effect are mentioned. A notable exception is India, where researchers stress the advocacy work of NGOs concerned with claiming rights for vulnerable societal groups in national MDG implementation (Siriginidi 2009). Similarly, NGO pressure is often seen as central in the implementation of MDG 3 on gender equality and women's human rights (Sen & Mukherjee 2014).

At the same time, scholars recognize the lack of NGO pressure as a major constraining factor for MDG implementation by national governments (Fukuda-Parr 2014; Manning et al., 2013). They point out that the formulation of the MDGs was not transparent to civil society and that the implementation has not been accompanied by larger public debates, all of which has limited possible entry points for NGO influence. As a consequence, civil society pressure was allegedly lacking in many African countries to push for the realization of the health related MDGs (Evans 2018). Likewise, only little NGO pressure was exerted on governments for improving education, and societal groups were not empowered to push for political reforms (McCormick 2014).

Hence, NGO pressure has in a few instances been conducive to MDG implementation at national level, particularly with regard to the goal of gender equality and related matters. Some NGOs used the MDGs for their advocacy for vulnerable societal groups. Nonetheless, pressure for the MDGs was limited. This can be seen as one reason for the slow implementation of the principles and norms of the millennium declaration in some countries.

Factor 4: Availability of financial resources

The fourth factor we identified is whether governments have sufficient availability of resources. Most obviously, governments of countries with strong resource constraints and severe budgetary limitations cannot carry out comprehensive political programmes to achieve the MDGs.

In the articles that we reviewed, resource availability is generally stressed as a key factor that is crucial for the implementation of the MDGs, especially regarding targets that require broad investments such as improving and maintaining national health systems (Akume 2014; Richards & Vining 2016). Governments of countries that planned to implement the MDGs relied on their ability to raise revenues and to allocate and spend their own income to deliver critical public services (Go & Quijada 2012). Due to a higher resource availability, emerging economies and countries with rising markets such as Kenya or South Africa are generally better situated to adopt and realize development strategies and programmes in accordance with the MDGs (Unterhalter & North 2011). Malaysia is referred to as a typical example of a country with a growing national economy that enabled its government to address basic problems of human development relevant for several MDGs (Hezri 2013).

Many studies also identify the lack of adequate resources as a factor that hinders the implementation of the MDGs (Abbott et al., 2017; Mashau et al., 2014; Rao & Seth 2009; Unterhalter & North 2011). Scarce financial means are a key constraint for all efforts to promote the MDGs, especially in least developed countries, such as Namibia, Tanzania, and Zambia (Chung et al., 2018; Evans 2018; Haug & Hella 2013; Ilcan & Lacey 2015). In this context, several studies point to the adverse effects of the outbreak of the financial crisis in 2007 and the later global economic recession (Akume 2014; Caprani 2016; Pici et al., 2014). These developments reduced the availability of resources in all developing countries and constrained their efforts to adopt policies for MDG implementation.

All things considered, a lack of resources heavily impeded effective implementation of the MDGs, especially in least developed countries. Emerging economies were better equipped to pursue policies in line with the MDGs but, also here, global emergencies could suddenly limit their resources and hamper their development strategies and programmes.

Factor 5: Administrative capacity and level of economic development

The fifth factor we acknowledged in our analysis is administrative capacity and level of economic development. Countries with strong administrative capacities and a high economic development level are more likely to take efforts for implementing the MDGs than countries with weak administrative capacities and a low economic development level.

The literature has highlighted stable administrative capacity and a certain economic development level as factors that strongly enables national MDG implementation (Abbott et al., 2017; Pouliot & Thérien 2018). According to quantitative studies, a higher per-capita gross domestic product in 1990 is generally associated with capable bureaucracies and effective implementation of the MDGs (Go & Quijada 2012). This suggests that the administrative capacity and economic development level of a country largely determine its MDG performance. A prominent example is China, which had strong administrative capacities and economic development and could hence adopt effective national strategies aligned with the MDGs (Li 2013). A professional and well-equipped public sector with a strong bureaucracy is perceived as key for carrying out effective development programmes (Akume 2014; Reddy & Kauzya 2015). Such organizational features are highlighted as prerequisites for good governance and service pro-vision consistent with the principles and norms of the Millennium Declaration (Gore 2010; Lay 2012; Richards & Vining 2015).

Conversely, the absence of administrative capacity and a low eco-nomic development level severely constrain national efforts to implement the MDGs (Alabaster 2014; Bernardi & De Chiara 2011; Elkinset al., 2018; Onditi & Odera 2017; Vyas-Doorgapersad 2014). Weak institutional frameworks and a high degree of poverty are major obstacles for effective policies for the promotion of the different MDGs (Omona 2010). In particular, countries that suffer from socio-economic inequality and lacking administrative capacity with deficient coordination are not able to take adequate measures that improve pro-poor development (Asadullah & Savoia 2018; Mashau et al., 2014), basic health services for the poor (Das 2018), environmental protection (Castello et al., 2010; Opr˘sal et al., 2018) or other MDG targets (Comim 2015; Haug & Hella 2013; Hoxhaj et al., 2014; Sío-Lopez 2015). Such capacity deficits open the door for policy makers to distort the programmes for their own gains leading to poor MDG implementation (Hezri 2013; Omona 2010; Ukachukwu & Iheriohanma 2013). This is most evident in conflict zones and areas without statehood where the MDGs had essentially no effects (Caprani 2016).

Overall, professional public administrations and related institutional frameworks as well as economic development and stability were decisive for national implementation of the MDGs. Without this,

governments faced huge barriers for adopting strategies and pro-grammes that could foster progress towards implementing the MDGs.

Factor 6: Support from international or bilateral donors

The sixth factor that we found is whether governments obtain enough support from international or bilateral donors. Governments of countries that receive substantial external financial assistance are generally in a better place to adopt measures in accordance with the principles and norms of the Millennium Declaration.

In the set of scientific studies that we evaluated, donor support was described as a strong factor for national implementation of the MDGs (Rao & Seth 2009; Reddy & Kauzya 2015; Shoaf Kozak et al., 2012). The work of the United Nations, for instance, encompassed capacity building for public entities, workshops and training sessions to enhance skills of local stakeholders, or concerted actions with specialized agencies for disaster risk reduction (Hollis 2014; Ilcan & Phillips 2010; Manning et al., 2013; Meth 2013). The World Bank moreover offered loans and sponsored development projects based on the MDGs to some developing countries (Elkins et al., 2018; Fukuda-Parr 2010; Pici et al., 2014). In addition, many bilateral donors have assisted governments of developing countries to pursue certain policies, such as improving maternal health, and to implement other MDG-related norms (Aurégan 2017; Evans 2018; Sío-L opez 2015).

However, support from international and national donors is not always seen as positive. Studies show that strong external agendas of donors often lead to dysfunctional outcomes of national MDG implementation (Abbott et al., 2017; Chung et al., 2018; Comim 2015; Sambu & Tarhule 2013; Shoaf Kozak et al., 2012). Scholars criticize the sectoral approach of development assistance and stress that donors often do not take national or local circumstances into account, but mainly seek to further their self-interests under the flag of the MDGs (Haug & Hella 2013; Ware 2011; Wickstead 2010). Moreover, authors state that too many technical details for monitoring and evaluation overwhelmed those countries with low resources and administrative capacities (Gore 2010). Beyond that, studies point to insufficient support from donors and a lack of adequate international funding especially in least developed countries because donors often worry that their support will not have significant effects in such countries (Caprani 2016; Hulme & Scott 2010; Onditi & Odera 2017).

All in all, donor support helped developing countries to launch political strategies and programmes to follow and pursue the MDGs. For some countries, political changes would not have been possible without such assistance. Least developed countries, however, did not receive adequate support. At the same time, strong external agendas of donors also undermined national commitments to the MDGs and hampered some initiatives of developing countries.

Discussion and forward-looking perspective

After presenting the results of our literature review, we now summa-rise our main results before drawing lessons for the global endeavor to implement the SDGs and point to the boundaries of our study.

Summary of key findings

Despite the large general attention that was devoted to the MDGs in scholarly literature, only a small portion of articles investigated the concrete conditions under which the MDGs have generated political changes in different national jurisdictions. Many authors still treat domestic politics as a ‘black box’ and

disregard the specific national contexts that determine whether and how global goals gain traction and affect politics on the ground, or touch upon these aspects only marginally. From our comprehensive synthesis of the literature on the MDGs, we identified six factors that have shaped national implementation of the MDGs in the 2000–2015 period.

Our analysis underscores that countries are deeply entangled in specific political trajectories and path dependencies. They allowed some governments to align their strategies with the principles and norms of the Millennium Declaration and kept others, which had different historical political orientations and traditions, from engaging in planning, capacity building and political actions for realizing the MDGs. This shows that the MDGs, as a global policy instrument, did not function as a driver but at most as a catalyst for action. The MDGs were supportive when their core ideas were already shared by governments, while they remained tooth-less when governments lacked any interest or disagreed with the core MDG norms. This reminds us that historical pathways must be taken seriously, as they can severely limit the effects of global goal-setting initiatives on public administrative systems and their policy apparatus.

Furthermore, we found that the effective implementation of the MDGs in national contexts relied first and foremost on three domestic factors. Only countries with sufficient resource availability, administrative capacity with a certain level of economic development, and adequate support from external donors had a real chance to adopt strategies and programmes in line with the MDGs. In some instances, national efforts to implement the MDGs were bolstered by state leaders who had developed ownership of the MDGs, while in individual cases NGOs pushed governments to adopt political changes to meet certain MDGs. What do these findings tell us about who benefitted from the MDGs as a governance instrument? The answer critically depends on the type of countries, and we recognize three categories.

First, countries with a relatively strong resource base, administrative capacity and economic development level and some donor support - notably Brazil, China, Indonesia, and India – performed comparatively well in terms of national implementation and advancing towards the MDGs. However, it remains largely unclear to what extent the MDGs have contributed to these developments. While the MDGs might have been conducive of some transitions towards good governance, the governments of these countries would have likely adopted the bulk of their political strategies and programmes also without the MDGs.

A second category comprises developing countries, such as Kenya, Malaysia, Nigeria, and South Africa, all of which have, relatively speaking, a sizeable resource availability, moderate administrative capacity and level of economic development, along with considerable international and bilateral donor support. In these countries, the MDGs had considerable effects on domestic politics and contributed to political changes. These changes were partly driven by the agendas of external actors, such as international funding bodies or different national development agencies, and partly by state leaders and public officials once they had assumed ownership of the principles and norms of the MDGs.

A third category entails those countries with a poor resource basis, limited or constrained administrative capacity and low economic development level, all of which hindered them from profiting from external assistance. For the populations of these countries—which are located primarily in Sub-Saharan Africa and conflict zones like Afghanistan and Somalia—the MDGs did not bring any substantial changes. Although these countries were most in need of financial support from bilateral and international donors, they were not able to access funding streams and did not receive substantial development assistance.

Thus, the MDGs have unfolded tangible effects on national politics only under specific domestic conditions and only in specific domestic contexts. More precisely, they fostered progress only for a few

developing countries with particular characteristics, namely a solid resource availability, administrative capacity and development level, and sufficient external financial assistance. In light of these main results from the literature review, we now draw lessons for the current efforts to implement the SDGs in different national jurisdictions.

Lessons learned for the SDGs

A first lesson is that path dependencies, such as prevailing historical political orientations and traditions, cannot easily be altered through global policy goals. Many experts placed high hopes and expectations in the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs, but they have underestimated the strong domestic obstacles for generating deep transformational changes towards sustainable development in national public administrative systems. Many governments remain stuck in conventional patterns and practices and the idea of sustainable development is only slowly gaining more fruitful ground (Forestier & Kim 2020; Horn & Grugel 2018; Spangenberg 2017).

A second lesson is that governments of countries with low resource availability, administrative capacity and level of economic development must be better supported through a more targeted and structural approach taken by wealthier countries. Least developed countries will otherwise not be in a position to adopt adequate measures to implement the SDGs in their jurisdictions (Fukuda-Parr & Hegstad 2018). A strengthened global funding initiative for these countries could leverage new public and private resources for sustainable development and over-come or mitigate their highest vulnerability (Bertheau & Lindner 2022; Doumbia & Lauridsen 2019; Hurley & Voituriez 2016).

A third lesson is that support from international and national donors for developing countries should not be selective and biased by strong external agendas. Instead, such assistance needs to be in line with the overall principle and norm of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to leave no one behind to enhance ownership and internalization of the SDGs within governments and populations of recipient countries. National ownership is crucial for deeper political changes towards sustainable development and should be emphasized in strategic development plans, capacity building, and political actions to mobilize political support at provincial and local levels (Biermann et al., 2017; Nhamo 2017).

A fourth lesson is that professional public administrations with effective coordination are crucial for countries to make progress on the SDGs. Weak institutional frameworks in public-administrative systems hamper the adoption and design of coherent policies for promoting sustainable development (Nilsson et al., 2022). Efforts for coordination and integration of the SDGs into national systems differ from country to country and there is no one-size-fits-all solution to achieve the SDGs. Yet, all governments need to build up their administrative capacities and educate public officials at all levels to be able to implement the SDGs in their jurisdictions (Breuer et al., 2019; Fourie 2018; Mbanda & Fourie 2020).

Finally, NGO pressure on national governments to take more ambitious actions towards sustainable development hinges on possibilities for engagement and involvement in global goalsetting initiatives. While numerous NGOs participated in the formulation of the SDGs, their role in the periodic review of goal implementation remains limited (Beisheim 2018). This diminishes the potential of NGOs to act as watchdogs holding governments accountable for national performances on sustainable development. Moreover, NGOs from the global South are underrepresented at global level and many countries restrict and suppress activities of NGOs (Arhin 2016; Gereke & Brühl 2019; Hassan et al., 2019).

Boundaries

As our literature review has been focusing on the MDGs, we need to acknowledge the scope conditions and a limited generalizability of our findings. In particular, the above-mentioned lessons might not apply to all countries but primarily to developing countries. Moreover, this study has examined domestic enabling and hindering factors and did not discuss other factors which contribute to the success and failure of global goal-setting initiatives, such as internal ambiguities, their overall structure, and specific goals. Nevertheless, by focusing on national conditions and domestic politics, we claim that our insights improve our understanding of the potentials and pitfalls of global goalsetting initiatives. Finally, the SDGs differ in several respects from the MDGs as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development entails a periodic review mechanism, fosters learning among governments and societal stakeholders, and provides for new financial instruments. These differences between the MDGs and the SDGs impede a direct translation of our results and allow some cautious optimism on the SDGs. Yet, they underline our point that developing countries will only be able to implement the SDGs if they receive adequate support from other actors through bilateral and international programmes.

Conclusions

This chapter demonstrates that the question of whether and to what extent global goal-setting initiatives generate political changes in national public-administrative systems critically depends on certain domestic prerequisites. Globally agreed goals therefore cannot be expected to easily trickle down from intergovernmental negotiations within the United Nations to the national level and then further to regions and provinces as well as cities and municipalities. Thus, scholars and policymakers concerned with the effectiveness of globally agreed policy goals should dedicate more attention to the domestic contexts in which such global principles and norms are supposed to take effect.

This brings us to some policy recommendations on how to enhance the effectiveness of the SDGs and foster sustainable development worldwide. First, the periodic review mechanism taking place at the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development needs to be strengthened and further developed (Beisheim & Fritzsche 2022). Second, learning among public and private actors for SDG implementation should be fostered at all levels and scales (Andonova et al., 2022; Türkeli et al., 2020) with large potential for cities and local governments to function as transmission belts between the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and actions on the ground (Hickmann 2021). Third, governments must substantially reallocate funding for sustainable development and establish stronger incentive structures to guide public and private funding to promote sustainability transformations in different sectors (Biermann et al., 2022).

Finally, our study points to important research avenues on global goalsetting initiatives as a governance mechanism. Further research is warranted for more fine-tuned empirical investigations of how and under what conditions globally agreed goals work in national contexts. As a recent assessment on the political impact of the SDGs shows several questions are still heavily under-researched despite the evolving research field (Biermann, Hickmann, & Sénit,2022). This applies in particular to research on whether the SDGs lead to more institutional and policy coherence at domestic level (Nilsson et al.,2022). We hence need studies that explore the links between global and domes-tic politics from a critical perspective to improve our understanding of the concrete pathways under which global governance initiatives may effectively unfold tangible effects on national politics. For such future research lines, our work here provides a solid foundation and several promising starting points.

D

Curriculum vitae

Melanie van Driel was born on the 11th of March 1992, and grew up in the village of Ter Aar, the Netherlands. After completing her secondary education (VWO) at the Ashram College in Alphen aan den Rijn, and a short period of studying Philosophy and Political Science at the University of Leiden, she started studying Political Science at the University of Amsterdam.

During her Bachelor's, she specialized in policy and governance, and wrote a thesis on citizen participation in wind energy projects in the Netherlands. Throughout her Bachelor's study she was a board member for a number of organizations, including the United Nations International Student Conference of Amsterdam (UNISCA), the Dutch United Nations Student Association (DUNSA) and the local department of the Green Party (GroenLinks) in the city of Alphen aan den Rijn and later in the Province of South-Holland. In her role as DUNSA board member, she was able to serve as an international election observer for the municipal elections in Vilnius, Lithuania, in 2015.

During her Master's program she combined her interest in policy and governance with a focus on international relations and wrote a thesis on Chinese energy investments in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan.

After graduating *Cum Laude* in 2016, she continued to work as a research assistant and coordinator at the Energy Programme Asia, an ERC granted project on the geopolitics of energy, focusing on China as well as the European Union.

In 2017, she took up a position as Lecturer at the Faculty of Governance and Global Affairs at the University of Leiden. Here, she was a lecturer for 12 different courses in the Public Administration Bachelor, and taught students following a minor in the same field. As a lecturer, she obtained a University Teaching Qualification (UTQ) and published her thesis as a journal article.

Between 2017 and 2021, Melanie served as a book review editor for the Journal of Comparative Sociology, published by Brill publishers.

In January of 2019, she joined the GlobalGoals project as a PhD researcher. In that same year, she undertook a consultancy project for the Global Donor Platform for Rural Development, which was requested by the German Agency for International Cooperation.

In 2020, Melanie was in the organizing team of GLOBALGOALS2020, the first (digital) international research conference bringing together scholars investigating the political impact of the SDGs.

Throughout her research, Melanie presented her work at seven international conferences, including the International Conference on Sustainable Development (ICSD), the International Studies Association Conference, the Earth System Governance Conference and the general conference of the European Consortium for Political Research. During these conferences, she often fulfilled roles as a chair or discussant for conference panels.

As a researcher, she (co-)authored 13 scientific outputs, among which 7 papers, 3 book chapters and 2 book reviews. In addition, she wrote multiple blogs and policy briefs, among others about the uptake of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the Netherlands.

Melanie also organized and (co-)moderated a number of seminars, webinars and side-events for the GlobalGoals team. Examples include a panel on the transformative potential of the SDGs in the Netherlands for GLOBALGOALS2020, a side-event on the scientific knowledge about the political impact of the SDGs at the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in 2022, a side-event along the same lines at the UNECE Regional Forum for Sustainable Development in 2023, and a webinar on future research directions for the Earth System Governance Research Network in 2023.

After the launch of an Earth System Governance Project's Taskforce on the SDGs in 2021, Melanie became a co-lead of its Global Governance working group. This group is consistent of 28 researchers from all over the world interested in the global political impact of the SDGs.

In addition to conducting her PhD research for the GlobalGoals project, Melanie has, since March of 2018, fulfilled the role of local village council member in the municipality of Oegstgeest. There, she chairs the faction of Progressief Oegstgeest, a combination of the Dutch Green Party (GroenLinks) and Labour Party (Partij van de Arbeid), as well as unbound progressives. In this role, she has worked on policies ranging from the housing of refugees and migrants to projects to realize the energy transition. She fulfills a range of roles in this function, including that of a Commission chair, member of the Presidium (daily governing entity of the council) and chair of the *Vertrouwenscommissie* (commission responsible for the functioning and continuation of the position of the mayor).

Melanie has always been driven by a passion to make our world a better place, with a special interest in the reduction of inequality, increasing animal welfare and tackling challenges to realize a more sustainable environment for current and future generations.

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