

4. From Ambition to Action? The Sustainable Development Goals Ten Years On

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015, A/RES/70/1

‘Why Do States Adhere to the Sustainable Development Goals?’ by Niamh Guiry, Transnational Environmental Law, Vol 13(2) (2024) (academic article)



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70/1. Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The General Assembly

Adopts the following outcome document of the United Nations summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda:

Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Preamble

This Agenda is a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity. It also seeks to strengthen universal peace in larger freedom. We recognize that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development.

All countries and all stakeholders, acting in collaborative partnership, will implement this plan. We are resolved to free the human race from the tyranny of poverty and want and to heal and secure our planet. We are determined to take the bold and transformative steps which are urgently needed to shift the world on to a sustainable and resilient path. As we embark on this collective journey, we pledge that no one will be left behind.

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets which we are announcing today demonstrate the scale and ambition of this new universal Agenda. They seek to build on the Millennium Development Goals and complete what they did not achieve. They seek to realize the human rights of all and to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. They are integrated and indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental.

The Goals and targets will stimulate action over the next 15 years in areas of critical importance for humanity and the planet.



People

We are determined to end poverty and hunger, in all their forms and dimensions, and to ensure that all human beings can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment.

Planet

We are determined to protect the planet from degradation, including through sustainable consumption and production, sustainably managing its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change, so that it can support the needs of the present and future generations.

Prosperity

We are determined to ensure that all human beings can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives and that economic, social and technological progress occurs in harmony with nature.

Peace

We are determined to foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies which are free from fear and violence. There can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development.

Partnership

We are determined to mobilize the means required to implement this Agenda through a revitalized Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, based on a spirit of strengthened global solidarity, focused in particular on the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable and with the participation of all countries, all stakeholders and all people.

The interlinkages and integrated nature of the Sustainable Development Goals are of crucial importance in ensuring that the purpose of the new Agenda is realized. If we realize our ambitions across the full extent of the Agenda, the lives of all will be profoundly improved and our world will be transformed for the better.

Declaration

Introduction

1. We, the Heads of State and Government and High Representatives, meeting at United Nations Headquarters in New York from 25 to 27 September 2015 as the Organization celebrates its seventieth anniversary, have decided today on new global Sustainable Development Goals.

2. On behalf of the peoples we serve, we have adopted a historic decision on a comprehensive, far-reaching and people-centred set of universal and transformative Goals and targets. We commit ourselves to working tirelessly for the full implementation of this Agenda by 2030. We recognize that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development. We are committed to achieving sustainable development in its three dimensions – economic, social and environmental – in a balanced and integrated manner. We will also build upon the achievements of the Millennium Development Goals and seek to address their unfinished business.

3. We resolve, between now and 2030, to end poverty and hunger everywhere; to combat inequalities within and among countries; to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies; to protect human rights and promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls; and to ensure the lasting protection of the planet and its natural resources. We resolve also to create conditions for sustainable, inclusive and sustained economic growth, shared prosperity and decent work for all, taking into account different levels of national development and capacities.

4. As we embark on this great collective journey, we pledge that no one will be left behind. Recognizing that the dignity of the human person is fundamental, we wish to see the Goals and targets met for all nations and peoples and for all segments of society. And we will endeavour to reach the furthest behind first.

5. This is an Agenda of unprecedented scope and significance. It is accepted by all countries and is applicable to all, taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities. These are universal goals and targets which involve the entire world, developed and developing countries alike. They are integrated and indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development.

6. The Goals and targets are the result of over two years of intensive public consultation and engagement with civil society and other stakeholders around the world, which paid particular attention to the voices of the poorest and most vulnerable. This consultation included valuable work done by the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals and by the United Nations, whose Secretary-General provided a synthesis report in December 2014.

Our vision

7. In these Goals and targets, we are setting out a supremely ambitious and transformational vision. We envisage a world free of poverty, hunger, disease and want, where all life can thrive. We envisage a world free of fear and violence. A world with universal literacy. A world with equitable and universal access to quality education at all levels, to health care and social protection, where physical, mental and social well-being are assured. A world where we reaffirm our commitments regarding the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation and

where there is improved hygiene; and where food is sufficient, safe, affordable and nutritious. A world where human habitats are safe, resilient and sustainable and where there is universal access to affordable, reliable and sustainable energy.

8. We envisage a world of universal respect for human rights and human dignity, the rule of law, justice, equality and non-discrimination; of respect for race, ethnicity and cultural diversity; and of equal opportunity permitting the full realization of human potential and contributing to shared prosperity. A world which invests in its children and in which every child grows up free from violence and exploitation. A world in which every woman and girl enjoys full gender equality and all legal, social and economic barriers to their empowerment have been removed. A just, equitable, tolerant, open and socially inclusive world in which the needs of the most vulnerable are met.

9. We envisage a world in which every country enjoys sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and decent work for all. A world in which consumption and production patterns and use of all natural resources – from air to land, from rivers, lakes and aquifers to oceans and seas – are sustainable. One in which democracy, good governance and the rule of law, as well as an enabling environment at the national and international levels, are essential for sustainable development, including sustained and inclusive economic growth, social development, environmental protection and the eradication of poverty and hunger. One in which development and the application of technology are climate-sensitive, respect biodiversity and are resilient. One in which humanity lives in harmony with nature and in which wildlife and other living species are protected.

Our shared principles and commitments

10. The new Agenda is guided by the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, including full respect for international law. It is grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,¹ international human rights treaties, the Millennium Declaration² and the 2005 World Summit Outcome.³ It is informed by other instruments such as the Declaration on the Right to Development.⁴

11. We reaffirm the outcomes of all major United Nations conferences and summits which have laid a solid foundation for sustainable development and have helped to shape the new Agenda. These include the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development,⁵ the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the World Summit for Social Development, the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development,⁶ the Beijing Platform for Action⁷ and the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. We also reaffirm the follow-up to these conferences, including the outcomes of the Fourth United

¹ Resolution 217 A (III).

² Resolution 55/2.

³ Resolution 60/1.

⁴ Resolution 41/128, annex.

⁵ *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3–14 June 1992*, vol. I, *Resolutions Adopted by the Conference* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigendum), resolution 1, annex I.

⁶ *Report of the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 5–13 September 1994* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.95.XIII.18), chap. I, resolution 1, annex.

⁷ *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4–15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.

Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, the third International Conference on Small Island Developing States, the second United Nations Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries and the Third United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction.

12. We reaffirm all the principles of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, including, inter alia, the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, as set out in principle 7 thereof.

13. The challenges and commitments identified at these major conferences and summits are interrelated and call for integrated solutions. To address them effectively, a new approach is needed. Sustainable development recognizes that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, combating inequality within and among countries, preserving the planet, creating sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and fostering social inclusion are linked to each other and are interdependent.

Our world today

14. We are meeting at a time of immense challenges to sustainable development. Billions of our citizens continue to live in poverty and are denied a life of dignity. There are rising inequalities within and among countries. There are enormous disparities of opportunity, wealth and power. Gender inequality remains a key challenge. Unemployment, particularly youth unemployment, is a major concern. Global health threats, more frequent and intense natural disasters, spiralling conflict, violent extremism, terrorism and related humanitarian crises and forced displacement of people threaten to reverse much of the development progress made in recent decades. Natural resource depletion and adverse impacts of environmental degradation, including desertification, drought, land degradation, freshwater scarcity and loss of biodiversity, add to and exacerbate the list of challenges which humanity faces. Climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time and its adverse impacts undermine the ability of all countries to achieve sustainable development. Increases in global temperature, sea level rise, ocean acidification and other climate change impacts are seriously affecting coastal areas and low-lying coastal countries, including many least developed countries and small island developing States. The survival of many societies, and of the biological support systems of the planet, is at risk.

15. It is also, however, a time of immense opportunity. Significant progress has been made in meeting many development challenges. Within the past generation, hundreds of millions of people have emerged from extreme poverty. Access to education has greatly increased for both boys and girls. The spread of information and communications technology and global interconnectedness has great potential to accelerate human progress, to bridge the digital divide and to develop knowledge societies, as does scientific and technological innovation across areas as diverse as medicine and energy.

16. Almost 15 years ago, the Millennium Development Goals were agreed. These provided an important framework for development and significant progress has been made in a number of areas. But the progress has been uneven, particularly in Africa, least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, and some of the Millennium Development Goals remain off-track, in particular those related to maternal, newborn and child health and to reproductive health. We recommit ourselves to the full realization of all the Millennium Development Goals, including the off-track Millennium Development Goals, in particular by providing focused and scaled-up assistance to least

developed countries and other countries in special situations, in line with relevant support programmes. The new Agenda builds on the Millennium Development Goals and seeks to complete what they did not achieve, particularly in reaching the most vulnerable.

17. In its scope, however, the framework we are announcing today goes far beyond the Millennium Development Goals. Alongside continuing development priorities such as poverty eradication, health, education and food security and nutrition, it sets out a wide range of economic, social and environmental objectives. It also promises more peaceful and inclusive societies. It also, crucially, defines means of implementation. Reflecting the integrated approach that we have decided on, there are deep interconnections and many cross-cutting elements across the new Goals and targets.

The new Agenda

18. We are announcing today 17 Sustainable Development Goals with 169 associated targets which are integrated and indivisible. Never before have world leaders pledged common action and endeavour across such a broad and universal policy agenda. We are setting out together on the path towards sustainable development, devoting ourselves collectively to the pursuit of global development and of “win-win” cooperation which can bring huge gains to all countries and all parts of the world. We reaffirm that every State has, and shall freely exercise, full permanent sovereignty over all its wealth, natural resources and economic activity. We will implement the Agenda for the full benefit of all, for today’s generation and for future generations. In doing so, we reaffirm our commitment to international law and emphasize that the Agenda is to be implemented in a manner that is consistent with the rights and obligations of States under international law.

19. We reaffirm the importance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as other international instruments relating to human rights and international law. We emphasize the responsibilities of all States, in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations, to respect, protect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction of any kind as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, disability or other status.

20. Realizing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls will make a crucial contribution to progress across all the Goals and targets. The achievement of full human potential and of sustainable development is not possible if one half of humanity continues to be denied its full human rights and opportunities. Women and girls must enjoy equal access to quality education, economic resources and political participation as well as equal opportunities with men and boys for employment, leadership and decision-making at all levels. We will work for a significant increase in investments to close the gender gap and strengthen support for institutions in relation to gender equality and the empowerment of women at the global, regional and national levels. All forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls will be eliminated, including through the engagement of men and boys. The systematic mainstreaming of a gender perspective in the implementation of the Agenda is crucial.

21. The new Goals and targets will come into effect on 1 January 2016 and will guide the decisions we take over the next 15 years. All of us will work to implement the Agenda within our own countries and at the regional and global levels, taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities. We will respect national policy space for

sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, in particular for developing States, while remaining consistent with relevant international rules and commitments. We acknowledge also the importance of the regional and subregional dimensions, regional economic integration and interconnectivity in sustainable development. Regional and subregional frameworks can facilitate the effective translation of sustainable development policies into concrete action at the national level.

22. Each country faces specific challenges in its pursuit of sustainable development. The most vulnerable countries and, in particular, African countries, least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, deserve special attention, as do countries in situations of conflict and post-conflict countries. There are also serious challenges within many middle-income countries.

23. People who are vulnerable must be empowered. Those whose needs are reflected in the Agenda include all children, youth, persons with disabilities (of whom more than 80 per cent live in poverty), people living with HIV/AIDS, older persons, indigenous peoples, refugees and internally displaced persons and migrants. We resolve to take further effective measures and actions, in conformity with international law, to remove obstacles and constraints, strengthen support and meet the special needs of people living in areas affected by complex humanitarian emergencies and in areas affected by terrorism.

24. We are committed to ending poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including by eradicating extreme poverty by 2030. All people must enjoy a basic standard of living, including through social protection systems. We are also determined to end hunger and to achieve food security as a matter of priority and to end all forms of malnutrition. In this regard, we reaffirm the important role and inclusive nature of the Committee on World Food Security and welcome the Rome Declaration on Nutrition and the Framework for Action.⁸ We will devote resources to developing rural areas and sustainable agriculture and fisheries, supporting smallholder farmers, especially women farmers, herders and fishers in developing countries, particularly least developed countries.

25. We commit to providing inclusive and equitable quality education at all levels – early childhood, primary, secondary, tertiary, technical and vocational training. All people, irrespective of sex, age, race or ethnicity, and persons with disabilities, migrants, indigenous peoples, children and youth, especially those in vulnerable situations, should have access to life-long learning opportunities that help them to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to exploit opportunities and to participate fully in society. We will strive to provide children and youth with a nurturing environment for the full realization of their rights and capabilities, helping our countries to reap the demographic dividend, including through safe schools and cohesive communities and families.

26. To promote physical and mental health and well-being, and to extend life expectancy for all, we must achieve universal health coverage and access to quality health care. No one must be left behind. We commit to accelerating the progress made to date in reducing newborn, child and maternal mortality by ending all such preventable deaths before 2030. We are committed to ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education. We will equally accelerate the pace of progress made in fighting malaria, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, hepatitis, Ebola and other communicable diseases and epidemics, including by addressing growing anti-microbial resistance

⁸ World Health Organization, document EB 136/8, annexes I and II.

and the problem of unattended diseases affecting developing countries. We are committed to the prevention and treatment of non-communicable diseases, including behavioural, developmental and neurological disorders, which constitute a major challenge for sustainable development.

27. We will seek to build strong economic foundations for all our countries. Sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth is essential for prosperity. This will only be possible if wealth is shared and income inequality is addressed. We will work to build dynamic, sustainable, innovative and people-centred economies, promoting youth employment and women's economic empowerment, in particular, and decent work for all. We will eradicate forced labour and human trafficking and end child labour in all its forms. All countries stand to benefit from having a healthy and well-educated workforce with the knowledge and skills needed for productive and fulfilling work and full participation in society. We will strengthen the productive capacities of least developed countries in all sectors, including through structural transformation. We will adopt policies which increase productive capacities, productivity and productive employment; financial inclusion; sustainable agriculture, pastoralist and fisheries development; sustainable industrial development; universal access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy services; sustainable transport systems; and quality and resilient infrastructure.

28. We commit to making fundamental changes in the way that our societies produce and consume goods and services. Governments, international organizations, the business sector and other non-State actors and individuals must contribute to changing unsustainable consumption and production patterns, including through the mobilization, from all sources, of financial and technical assistance to strengthen developing countries' scientific, technological and innovative capacities to move towards more sustainable patterns of consumption and production. We encourage the implementation of the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns. All countries take action, with developed countries taking the lead, taking into account the development and capabilities of developing countries.

29. We recognize the positive contribution of migrants for inclusive growth and sustainable development. We also recognize that international migration is a multidimensional reality of major relevance for the development of countries of origin, transit and destination, which requires coherent and comprehensive responses. We will cooperate internationally to ensure safe, orderly and regular migration involving full respect for human rights and the humane treatment of migrants regardless of migration status, of refugees and of displaced persons. Such cooperation should also strengthen the resilience of communities hosting refugees, particularly in developing countries. We underline the right of migrants to return to their country of citizenship, and recall that States must ensure that their returning nationals are duly received.

30. States are strongly urged to refrain from promulgating and applying any unilateral economic, financial or trade measures not in accordance with international law and the Charter of the United Nations that impede the full achievement of economic and social development, particularly in developing countries.

31. We acknowledge that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change⁹ is the primary international, intergovernmental forum for negotiating the global response to climate change. We are determined to address decisively the threat posed by climate change and environmental degradation. The global nature of

⁹ United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1771, No. 30822.

climate change calls for the widest possible international cooperation aimed at accelerating the reduction of global greenhouse gas emissions and addressing adaptation to the adverse impacts of climate change. We note with grave concern the significant gap between the aggregate effect of parties' mitigation pledges in terms of global annual emissions of greenhouse gases by 2020 and aggregate emission pathways consistent with having a likely chance of holding the increase in global average temperature below 2 degrees Celsius, or 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

32. Looking ahead to the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties in Paris, we underscore the commitment of all States to work for an ambitious and universal climate agreement. We reaffirm that the protocol, another legal instrument or agreed outcome with legal force under the Convention applicable to all parties shall address in a balanced manner, inter alia, mitigation, adaptation, finance, technology development and transfer and capacity-building; and transparency of action and support.

33. We recognize that social and economic development depends on the sustainable management of our planet's natural resources. We are therefore determined to conserve and sustainably use oceans and seas, freshwater resources, as well as forests, mountains and drylands and to protect biodiversity, ecosystems and wildlife. We are also determined to promote sustainable tourism, to tackle water scarcity and water pollution, to strengthen cooperation on desertification, dust storms, land degradation and drought and to promote resilience and disaster risk reduction. In this regard, we look forward to the thirteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity to be held in Mexico.

34. We recognize that sustainable urban development and management are crucial to the quality of life of our people. We will work with local authorities and communities to renew and plan our cities and human settlements so as to foster community cohesion and personal security and to stimulate innovation and employment. We will reduce the negative impacts of urban activities and of chemicals which are hazardous for human health and the environment, including through the environmentally sound management and safe use of chemicals, the reduction and recycling of waste and the more efficient use of water and energy. And we will work to minimize the impact of cities on the global climate system. We will also take account of population trends and projections in our national rural and urban development strategies and policies. We look forward to the upcoming United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development to be held in Quito.

35. Sustainable development cannot be realized without peace and security; and peace and security will be at risk without sustainable development. The new Agenda recognizes the need to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies that provide equal access to justice and that are based on respect for human rights (including the right to development), on effective rule of law and good governance at all levels and on transparent, effective and accountable institutions. Factors which give rise to violence, insecurity and injustice, such as inequality, corruption, poor governance and illicit financial and arms flows, are addressed in the Agenda. We must redouble our efforts to resolve or prevent conflict and to support post-conflict countries, including through ensuring that women have a role in peacebuilding and State-building. We call for further effective measures and actions to be taken, in conformity with international law, to remove the obstacles to the full realization of the right of self-determination of peoples living under colonial and foreign occupation, which continue to adversely affect their economic and social development as well as their environment.

36. We pledge to foster intercultural understanding, tolerance, mutual respect and an ethic of global citizenship and shared responsibility. We acknowledge the natural and cultural diversity of the world and recognize that all cultures and civilizations can contribute to, and are crucial enablers of, sustainable development.

37. Sport is also an important enabler of sustainable development. We recognize the growing contribution of sport to the realization of development and peace in its promotion of tolerance and respect and the contributions it makes to the empowerment of women and of young people, individuals and communities as well as to health, education and social inclusion objectives.

38. We reaffirm, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, the need to respect the territorial integrity and political independence of States.

Means of implementation

39. The scale and ambition of the new Agenda requires a revitalized Global Partnership to ensure its implementation. We fully commit to this. This Partnership will work in a spirit of global solidarity, in particular solidarity with the poorest and with people in vulnerable situations. It will facilitate an intensive global engagement in support of implementation of all the Goals and targets, bringing together Governments, the private sector, civil society, the United Nations system and other actors and mobilizing all available resources.

40. The means of implementation targets under Goal 17 and under each Sustainable Development Goal are key to realizing our Agenda and are of equal importance with the other Goals and targets. The Agenda, including the Sustainable Development Goals, can be met within the framework of a revitalized Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, supported by the concrete policies and actions as outlined in the outcome document of the third International Conference on Financing for Development, held in Addis Ababa from 13 to 16 July 2015. We welcome the endorsement by the General Assembly of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda,¹⁰ which is an integral part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We recognize that the full implementation of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda is critical for the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals and targets.

41. We recognize that each country has primary responsibility for its own economic and social development. The new Agenda deals with the means required for implementation of the Goals and targets. We recognize that these will include the mobilization of financial resources as well as capacity-building and the transfer of environmentally sound technologies to developing countries on favourable terms, including on concessional and preferential terms, as mutually agreed. Public finance, both domestic and international, will play a vital role in providing essential services and public goods and in catalysing other sources of finance. We acknowledge the role of the diverse private sector, ranging from micro-enterprises to cooperatives to multinationals, and that of civil society organizations and philanthropic organizations in the implementation of the new Agenda.

42. We support the implementation of relevant strategies and programmes of action, including the Istanbul Declaration and Programme of Action,¹¹ the SIDS

¹⁰ The Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (Addis Ababa Action Agenda), adopted by the General Assembly on 27 July 2015 (resolution 69/313, annex).

¹¹ *Report of the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, Istanbul, Turkey, 9–13 May 2011* (A/CONF.219/7), chaps. I and II.

Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway¹² and the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014–2024,¹³ and reaffirm the importance of supporting the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the programme of the New Partnership for Africa's Development,¹⁴ all of which are integral to the new Agenda. We recognize the major challenge to the achievement of durable peace and sustainable development in countries in conflict and post-conflict situations.

43. We emphasize that international public finance plays an important role in complementing the efforts of countries to mobilize public resources domestically, especially in the poorest and most vulnerable countries with limited domestic resources. An important use of international public finance, including official development assistance (ODA), is to catalyse additional resource mobilization from other sources, public and private. ODA providers reaffirm their respective commitments, including the commitment by many developed countries to achieve the target of 0.7 per cent of gross national income for official development assistance (ODA/GNI) to developing countries and 0.15 per cent to 0.2 per cent of ODA/GNI to least developed countries.

44. We acknowledge the importance for international financial institutions to support, in line with their mandates, the policy space of each country, in particular developing countries. We recommit to broadening and strengthening the voice and participation of developing countries – including African countries, least developed countries, landlocked developing countries, small island developing States and middle-income countries – in international economic decision-making, norm-setting and global economic governance.

45. We acknowledge also the essential role of national parliaments through their enactment of legislation and adoption of budgets and their role in ensuring accountability for the effective implementation of our commitments. Governments and public institutions will also work closely on implementation with regional and local authorities, subregional institutions, international institutions, academia, philanthropic organizations, volunteer groups and others.

46. We underline the important role and comparative advantage of an adequately resourced, relevant, coherent, efficient and effective United Nations system in supporting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and sustainable development. While stressing the importance of strengthened national ownership and leadership at the country level, we express our support for the ongoing dialogue in the Economic and Social Council on the longer-term positioning of the United Nations development system in the context of this Agenda.

Follow-up and review

47. Our Governments have the primary responsibility for follow-up and review, at the national, regional and global levels, in relation to the progress made in implementing the Goals and targets over the coming 15 years. To support accountability to our citizens, we will provide for systematic follow-up and review at the various levels, as set out in this Agenda and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda. The high-level political forum under the auspices of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council will have the central role in overseeing follow-up and review at the global level.

¹² Resolution 69/15, annex.

¹³ Resolution 69/137, annex II.

¹⁴ [A/57/304](#), annex.

48. Indicators are being developed to assist this work. Quality, accessible, timely and reliable disaggregated data will be needed to help with the measurement of progress and to ensure that no one is left behind. Such data is key to decision-making. Data and information from existing reporting mechanisms should be used where possible. We agree to intensify our efforts to strengthen statistical capacities in developing countries, particularly African countries, least developed countries, landlocked developing countries, small island developing States and middle-income countries. We are committed to developing broader measures of progress to complement gross domestic product.

A call for action to change our world

49. Seventy years ago, an earlier generation of world leaders came together to create the United Nations. From the ashes of war and division they fashioned this Organization and the values of peace, dialogue and international cooperation which underpin it. The supreme embodiment of those values is the Charter of the United Nations.

50. Today we are also taking a decision of great historic significance. We resolve to build a better future for all people, including the millions who have been denied the chance to lead decent, dignified and rewarding lives and to achieve their full human potential. We can be the first generation to succeed in ending poverty; just as we may be the last to have a chance of saving the planet. The world will be a better place in 2030 if we succeed in our objectives.

51. What we are announcing today – an Agenda for global action for the next 15 years – is a charter for people and planet in the twenty-first century. Children and young women and men are critical agents of change and will find in the new Goals a platform to channel their infinite capacities for activism into the creation of a better world.

52. “We the peoples” are the celebrated opening words of the Charter of the United Nations. It is “we the peoples” who are embarking today on the road to 2030. Our journey will involve Governments as well as parliaments, the United Nations system and other international institutions, local authorities, indigenous peoples, civil society, business and the private sector, the scientific and academic community – and all people. Millions have already engaged with, and will own, this Agenda. It is an Agenda of the people, by the people and for the people – and this, we believe, will ensure its success.

53. The future of humanity and of our planet lies in our hands. It lies also in the hands of today’s younger generation who will pass the torch to future generations. We have mapped the road to sustainable development; it will be for all of us to ensure that the journey is successful and its gains irreversible.

Sustainable Development Goals and targets

54. Following an inclusive process of intergovernmental negotiations, and based on the proposal of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals,¹⁵ which includes a chapeau contextualizing the latter, set out below are the Goals and targets which we have agreed.

55. The Sustainable Development Goals and targets are integrated and indivisible, global in nature and universally applicable, taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities. Targets are defined as aspirational and global, with each Government setting its own national targets guided by the global level of ambition but taking into account national circumstances. Each Government will also decide how these aspirational and global targets should be incorporated into national planning processes, policies and strategies. It is important to recognize the link between sustainable development and other relevant ongoing processes in the economic, social and environmental fields.

56. In deciding upon these Goals and targets, we recognize that each country faces specific challenges to achieve sustainable development, and we underscore the special challenges facing the most vulnerable countries and, in particular, African countries, least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, as well as the specific challenges facing the middle-income countries. Countries in situations of conflict also need special attention.

57. We recognize that baseline data for several of the targets remains unavailable, and we call for increased support for strengthening data collection and capacity-building in Member States, to develop national and global baselines where they do not yet exist. We commit to addressing this gap in data collection so as to better inform the measurement of progress, in particular for those targets below which do not have clear numerical targets.

58. We encourage ongoing efforts by States in other forums to address key issues which pose potential challenges to the implementation of our Agenda, and we respect the independent mandates of those processes. We intend that the Agenda and its implementation would support, and be without prejudice to, those other processes and the decisions taken therein.

59. We recognize that there are different approaches, visions, models and tools available to each country, in accordance with its national circumstances and priorities, to achieve sustainable development; and we reaffirm that planet Earth and its ecosystems are our common home and that “Mother Earth” is a common expression in a number of countries and regions.

¹⁵ Contained in the report of the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals ([A/68/970](#) and Corr.1; see also [A/68/970/Add.1–3](#)).

Sustainable Development Goals

- Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere
- Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
- Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
- Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
- Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
- Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
- Goal 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
- Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
- Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
- Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries
- Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
- Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
- Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts*
- Goal 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
- Goal 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
- Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
- Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

* Acknowledging that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is the primary international, intergovernmental forum for negotiating the global response to climate change.

Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere

1.1 By 2030, eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, currently measured as people living on less than \$1.25 a day

1.2 By 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions

1.3 Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable

1.4 By 2030, ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance

1.5 By 2030, build the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters

1.a Ensure significant mobilization of resources from a variety of sources, including through enhanced development cooperation, in order to provide adequate and predictable means for developing countries, in particular least developed countries, to implement programmes and policies to end poverty in all its dimensions

1.b Create sound policy frameworks at the national, regional and international levels, based on pro-poor and gender-sensitive development strategies, to support accelerated investment in poverty eradication actions

Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

2.1 By 2030, end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round

2.2 By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons

2.3 By 2030, double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment

2.4 By 2030, ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems, that strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters and that progressively improve land and soil quality

2.5 By 2020, maintain the genetic diversity of seeds, cultivated plants and farmed and domesticated animals and their related wild species, including through soundly

managed and diversified seed and plant banks at the national, regional and international levels, and promote access to and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge, as internationally agreed

2.a Increase investment, including through enhanced international cooperation, in rural infrastructure, agricultural research and extension services, technology development and plant and livestock gene banks in order to enhance agricultural productive capacity in developing countries, in particular least developed countries

2.b Correct and prevent trade restrictions and distortions in world agricultural markets, including through the parallel elimination of all forms of agricultural export subsidies and all export measures with equivalent effect, in accordance with the mandate of the Doha Development Round

2.c Adopt measures to ensure the proper functioning of food commodity markets and their derivatives and facilitate timely access to market information, including on food reserves, in order to help limit extreme food price volatility

Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

3.1 By 2030, reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births

3.2 By 2030, end preventable deaths of newborns and children under 5 years of age, with all countries aiming to reduce neonatal mortality to at least as low as 12 per 1,000 live births and under-5 mortality to at least as low as 25 per 1,000 live births

3.3 By 2030, end the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and neglected tropical diseases and combat hepatitis, water-borne diseases and other communicable diseases

3.4 By 2030, reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being

3.5 Strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, including narcotic drug abuse and harmful use of alcohol

3.6 By 2020, halve the number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents

3.7 By 2030, ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes

3.8 Achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all

3.9 By 2030, substantially reduce the number of deaths and illnesses from hazardous chemicals and air, water and soil pollution and contamination

3.a Strengthen the implementation of the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control in all countries, as appropriate

3.b Support the research and development of vaccines and medicines for the communicable and non-communicable diseases that primarily affect developing

countries, provide access to affordable essential medicines and vaccines, in accordance with the Doha Declaration on the TRIPS Agreement and Public Health, which affirms the right of developing countries to use to the full the provisions in the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights regarding flexibilities to protect public health, and, in particular, provide access to medicines for all

3.c Substantially increase health financing and the recruitment, development, training and retention of the health workforce in developing countries, especially in least developed countries and small island developing States

3.d Strengthen the capacity of all countries, in particular developing countries, for early warning, risk reduction and management of national and global health risks

Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

4.1 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes

4.2 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education

4.3 By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university

4.4 By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship

4.5 By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations

4.6 By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy

4.7 By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development

4.a Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all

4.b By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programmes, in developed countries and other developing countries

4.c By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States

Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

- 5.1 End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere
 - 5.2 Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation
 - 5.3 Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation
 - 5.4 Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate
 - 5.5 Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life
 - 5.6 Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences
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- 5.a Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws
 - 5.b Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women
 - 5.c Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels

Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

- 6.1 By 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all
- 6.2 By 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations
- 6.3 By 2030, improve water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating dumping and minimizing release of hazardous chemicals and materials, halving the proportion of untreated wastewater and substantially increasing recycling and safe reuse globally
- 6.4 By 2030, substantially increase water-use efficiency across all sectors and ensure sustainable withdrawals and supply of freshwater to address water scarcity and substantially reduce the number of people suffering from water scarcity
- 6.5 By 2030, implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate
- 6.6 By 2020, protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes

6.a By 2030, expand international cooperation and capacity-building support to developing countries in water- and sanitation-related activities and programmes, including water harvesting, desalination, water efficiency, wastewater treatment, recycling and reuse technologies

6.b Support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management

Goal 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

7.1 By 2030, ensure universal access to affordable, reliable and modern energy services

7.2 By 2030, increase substantially the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix

7.3 By 2030, double the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency

7.a By 2030, enhance international cooperation to facilitate access to clean energy research and technology, including renewable energy, energy efficiency and advanced and cleaner fossil-fuel technology, and promote investment in energy infrastructure and clean energy technology

7.b By 2030, expand infrastructure and upgrade technology for supplying modern and sustainable energy services for all in developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and landlocked developing countries, in accordance with their respective programmes of support

Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

8.1 Sustain per capita economic growth in accordance with national circumstances and, in particular, at least 7 per cent gross domestic product growth per annum in the least developed countries

8.2 Achieve higher levels of economic productivity through diversification, technological upgrading and innovation, including through a focus on high-value added and labour-intensive sectors

8.3 Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services

8.4 Improve progressively, through 2030, global resource efficiency in consumption and production and endeavour to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation, in accordance with the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production, with developed countries taking the lead

8.5 By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value

8.6 By 2020, substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training

8.7 Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms

8.8 Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment

8.9 By 2030, devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products

8.10 Strengthen the capacity of domestic financial institutions to encourage and expand access to banking, insurance and financial services for all

8.a Increase Aid for Trade support for developing countries, in particular least developed countries, including through the Enhanced Integrated Framework for Trade-related Technical Assistance to Least Developed Countries

8.b By 2020, develop and operationalize a global strategy for youth employment and implement the Global Jobs Pact of the International Labour Organization

Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

9.1 Develop quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure, including regional and transborder infrastructure, to support economic development and human well-being, with a focus on affordable and equitable access for all

9.2 Promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and, by 2030, significantly raise industry's share of employment and gross domestic product, in line with national circumstances, and double its share in least developed countries

9.3 Increase the access of small-scale industrial and other enterprises, in particular in developing countries, to financial services, including affordable credit, and their integration into value chains and markets

9.4 By 2030, upgrade infrastructure and retrofit industries to make them sustainable, with increased resource-use efficiency and greater adoption of clean and environmentally sound technologies and industrial processes, with all countries taking action in accordance with their respective capabilities

9.5 Enhance scientific research, upgrade the technological capabilities of industrial sectors in all countries, in particular developing countries, including, by 2030, encouraging innovation and substantially increasing the number of research and development workers per 1 million people and public and private research and development spending

9.a Facilitate sustainable and resilient infrastructure development in developing countries through enhanced financial, technological and technical support to African countries, least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States

9.b Support domestic technology development, research and innovation in developing countries, including by ensuring a conducive policy environment for, inter alia, industrial diversification and value addition to commodities

9.c Significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020

Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries

10.1 By 2030, progressively achieve and sustain income growth of the bottom 40 per cent of the population at a rate higher than the national average

10.2 By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status

10.3 Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard

10.4 Adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality

10.5 Improve the regulation and monitoring of global financial markets and institutions and strengthen the implementation of such regulations

10.6 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

10.7 Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies

10.a Implement the principle of special and differential treatment for developing countries, in particular least developed countries, in accordance with World Trade Organization agreements

10.b Encourage official development assistance and financial flows, including foreign direct investment, to States where the need is greatest, in particular least developed countries, African countries, small island developing States and landlocked developing countries, in accordance with their national plans and programmes

10.c By 2030, reduce to less than 3 per cent the transaction costs of migrant remittances and eliminate remittance corridors with costs higher than 5 per cent

Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

11.1 By 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums

11.2 By 2030, provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons

11.3 By 2030, enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries

11.4 Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage

11.5 By 2030, significantly reduce the number of deaths and the number of people affected and substantially decrease the direct economic losses relative to global gross domestic product caused by disasters, including water-related disasters, with a focus on protecting the poor and people in vulnerable situations

11.6 By 2030, reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, including by paying special attention to air quality and municipal and other waste management

11.7 By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities

11.a Support positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning

11.b By 2020, substantially increase the number of cities and human settlements adopting and implementing integrated policies and plans towards inclusion, resource efficiency, mitigation and adaptation to climate change, resilience to disasters, and develop and implement, in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, holistic disaster risk management at all levels

11.c Support least developed countries, including through financial and technical assistance, in building sustainable and resilient buildings utilizing local materials

Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

12.1 Implement the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns, all countries taking action, with developed countries taking the lead, taking into account the development and capabilities of developing countries

12.2 By 2030, achieve the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources

12.3 By 2030, halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses

12.4 By 2020, achieve the environmentally sound management of chemicals and all wastes throughout their life cycle, in accordance with agreed international frameworks, and significantly reduce their release to air, water and soil in order to minimize their adverse impacts on human health and the environment

12.5 By 2030, substantially reduce waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse

12.6 Encourage companies, especially large and transnational companies, to adopt sustainable practices and to integrate sustainability information into their reporting cycle

12.7 Promote public procurement practices that are sustainable, in accordance with national policies and priorities

12.8 By 2030, ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature

12.a Support developing countries to strengthen their scientific and technological capacity to move towards more sustainable patterns of consumption and production

12.b Develop and implement tools to monitor sustainable development impacts for sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products

12.c Rationalize inefficient fossil-fuel subsidies that encourage wasteful consumption by removing market distortions, in accordance with national circumstances, including by restructuring taxation and phasing out those harmful subsidies, where they exist, to reflect their environmental impacts, taking fully into account the specific needs and conditions of developing countries and minimizing the possible adverse impacts on their development in a manner that protects the poor and the affected communities

Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts*

13.1 Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries

13.2 Integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning

13.3 Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning

13.a Implement the commitment undertaken by developed-country parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to a goal of mobilizing jointly \$100 billion annually by 2020 from all sources to address the needs of developing countries in the context of meaningful mitigation actions and transparency on implementation and fully operationalize the Green Climate Fund through its capitalization as soon as possible

13.b Promote mechanisms for raising capacity for effective climate change-related planning and management in least developed countries and small island developing States, including focusing on women, youth and local and marginalized communities

Goal 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

14.1 By 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution

14.2 By 2020, sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems to avoid significant adverse impacts, including by strengthening their resilience, and take action for their restoration in order to achieve healthy and productive oceans

14.3 Minimize and address the impacts of ocean acidification, including through enhanced scientific cooperation at all levels

* Acknowledging that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is the primary international, intergovernmental forum for negotiating the global response to climate change.

14.4 By 2020, effectively regulate harvesting and end overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and destructive fishing practices and implement science-based management plans, in order to restore fish stocks in the shortest time feasible, at least to levels that can produce maximum sustainable yield as determined by their biological characteristics

14.5 By 2020, conserve at least 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, consistent with national and international law and based on the best available scientific information

14.6 By 2020, prohibit certain forms of fisheries subsidies which contribute to overcapacity and overfishing, eliminate subsidies that contribute to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and refrain from introducing new such subsidies, recognizing that appropriate and effective special and differential treatment for developing and least developed countries should be an integral part of the World Trade Organization fisheries subsidies negotiation¹⁶

14.7 By 2030, increase the economic benefits to small island developing States and least developed countries from the sustainable use of marine resources, including through sustainable management of fisheries, aquaculture and tourism

14.a Increase scientific knowledge, develop research capacity and transfer marine technology, taking into account the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission Criteria and Guidelines on the Transfer of Marine Technology, in order to improve ocean health and to enhance the contribution of marine biodiversity to the development of developing countries, in particular small island developing States and least developed countries

14.b Provide access for small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and markets

14.c Enhance the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources by implementing international law as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which provides the legal framework for the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources, as recalled in paragraph 158 of “The future we want”

Goal 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

15.1 By 2020, ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, in particular forests, wetlands, mountains and drylands, in line with obligations under international agreements

15.2 By 2020, promote the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests, halt deforestation, restore degraded forests and substantially increase afforestation and reforestation globally

15.3 By 2030, combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods, and strive to achieve a land degradation-neutral world

¹⁶ Taking into account ongoing World Trade Organization negotiations, the Doha Development Agenda and the Hong Kong ministerial mandate.

15.4 By 2030, ensure the conservation of mountain ecosystems, including their biodiversity, in order to enhance their capacity to provide benefits that are essential for sustainable development

15.5 Take urgent and significant action to reduce the degradation of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity and, by 2020, protect and prevent the extinction of threatened species

15.6 Promote fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and promote appropriate access to such resources, as internationally agreed

15.7 Take urgent action to end poaching and trafficking of protected species of flora and fauna and address both demand and supply of illegal wildlife products

15.8 By 2020, introduce measures to prevent the introduction and significantly reduce the impact of invasive alien species on land and water ecosystems and control or eradicate the priority species

15.9 By 2020, integrate ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning, development processes, poverty reduction strategies and accounts

15.a Mobilize and significantly increase financial resources from all sources to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity and ecosystems

15.b Mobilize significant resources from all sources and at all levels to finance sustainable forest management and provide adequate incentives to developing countries to advance such management, including for conservation and reforestation

15.c Enhance global support for efforts to combat poaching and trafficking of protected species, including by increasing the capacity of local communities to pursue sustainable livelihood opportunities

Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere

16.2 End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children

16.3 Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all

16.4 By 2030, significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organized crime

16.5 Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms

16.6 Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels

16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels

16.8 Broaden and strengthen the participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance

16.9 By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration

16.10 Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements

16.a Strengthen relevant national institutions, including through international cooperation, for building capacity at all levels, in particular in developing countries, to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime

16.b Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development

Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

Finance

17.1 Strengthen domestic resource mobilization, including through international support to developing countries, to improve domestic capacity for tax and other revenue collection

17.2 Developed countries to implement fully their official development assistance commitments, including the commitment by many developed countries to achieve the target of 0.7 per cent of gross national income for official development assistance (ODA/GNI) to developing countries and 0.15 to 0.20 per cent of ODA/GNI to least developed countries; ODA providers are encouraged to consider setting a target to provide at least 0.20 per cent of ODA/GNI to least developed countries

17.3 Mobilize additional financial resources for developing countries from multiple sources

17.4 Assist developing countries in attaining long-term debt sustainability through coordinated policies aimed at fostering debt financing, debt relief and debt restructuring, as appropriate, and address the external debt of highly indebted poor countries to reduce debt distress

17.5 Adopt and implement investment promotion regimes for least developed countries

Technology

17.6 Enhance North-South, South-South and triangular regional and international cooperation on and access to science, technology and innovation and enhance knowledge sharing on mutually agreed terms, including through improved coordination among existing mechanisms, in particular at the United Nations level, and through a global technology facilitation mechanism

17.7 Promote the development, transfer, dissemination and diffusion of environmentally sound technologies to developing countries on favourable terms, including on concessional and preferential terms, as mutually agreed

17.8 Fully operationalize the technology bank and science, technology and innovation capacity-building mechanism for least developed countries by 2017 and enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology

Capacity-building

17.9 Enhance international support for implementing effective and targeted capacity-building in developing countries to support national plans to implement all the Sustainable Development Goals, including through North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation

Trade

17.10 Promote a universal, rules-based, open, non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system under the World Trade Organization, including through the conclusion of negotiations under its Doha Development Agenda

17.11 Significantly increase the exports of developing countries, in particular with a view to doubling the least developed countries' share of global exports by 2020

17.12 Realize timely implementation of duty-free and quota-free market access on a lasting basis for all least developed countries, consistent with World Trade Organization decisions, including by ensuring that preferential rules of origin applicable to imports from least developed countries are transparent and simple, and contribute to facilitating market access

Systemic issues*Policy and institutional coherence*

17.13 Enhance global macroeconomic stability, including through policy coordination and policy coherence

17.14 Enhance policy coherence for sustainable development

17.15 Respect each country's policy space and leadership to establish and implement policies for poverty eradication and sustainable development

Multi-stakeholder partnerships

17.16 Enhance the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in all countries, in particular developing countries

17.17 Encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships

Data, monitoring and accountability

17.18 By 2020, enhance capacity-building support to developing countries, including for least developed countries and small island developing States, to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts

17.19 By 2030, build on existing initiatives to develop measurements of progress on sustainable development that complement gross domestic product, and support statistical capacity-building in developing countries

Means of implementation and the Global Partnership

60. We reaffirm our strong commitment to the full implementation of this new Agenda. We recognize that we will not be able to achieve our ambitious Goals and targets without a revitalized and enhanced Global Partnership and comparably ambitious means of implementation. The revitalized Global Partnership will facilitate an intensive global engagement in support of implementation of all the Goals and targets, bringing together Governments, civil society, the private sector, the United Nations system and other actors and mobilizing all available resources.

61. The Agenda's Goals and targets deal with the means required to realize our collective ambitions. The means of implementation targets under each Sustainable Development Goal and Goal 17, which are referred to above, are key to realizing our Agenda and are of equal importance with the other Goals and targets. We shall accord them equal priority in our implementation efforts and in the global indicator framework for monitoring our progress.

62. This Agenda, including the Sustainable Development Goals, can be met within the framework of a revitalized Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, supported by the concrete policies and actions outlined in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, which is an integral part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Addis Ababa Action Agenda supports, complements and helps to contextualize the 2030 Agenda's means of implementation targets. It relates to domestic public resources, domestic and international private business and finance, international development cooperation, international trade as an engine for development, debt and debt sustainability, addressing systemic issues and science, technology, innovation and capacity-building, and data, monitoring and follow-up.

63. Cohesive nationally owned sustainable development strategies, supported by integrated national financing frameworks, will be at the heart of our efforts. We reiterate that each country has primary responsibility for its own economic and social development and that the role of national policies and development strategies cannot be overemphasized. We will respect each country's policy space and leadership to implement policies for poverty eradication and sustainable development, while remaining consistent with relevant international rules and commitments. At the same time, national development efforts need to be supported by an enabling international economic environment, including coherent and mutually supporting world trade, monetary and financial systems, and strengthened and enhanced global economic governance. Processes to develop and facilitate the availability of appropriate knowledge and technologies globally, as well as capacity-building, are also critical. We commit to pursuing policy coherence and an enabling environment for sustainable development at all levels and by all actors, and to reinvigorating the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.

64. We support the implementation of relevant strategies and programmes of action, including the Istanbul Declaration and Programme of Action, the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway and the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014–2024, and reaffirm the importance of supporting the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the programme of the New Partnership for Africa's Development, all of which are integral to the new Agenda. We recognize the major challenge to the achievement of durable peace and sustainable development in countries in conflict and post-conflict situations.

65. We recognize that middle-income countries still face significant challenges to achieve sustainable development. In order to ensure that achievements made to date

are sustained, efforts to address ongoing challenges should be strengthened through the exchange of experiences, improved coordination, and better and focused support of the United Nations development system, the international financial institutions, regional organizations and other stakeholders.

66. We underscore that, for all countries, public policies and the mobilization and effective use of domestic resources, underscored by the principle of national ownership, are central to our common pursuit of sustainable development, including achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. We recognize that domestic resources are first and foremost generated by economic growth, supported by an enabling environment at all levels.

67. Private business activity, investment and innovation are major drivers of productivity, inclusive economic growth and job creation. We acknowledge the diversity of the private sector, ranging from micro-enterprises to cooperatives to multinationals. We call upon all businesses to apply their creativity and innovation to solving sustainable development challenges. We will foster a dynamic and well-functioning business sector, while protecting labour rights and environmental and health standards in accordance with relevant international standards and agreements and other ongoing initiatives in this regard, such as the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights¹⁷ and the labour standards of the International Labour Organization, the Convention on the Rights of the Child¹⁸ and key multilateral environmental agreements, for parties to those agreements.

68. International trade is an engine for inclusive economic growth and poverty reduction, and contributes to the promotion of sustainable development. We will continue to promote a universal, rules-based, open, transparent, predictable, inclusive, non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system under the World Trade Organization, as well as meaningful trade liberalization. We call upon all members of the World Trade Organization to redouble their efforts to promptly conclude the negotiations on the Doha Development Agenda.¹⁹ We attach great importance to providing trade-related capacity-building for developing countries, including African countries, least developed countries, landlocked developing countries, small island developing States and middle-income countries, including for the promotion of regional economic integration and interconnectivity.

69. We recognize the need to assist developing countries in attaining long-term debt sustainability through coordinated policies aimed at fostering debt financing, debt relief, debt restructuring and sound debt management, as appropriate. Many countries remain vulnerable to debt crises and some are in the midst of crises, including a number of least developed countries, small island developing States and some developed countries. We reiterate that debtors and creditors must work together to prevent and resolve unsustainable debt situations. Maintaining sustainable debt levels is the responsibility of the borrowing countries; however we acknowledge that lenders also have a responsibility to lend in a way that does not undermine a country's debt sustainability. We will support the maintenance of debt sustainability of those countries that have received debt relief and achieved sustainable debt levels.

¹⁷ [A/HRC/17/31](#), annex.

¹⁸ United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1577, No. 27531.

¹⁹ [A/C.2/56/7](#), annex.

70. We hereby launch a Technology Facilitation Mechanism which was established by the Addis Ababa Action Agenda in order to support the Sustainable Development Goals. The Technology Facilitation Mechanism will be based on a multi-stakeholder collaboration between Member States, civil society, the private sector, the scientific community, United Nations entities and other stakeholders and will be composed of a United Nations inter-agency task team on science, technology and innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals, a collaborative multi-stakeholder forum on science, technology and innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals and an online platform.

- The United Nations inter-agency task team on science, technology and innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals will promote coordination, coherence and cooperation within the United Nations system on science, technology and innovation-related matters, enhancing synergy and efficiency, in particular to enhance capacity-building initiatives. The task team will draw on existing resources and will work with 10 representatives from civil society, the private sector and the scientific community to prepare the meetings of the multi-stakeholder forum on science, technology and innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as in the development and operationalization of the online platform, including preparing proposals for the modalities for the forum and the online platform. The 10 representatives will be appointed by the Secretary-General, for periods of two years. The task team will be open to the participation of all United Nations agencies, funds and programmes and the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council and it will initially be composed of the entities that currently integrate the informal working group on technology facilitation, namely, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat, the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the International Telecommunication Union, the World Intellectual Property Organization and the World Bank.
- The online platform will be used to establish a comprehensive mapping of, and serve as a gateway for, information on existing science, technology and innovation initiatives, mechanisms and programmes, within and beyond the United Nations. The online platform will facilitate access to information, knowledge and experience, as well as best practices and lessons learned, on science, technology and innovation facilitation initiatives and policies. The online platform will also facilitate the dissemination of relevant open access scientific publications generated worldwide. The online platform will be developed on the basis of an independent technical assessment which will take into account best practices and lessons learned from other initiatives, within and beyond the United Nations, in order to ensure that it will complement, facilitate access to and provide adequate information on existing science, technology and innovation platforms, avoiding duplications and enhancing synergies.
- The multi-stakeholder forum on science, technology and innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals will be convened once a year, for a period of two days, to discuss science, technology and innovation cooperation around thematic areas for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, congregating all relevant stakeholders to actively contribute in their area of expertise. The forum will provide a venue for facilitating interaction,

matchmaking and the establishment of networks between relevant stakeholders and multi-stakeholder partnerships in order to identify and examine technology needs and gaps, including on scientific cooperation, innovation and capacity-building, and also in order to help to facilitate development, transfer and dissemination of relevant technologies for the Sustainable Development Goals. The meetings of the forum will be convened by the President of the Economic and Social Council before the meeting of the high-level political forum under the auspices of the Council or, alternatively, in conjunction with other forums or conferences, as appropriate, taking into account the theme to be considered and on the basis of a collaboration with the organizers of the other forums or conferences. The meetings of the forum will be co-chaired by two Member States and will result in a summary of discussions elaborated by the two co-Chairs, as an input to the meetings of the high-level political forum, in the context of the follow-up and review of the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda.

- The meetings of the high-level political forum will be informed by the summary of the multi-stakeholder forum. The themes for the subsequent multi-stakeholder forum on science, technology and innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals will be considered by the high-level political forum on sustainable development, taking into account expert inputs from the task team.

71. We reiterate that this Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals and targets, including the means of implementation, are universal, indivisible and interlinked.

Follow-up and review

72. We commit to engaging in systematic follow-up and review of the implementation of this Agenda over the next 15 years. A robust, voluntary, effective, participatory, transparent and integrated follow-up and review framework will make a vital contribution to implementation and will help countries to maximize and track progress in implementing this Agenda in order to ensure that no one is left behind.

73. Operating at the national, regional and global levels, it will promote accountability to our citizens, support effective international cooperation in achieving this Agenda and foster exchanges of best practices and mutual learning. It will mobilize support to overcome shared challenges and identify new and emerging issues. As this is a universal Agenda, mutual trust and understanding among all nations will be important.

74. Follow-up and review processes at all levels will be guided by the following principles:

(a) They will be voluntary and country-led, will take into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and will respect policy space and priorities. As national ownership is key to achieving sustainable development, the outcome from national-level processes will be the foundation for reviews at the regional and global levels, given that the global review will be primarily based on national official data sources.

(b) They will track progress in implementing the universal Goals and targets, including the means of implementation, in all countries in a manner which respects

their universal, integrated and interrelated nature and the three dimensions of sustainable development.

(c) They will maintain a longer-term orientation, identify achievements, challenges, gaps and critical success factors and support countries in making informed policy choices. They will help to mobilize the necessary means of implementation and partnerships, support the identification of solutions and best practices and promote the coordination and effectiveness of the international development system.

(d) They will be open, inclusive, participatory and transparent for all people and will support reporting by all relevant stakeholders.

(e) They will be people-centred, gender-sensitive, respect human rights and have a particular focus on the poorest, most vulnerable and those furthest behind.

(f) They will build on existing platforms and processes, where these exist, avoid duplication and respond to national circumstances, capacities, needs and priorities. They will evolve over time, taking into account emerging issues and the development of new methodologies, and will minimize the reporting burden on national administrations.

(g) They will be rigorous and based on evidence, informed by country-led evaluations and data which is high-quality, accessible, timely, reliable and disaggregated by income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migration status, disability and geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts.

(h) They will require enhanced capacity-building support for developing countries, including the strengthening of national data systems and evaluation programmes, particularly in African countries, least developed countries, small island developing States, landlocked developing countries and middle-income countries.

(i) They will benefit from the active support of the United Nations system and other multilateral institutions.

75. The Goals and targets will be followed up and reviewed using a set of global indicators. These will be complemented by indicators at the regional and national levels which will be developed by Member States, in addition to the outcomes of work undertaken for the development of the baselines for those targets where national and global baseline data does not yet exist. The global indicator framework, to be developed by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators, will be agreed by the Statistical Commission by March 2016 and adopted thereafter by the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly, in line with existing mandates. This framework will be simple yet robust, address all Sustainable Development Goals and targets, including for means of implementation, and preserve the political balance, integration and ambition contained therein.

76. We will support developing countries, particularly African countries, least developed countries, small island developing States and landlocked developing countries, in strengthening the capacity of national statistical offices and data systems to ensure access to high-quality, timely, reliable and disaggregated data. We will promote transparent and accountable scaling-up of appropriate public-private cooperation to exploit the contribution to be made by a wide range of data, including earth observation and geospatial information, while ensuring national ownership in supporting and tracking progress.

77. We commit to fully engage in conducting regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the subnational, national, regional and global levels. We will draw as far as possible on the existing network of follow-up and review institutions and mechanisms. National reports will allow assessments of progress and identify challenges at the regional and global level. Along with regional dialogues and global reviews, they will inform recommendations for follow-up at various levels.

National level

78. We encourage all Member States to develop as soon as practicable ambitious national responses to the overall implementation of this Agenda. These can support the transition to the Sustainable Development Goals and build on existing planning instruments, such as national development and sustainable development strategies, as appropriate.

79. We also encourage Member States to conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and subnational levels which are country-led and country-driven. Such reviews should draw on contributions from indigenous peoples, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders, in line with national circumstances, policies and priorities. National parliaments as well as other institutions can also support these processes.

Regional level

80. Follow-up and review at the regional and subregional levels can, as appropriate, provide useful opportunities for peer learning, including through voluntary reviews, sharing of best practices and discussion on shared targets. We welcome in this respect the cooperation of regional and subregional commissions and organizations. Inclusive regional processes will draw on national-level reviews and contribute to follow-up and review at the global level, including at the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

81. Recognizing the importance of building on existing follow-up and review mechanisms at the regional level and allowing adequate policy space, we encourage all Member States to identify the most suitable regional forum in which to engage. United Nations regional commissions are encouraged to continue supporting Member States in this regard.

Global level

82. The high-level political forum will have a central role in overseeing a network of follow-up and review processes at the global level, working coherently with the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and other relevant organs and forums, in accordance with existing mandates. It will facilitate sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned, and provide political leadership, guidance and recommendations for follow-up. It will promote system-wide coherence and coordination of sustainable development policies. It should ensure that the Agenda remains relevant and ambitious and should focus on the assessment of progress, achievements and challenges faced by developed and developing countries as well as new and emerging issues. Effective linkages will be made with the follow-up and review arrangements of all relevant United Nations conferences and processes, including on least developed countries, small island developing States and landlocked developing countries.

83. Follow-up and review at the high-level political forum will be informed by an annual progress report on the Sustainable Development Goals to be prepared by the Secretary-General in cooperation with the United Nations system, based on the

global indicator framework and data produced by national statistical systems and information collected at the regional level. The high-level political forum will also be informed by the *Global Sustainable Development Report*, which shall strengthen the science-policy interface and could provide a strong evidence-based instrument to support policymakers in promoting poverty eradication and sustainable development. We invite the President of the Economic and Social Council to conduct a process of consultations on the scope, methodology and frequency of the global report as well as its relation to the progress report, the outcome of which should be reflected in the ministerial declaration of the session of the high-level political forum in 2016.

84. The high-level political forum, under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, shall carry out regular reviews, in line with General Assembly resolution 67/290 of 9 July 2013. Reviews will be voluntary, while encouraging reporting, and include developed and developing countries as well as relevant United Nations entities and other stakeholders, including civil society and the private sector. They shall be State-led, involving ministerial and other relevant high-level participants. They shall provide a platform for partnerships, including through the participation of major groups and other relevant stakeholders.

85. Thematic reviews of progress on the Sustainable Development Goals, including cross-cutting issues, will also take place at the high-level political forum. These will be supported by reviews by the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council and other intergovernmental bodies and forums which should reflect the integrated nature of the Goals as well as the interlinkages between them. They will engage all relevant stakeholders and, where possible, feed into, and be aligned with, the cycle of the high-level political forum.

86. We welcome, as outlined in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the dedicated follow-up and review for the financing for development outcomes as well as all the means of implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals which is integrated with the follow-up and review framework of this Agenda. The intergovernmentally agreed conclusions and recommendations of the annual Economic and Social Council forum on financing for development will be fed into the overall follow-up and review of the implementation of this Agenda in the high-level political forum.

87. Meeting every four years under the auspices of the General Assembly, the high-level political forum will provide high-level political guidance on the Agenda and its implementation, identify progress and emerging challenges and mobilize further actions to accelerate implementation. The next high-level political forum under the auspices of the General Assembly will be held in 2019, with the cycle of meetings thus reset, in order to maximize coherence with the quadrennial comprehensive policy review process.

88. We also stress the importance of system-wide strategic planning, implementation and reporting in order to ensure coherent and integrated support to the implementation of the new Agenda by the United Nations development system. The relevant governing bodies should take action to review such support to implementation and to report on progress and obstacles. We welcome the ongoing dialogue in the Economic and Social Council on the longer-term positioning of the United Nations development system and look forward to taking action on these issues, as appropriate.

89. The high-level political forum will support participation in follow-up and review processes by the major groups and other relevant stakeholders in line with resolution 67/290. We call upon those actors to report on their contribution to the implementation of the Agenda.

90. We request the Secretary-General, in consultation with Member States, to prepare a report, for consideration at the seventieth session of the General Assembly in preparation for the 2016 meeting of the high-level political forum, which outlines critical milestones towards coherent, efficient and inclusive follow-up and review at the global level. The report should include a proposal on the organizational arrangements for State-led reviews at the high-level political forum under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, including recommendations on voluntary common reporting guidelines. It should clarify institutional responsibilities and provide guidance on annual themes, on a sequence of thematic reviews, and on options for periodic reviews for the high-level political forum.

91. We reaffirm our unwavering commitment to achieving this Agenda and utilizing it to the full to transform our world for the better by 2030.

*4th plenary meeting
25 September 2015*

**Instruments mentioned in the section entitled
“Sustainable Development Goals and targets”**

World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 2302, No. 41032)

Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 (resolution 69/283, annex II)

United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1833, No. 31363)

“The future we want” (resolution 66/288, annex)

ARTICLE

Why Do States Adhere to the Sustainable Development Goals?

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Abstract

The rationale behind state support for, and obedience to, normative rules and obligations has long been a topic of international law scholarship discourse. What has yet to be fully established, however, is why virtually all states have agreed to adhere to a seemingly novel global paradigm with ambitious yet non-binding objectives – the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This article identifies six factors as contributing to the influencing power of the SDGs – namely, the role of law, particularly inter- and transnational law, the legitimacy of the framework, the notion of reciprocity, reputational concerns, national self-interest, and the moral duty to address the shared global challenges of sustainable development.

By exploring their strengths and limitations through several theoretical frameworks (including Harold Koh's theory of transnational legal processes, Thomas Franck's theory of legitimacy, and Ryan Goodman and Derek Jinks' three mechanisms of social influence), this article argues that the combination of these factors motivates voluntary state commitment, reporting, and cooperation under the SDG framework and that, overall, the SDGs offer a versatile lens to explore the different motives for state adherence to a soft law framework in the inter- and transnational legal spheres.

Keywords: Sustainable development; United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); International law; Transnational lawmaking; State compliance

1. Introduction

The concept of sustainable development has undergone considerable evolution since its first explicit articulation in the 1987 Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, 'Our Common Future', which described 'sustainable development' as development that meets the needs of present and future generations by balancing social and economic advancement with environmental protection.¹ The realization of this conceptualization of development has long been an aspiration and challenge for international law and governance. With the rapid proliferation of intersecting environmental crises, achieving the ecological and social justice ambitions of

¹ United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), 'Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future', 4 Aug. 1987, UN Doc. A/42/427, available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/5987our-common-future.pdf>.

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sustainable development has never been so urgent. In response to these mounting challenges, the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted in 2015.² Intended to guide domestic and global decision making for at least 15 years, the framework aspires to take ‘bold and transformative steps’ to realize sustainable development and has permeated many aspects of social organization, including global governance, international relations, and inter- and transnational law.³ While the SDGs do not constitute binding obligations, it is evident that their elaboration and ongoing implementation were intentionally designed to support and complement existing norms and principles of international law and policy. They may, therefore, act as a means of measuring domestic performance outcomes, indicating the importance and quality of certain state behaviour and commitments against SDG objectives. These normative, albeit soft, alignments raise fundamental questions concerning the influencing powers of the SDGs and the possible reasoning behind state adherence to this framework.

When seeking to characterize ‘adherence’ in this context, the Cambridge Dictionary definition of adherence might be used, described as ‘the fact of someone behaving exactly according to rules, beliefs, etc.’, and offers synonyms such as ‘obedience’, ‘attachment’, and ‘loyalty’.⁴ A common thread between these terms is the idea of commitment, which is a central element that must be considered when exploring why states sign up to particular normative frameworks, and in this case why states agree to alter their behaviour and engage in transnational cooperation to realize the SDGs. In this context, it would be inappropriate to refer to matters of strict compliance;⁵ this article therefore focuses on the notion of adherence to this non-binding framework. To understand the authority of the SDGs, six potential factors are identified to elucidate why virtually all states have agreed to adhere to a set of aspirational goals.

Insights are drawn from theories of state behaviour and compliance with international law. The analysis extends beyond binding treaties, permitting consideration of broad, dynamic, and varied dimensions of the international order. Franck, for example, includes the spectrum of rules that exist in the international field (including UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolutions) when discussing how and to what extent states obey existing international rules.⁶ Koh also acknowledges how international law has evolved to include a diverse range of hard and soft rules in efforts to regulate state behaviour.⁷

² UNGA Resolution 70/1, ‘Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’, 21 Oct. 2015, UN Doc. A/RES/70/1, available at: https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_70_1_E.pdf (2030 Agenda).

³ Ibid., Preamble.

⁴ ‘Meaning of Adherence in English’, *Cambridge Dictionary*, available at: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/adherence>; ‘Synonyms and Antonyms of Adherence in English’, *Cambridge Dictionary*, available at: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/thesaurus/adherence>.

⁵ Compliance can be described as the way in which international law controls state conduct and interactions; see A.T. Guzman, ‘A Compliance-Based Theory of International Law’ (2002) 90(6) *California Law Review*, pp. 1823–87, at 1826, 1830.

⁶ T.M. Franck, *The Power of Legitimacy Among Nations* (Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 41–2.

⁷ Koh remarks that ‘[i]nternational law now comprises a complex blend of customary, positive, declarative, and “soft” law, which seeks not simply to ratify existing practice, but to elevate it’: H.H. Koh, ‘Why Do Nations Obey International Law?’ (1997) 106(8) *Yale Law Journal*, pp. 2599–659, at 2630–1.

Past explorations, at times, have been disparaging of soft law,⁸ or indeed excluded such from ‘the theoretical framework of international legal scholars’.⁹ As a result of such omissions, these works fail to provide a full picture of the intricate and interactive nature of international law. Recognizing the role of non-binding rules, Goodman and Jinks observe that ‘under certain conditions, “soft law” mechanisms will be more effective in establishing durable norms’ than binding obligations.¹⁰ While appreciating the differences between binding and non-binding rules, it has been said that soft law can ‘support a similar normative discourse’, and be used by campaigners to advance particular causes and to hold governments to account.¹¹ Thus, existing dynamics suggest that it is possible to adapt such theories in exploring the influence of soft law instruments such as the SDGs.

Section 2 of this article begins by briefly introducing the SDG framework and its relationship with international law before examining the possible reasons for state adherence to the SDGs in Section 3. These include the legality embedded within the SDGs (3.1), the legitimacy of the framework (3.2), the notion of reciprocity (3.3), reputational motivations (3.3), national self-interest (3.4), and the moral duty to address the common challenges of humankind (3.5). Three principal theoretical frameworks are employed to explore these factors. Firstly, Harold Koh’s theory of transnational legal processes as interactive engagement is used to examine state obedience to the framework and its associated mechanisms. Secondly, Thomas Franck’s theory of legitimacy is applied to the SDGs. Using his four identified dimensions of rule legitimacy, the degree of alignment between the framework and legitimacy is discussed. Lastly, Ryan Goodman and Derek Jinks’ three mechanisms of social influence are analyzed, charting parallels with the SDG data mechanisms. Section 4 of the article concludes with a brief reflection on the versatility demonstrated by the SDGs as a novel mechanism of global governance and transnational rule making.

2. The SDGs

The SDG framework, composed of 17 goals and 169 targets, outlines aspirational objectives of unprecedented magnitude, with the general ethos of the goals being that ‘no one will be left behind’.¹² Incorporating lessons learned from the preceding Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), states committed under the SDGs to take unified steps to end social inequalities, combat the climate crisis, and promote ecological conservation – monumental objectives that require expansive and long-term changes across all sectors of society to be achieved. The SDGs embody an institutional cosmopolitan approach to sustainable development: states, as individual nations and as an international community, are committed to the realization of common objectives

⁸ See K.W. Abbott & D. Snidal, ‘Hard and Soft Law in International Governance’ (2000) 54(3) *Legalization and World Politics*, pp. 421–56, at 422–3.

⁹ Guzman, n. 5 above, pp. 1879–81.

¹⁰ R. Goodman & D. Jinks, ‘How to Influence States: Socialization and International Human Rights Law’ (2004) University of Chicago Public Law & Legal Theory Working Paper No. 62, pp. 2–55, at 46.

¹¹ Abbott & Snidal, n. 8 above, p. 452.

¹² 2030 Agenda, Preamble.

that serve to benefit all people, working under the institutions created by the framework.¹³ Ebbesson and Hey classify this normatively as an ‘innovative and bold cosmopolitan understanding of sustainable development’, as it focuses on the well-being and interests of the individual.¹⁴ Applicable to all states, the SDGs are to be implemented through collaborative means while recognizing differences in national capacity, ultimately grounded in the ‘spirit of strengthened global solidarity’.¹⁵ All 193 UN member states signed up to adhere to the SDGs and report on domestic progress made towards their realization.¹⁶

When considering their normative relationships, the SDGs may align well with international law. For example, paragraph 8 of the 2030 Agenda emulates the importance of human rights standards, non-discrimination norms, and the rule of law for sustainable development:

We envisage a world of universal respect for human rights and human dignity, the rule of law, justice, equality and non-discrimination; of respect for race, ethnicity and cultural diversity; and of equal opportunity permitting the full realisation of human potential and contributing to shared prosperity.¹⁷

By endorsing this so-called transformative agenda, states reiterate their ‘commitment to international law’ and recognize the normatively reinforcing role that the SDGs play: while the SDGs did not seek to create any strict obligations as such, the framework is ‘to be implemented in a manner that is consistent with the rights and obligations of States under international law’.¹⁸ Indeed, many SDG targets mimic existing international provisions. In the context of SDG 14 (Life Below Water), Huck demonstrates that obligations of international marine law are ‘embodied’ in the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda.¹⁹ She further notes that the objectives and indicators of SDG 14 in addition to ‘its embeddedness in [the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea] and maritime law regimes reveals to a certain extent how a sustainably managed ocean or an ecologically sound marine resource is constituted’.²⁰

Likewise, SDG 15.6, which seeks to ‘[p]romote fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and promote appropriate access to such resources’,²¹ is consistent with the objectives of the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits

¹³ See T.W. Pogge, ‘Cosmopolitanism and Sovereignty’ (1992) 103(1) *Ethics*, pp. 48–75.

¹⁴ J. Ebbesson & E. Hey, ‘Introduction: The Sustainable Development Goals, Agenda 2030, and International Law’, in J. Ebbesson & E. Hey (eds), *The Cambridge Handbook of the Sustainable Development Goals and International Law* (Cambridge University Press, 2022), pp. 1–49, at 2.

¹⁵ 2030 Agenda, Preamble.

¹⁶ UN, ‘Historic New Sustainable Development Agenda Unanimously Adopted by 193 UN Members’, 25 Sept. 2015, available at: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2015/09/historic-new-sustainable-development-agenda-unanimously-adopted-by-193-un-members>.

¹⁷ 2030 Agenda, para. 8.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 18.

¹⁹ W. Huck, *Sustainable Development Goals Article-by-Article Commentary* (Nomos, 2022), p. 527.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 549. See pp. 526–34 for more discussions on SDG 14 and alignments in international law.

²¹ 2030 Agenda, SDG 15.

Arising from their Utilization (Nagoya Protocol)²² to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).²³ The ambition to address issues of illegal poaching and trafficking of protected plants and animals established by SDG 15.7 aligns with the regulatory processes and protective provisions of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).²⁴ Clear parallels can also be made with the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, including between SDG 15.1 and Aichi Target 11, SDG 15.8 and Aichi Target 9, and SDG 15.9 and Aichi Target 2. In fact, the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical, and Technological Advice of the CBD has noted that '[m]ost of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets are well reflected' in the SDGs.²⁵

Altogether, the 2030 Agenda could be seen to represent a non-traditional method of rule making.²⁶ International law has long used top-down approaches to establish binding obligations, and the universal adoption of this novel paradigm may indicate a shift towards 'shared state responsibility and collective values over strictly binding systems' to address demanding multifaceted sustainable development challenges.²⁷

2.1. SDG Mechanisms

Reporting

States are primarily responsible for monitoring SDG progress: evidence of state adherence can thus be found in their reporting behaviour as well as the degree of SDG internalization within domestic governance structures and legal systems. The framework recognizes that good governance and strong institutions at all levels are essential for sustainable development efforts.²⁸ As outlined by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), good governance embodies eight fundamental characteristics, including the rule of law.²⁹ This dimension of good governance is of particular interest as it aligns with the underlying basis of the legal system in addition to the overall objective of SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), specifically target 16.3.³⁰ A total of 248 indicators were developed to act as follow-up and review mechanisms. Intended to be a 'simple yet robust' system,

²² Nagoya (Japan), 29 Oct. 2010, in force 12 Oct. 2014, available at: <https://www.cbd.int/abs/doc/protocol/nagoya-protocol-en.pdf>.

²³ Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), 5 June 1992, in force 29 Dec. 1993, available at: <https://www.cbd.int/convention>.

²⁴ Washington, DC (US), 3 Mar. 1973, in force 1 July 1975, available at: <http://www.cites.org/eng/disc/text.php>; see, e.g., provisions under Art. VIII.

²⁵ CBD Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice, 'Biodiversity and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', 12 Sept. 2017, UN Doc. CBD/SBSTTA/21/2/Add.1, para. 4, <https://www.cbd.int/doc/meetings/sbstta/sbstta-21/official/sbstta-21-02-add1-en.pdf>.

²⁶ Multiple edited volumes have been published exploring the SDG–international law relationship; see, e.g., Ebbesson & Hey, n. 14 above; D. French & L.J. Kotzé (eds), *Sustainable Development Goals: Law, Theory and Implementation* (Edward Elgar, 2018).

²⁷ N. Guiry, 'International Law & The Sustainable Development Goals' (2024) 7 *The Boolean*, pp. 1–5, at 3.

²⁸ 2030 Agenda, para. 35, SDG 16.

²⁹ UNESCAP, 'What is Good Governance?', 10 July 2009, available at: <https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/good-governance.pdf>.

³⁰ SDG 16.3: 'Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all'.

the indicators correspond to all goals and targets at the regional, national, and global levels, allowing data to be compiled and measured.³¹ Concurrently, states began to carry out voluntary national reviews (VNRs) in 2016 as a method of recording national SDG progress, which includes ‘the means of implementation, in all countries in a manner which respects their universal, integrated and interrelated nature and the three dimensions of sustainable development’.³² By 2023, 188 countries had presented VNRs to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) and many countries have embedded the 2030 Agenda into domestic development plans.³³ Despite the lack of dispute-resolution mechanisms associated with the framework or sanctions for failure to adhere to the SDGs, the framework has been, to a degree, influential on state behaviour.

Adherence

Adherence to the SDGs is built upon political collaboration and transparency rather than a system of punitive action. The lack of existing enforcement mechanisms has been described as an intentional design characteristic of the SDGs. According to Donald, states adopted a purposefully ‘narrow’ interpretation of ‘accountability’ and resisted its inclusion because of the non-binding character of the framework.³⁴ SDG 16 and SDG 17 (Partnership for the Goals) seek to strengthen domestic implementation of the framework but do not provide much elaboration on how specifically this would be achieved.³⁵ Implementation and accountability, therefore, lie in the hands of state governments and their citizens and in the follow-up and review mechanisms of the framework. Nevertheless, evidence of state adherence to the SDGs can be found, particularly if one investigates the VNR outputs.

To date, over 370 VNR-related state documents have been submitted.³⁶ The latest VNRs Synthesis Report shows how the SDGs have had an impact on state behaviour: it states that every VNR received in 2023 outlined ‘Government actions to integrate the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs into their national development plans and strategies or equivalent policy frameworks’.³⁷ Brief examples of actionable changes taken in domestic settings to align with the 2030 Agenda include the adoption by the Swedish government of a bill (Govt Bill 2019/2020:188) to guide and enhance national

³¹ 2030 Agenda, paras 47–8, 75.

³² UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, ‘Synthesis of Voluntary National Reviews: 2016’, pp. 10–1, available at: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/127761701030E_2016_VNR_Synthesis_Report_ver3.pdf.

³³ UN, ‘The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023: Special Edition’, 10 July 2023, p. 49, available at: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2023>; UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, ‘2022 Voluntary National Reviews Synthesis Report’, pp. 10–1, available at: <https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/VNR%202022%20Synthesis%20Report.pdf>.

³⁴ K. Donald, ‘Promising the World: Accountability and the SDGs’, *Health and Human Rights Journal*, 27 Jan. 2016, available at: <https://www.hhrjournal.org/2016/01/promising-the-world-accountability-and-the-sdgs>.

³⁵ 2030 Agenda, SDG 17.18–19.

³⁶ See HLPF, ‘Countries Who Have Presented Their Voluntary National Reviews’, available at: <https://hlpf.un.org/countries>.

³⁷ HLPF, ‘Voluntary National Reviews Synthesis Report: 2023’, p. 10, available at: https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-12/2023_VNR_Synthesis_Report.pdf.

SDG implementation, putting particular emphasis on human rights (including the rights of the child and gender equality).³⁸ In Scotland, a National Performance Framework (NPF) has been used to translate the SDGs into implementational actions at regional, local, and national levels alongside monitoring the progression of objectives, with each national outcome linked to its corresponding SDG(s) and accompanied by a national indicator.³⁹ The NPF also directly informs corresponding strategies and programmes, including Scotland's Forestry Strategy 2019–2029,⁴⁰ the Environment Strategy for Scotland,⁴¹ and the Climate Ready Scotland: Climate Change Adaptation Programme 2019–2024, the latter of which was 'derived' from the NPF and the SDGs.⁴² Lastly, Norway designated the Ministry of Local Government and Modernization responsible for coordinating domestic SDG implementation in 2020, an appointment that is credited for enhancing 'cross-sectoral cooperation and a holistic approach to sustainable development'.⁴³

Despite evidence of domestic integration, the framework is criticized for having limited normative and institutional impacts.⁴⁴ Whether states are truly adhering to the SDGs can therefore be questioned. The overwhelming majority of states may have committed to the SDGs but many are far-removed from comprehensively realizing their objectives.⁴⁵ That said, in the light of near-universal state support for these

³⁸ Sweden, 'Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', 10 June 2021, pp. 11–2, available at: https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/vnrs/2021/279582021_VNR_Report_Sweden.pdf.

³⁹ Scottish Government, 'Scotland's National Performance Framework: Our Purpose, Values and National Outcomes', available at: https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/sites/default/files/documents/NPF_A4_Booklet.pdf; United Kingdom, 'Voluntary National Review of Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals', 26 June 2019, p. 11, available at: https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/vnrs/2021/23678UK_12072019_UK_Voluntary_National_Review_2019.pdf.

⁴⁰ Scottish Government, 'Scotland's Forestry Strategy 2019–2029', 5 Feb. 2019, p. 17, available at: <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/strategy-plan/2019/02/scotlands-forestry-strategy-2019-2029/documents/scotlands-forestry-strategy-2019-2029/scotlands-forestry-strategy-2019-2029/govscot%3Adocument/scotlands-forestry-strategy-2019-2029.pdf>.

⁴¹ Scottish Government, 'The Environmental Strategy for Scotland: Vision and Outcomes', 25 Feb. 2020, p. 6, available at: <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/strategy-plan/2020/02/environment-strategy-scotland-vision-outcomes/documents/environment-strategy-scotland-vision-outcomes/environment-strategy-scotland-vision-outcomes/govscot%3Adocument/environment-strategy-scotland-vision-outcomes.pdf>.

⁴² Scottish Government, 'Climate Ready Scotland: Second Scottish Climate Change Adaptation Programme 2019–2024', 23 Sept. 2019, p. 10, available at: <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/strategy-plan/2019/09/climate-ready-scotland-second-scottish-climate-change-adaptation-programme-2019-2024/documents/climate-ready-scotland-second-scottish-climate-change-adaptation-programme-2019-2024/climate-ready-scotland-second-scottish-climate-change-adaptation-programme-2019-2024/govscot%3Adocument/climate-ready-scotland-second-scottish-climate-change-adaptation-programme-2019-2024.pdf>.

⁴³ Norway, 'Voluntary National Review 2021 Norway: Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', 2021, p. 22, available at: https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/vnrs/2021/28233Voluntary_National_Review_2021_Norway.pdf.

⁴⁴ F. Biermann et al., 'Scientific Evidence on the Political Impact of the Sustainable Development Goals' (2022) 5 *Nature Sustainability*, pp. 795–800.

⁴⁵ Anonymous, 'Get the Sustainable Development Goals Back on Track' (2020) 557(7788) *Nature*, pp. 7–8; UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2021* (UN, 2021), pp. 2–7, available at: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2021/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2021.pdf>.

non-binding goals, the influence of the SDGs on state and non-state actors cannot be denied. The next section identifies several, potentially overlapping, elements that contribute to the power and legitimacy of the framework.

3. Factors Influencing State Adherence to the SDGs

3.1. The Role of Law

The rationality behind state compliance with international law has long been a topic of debate in legal scholarship.⁴⁶ Chayes and Chayes believe that when nations ratify international agreements, ‘they alter their behavior, their relationships, and their expectations of one another over time in accordance with its terms’.⁴⁷ Some scholars argue that power is the overriding influence on state behaviour, and not the rule of law or the normativity enshrined in international law.⁴⁸ While law cannot be separated from our ‘social reality’,⁴⁹ to dismiss its normative influence on state behaviour, particularly in the context of the SDGs, fails to recognize the power of the ‘principled ideas’ of international law.⁵⁰ While perceived by some as an ‘alternative to international law’,⁵¹ the normativity of the SDGs is debated. Before proceeding, the discourse regarding the effectiveness, or lack thereof, of soft law must be acknowledged. To do so, the nature of such instruments must first be established:

Soft law instruments range from treaties, but which include only soft obligations (‘legal soft law’), to non-binding or voluntary resolutions and codes of conduct formulated and accepted by international and regional organizations (‘non-legal soft law’), to statements prepared by individuals in a non-governmental capacity, but which purport to lay down international principles.⁵²

Said to ‘offer a focal point for convergence’,⁵³ soft law is believed to have had considerable impacts on international law, especially regarding the development of

⁴⁶ Koh, n. 7 above; A. Chayes & A.H. Chayes, *The New Sovereignty: Compliance with International Regulatory Agreements* (Harvard University Press, 1995); E.A. Posner, ‘Do States Have a Moral Obligation to Obey International Law?’ (2003) 55 *Stanford Law Review*, pp. 1901–19.

⁴⁷ A. Chayes & A.H. Chayes, ‘On Compliance’ (1993) 47(2) *International Organization*, pp. 175–205, at 176.

⁴⁸ B.A. Simmons, ‘Compliance with International Agreements’ (1998) 1 *Annual Review of Political Science*, pp. 75–93, at 79–80.

⁴⁹ H. Bull, ‘International Law and International Order’, in H. Bull (ed.), *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (Red Globe Press London, 2nd edn, 1977), p. 123.

⁵⁰ See O.A. Hathaway, ‘Between Power and Principle: An Integrated Theory of International Law’ (2005) 72(2) *University of Chicago Law Review*, pp. 469–536.

⁵¹ L.-A. Duvic-Paoli, ‘From Aspirational Politics to Soft Law? Exploring the International Legal Effects of Sustainable Development Goal 7 on Affordable and Clean Energy’ (2021) 22(1) *Melbourne Journal of International Law*, pp. 1–23, at 3.

⁵² C.M. Chinkin, ‘The Challenge of Soft Law: Development and Change in International Law’ (1989) 38(4) *International and Comparative Law Quarterly*, pp. 850–66, at 851.

⁵³ A.-M. Slaughter, *A New World Order* (Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 180.

international environmental norms and principles.⁵⁴ This, however, is not a universally held perspective. Klabbers, for example, disputes the ability of soft law to contribute to the application of binding law and argues that it is not only unnecessary but potentially harmful to the rule of law.⁵⁵ There are also concerns surrounding both the theoretical complexities (whether soft law is conceivably a type of law at all or if it transcends dimensions as ‘non-law’) and the practical effects of soft law (whether it can actually be enforced).⁵⁶ These criticisms, however, do not recognize the flexibility offered by soft law, including its adaptability to change and its role in facilitating state agreement.⁵⁷

As the dichotomy of hard and soft law continues to be a source of discussion, similar debates are ongoing concerning the SDGs and their position within the legal order. French, for example, argues that the SDGs cannot be categorized as law as they ‘remain conceptually and programmatically indeterminate’,⁵⁸ whereas Duvic-Paoli is more receptive to the influencing legal power of the SDGs.⁵⁹ Castillo-Winckels argues that the framework does, in fact, have the ability to shape domestic frameworks, given that it is underpinned by international norms and treaties.⁶⁰ Bantekas and Akestoridi have gone so far as to classify the SDGs as ‘political normativity’, as each goal and target was meticulously negotiated by state actors before receiving near-universal approval; thus embedding ‘political commitments’ and domestic priorities into the framework, which consequently ‘allows the parties to implement the SDGs as if they were based on normative commitments’.⁶¹ Acknowledging the variety of opinions concerning the credibility, or lack thereof, of soft law and the normative status of the SDGs, it is necessary to examine how different fields of law may be interacting with the 2030 Agenda and consequently affecting the framework’s authority.

International law

It could be argued that the interrelationship between international law and the SDGs is an example of a novel regime interaction. As mentioned, the goals are said to be guided by international law and implemented in accordance with international law

⁵⁴ See P.-M. Dupuy, ‘Soft Law and the International Law of the Environment’ (1991) 12(2) *Michigan Journal of International Law*, pp. 420–35; W. Scholtz & M. Barnard, ‘The Environment and the Sustainable Development Goals: “We Are on a Road to Nowhere”’, in French & Kotzé, n. 26 above, pp. 222–49.

⁵⁵ See J. Klabbers, ‘The Redundancy of Soft Law’ (1996) 65(2) *Nordic Journal of International Law*, pp. 167–82; J. Klabbers, ‘The Undesirability of Soft Law’ (1998) 67(4) *Nordic Journal of International Law*, pp. 381–91.

⁵⁶ F. Weiss, ‘The Device of Soft Law: Some Theoretical Underpinnings’, in F. Weiss & A.J. Kammel (eds), *The Changing Landscape of Global Financial Governance and the Role of Soft Law* (Brill Nijhoff, 2015), pp. 47–58, at 53.

⁵⁷ A. Boyle & C. Chinkin, *The Making of International Law* (Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 214.

⁵⁸ D. French, ‘The Global Goals: Formalism Foregone, Contested Legality and “Re-imaginings” of International Law’, in Z. Yihdego, M.G. Desta & F. Merso (eds), *Ethiopian Yearbook of International Law 2016* (Springer, 2017), pp. 151–78, at 151.

⁵⁹ Duvic-Paoli, n. 51 above.

⁶⁰ N.S. Castillo-Winckels, ‘How the Sustainable Development Goals Promote a New Conception of Ocean Commons Governance’, in French & Kotzé, n. 26 above, pp. 117–46, at 121–2.

⁶¹ I. Bantekas & K. Akestoridi, ‘Sustainable Development Goals, Between Politics and Soft Law: The Emergence of “Political Normativity” in International Law’ (2023) 37(4) *Emory International Law Review*, pp. 499–560, at 504.

obligations. While states are not legally bound to achieve the SDGs, given the influence of international law on the framework's formation, many overlaps exist between the SDGs and (non)-binding obligations and regimes, as outlined in Section 2. Target 14.1 further elucidates this interconnection: its focus is to 'reduce marine pollution of all kinds'⁶² and corresponds to Part XII Section 5 of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS),⁶³ the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships,⁶⁴ the Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter,⁶⁵ and the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal.⁶⁶ SDG 14.5 seeks to conserve at least 10% of coastal and marine areas by 2020, with progress made towards this objective measured through the '[c]overage of protected areas in relation to marine areas'.⁶⁷ While Scott describes this target as an 'important catalyst' to enhance measures related to existing legal regimes, she also identifies existing ambiguity, highlighting that SDG 14.5 does not delineate what 'conserve' means in this context and the lack of specificity concerning what area-based protection mechanisms should be implemented.⁶⁸

A 2022 study found that SDG 14.5 remains a distant goal for many countries, a shortcoming that is of concern as the objective pre-exists the SDGs.⁶⁹ Aichi Target 11 contains the same objective as SDG 14.5,⁷⁰ demonstrating an alignment between the SDGs and non-binding international obligations, albeit an alignment that may now, in some respects, be outdated. The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KBF), established by the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the CBD, enhances conservation ambitions pertaining to marine protected areas.⁷¹ Target 2 of the KBF aims to ensure that at least 30% of degraded terrestrial, inland water, coastal, and marine ecosystems are restored by 2030.⁷² Target 3 seeks to ensure that 30% of

⁶² 2030 Agenda, SDG 14.1.

⁶³ Montego Bay (Jamaica), 10 Dec. 1982, in force 16 Nov. 1994, available at: https://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos_e.pdf.

⁶⁴ London (United Kingdom (UK)), 2 Nov. 1973, in force 2 Oct. 1983, available at: <https://www.wco.imo.org/localresources/en/KnowledgeCentre/ConferencesMeetings/Documents/MARPOL%201973%20-%20Final%20Act%20and%20Convention.pdf>.

⁶⁵ London (UK), 13 Nov. 1972, in force 30 Aug. 1975, available at: <https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/units/volume%201046/volume-1046-i-15749-english.pdf>.

⁶⁶ Basel (Switzerland), 22 Mar. 1989, in force 5 May 1992, available at: <https://www.basel.int/Portals/4/Basel%20Convention/docs/text/BaselConventionText-e.pdf>.

⁶⁷ UN Statistics Division, 'Tier Classification for Global SDG Indicators as of 9 June 2022', 9 June 2022, p. 23, available at: https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/Tier%20Classification%20of%20SDG%20Indicators_9%20Jun%202022_web.pdf.

⁶⁸ K.N. Scott, 'SDG 14: Conserve and Sustainably Use the Oceans, Seas, and Marine Resources for Sustainable Development', in Ebbesson & Hey, n. 14 above, pp. 354–75, at 366–7.

⁶⁹ M. Andriamahefazafy et al., 'Sustainable Development Goal 14: To What Degree Have We Achieved the 2020 Targets for Our Oceans?' (2022) 227(1) *Ocean & Coastal Management*, pp. 1–9, at 5.

⁷⁰ Ibid.; CBD COP, Decision X/2, 'The Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020 and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets', 29 Oct. 2010, UN Doc. UNEP/CBD/COP/DEC/X/2, available at: <https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-10/cop-10-dec-02-en.pdf>.

⁷¹ CBD COP, Decision 15/4, 'Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework', 19 Dec. 2022, UN Doc. CBD/COP/DEC/15/4, available at: <https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-15/cop-15-dec-04-en.pdf>.

⁷² Ibid.

these ecosystems are protected and sustainably managed by 2030.⁷³ As Kim writes, ‘international law provides a normative context in which the SDGs and targets should operate and interact with each other’.⁷⁴ Yet, in the eight years since their establishment, the SDGs may have fallen behind the aspirations of international law in the area of marine protection, something that could be a symptom of an inherent weakness of the framework overall. The 15-year timeline may facilitate integrative thinking regarding sustainable development solutions but, in the absence of established processes to review and revise SDG objectives, the framework does not have the ability to keep pace with ongoing and emerging international law developments.

The SDGs unite all states in the pursuit of common goals, promoting and enhancing transboundary development cooperation, a key feature of international environmental law. The majority of freshwater resources are transboundary, shared between two or more states,⁷⁵ and, as McIntyre demonstrates, the targets of SDG 6 – to ensure the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all – are consistent with current obligations found in domestic and international environmental and human rights law.⁷⁶ Using the example of SDG 6.1, which seeks to provide universal access to clean water by 2030, a normative alignment is drawn with the human right to water outlined in General Comment No. 15: The Right to Water, based on the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights.⁷⁷ Furthermore, the coordinated reporting obligations found in SDG 6.5.2, and SDG 6 overall, are consistent with the commitments and principles of international water law, including the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes,⁷⁸ mechanisms that may have ‘sowed the seeds for a more transparent and collaborative system’.⁷⁹

Langford argues that the normativity embodied by the SDGs allows states to use the framework as a ‘political resource’ to prioritize and promote specific sustainable development challenges that warrant support.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, given the overarching focus of the SDGs on the environmental, social, and economic pillars of sustainable

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ R.E. Kim, ‘The Nexus between International Law and the Sustainable Development Goals’ (2016) 25(1) *Review of European, Comparative & International Environmental Law*, pp. 15–26, at 17.

⁷⁵ M. de Chaisemartin, ‘Measuring Transboundary Water Cooperation within the Framework of Agenda 2030: A Proposal for a Revision of SDG Indicator 6.5.2’ (2020) 45(1) *Water International*, pp. 60–78, at 61.

⁷⁶ See O. McIntyre, ‘International Water Law and SDG 6: Mutually Reinforcing Paradigms’, in French & Kotzé, n. 26 above, pp. 173–200.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 179; UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, ‘General Comment No. 15: The Right to Water (Arts 11 and 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights) of the Covenant’, Nov. 2002, UN Doc. E/C.12/2002/11, available at: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/486454?ln=en>.

⁷⁸ Helsinki (Finland), 17 Mar. 1992, in force 6 Oct. 1996, available at: https://treaties.un.org/doc/Treaties/1992/03/19920317%2005-46%20AM/Ch_XXVII_05p.pdf.

⁷⁹ A. Rieu-Clarke, ‘Can Reporting Enhance Transboundary Water Cooperation? Early Insights from the Water Convention and the Sustainable Development Goals Reporting Exercise’ (2020) 29(3) *Review of European, Comparative & International Environmental Law*, pp. 361–71, at 370.

⁸⁰ M. Langford, ‘Lost in Transformation? The Politics of the Sustainable Development Goals’ (2016) 30(2) *Ethics & International Affairs*, pp. 167–76, at 175.

development, not all international obligations are included in the SDGs.⁸¹ The framework can therefore be described as a ‘subset of existing intergovernmental commitments’, creating a seemingly mutualistic relationship between relevant fields of international law and the SDGs through which law and the goals can interact.⁸² A failure to realize SDG objectives may result in a failure to comply with critical obligations enshrined in conventional and customary international law, whereby state non-compliance may be sanctionable.

Transnational law

Transnational law represents a type of lawmaking that challenges the way in which we theorize law as it transcends domestic borders, mainstream mechanisms of global governance, and traditionally perceived international relations.⁸³ It is not a ‘unitary system’, but acts as ‘an amalgam of norms, processes and actors with normative effects’ that can take the form of ‘discourse, methodology, or field of practice’.⁸⁴ Koh describes transnational legal processes as the ‘theory and practice of how public and private actors ... interact in a variety of public and private, domestic and international fora to make, interpret, enforce, and ultimately, internalize rules of transnational law’.⁸⁵ These are complex processes through which norms are formed and conveyed.⁸⁶

The SDGs bear many of the hallmarks of transnational legal processes identified by Koh. Firstly, these processes are non-traditional, as transnational legal processes bridge the divide between public-private and national-international law.⁸⁷ International law has ‘traditionally’ been made up of customary international law derived from common state practice and conventional international law derived from ratified instruments.⁸⁸ As aforementioned, the SDGs circumvent the typical method of rule making as they encompass both domestic and international legal frameworks, representing an unorthodox paradigm that uses voluntary norms to motivate states to realize shared objectives. Its non-binding nature, combined with its significant regard for the rule of law and international law standards, establishes an internal contradiction within the SDGs, which is a significant deviation from the long-established traditional means of developing international law.

⁸¹ Kim, n. 74 above, p. 16.

⁸² Ibid., pp. 16–7.

⁸³ See P.C. Zumbansen, ‘Transnational Law, Evolving’, in J. Smits (ed.), *Elgar Encyclopedia of Comparative Law* (Edward Elgar, 2nd edn, 2012), pp. 898–925; G. Teubner, ‘Breaking Frames: The Global Interplay of Legal and Social Systems’ (1997) 45(1) *The American Journal of Comparative Law*, pp. 149–69; V. Heyvaert & L.-A. Duvic-Paoli, ‘The Meanings of Transnational Environmental Law’, in V. Heyvaert & L.-A. Duvic-Paoli (eds), *Research Handbook on Transnational Environmental Law* (Edward Elgar, 2020), pp. 2–17, at 3–5.

⁸⁴ Heyvaert & Duvic-Paoli, *ibid.*, pp. 4–6.

⁸⁵ H.H. Koh, ‘The 1994 Roscoe Pound Lecture: Transnational Legal Process’ (1996) 75(1) *Nebraska Law Review*, pp. 181–207, at 183–4.

⁸⁶ G. Shaffer, ‘Transnational Legal Process and State Change’ (2012) 37(2) *Law & Social Inquiry*, pp. 229–64, at 235–6.

⁸⁷ Koh, n. 85 above, p. 184.

⁸⁸ R.B. Baker, ‘Customary International Law in the 21st Century: Old Challenges and New Debates’ (2010) 21(1) *European Journal of International Law*, pp. 173–204, at 176.

Secondly, Koh characterizes transnational legal processes as non-statist.⁸⁹ Non-state actors have played a significant role in the formation of the SDGs, with non-state collaborative partnerships and engagement acting as core elements of the 2030 Agenda. In January 2013, the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (OWG) was formed to develop the SDGs. Consisting of 30 members, the OWG held 13 sessions between March 2013 and July 2014.⁹⁰ Through these sessions, civil society stakeholders could submit proposed amendments to the draft SDGs.⁹¹ These suggestions were considered by the OWG and helped to shape the final framework. Paragraph 89 of the 2030 Agenda states that the HLPF is to facilitate stakeholder engagement with the follow-up and review mechanisms.⁹² Despite providing no elaboration on how such participation would be facilitated, engagement with non-state actors is an active facet of the framework. For instance, the 2030 Agenda Partnership Accelerator was established by the UN to enhance partnerships to achieve the SDGs.⁹³ In 2019, UN states launched a political declaration to advance action to realize the SDGs by 2030, which recognized the need to establish deep-rooted partnerships between governments and public, private, and civil society stakeholders.⁹⁴ Altogether, active engagement by civil society with the framework and its efforts to hold public actors accountable reflect an ‘emerging multi-faceted and multi-layered approach to implementing the 2030 Agenda’⁹⁵ and strongly align with the non-statist element of Koh’s framework.

Thirdly, transnational legal processes are dynamic.⁹⁶ Koh writes that ‘[t]ransnational law transforms, mutates, and percolates up and down, from the public to the private, from the domestic to the international level and back down again’.⁹⁷ As the text of the 2030 Agenda has not been altered since its initial publication, the SDGs themselves remain static, demonstrating a weak alignment with this aspect of transnational legal processes. Nevertheless, the UNGA has continued to enact decisions to support SDG implementation. For example, the UNGA has adopted resolutions supporting the

⁸⁹ Koh, n. 85 above, p. 184.

⁹⁰ UNGA Draft Decision, ‘Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals’, 15 Jan. 2013, UN Doc. A/67/L.48/Rev.1, available at: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/742043?ln=en&v=pdf>.

⁹¹ OWG, ‘Eleventh Session of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (5–9 May 2014), Major Groups and other Stakeholders Morning Hearings: Summary of Statements (FA 1–10)’, May 2014, available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/documents/3758mgsummary11.pdf>; UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, ‘Open Letter to Co-chairs from Major Groups’, 16 June 2014, available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/statements/open-letter-co-chairs-major-groups-12463>.

⁹² 2030 Agenda, para. 89.

⁹³ See D. Stibbe & D. Prescott, *The SDG Partnership Guidebook: A Practical Guide to Building High Impact Multi-stakeholder Partnerships for the Sustainable Development Goals* (UN & The Partnering Initiative, 2020), available at: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/2698SDG_Partnership_Guidebook_1.01_web.pdf.

⁹⁴ UNGA, ‘Political Declaration of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development Convened under the Auspices of the General Assembly’, 9 Sept. 2019, UN Doc. A/HLPF/2019/L.1, para. 14, available at: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3827215?ln=en&v=pdf>.

⁹⁵ See Biermann et al., n. 44 above, p. 796.

⁹⁶ Koh, n. 85 above, p. 184.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

sustainable consumption and production goals of the 2030 Agenda⁹⁸ and objectives linked to eradicating poverty.⁹⁹ Likewise, the UNESCAP has published documents related to mainstreaming the SDGs into domestic economic policymaking,¹⁰⁰ and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)¹⁰¹ has outlined in a technical paper the opportunities for SDG integration with the UNFCCC and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030.¹⁰² Though limited, the SDGs exhibit some degree of dynamism consistent with Koh's theory.

The last characteristic of transnational legal processes, as identified by Koh, is normativity, which is described as the ability for 'new rules of law [to] emerge', and explores both how transnational actors shape law and how law in turn shapes these interactions.¹⁰³ While the framework did not establish any binding obligations, the preparatory sessions were grounded in law and the framework gives due regard to the rule of law, the importance of good governance, and existing principles and treaties of international law.¹⁰⁴ It remains unclear if the transnational interactions being facilitated by the SDG–international law interrelationship is resulting in the formation of new rules and norms. Bearing in mind this complex relationship, however, some scholars do contend that the SDGs may have the power to directly affect our 'legal thinking'.¹⁰⁵

Koh outlines, in his 1997 paper, that the cyclical system of interaction (state-state cooperation), interpretation (generation of norms based on interactions), and internalization (integration into domestic law systems) of transnational legal processes facilitates state obedience to international law, and asserts that 'perceived self-interest' is the motivation for compliance.¹⁰⁶ Divergence from this pattern creates 'frictions' between states, and so nations are compelled to comply with international legal systems.¹⁰⁷ This could also be applied to the SDGs. Close state cooperation, as required under the framework, allows for the generation of shared development solutions.

Common standards of practice are established, which can be integrated into domestic policy. If states breach existing codes of conduct, it could have ramifications not only for

⁹⁸ UNGA Resolution 76/202, 'Promoting Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Building on Agenda 21', 5 Jan. 2022, UN Doc. A/RES/76/202, available at: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3953782?ln=en&v=pdf>.

⁹⁹ UNGA Resolution 76/219, 'Eradicating Rural Poverty to Implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', 10 Jan. 2022, UN Doc. A/RES/76/219, available at: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3954762?ln=en&v=pdf>.

¹⁰⁰ UNESCAP, 'Mainstreaming the Sustainable Development Goals into Economic Policymaking', 28 Aug. 2019, UN Doc. ESCAP/CMPF/2019/1, available at: https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/event-documents/CMPF-2~1_2.PDF.

¹⁰¹ New York, NY (US), 9 May 1992, in force 21 Mar. 1994, available at: <https://unfccc.int>.

¹⁰² UNFCCC Secretariat, 'Opportunities and Options for Integrating Climate Change Adaptation with the Sustainable Development Goals and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030', 19 Oct. 2017, UN Doc. FCCC/TP/2017/3, available at: <https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2017/tp/03.pdf>.

¹⁰³ Koh, n. 85 above, p. 184.

¹⁰⁴ 2030 Agenda, paras 8–10, 18–9, 23, 30, 35.

¹⁰⁵ P. Wrange, 'SDG 16: Promote Peaceful and Inclusive Societies for Sustainable Development, Provide Access to Justice for All and Build Effective, Accountable and Inclusive Institutions at All Levels', in Ebbesson & Hey (eds), n. 14 above, pp. 399–21, at 405.

¹⁰⁶ Koh, n. 7 above, p. 2655.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

the shared sustainable development matter in question but for state relations overall. It has been said that the international law system is being transformed ‘through transnational legal process and the development of governance regimes, from the era of state “individualism” to the era of the collective community of state’.¹⁰⁸ The SDGs seek to surpass normative state individualism in the collective pursuit of sustainable development, and are compatible with many of the characteristics of transnational legal processes, albeit to varying degrees, demonstrating the potential of the framework to represent a novel method of transnational rule making. The SDGs challenge traditional binary divisions of law, and the international legal system, by offering an approach consistent with transnational law: it is flexible, holistic, inclusive of all actors, and inherently interactional, fully dependent on state commitment and partnerships to fulfil its objectives.

3.2. Legitimacy

Legitimacy can be described as a ‘non-coercive’ method of obedience¹⁰⁹ and is simultaneously a ‘source of power and a constraint on power’.¹¹⁰ Legitimacy is not necessarily immediately established; rather it is something that builds over time under the rule or institutions at issue.¹¹¹ According to Franck, determinacy, symbolic validation, coherence, and adherence are four factors that serve as indicators of rule legitimacy.¹¹² The alignment of the SDGs, or lack thereof, with these factors of legitimacy, will now be explored.

Determinacy

Determinacy can be described as the clarity and accessibility of legal text and rules.¹¹³ For legitimacy to be established, states must understand what is expected of them and what type of behaviour is acceptable, or unacceptable, under the rule(s) in question.¹¹⁴ Issues concerning the ambiguity of the SDGs, how these commitments are to be achieved, and lack of clarity regarding stakeholder engagement were discussed above. The framework recognizes the critical role of non-state actors in SDG implementation¹¹⁵ but, as Bexell and Jönsson highlight, commitments centred around non-state involvement are ‘vague’ and dependent on the voluntary initiative of non-state actors.¹¹⁶ This, based on Franck’s theory, weakens the SDGs’ legitimacy.

¹⁰⁸ M.-C. Cordonier Segger & H.E. Judge C.G. Weeramantry, ‘Introduction’, in M.-C. Cordonier Segger & H.E. Judge C.G. Weeramantry (eds), *Sustainable Development Principles in the Decisions of International Courts and Tribunals: 1992–2012* (Routledge, 2017), pp. 1–26, at 4.

¹⁰⁹ Franck, n. 6 above, p. 16.

¹¹⁰ M. Bexell & K. Jönsson, *The Politics of the Sustainable Development Goals: Legitimacy, Responsibility, and Accountability* (Routledge, 2021), p. 25.

¹¹¹ Chayes & Chayes, n. 46 above, p. 128.

¹¹² T.M. Franck, *Fairness in International Law and Institutions* (Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 30.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 30–1.

¹¹⁴ T.M. Franck, ‘Legitimacy in the International System’ (1988) 82(4) *American Journal of International Law*, pp. 705–59, at 713, 716.

¹¹⁵ 2030 Agenda, paras 39, 45, 60.

¹¹⁶ M. Bexell & K. Jönsson, ‘Responsibility and the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals’ (2017) 44(1) *Forum for Development Studies*, pp. 13–29, at 22.

It is conceivable that general aspirations and mechanisms were formalized to allow states to embody a more ‘flexible’ approach to sustainable development, something that is a useful feature of indeterminacy.¹¹⁷ This is not without disadvantages, however, as indeterminacy can complicate state conformity and be used to rationalize non-observance.¹¹⁸

Transparency of processes also increases textual determinacy and, by extension, legitimacy.¹¹⁹ The SDG follow-up and review mechanisms, and the data that is subsequently derived from these processes, were designed to be accessible and transparent.¹²⁰ As most states have participated in the VNR processes, and guidelines for national SDG reporting are readily available, this could suggest that these objectives – transparency and accessibility – are being achieved to some degree.¹²¹ Reporting domestic progress towards agreed commitments is key not only to enhancing transparency but also overall state understanding of said commitments.¹²² Determinacy, which includes the clarity of the SDGs and the availability of processes to clarify existing uncertainty around their character or implementation, affects the legitimacy of the framework.¹²³ The follow-up and review mechanisms, therefore, reinforce determinacy, while the existing ambiguity weakens this aspect of the framework’s legitimacy.

Symbolic validation

While determinacy can convey the meaning of rules and associated processes, symbolic validation conveys their ‘authority’.¹²⁴ The idea that the legitimacy of a rule is influenced by the characteristics that communicate its position in the ‘overall system of social order’ refers to symbolic validation.¹²⁵ The framework aligns with this dimension of legitimacy. The SDGs were officially adopted through an UNGA resolution. Described as the ‘predominant political body of the world organization’, the UNGA does not possess traditional normative powers but can have a substantial influence on state opinion, behaviour, and compliance through the adoption of resolutions.¹²⁶ The framework was not adopted as a conventional action plan, but as a collective undertaking to transform our world, holding significant symbolic weight of unity and universal equality. Furthermore, the SDG branding is highly recognizable and aligns with the ‘symbolic reinforcement’ dimension of Franck’s legitimacy theory.¹²⁷

¹¹⁷ Franck, n. 112 above, p. 31.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Franck, n. 114 above, p. 716.

¹²⁰ 2030 Agenda, paras 47, 72, 74(g).

¹²¹ See UN Development Group, ‘Guidelines to Support Country Reporting of the Sustainable Development Goals’, available at: <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/Guidelines-to-Support-Country-Reporting-on-SDGs-1.pdf>.

¹²² Rieu-Clarke, n. 79 above, p. 362.

¹²³ Franck, n. 114 above, p. 725.

¹²⁴ Franck, n. 112 above, p. 34.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ G.R. Lande, ‘The Changing Effectiveness of General Assembly Resolutions’ (1964) 58 *Proceedings of the American Society of International Law at Its Annual Meeting*, pp. 162–73, at 162–4.

¹²⁷ Franck, n. 112 above, pp. 34–6.

Franck identifies ritual and pedigree as associated concepts of symbolic validation.¹²⁸ Rituals often take the form of ceremonies, and one could argue that the annual meetings of the HLPF – during which SDG commitments are reaffirmed and established formalities and diplomatic practices are strictly adhered to – communicate the framework’s core values and purpose.¹²⁹ Pedigree strengthens the legitimacy and compliance power of a rule or institution by highlighting its ‘historical origins’ and ‘cultural or anthropological deep-rootedness’.¹³⁰ Described as ‘historic’ by the UN,¹³¹ the SDGs unify states with the intention of building a world without inequality, injustice, and violence. Near-universal commitment to the framework signals strong political support for the SDGs, their objectives and overarching global vision. Furthermore, their collective nature creates a sense of ownership of the goals among state and non-state actors alike, which may, as Franck writes, ‘reinforce the sense of a “rule community”’.¹³²

From representatives of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights recognizing the interlinkages between human rights and the 2030 Agenda¹³³ to the UNESCAP adopting resolutions to enhance SDG implementation,¹³⁴ the effects of the SDGs on the processes of UN institutions are visible. To illustrate, the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) has recognized the ability of the Environmental Performance Review Programme to aid the realization of the SDGs,¹³⁵ alongside exploring ways in which the Programme could incorporate SDG considerations into its review processes.¹³⁶ In terms of embedding gender considerations into the progressive implementation of the KBF, the CBD Subsidiary Body on Implementation (SBI), which operates under the auspices of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), gave due regard to the 2030 Agenda when formulating the Gender Plan of Action. Under considerations of modalities

¹²⁸ Ibid.; Franck, n. 114 above, p. 733.

¹²⁹ For information on the format of HLPF meetings see UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, ‘Summary of the President of the General Assembly’, 21 Oct. 2019, available at: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/25200SDG_Summary.pdf.

¹³⁰ Franck, n. 114 above, p. 726.

¹³¹ See UN, n. 16 above.

¹³² Franck, n. 112 above, p. 34.

¹³³ M. Bachelet, ‘Ensuring that No One Is Left Behind: How Do We Protect the Poorest and Most Vulnerable from the Crisis and Empower Them to Realize the SDGs’, 6 July 2021, available at: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/28686Statement_Ms_Michelle_Bachelet_Jeria.pdf; I. Brands Kehris, ‘Human Rights Council’s 3rd Intersessional Meeting for Dialogue and Cooperation on Human Rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’, 14 Jan. 2021, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2021/01/human-rights-councils-3rd-intersessional-meeting-dialogue-and-cooperation-human>.

¹³⁴ UNESCAP Resolution 79/4, ‘Accelerating the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development for a Better Future For All in Asia and the Pacific’, 22 May 2023, UN Doc. E/ESCAP/RES/79/4, available at: https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/event-documents/ESCAP_RES_79_4_E_0.pdf.

¹³⁵ UNECE, ‘Report of the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference’, 13 June 2016, UN Doc. ECE/BATUMI.CONF/2016/2/Add.1, para. 9, available at: <https://unece.org/DAM/env/documents/2016/ece/ece.batumi.conf.2016.2.add.1.e.pdf>.

¹³⁶ UNECE, ‘Role of Environmental Performance Reviews in Supporting the Achievement and Monitoring of Sustainable Development Goals in the Pan-European Region’, 29 Aug. 2017, UN Doc. ECE/CEP/2017/11, s. III(C), available at: <https://unece.org/DAM/env/documents/2017/ece/cep/ece.cep.2017.11.e.pdf>.

of the draft Gender Plan of Action,¹³⁷ the implementation and intended objectives of the Plan are based on '[e]nsuring coherence and coordination' with the SDGs.¹³⁸

Recognizing that ambitions of gender equality are represented as a specific SDG alongside being embedded throughout the goals, the Gender Plan of Action 'is intended to complement and support the implementation of the different Sustainable Development Goals, in line with the biodiversity agenda and the implementation of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework'.¹³⁹ While acknowledging that the SBI does not deliver legally binding recommendations, it does work to offer an authoritative voice to the CBD COP, seeking to review and shape the progress and implementation of the Convention and its protocols while strengthening coordination between the CBD, its institutional arrangements, and relevant international biodiversity instruments.¹⁴⁰ This SDG-focused modality can be found in the official Gender Plan of Action adopted by the CBD in December 2022.¹⁴¹ Such examples illustrate the correlation between the SDGs and the workings of international institutions, and how the SDGs can be used to reinforce the objectives of a foundational international biodiversity instrument.

Coherence

The above-mentioned dimensions of legitimacy intersect with coherence.¹⁴² Coherence, according to Franck, establishes consistency in the application of rules and is a 'key factor in explaining why rules compel'.¹⁴³ This concept also channels the idea that a rule can increase in strength if it is perceived as being linked with a 'network of other rules by an underlying general principle'.¹⁴⁴ The principle of sustainable development, rooted in concepts of equity and justice, is the foundation of the SDGs. Sustainable development is also closely related to other international law standards, including the precautionary principle, the principle of common but differentiated responsibility (CBDR), and intergenerational equity. While sustainable development can be found in a plethora of international legal instruments, reflecting its normative value, issues related to vague formulations of sustainable development remain.¹⁴⁵

¹³⁷ Proposed methods to support the implementation of the Gender Plan of Action. See footnote 3 of CBD Subsidiary Body on Implementation, Recommendation 3/3, 'Gender Plan of Action for the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework', 28 Mar. 2022, UN Doc. CBD/SBI/REC/3/3, available at: <https://www.cbd.int/doc/recommendations/sbi-03/sbi-03-rec-03-en.pdf>.

¹³⁸ Ibid., Annex, para. 2(b).

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ See CBD COP, Decision XII/26, 'Improving the Efficiency of Structures and Processes of the Convention: Subsidiary Body on Implementation', 7. Oct. 2014, UN Doc. UNEP/CBD/COP/DEC/XII/26, available at: <https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-12/cop-12-dec-26-en.pdf>; CBD, 'Report of the Subsidiary Body on Implementation on its First Meeting', 6 May 2016, UN Doc. UNEP/CBD/SBI/1/14-UNEP/CBD/COP/13/6, available at: <https://www.cbd.int/doc/meetings/cop/cop-13/official/cop-13-06-en.pdf>.

¹⁴¹ CBD COP, Decision 15/11, 'Gender Plan of Action', 19 Dec. 2022, UN Doc. CBD/COP/DEC/15/11*, Annex, s. II, para. 2(b), available at: <https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-15/cop-15-dec-11-en.docx>.

¹⁴² Franck, n. 114 above, p. 736.

¹⁴³ Franck, n. 112 above, p. 38.

¹⁴⁴ Franck, n. 114 above, p. 741.

¹⁴⁵ V. Barral, 'Sustainable Development in International Law: Nature and Operation of an Evolutive Legal Norm' (2012) 23(2) *European Journal of International Law*, pp. 377–400, at 383–5.

Enhancing policy coherence for sustainable development is the objective of SDG 17.14 and, through paragraph 63 of the 2030 Agenda, states commit to pursuing policy coherence at all levels.¹⁴⁶ The goals were designed to be ‘integrated and indivisible’,¹⁴⁷ and the complexity and coherence of each goal correlates with the number and relevance of associated targets.¹⁴⁸ The existing ambiguity within the framework, which leaves states free to interpret the meaning of critical commitments, risks generating a lack of coherence among and within domestic policy initiatives.¹⁴⁹ For example, a 2021 study found that the majority of coherence found in policy agendas related to environmental SDGs was ‘lost’ during the implementation phase.¹⁵⁰ The SDGs are, by principle, integrative, but the obscurity of some aspects lessens their coherence and, by extension, their legitimacy.

Adherence

According to Franck, the manner in which primary rules are supported by a hierarchical framework of secondary rules and processes that oversee their development and implementation is known as adherence.¹⁵¹ The legitimacy of the rule is influenced by the degree of adherence to this secondary framework and, as Franck outlines, rules that have this secondary ‘procedural and institutional’ support impose stronger compliance powers on states.¹⁵² The SDGs and associated targets could be viewed as the primary rules that states are expected to achieve. By this logic, the 248 indicators and associated reporting mechanisms represent the supporting secondary framework. The custodian agencies responsible for compiling SDG data could also be said to correspond to the supportive institutions that Franck outlines. The hierarchical aspect of this theory, however, is lacking as the framework’s objectives are not ranked based on importance, weakening the adherence factor of the framework’s legitimacy.

Commitment to the SDGs and engagement with the regime’s voluntary mechanisms are required in order to be recognized as a proactive member of the international community of states working collectively to address sustainable development issues. The presence of these four dimensions strengthens the likelihood of state observance, while their absence weakens the authority and legitimacy of the rule or institution in question.¹⁵³ As with transnational legal processes, the SDGs demonstrate varying degrees of alignment with Franck’s legitimacy factors, meaning that the perceived legitimacy of the framework may not be an overwhelming motivator for state adherence.

Franck notes, however, that failure to comply with a rule does not always reflect weak legitimacy. Instead, non-compliance may indicate a change in national priorities. In these instances, the legitimacy of a rule can be found in the ‘discomfort’ experienced

¹⁴⁶ 2030 Agenda, SDG 17.14, para. 63.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., para. 18.

¹⁴⁸ L. Coscieme, L.F. Mortensen & I. Donohue, ‘Enhance Environmental Policy Coherence to Meet the Sustainable Development Goals’ (2021) 296 *Journal of Cleaner Production*, pp. 1–8, at 2.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 4–6.

¹⁵¹ Franck, n. 112 above, pp. 41–6; Franck, n. 114 above, pp. 751–2.

¹⁵² Franck, n. 112 above, p. 41.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 30.

by the non-compliant state and in the ‘inherent pull power’ of the rule which pressures states to comply.¹⁵⁴ Given that legitimacy grows over time, one could speculate that the legitimacy of a set of non-binding global development goals began with the establishment of the MDGs. Using this logic, the legitimacy of the SDGs will continue to grow each year as it approaches the 2030 deadline and as stakeholders continue to engage with the mechanisms of the framework through which more voluntary procedures are established.

3.3. Reciprocity and Reputation

Franck writes that in the context of international law, ‘rules usually are not enforced yet they are mostly obeyed’.¹⁵⁵ Without policing or sanctioning power, SDG adherence is motivated by reciprocity and reputational concerns. States are the primary actors that create and enforce international law,¹⁵⁶ and the influence of the perception of other states engaging with the SDGs, both nationally and internationally, aligns with the idea of reciprocity. Franck describes reciprocity as ‘an awareness that what one actor does in a particular transaction is of more than passing interest because it will affect the behaviour of the same, and also other, actors in a continuing line of similar – or even different – transactions’.¹⁵⁷ This notion of reciprocity, as it is linked with state behaviour, can facilitate inter- and transnational cooperation.¹⁵⁸ Reciprocity allows for a *quid pro quo* arrangement between states in the pursuit of sustainable development, and any violations of the ‘norms of reciprocity’ could be viewed as a violation of the law itself.¹⁵⁹ The overriding concept of reciprocity, which traverses inter- and transnational law and international relations, may act as a method of political peer pressure to conform to the behaviour of fellow states in realizing the SDGs.

Mechanisms of social influence

Goodman and Jinks contend that international institutions can affect state behaviour through three mechanisms of ‘social influence’: coercion (compliance through cost-benefit considerations), persuasion (acceptance through ‘strategic inculcation’), and acculturation (conformity through assimilation).¹⁶⁰ Pressures on states to conform can originate from internal or external forces,¹⁶¹ and SDG data processes can be characterized as aligning with all three of these theoretical mechanisms. Coercive dimensions can be found in national data collection activities. Engaging with voluntary

¹⁵⁴ Franck, n. 114 above, p. 712.

¹⁵⁵ Franck, n. 6 above, p. 3.

¹⁵⁶ A.-M. Slaughter, ‘International Law in a World of Liberal States’ (1995) 6(3) *European Journal of International Law*, pp. 503–38; R. Brewster, ‘Unpacking the State’s Reputation’ (2009) 50(2) *Harvard International Law Journal*, pp. 231–69.

¹⁵⁷ Franck, n. 6 above, p. 199.

¹⁵⁸ R.O. Keohane, ‘Reciprocity in International Relations’ (1986) 40(1) *International Organization*, pp. 1–27, at 1.

¹⁵⁹ F. Paris & N. Ghei, ‘The Role of Reciprocity in International Law’ (2003) 36(1) *Cornell International Law Journal*, pp. 93–123, at 121.

¹⁶⁰ Goodman & Jinks, n. 10 above, pp. 9–13.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

data-reporting mechanisms establishes states as active SDG supporters. The transnational cooperation that is facilitated by SDG institutions also benefits states by helping to reduce ‘transaction costs’ and ‘collective action problems’.¹⁶² Goodman and Jinks state that coercion does not necessarily generate changes in values or attitudes. By this logic, the ‘benefits of conformity’, or the drawbacks of failing to conform, with the framework could be motivating state engagement.¹⁶³ Nations may perceive adherence with the SDGs as aligning with their ‘material interest[s]’, motivating changes in behaviour and domestic frameworks as a result.¹⁶⁴

States are persuaded to conform through ‘social “learning” and other forms of information conveyance’ with the strategic aim of changing state behaviour, as well as attitudes and values.¹⁶⁵ The established SDG data procedures instil an association of credibility and value in the information gathered and disseminated, aligning with the persuasive mechanisms of social influence.¹⁶⁶ The existence of reputable guidelines can influence states to “internalize” new norms’ and procedures of conduct, realigning domestic priorities with the framework.¹⁶⁷ States undergo peer-to-peer learning through the SDG data-reporting mechanisms, allowing nations to develop agreed procedures related to shared resources. SDG databases also allow states to gain insights from examples of good practice.¹⁶⁸ The first and second editions of *SDG Good Practices* highlight examples of initiatives submitted by stakeholders, which can be learned from and replicated.¹⁶⁹ A dedicated website acts as an online directory of SDG best practices.¹⁷⁰ In this regard, the 2030 Agenda may act as an information conduit through which states are persuaded to accept the validity of SDG processes and consequently adhere.

Goodman and Jinks characterize acculturation as ‘adopting the beliefs and behavioural patterns of the surrounding culture’.¹⁷¹ The data collection and dissemination patterns of best practice that have been developed through the framework, with which states are now familiar, aligns with this social mechanism. The SDGs may be creating a new culture, which values and promotes transnational cooperation, information sharing, and voluntary engagement. The SDG mechanisms have facilitated state behavioural change and the adoption of shared norms in line

¹⁶² Ibid., p. 10.

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 10.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 10–11.

¹⁶⁶ See R.O. Keohane & J.S. Nye Jr, ‘Power and Interdependence in the Information Age’ (1998) 77(5) *Foreign Affairs*, pp. 81–94, at 94.

¹⁶⁷ Goodman & Jinks, n. 10 above, p. 11.

¹⁶⁸ The data collection calendars of each SDG custodian agency and national reporting entity are readily accessible: UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Statistics Division, ‘SDG Indicators: Data Collection Information & Focal Points’, available at: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataContacts>.

¹⁶⁹ UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, ‘SDG Good Practices: A Compilation of Success Stories and Lessons Learned in SDG Implementation’, Dec. 2020, available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/publications/sdg-good-practices-2020>; UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, ‘SDG Good Practices: A Compilation of Success Stories and Lessons Learned in SDG Implementation’, Jan. 2022, available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/publications/sdg-good-practices-2nd-edition-2022>.

¹⁷⁰ UN, ‘SDG Good Practices’, available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/sdg-good-practices>.

¹⁷¹ Goodman & Jinks, n. 10 above, p. 12.

with the pursuit of common goals. The ‘social’ and ‘cognitive’ pressure to conform with this universally established framework and achieve a sense of ‘belonging’ with the international community could be leading to state adherence.¹⁷² It could also be speculated that witnessing leading states publicly and enthusiastically supporting the SDGs and engaging with the regime’s voluntary mechanisms encourages others to follow suit.¹⁷³ In short, the SDGs, according to Bantekas and Akestoridi, have established a ‘process’ which they contend is ‘far more effective than any binding treaty mechanisms’.¹⁷⁴ This is not just one single procedure, but a multi-dimensional process of reporting, cooperation, and commitment to shared goals grounded in ‘mutual trust’ and moral concerns.¹⁷⁵

National image

Those who are successful in realizing the SDGs will be rewarded with the image of a state capable of addressing complex sustainable development issues. Despite the lack of stringent compliance mechanisms, 95% of states have submitted a VNR at least once.¹⁷⁶ A state can benefit from establishing a credible reputation as a nation that respects binding and non-binding commitments and acts as a reliable member of the international community.¹⁷⁷ Transparency of action and support are central aims of the framework and, as discussed, data is compiled under every goal, target, and indicator.¹⁷⁸ The use of data gathering and indicators has become a ‘pervasive form of social pressure’ in the international landscape, used to influence and modify state policy.¹⁷⁹ Compliance mechanisms ‘seek to remove obstacles, clarify issues, and convince parties to change their behavior’,¹⁸⁰ and the reporting mechanisms of the SDGs may serve as a soft form of compliance.

Domestic performance in relation to the SDGs undergoes comparable ranking, which may act as an effective device of adherence as state progress, or lack thereof, is under scrutiny in the public eye.¹⁸¹ Any inadequate implementation of the goals, or failure to report data to the relevant custodian agencies, will be communicated to stakeholders. State aversion to incurring international reputational opprobrium for failing to engage extensively with the SDGs could contribute to their power. The responsibility for achieving these goals lies with states and the international community

¹⁷² Ibid., p. 15.

¹⁷³ See B. Obama, ‘Remarks by the President on Sustainable Development Goals’, 27 Sept. 2015, available at: <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/09/27/remarks-president-sustainable-development-goals>; D. Cameron, ‘PM’s Speech to the UN Sustainable Development Goals Summit 2015’, 28 Sept. 2015, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pms-speech-to-the-un-sustainable-development-goals-summit-2015>.

¹⁷⁴ Bantekas & Akestoridi, n. 61 above, p. 510.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 509–10.

¹⁷⁶ UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, n. 33 above, p. 6.

¹⁷⁷ A. van Aaken & B. Simsek, ‘Rewarding in International Law’ (2021) 115(2) *American Journal of International Law*, pp. 195–241, at 201.

¹⁷⁸ 2030 Agenda, para. 48.

¹⁷⁹ J.G. Kelley & B.A. Simmons, ‘Politics by Number: Indicators as Social Pressure in International Relations’ (2015) 59(1) *American Journal of Political Science*, pp. 55–70, at 56.

¹⁸⁰ Chayes & Chayes, n. 46 above, p. 109.

¹⁸¹ See Kelley & Simmons, n. 179 above, p. 57.

as a whole. If these objectives are not realized by the 2030 deadline, states that fail to effectively implement SDG policy into their regional and domestic frameworks will face criticism. These dynamics may encourage states to conform out of fear of being labelled as bad actors or alienating themselves from the international community.

That said, legal scholarship is divided regarding the veracity (or inveracity) of reputational concerns as an influencing factor for state compliance with international law.¹⁸² As Guzman summarizes, '[t]he value of a reputation for compliance with international commitments is rarely large enough to affect the outcome when decisions are of such great magnitude'.¹⁸³ He argues that 'reputational cost[s]' are changeable, they may plateau at a certain point, and do not 'necessarily increase with the importance of the issue'.¹⁸⁴ Moreover, it is possible to rehabilitate the integrity and character of a state; thus, the impacts of a tarnished reputation are not perpetual.¹⁸⁵ While state reputation could be an important factor in influencing compliance with international law, it cannot act in isolation.¹⁸⁶ Brewster makes the point that states themselves are not static and, given the dynamic nature of appointed governments, reputational concerns are not necessarily an equal or consistent influence on state behaviour.¹⁸⁷ As momentum to realize the SDGs is largely dependent on political action, pursuant to Brewster's argument, transient governmental systems may be putting these objectives at great risk. It is arguable that the gradual progression of the SDGs through changeable political systems is currently moving at too slow a pace to execute the 'fundamental changes' enshrined in the 2030 Agenda.¹⁸⁸ Therefore, while national image may be a contributing factor in adherence to the SDGs, it is unlikely to be a constant or universal motivating force for every state.

3.4. National Self-Interest

It is difficult to imagine that state commitment to the SDGs is wholly altruistic. National self-interest must contribute to a state's motivation to adhere to the framework. The SDGs are framed as a progressive agenda for the good of people, the planet, and economic prosperity. Thus, political support and national integration of SDG policy considerations create an image of a country that is concerned for all citizens and the longevity of the Earth's natural resources. Increased scientific and public awareness of the perils of unsustainable living and widespread ecological crises have undoubtedly shaped domestic and international priorities. As explored by Bøggild, politicians' 'desire for re-election' and public favourability incentivize them to be receptive to the

¹⁸² See R. Brewster, 'The Limits of Reputation on Compliance' (2009) 1(2) *International Theory*, pp. 323–33; G.W. Downs & M.A. Jones, 'Reputation, Compliance, and International Law' (2002) 31(S1) *Journal of Legal Studies*, pp. S95–S114; A.T. Guzman, 'Reputation', in A.T. Guzman, *How International Law Works: A Rational Choice Theory* (Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 71–118.

¹⁸³ Guzman, n. 5 above, p. 1883.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1884.

¹⁸⁵ Guzman, n. 182 above, p. 86.

¹⁸⁶ Downs & Jones, n. 182 above, p. S98.

¹⁸⁷ Brewster, n. 182 above, p. 325.

¹⁸⁸ See Biermann et al., n. 44 above; 2030 Agenda, para. 28.

needs and wants of voters.¹⁸⁹ Given the rise in popularity of the concept and principle of sustainable development, electoral self-interest may also be a contributing factor in SDG adherence. As Brewster comments, ‘even purely self-interested states will comply with international law because the benefits of cooperation outweigh the short-term costs of compliance’.¹⁹⁰ She further remarks that for this theory to be effective, non-compliant states must be excluded from collaborative opportunities to tip the scales of cost-benefit analysis towards compliance.¹⁹¹ It should be noted, however, that the exclusion of non-adhering states from SDG processes will only serve to hinder the overall objective of tackling shared sustainable development challenges.¹⁹²

International legal instruments are ‘artifacts of political choice and social existence’,¹⁹³ and this is also true for the SDGs. States willingly signed up to the 2030 Agenda and its formation was a democratic process, elaborated and refined by the OWG with participation and input from non-political and civil society stakeholders alike. While the OWG could consist of only 30 member states at any one time, the vast majority of nations took part in the developmental process.¹⁹⁴ It is apparent that ‘[d]ecisions are not a free good’ as time, expertise, and financial resources are required to participate in international decision-making processes.¹⁹⁵ Therefore, states are deliberate with how they spend these resources, and the advantages of state participation and compliance must exceed the costs.¹⁹⁶ Comprehensive state participation in the SDG development processes and adherence to associated reporting practices suggests that the advantages of achieving sustainable development counterbalance any existing or potential short-term disadvantages. Achievement of the SDGs is favourable to states for many reasons, two of which will now be discussed.

Climate mitigation

If global temperature increases are not limited to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels as detailed in the Paris Agreement,¹⁹⁷ aligning with SDG 13 (Climate Action), there will be severe ecological and socio-economic consequences.¹⁹⁸ These impacts would have untold costs for national systems, forcefully displacing countless people, and

¹⁸⁹ See T. Bøggild, ‘How Politicians’ Reelection Efforts Can Reduce Public Trust, Electoral Support, and Policy Approval’ (2016) 37(6) *Political Psychology*, pp. 901–19.

¹⁹⁰ Brewster, n. 156 above, p. 231.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 231–2.

¹⁹² See Brewster (n. 182 above, p. 331) for similar arguments concerning the Kyoto Protocol to the UNFCCC (Kyoto (Japan), 11 Dec. 1997, in force 16 Feb. 2005, available at: <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/kpeng.pdf>).

¹⁹³ Chayes & Chayes, n. 47 above, p. 180.

¹⁹⁴ Langford, n. 80 above, p. 170.

¹⁹⁵ Chayes & Chayes, n. 46 above, p. 4.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ Paris Agreement, Paris (France), 12 Dec. 2015, in force 4 Nov. 2016, Art. 2.1(a), available at: https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/parisagreement_publication.pdf.

¹⁹⁸ See K.L. Ebi et al., ‘Extreme Weather and Climate Change: Population Health and Health System Implications’ (2021) 42(1) *Annual Review of Public Health*, pp. 293–315; C. Bellard et al., ‘Impacts of Climate Change on the Future of Biodiversity’ (2012) 15 *Ecology Letters*, pp. 365–77; A.K. Misra, ‘Climate Change and Challenges of Water and Food Security’ (2014) 3(1) *International Journal of Sustainable Built Environment*, pp. 153–65.

thus generating significant human rights and security concerns.¹⁹⁹ Achieving the most environmentally focused SDGs would help to alleviate the domestic economic and systemic burdens of these climate challenges.²⁰⁰ The co-benefits of climate mitigation are well-established and relate to energy security, improving public health, resource efficiency, sustainable employment opportunities, and reduced socio-economic disparities.²⁰¹ Therefore, strong and ambitious leadership to address the myriad of issues associated with the environmental pillar of sustainable development would be favourable on practical and political levels.

Traditional economic growth

Domestic economic benefits are associated with sustainable development. Economic prosperity is one of the three ‘mutually reinforcing’ dimensions of sustainable development,²⁰² with SDG 8 dedicated to achieving decent work and economic growth.²⁰³ The 2030 Agenda resolves to ‘create conditions for sustainable, inclusive and sustained economic growth, shared prosperity and decent work for all, taking into account different levels of national development and capacities’.²⁰⁴ This objective of sustained economic growth, by its very nature, may be a paradox of the SDGs. As leading scholars argue, ecological sustainability is incompatible with current models of production, consumption, and development.²⁰⁵ Despite being imaged as ‘bold’ and ‘ambitious’, the framework does not seek to radically transform global development.²⁰⁶ It does not call for the deconstruction of capitalism or for a transition to an alternative economic system. Rather, the SDGs uphold the status quo of infinite economic progress under the current unsustainable capitalist model. As a result, it is likely that states perceive national self-interest in the conservative economic agenda of the SDGs. Aligning with the traditional priorities of states to pursue ‘relentless growth-driven development’, the SDGs do not require strict respect for ‘planetary boundaries’ or challenge associated ecologically or socially destructive power structures.²⁰⁷ Additionally, the SDGs do not encroach on state sovereignty.²⁰⁸ While the framework could act as a stepping stone to more progressive development agendas in the future, the SDGs do not address the root cause of the human-made climate crisis and bypass opportunities for a sustainable economic

¹⁹⁹ See V. Kolmannskog, ‘Climate Change, Environmental Displacement and International Law’ (2012) 24(8) *Journal of International Development*, pp. 1071–81.

²⁰⁰ Such as SDG 13, 14, and 15.

²⁰¹ See A. Smith, *The Climate Bonus: Co-benefits of Climate Policy* (Routledge, 2013).

²⁰² UN, ‘Report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development’, Johannesburg (South Africa), 26 Aug.–4 Sept. 2002, UN Doc. A/CONF.199/20*, para. 5, available at: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/478154?ln=en>.

²⁰³ 2030 Agenda, SDG 8.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, para. 3.

²⁰⁵ S. Adelman, ‘The Sustainable Development Goals: Anthropocentrism and Neoliberalism’, in French & Kotzé, n. 26 above, pp. 15–40.

²⁰⁶ 2030 Agenda, Preamble, para. 7.

²⁰⁷ L.J. Kotzé & S. Adelman, ‘Environmental Law and the Unsustainability of Sustainable Development: A Tale of Disenchantment and of Hope’ (2023) *Law and Critique*, pp. 227–48, at 229–30.

²⁰⁸ 2030 Agenda, para. 18.

metamorphosis, opting instead for inadequate ‘techno-managerial green capitalist “solutions”’.²⁰⁹

3.5. Moral Obligation

States have an overriding moral obligation, both to their own citizens and as members of the international community, to tackle issues like the climate crisis, given its classification as a common concern for humankind.²¹⁰ In particular, nations in the global north have a historic responsibility for generating the majority of greenhouse gas emissions and over-exploitation of natural resources through colonial pursuits. By committing to the framework, states display their support for the realization of the 17 goals and associated norms, and state adherence to the voluntary monitoring and reporting mechanisms indicates that states believe that these objectives should be honoured and fulfilled.

Posner argues that states do not have a moral obligation to comply with international law and asserts that this way of thinking ‘sows confusion and causes harm rather than good’.²¹¹ However, upon examination of the principles of international law, it is clear that moral standards have been instilled into the foundations of the international legal system through the concept and language of solidarity. The Stockholm Declaration begins with a consideration of the need for a ‘common outlook and for common principles to inspire and guide the peoples of the world in the preservation and enhancement of the human environment’.²¹² It goes on to recognize that environmental protection is critical for the ‘well-being of peoples and economic development throughout the world’.²¹³ The manifestation of global solidarity can also be seen through the principle of CBDR. Recognizing the differences in national capacities and availability of resources, this principle instils a duty to minimize the impacts of the climate crisis and environmental degradation with regard to and in accordance with equity and respective capabilities, as set out in the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development²¹⁴ and the UNFCCC.²¹⁵

It could be said that sustainable development has always embodied moral considerations, given its regard for intra- and intergenerational equity. The definition of sustainable development used in the Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, ‘Our Common Future’, is based on two concepts: the ‘needs’ of humankind, particularly those in poverty, and the ‘limitations’ of the ability of the

²⁰⁹ Kotzé & Adelman, n. 207 above, pp. 235–6.

²¹⁰ UNFCCC, n. 101 above, Preamble.

²¹¹ Posner, n. 46 above, p. 1919.

²¹² Stockholm Declaration, adopted by the UN Conference on the Human Environment, Stockholm (Sweden), 5–16 June 1972, UN Doc. A/CONF.48/14/Rev.1, Preamble, available at: <https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/29567/ELGP1StockD.pdf>.

²¹³ Ibid., para. 2.

²¹⁴ Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, adopted by the UN Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), 3–14 June 1992, UN Doc. A/CONF.151/26 (Vol. I), 14 June 1992, Principle 7, available at: https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_CONF.151_26_Vol.I_Declaration.pdf.

²¹⁵ UNFCCC, n. 101 above, Art. 3.

natural environment to fulfil the needs of present and future generations.²¹⁶ In the light of these considerations, it would be erroneous to separate law and morality as these ‘are not radically distinct concepts’.²¹⁷ The SDGs represent the 21st-century ‘ethical agenda’ for sustainable development²¹⁸ and demonstrate a ‘collective endeavour based on moral commitment’ through political and social cooperation.²¹⁹ It is conceivable that the SDGs balance the legitimacy of law with principles of equity and social justice, traversing ‘political and moral dimensions’,²²⁰ and moral considerations cannot be separated from this framework. Achieving the SDGs would ‘profoundly’ improve the lives of all people and transform our world for the better.²²¹ By supporting the goals, states are taking responsibility for the well-being of current and future generations, signifying an understanding by the international community that achieving sustainable development is a morally right act. While no normative punishment exists for failure to adhere to the SDGs, there is a much greater existential cost to pay if the worst impacts of the climate crisis are not avoided, biodiversity loss is not halted, and critical human rights are not realized.

4. Conclusion

The SDGs have garnered global support and somewhat influenced domestic, international, and transnational priorities.²²² The near-universal acceptance of and reporting on a non-binding framework by states has created a newfound global paradigm, the normative impacts of which are yet to be fully established. A combination of all the above-mentioned factors contribute to the authority of the SDGs and influence state adherence, a feat that is particularly impressive when one considers its non-binding character. While national SDG progress is monitored, it may be difficult to quantify whether domestic adherence is sufficient, especially when attempting to compare nations with vastly different financial and governmental capacities. Most likely, adherence exists on a spectrum, ranging from minimal reporting and national integration to maximum engagement. States are not comprehensively adhering to this soft framework, which means that progress related to some SDG targets is inadequate, indicating ‘no movement’ or indeed have ‘regressed’ to 2015 levels.²²³ SDG non-adherence could be a deliberate decision by states, ignoring these soft commitments in pursuit of short-term gains. Yet, non-adherence does not necessarily signify state disregard for the three pillars of sustainable development. It could be

²¹⁶ ‘Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’: UNGA, n. 1 above, Ch. 2, para. 1.

²¹⁷ J. Brunnée & S.J. Toope, ‘International Law and Constructivism: Elements of an Interactional Theory of International Law’ (2000) 39(1) *Columbia Journal of Transnational Law*, pp. 19–74, at 40.

²¹⁸ J.B.S.O.A. Guerra et al., ‘Sustainable Development Goals and Ethics: Building “The Future We Want”’ (2022) 24(1) *Environment, Development and Sustainability*, pp. 9407–28, at 9425.

²¹⁹ Bexell & Jönsson, n. 116 above, p. 21.

²²⁰ Ibid, p. 20.

²²¹ 2030 Agenda, Preamble.

²²² See Biermann et al., n. 44 above (for discussions of the limited political impact of the SDGs).

²²³ UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, n. 33 above, p. 4.

reflective of an existing lack of political will to tackle these labyrinthine challenges or a ‘shift in the policy goals’ of a state.²²⁴ Undoubtedly, the problem of inadequate state observance with agreed commitments is not unique to the SDGs, but is a widespread issue facing both binding and non-binding obligations in the international normative order.

This article identified normative, legitimacy, reciprocity, reputational, self-interest, and moral dimensions, which seem to be influencing state behaviour and motivating commitment to the SDGs. While demonstrating varying degrees of theoretical alignment, the SDGs offer a versatile lens to explore the different motives for state adherence to a soft law framework in the inter- and transnational legal spheres. The complex dynamics at play are important to recognize. As with understanding the relationship between states and inter- and transnational law,²²⁵ by discerning what motivates states to adhere to the SDGs, their functionality and practical applications can be strengthened and leveraged to inform the design and implementation of the post-2030 Agenda.

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²²⁴ Brewster, n. 182 above, p. 330.

²²⁵ Guzman, n. 5 above, p. 1826.

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