

Executive Summary

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are the centrepiece of a new post-2015 development agenda. This agenda envisages a world free from poverty and deprivation, and where the fundamental conditions for human prosperity—healthy ecosystems, a stable climate, and a clean environment—are safely maintained. This vision is expected to guide international organisations, the private sector, civil society, and governments in all countries and at all levels in the shared pursuit of a healthier world and a better tomorrow. Governments will likely agree on the SDGs in September 2015 in New York, culminating a two-year negotiation process. The recently completed 3rd International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD3) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, was the latest milestone in that process, concluding with an agreement upon, amongst others, a technology facilitation mechanism to help implement the SDGs. But while this process has made some headway on this new mechanism and other means of implementation (MOI), considerable work lies ahead in bringing this new development agenda into action.

This book *Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals: From Agenda to Action* joins the timely discussion on what should happen after the SDGs are adopted. It deals with the questions of how globally agreed goals can be made relevant to different national and local contexts, and what institutional architectures and policy frameworks can pave the way for achieving them. More specifically, the book focuses on how governance—the way authority is exercised and decisions are made and

executed—can infuse action into the new development agenda. The book is divided into two main sections. The first half focuses on how governance and finance affected broad-based development goals; the second half concentrates on governance and MOI for the education, water, energy and biodiversity sectors.

The introductory chapter outlines an analytical framework that stresses how three different aspects of governance influence development: 1) the make-up of national government institutions; 2) the interaction between the design of international agreements and national compliance with their provisions; and 3) the facilitation of collaboration across multiple stakeholders at multiple levels (see Figure 1 below). It suggests that implementing the SDGs will require attention to how the main actors and primary motivations in these three views can help countries make progress on the SDGs. It further argues that the insights from each of these views can be seen by looking at how governance and other MOI affected past international policymaking processes and how it is likely to affect future developments across (Chapters 2 through 4) and within key sectors (Chapters 5 through 8).

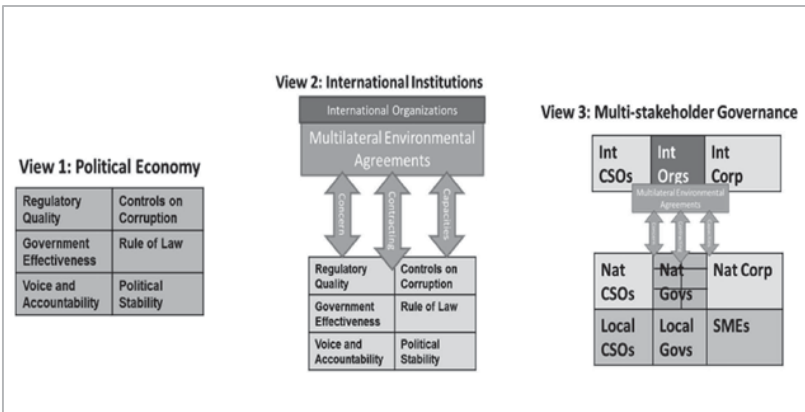


Figure 1: Analytical framework: three views on governance.

Chapter 2 draws chiefly on the first perspective of governance (the make-up of national government institutions) to show that effective governments and rule of law had a significant influence on progress with the MDGs for a wide range of countries. It concludes that international organisations and donor agencies should devote more resources to building essential skills and base competencies for government

institutions; this will not only be essential for achieving basic development priorities but could offer a springboard for a more integrated, transformational and universal agenda under the SDGs. Failure to get these institutional fundamentals in place could stall progress at the formative stages of SDG implementation.

Chapter 3 identifies two basic forms of governance: top-down enforcement-based governance (compliance) and governance based on voluntary stakeholder engagement (collaboration) (the second and third views in the introductory chapter). It then uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to analyse how the discourse of governance has evolved in key intergovernmental documents and agreements on sustainable development. Based on this analysis, the chapter shows that over time there has been a notable increase in references to both compliance and collaborative governance, with an especially pronounced increase in references to collaboration. The chapter concludes that national governments should aim for governance arrangements that complement conventional compliance with those fostering multi-stakeholder collaboration and apply this in their planning and policy making.

Chapter 4 focuses on financing. Its analysis of international agreements on financing identifies key elements for keeping signatories accountable. It argues that clear commitments, strong monitoring frameworks, and substantial high-level dialogues on follow-up measures were essential for accountability in past international agreements. It also identifies a need for indicators not only to monitor the input side—how much funding is provided—but also how funds are spent and how this contributes to concrete development outcomes. These findings are expected to apply not only to financing agreements but international agreements in general. Looking at the outcome of the recently held FfD3 meeting on finance, it concludes that the vague and general commitments of that agreement will make accountability challenging.

Chapter 5 underlines that improving the quality as well as the quantity of education is essential to sustainable development. Few other areas offer as great a return of investment as qualitative upgrades in education. As such, the inclusion of quality education needs not to be seen as simply an SDG but also an essential MOI for other SDGs. Making connections between education and other SDGs will reduce the likelihood that less quantifiable elements of quality education are cut from policy agendas, budgets, and curricula. The chapter further argues that Education for

Sustainable Development (ESD) offers an actionable approach to enhancing education quality.

Chapter 6 argues that the key to making water systems more secure is an integrated perspective that positions water at the core of the SDGs. Failure to operationalise such an integrated perspective could have ramifications for several areas, including food, health, energy and environment. The chapter contends that capturing synergies goes beyond simply recognising water management’s inherent complexities; these have been well-documented in calls for integrated water resources management (IWRM). Moving beyond IWRM requires policies and practices that leverage synergies between water and other sustainability objectives. However, which synergies countries pursue will vary depending on the importance they attach to: 1) improved access; 2) enhanced efficiency; and 3) systems transformation (see Figure 2 below).

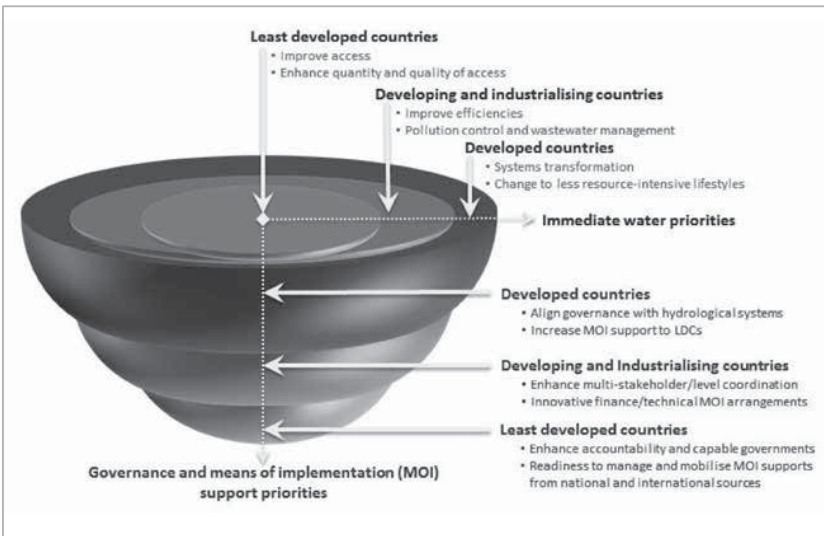


Figure 2: An illustration of how countries may interpret targets and MOI for an SDG on water

Chapter 7 maintains the SDGs are uniquely positioned for “synergistic interactions” with existing legal instruments, namely the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and its Aichi Targets. Capturing these complementarities will necessitate recognising the multiple benefits of integrating biodiversity into the SDGs as well as due attention to consistency between targets, national planning and policies,

multi-stakeholder engagement, and reporting and review mechanisms.

Chapter 8 suggests a well-designed energy SDG can alleviate poverty, improve health and wellbeing, and mitigate climate change. But realising these multiple benefits requires countries to tailor SDGs to national contexts. This will involve placing varying weights on energy access, energy efficiency, renewable energy and energy conservation. These context-appropriate targets are likely to be more effective when embedded in enabling policy environments that allow local governments and businesses to introduce and scale up energy-saving innovations as well as to deploy renewables. Existing initiatives such as Sustainable Energy for All (SE4All) could help support the scaling process; leveraging synergies between energy and other SDGs could also contribute to implementation and scaling of an energy SDG.

Chapter 9 summarises the book's main conclusions and proposes future research. In particular, it highlights the importance and possible tensions within shifts to more integrated and inclusive forms of governance. It further outlines a broadening of research methodologies to actively involve multiple stakeholders in the generation of research outputs, focus on partnerships, and on effective multi-stakeholder participation. These elements are likely to become preconditions for turning aspirational goals and targets into transformational actions.

