



Our Shared Future

The governance challenges posed by the sustainable development, climate and World Humanitarian Summit agendas

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Key messages

- The outcomes of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the Sustainable Development Summit and the World Humanitarian Summit reflect a common recognition of the urgent need for new, effective and coherent institutional mechanisms to tackle climate change, sustainable development and humanitarian crises.
- The outcomes of all three summits rest on effective political leadership and positive political momentum. Yet the breadth of the demands contained within them underlines the daunting scale and complexity of the political and policy challenges.
- Institutional fragmentation, competing political interests, weak political commitment and leadership, and uncertain civil society and business engagement risk jeopardising progress towards the goals and commitments of the three agendas.
- Progress will depend on action by governments, the UN Development System, the World Bank and other inter-governmental organisations and regional institutions to bed these instruments down in national governance arrangements and political processes.

1. Introduction

The major global summits of 2015 and 2016, in particular the Sustainable Development Summit (Agenda 2030), the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS), reflect a growing recognition that the complexity, magnitude and perilous nature of crises – including climate change, inequality, chronic poverty, state fragility, conflict, forced displacement and protracted humanitarian crises – far outstrip the capacities of the global governance system. The overlaps and commonalities in the problems identified and the solutions sought across all these agendas speak to the urgent need to develop a new shared institutional machinery. The question now is whether these global summits – separately and together – have delivered at least the promise of the kind of governance apparatus that the world needs, and have sketched out clearly what can be done to maximise the chances that these new instruments will make a difference. Although starting from a shared recognition of the challenges humanity faces, to what extent are these agreements mutually reinforcing? Have they covered all the governance issues that need to be addressed for genuine progress to be made towards the goals they have set, and if not, where are the gaps that need to be filled?

This briefing paper appraises the new governance landscape that these agreements have created – or at least aspire to create. Its focus is on the extent to which the global instruments created through these summits are likely to direct and constrain the decisions, behaviours, activities and relationships of key stakeholders, including state and non-state actors, in ways that promote progress towards achieving the agreed goals. It starts by reviewing the main attributes of the governance arrangements that have come out of the three summits, asking where each sits along the continuum between binding obligations, at one extreme, and declarations of intent at the other. The focus then moves to areas of convergence and tension, gaps and weaknesses, within and among the three agendas, and the mechanisms of governance that they seek to establish. The final section offers suggestions for what needs to happen now for the new frameworks to have any hope of delivering on their promises in the decades ahead. The paper highlights a number of priority areas for the UN's Development System, the incoming Secretary-General, the wider international community, civil society and business actors over the coming years and decades.

2. Governance frameworks

The Paris Agreement, Agenda 2030 and the WHS outcomes all aim for the widest possible participation globally. The 2030 Agenda's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement were adopted by all UN member states, and while the WHS outcomes did not achieve the same level and breadth of international

approval, it had at the outset the shared ambition of universal global endorsement. Received wisdom from the history of international relations would suggest that the price that has to be paid for such wide participation is a reduction in the depth or ambition of the commitments agreed to. What seems fairly remarkable, therefore, particularly as regards the SDGs and the Paris Agreement, is that the breadth of participation has been combined with significant depth in terms of the substantive commitments that these agreements entail (Persson et al., 2016).

In all three cases, it is the 'soft' legal standing of the commitments that largely squares the circle. In the case of the SDGs, there are no hard obligations in terms of binding rules and commitments within the 17 goals, many of the 169 associated targets are vague and aspirational, and no implementation responsibilities or accountabilities are clearly assigned to any particular authorities (*ibid.*). The Paris Agreement, meanwhile, has been described as combining a 'hard' legal shell with a 'soft' enforcement mechanism: although governments that have signed up to the agreement will be obliged under international law to produce and register Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to climate change mitigation and adaptation, they will not be legally obliged to achieve them (Bailey and Tomlinson, 2016). The Paris Agreement is therefore a hybrid type of international accord combining binding and non-binding elements, with only the procedural aspects carrying any substantive obligations. At the very softest end of the spectrum, the WHS commitments reflect the fact that the summit itself was not an inter-governmental process but rather a multi-stakeholder consultation intended to produce (hopefully) a shared roadmap for all actors – governments, NGOs and others – with a stake in responding to humanitarian crises. While there is the possibility (indeed likelihood, in the case of the SDGs and the Paris Agreement) that some of the targets pledged at international level will be translated into domestic legislation, the inherent flexibility of these agreements nonetheless has profound implications for the nature of the governance regimes they support.

A number of important common governance attributes can be identified within all three sets of goals and commitments, all of which flow from their non-binding (and therefore, at the international level at least, their essentially political) nature.

2.1 National responsibilities

Although global in scope and ambition, and despite a recognition that individual state or UN action is inadequate in the face of global climate change, sustainable development challenges and humanitarian crises, it is nevertheless mainly to national, sub-national and non-state actors that the world has turned.

Thus, the UN General Assembly Resolution on Agenda 2030 states that '[c]ohesive nationally owned sustainable development strategies, supported by integrated national

financing frameworks, will be at the heart of our efforts’, and reiterates 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’. Meanwhile, the resolution adopting the 169 targets states that they are ‘aspirational and global, with each Government setting its own national targets guided by the global level of ambition but taking into account national circumstances’.

Following the failure of the top-down, legally binding framework of the Kyoto Protocol, the Paris Agreement allows countries to set their own targets and plans for climate change mitigation, and establishes an international framework only for the reporting and reviewing of national pledges. While it includes the principle of ‘common but differentiated responsibilities’, the bottom-up process through which countries determine their NDCs allows for ‘self-differentiation’, enabling individual countries to take their own economic circumstances into account in deciding emission reduction targets and mitigation efforts.

The WHS, meanwhile, brought together a wide range of state and non-state actors in a common but diffused pledging exercise, leading to a complex patchwork of essentially informal governmental, organisational and network-based commitments to the five-pronged agenda for change articulated by the outgoing Secretary-General: to strengthen political leadership to prevent and end conflict; to uphold the norms that safeguard humanity; to ‘leave no one behind’; to shift from delivering aid to ending need; and to ‘invest in humanity’. Whatever the specific commitments made – for example, the Grand Bargain agreed by major donors and aid agencies to make aid more efficient and effective, or the Charter on Disability Inclusion signed by around 100 governments and agencies, and the Charter4Change through which 27 international NGOs commit to passing at least 20% of their funding to national NGOs by 2018 – the institutional responsibility for implementation sits with the individual governmental and non-governmental actors that signed up.

2.2 Inclusion and accountability

In all three summit processes, the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders in the development of the outcomes reflected not only an acknowledgement of the importance of consultation and broad-based ownership and awareness of the commitments across civil society, but also a recognition of the importance and shared responsibilities of non-state actors in the implementation, monitoring and review of the various summit goals and commitments.

Action on climate change globally has evolved substantially beyond the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to involve a wide variety of non-state actors, including civil society organisations, national and international NGOs, global corporations and smaller firms, sub-national and

transnational networks and regional and sub-national organisations. Through the Lima-Paris Action Agenda, the Paris Agreement provides an explicit platform for actions by businesses, financial institutions, municipal authorities and regional organisations, as well as NGOs and other civil society representatives. Future reporting on climate mitigation will include initiatives by non-state actors, with a dedicated UNFCCC portal established for this purpose; meanwhile, scrutiny by civil society, including ongoing monitoring and public naming and shaming, represents a key mechanism of the Paris Agreement’s review system.

The governance architecture of the SDGs will also depend on multi-stakeholder participation in national review processes. A recent resolution on follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda (UN General Assembly, 2016) acknowledges the critical roles of non-governmental actors and groups in the formal SDG review process, not only as an independent check on government reporting, but also as stakeholders in the SDGs themselves, and therefore as actors equally bound to report on their commitments and contributions to achieving the goals.

During the global consultations for the WHS, the field was purposefully left open for proposals and commitments from all stakeholders participating in the summit to shape the outcomes, and all actors taking part were encouraged to make their pledges public. Around 9,000 people attended the summit, with representation weighted very heavily towards inter-governmental, non-governmental and civil society actors, rather than heads of government (of whom only 55 were present). The balance of representation and the nature of the WHS commitments reflected the fact that NGOs – particularly international NGOs – bear a heavy burden of responsibility for action in the humanitarian sector, and hence for implementation of the WHS commitments, alongside governments and donor agencies. At the same time, the lack of clear commitments to support local responders and people affected by crisis and to strengthen downward accountability betrayed the continuing barriers to meaningful participation in humanitarian action for many stakeholders at the local level.

2.3 Political leadership

The outcomes of all three summits rest first and foremost on an assumption of (or at least hope for) effective political leadership and positive political momentum towards achieving the headline objectives. The bottom-up design of both the Paris Agreement and Agenda 2030 means that both depend on national political processes and bargaining to maintain progress. Both, however, will also depend to a great extent on effective political leadership at the global level. The G7 countries, for instance, will be expected to demonstrate leadership in climate change mitigation, having committed in 2015 to de-carbonise their economies over the course of the century (Bailey and Tomlinson, 2016). The extent to which faith is placed in

political leadership, both nationally and internationally, also exposes the fundamental political fragility of these agreements. Although the Paris Agreement has entered into force much sooner than expected, its fate will rest on whether governments are willing and able to ratchet up their commitments over the coming years.

For the SDGs, the success of the HLPF as a political champion of the sustainable development agenda, combined with governments' buy-in, will be crucial to maintain positive political momentum at the global level. To improve on the less than dazzling achievements of its predecessor, the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, the HLPF will need to attract and maintain high-level political participation, such as at the heads of state meeting in 2019, plus hold the continuing interest and involvement of a broad swathe of non-governmental actors and interests.

Political leadership is also crucial to the WHS' five core responsibilities. Yet the participation of heads of government was disappointing, with none of the P5 heads of state represented and Russia boycotting the summit altogether. Despite the lofty ambitions articulated in the summit outcomes, some of the most important and politically contentious issues facing the international humanitarian sector, including human rights violations, internal displacement, access issues and UN reform, were all but entirely sidestepped. Against the backdrop of the vicious wars in Syria, Yemen and elsewhere, and with Russia not at the summit table, governments' joint statement on the affirmation of the importance of and adherence to international humanitarian law¹ and their condemnation of attacks on hospitals and other civilian targets appeared somewhat hollow. Overall, the lack of high-level political patronage supporting the WHS commitments significantly undermines their credibility.

2.4 Follow-up and review processes

Monitoring, reporting and verification will be essential components of the governance architectures associated with the three summits. In all three cases, the bottom-up nature of implementation implies a matching bottom-up, and therefore fairly dispersed, structure for monitoring and verification arrangements.

In the case of the SDGs, each country decides national review processes based on existing domestic governance mechanisms, such as parliamentary oversight arrangements. Review arrangements at the international level will focus on Voluntary National Reviews carried out by the HLPF to assess progress, achievements and challenges, to share experiences and to provide guidance and recommendations for follow-up. Complementing review activities at the international level, regional groupings are expected to support peer learning and the

sharing of best practices and discussion of shared targets; at all levels, from global down to local, non-governmental organisations and groups are expected to play a role. To support follow-up, an Inter-Agency and Expert Group on the SDGs (IAEG-SDGs) is developing a comprehensive set of global indicators to support each of the 169 targets, as well as highlighting where an appropriate methodology or standards are being developed, and which indicators currently lack any established methodology or standards (cf. UN Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDGs, 2016).

For the Paris Agreement, transparency is a key regulatory instrument. Although the agreement established principles for an integrated reporting system, it has not codified specific rules to govern monitoring, reporting and verification for emissions and national implementation of related pledges and policies. According to Bailey and Tomlinson (2016), this is likely to be one of the main negotiating topics over coming years, with little likelihood of a strong system of independent verification coming out of it; they also note that the reporting framework will apply only to states, so aggregating state and non-state actions without double-counting will pose a significant challenge. The main mechanism to drive any ratcheting up of future commitments will be regular reviews of progress towards the target of not exceeding a 2° global temperature rise, with a first 'facilitative dialogue' review scheduled for 2018 and a formal 'global stocktake' intended for 2023 and every five years thereafter.

No comparable monitoring, reporting and verification architecture is envisaged for the WHS commitments. Indeed, even the Grand Bargain, perhaps the most concrete commitment to come out of the WHS process, is arguably too weak to support a robust system of follow-up and review even if there was an intention to establish one. Donors have only committed for funding to flow 'as directly as possible' to local and national aid actors. It is also still unclear where the institutional home of the Grand Bargain will be (the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) are both under consideration). The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has established a database to collate agencies' reporting against the WHS commitments,² and networks such as ALNAP³ are considering other mechanisms to monitor the implementation of commitments across the sector, but participation in these initiatives is more-or-less entirely voluntary. The lack of any more robust or formalised follow-up and review mechanisms linked to the WHS outcomes – plus the fact that the power to achieve the core responsibilities is largely not in the hands of most participants in the WHS process – does not bode well.

1. See <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2016/05/257660.htm>

2. Platform for Action, Commitments and Transformations (PACT): <http://agendaforhumanity.org>.

3. Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action: www.alnap.org.

2.5 Lack of standardisation across targets and commitments

Another feature of the bottom-up processes supporting the international governance of climate change, sustainable development and humanitarian action is the lack of read-across or standardisation of associated national (and sub-national, non-governmental and regional) targets and commitments. Although the sustainable development agenda has a head start in the work of the IAEG-SDG, the emphasis on national ownership of sustainable development processes and national monitoring and verification mechanisms means that many countries are likely to develop their own targets. It is not clear whether the UN's monitoring and verification system, which focuses on the work of the HLPF, will accommodate highly variable sets of national targets and associated data, or whether this will require more standardised reporting based on internationally developed targets (Persson et al., 2016).

The NDCs pledged under the Paris Agreement are so far entirely unstandardised; for example, some relate to the entire economy, whereas others are focused on specific sectors. This poses substantial problems for comparing and aggregating target-related data, and will make it difficult to compare or assess individual countries' NDCs and their implementation. Participants in the WHS, meanwhile, were asked but not required to generate commitments. While there is support for making the commitments public, it will be left to individual organisations, governments and networks to hold themselves to account for the commitments made.

3. Convergence, tensions, gaps and weaknesses

As noted in a recent briefing on the Paris Agreement and Agenda 2030, '[t]he sustainable development agenda and the climate agenda of the United Nations are not established in a vacuum or isolated from each other; [t]hey are rather part of the same reality' (Sharp and van see Krooij, 2015). Many argue that the SDGs require a successful climate deal, and vice-versa, and the two processes have the potential to influence each other on an institutional level and in terms of substance (*ibid.*). Hence, it is significant that the Secretary-General's office worked to broaden discussions within the UNFCCC to include resilient development, and that Goal 13 of the SDGs directly ties in the sustainable development agenda with the Paris Agreement.

For the WHS, a key feature of the consultations leading up to the summit was a drive to break down the institutional and operational barriers between humanitarian response, climate change action and sustainable development, to arrive at a more coherent approach to supporting and assisting people affected by – and at risk of – crisis. The UN agencies signed up to a Commitment to Action on collaborating towards

collective outcomes that are consistent with the SDGs and over multi-year timeframes, reflecting the Secretary-General's vision of a more effective common approach, with humanitarian and development agencies responding as one. The holistic approach promoted by Agenda 2030, in which human development, environmental sustainability and peace are seen as linked and addressed in a joined-up way, similarly adds new impetus behind the long-standing drive to achieve improved coherence. The challenge of leaving no one behind and ending need immediately implies responsibilities for humanitarian actors alongside development counterparts, particularly in light of the fact that perhaps half of the global poor now live in states affected by conflict and violence (Chandran et al., 2015).

Through the negotiations leading up to the Paris Agreement, developing countries succeeded in their demands that it establish adaptation to climate change alongside mitigation as a global goal (Article 7(1)), thereby strengthening the existing adaptation framework and reinforcing recognition of the disproportionate impacts of climate change on poorer countries (Falkner, 2016). The 2015 Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction lends further strength to the demand for more coherent approaches with its call for 'integrated and inclusive economic, structural, legal, social, health, cultural, educational, environmental, technological, political and institutional measures that prevent and reduce hazard exposure and vulnerability to disaster, increase preparedness for response recovery, and thus strengthen resilience'.

Overlaps in the solutions and recommendations proposed by these global agendas also highlight the importance of identifying and implementing synergistic approaches and actions wherever possible, within the UN and in government policies and the activities of private sector and other non-governmental actors. Across the three agreements, there is a common call for concerted and coherent action to manage global challenges holistically, a common focus on prevention and resilience, a common demand for more seamless 'transitions', a common recognition of the central importance of addressing root causes (and hence the centrality of politics), and a recognition of the need to localise responses through a renewed focus on nationally or locally owned processes (UN Working Group on Transitions, 2015). In all cases, however, the sheer breadth of the demands only underlines the daunting scale and complexity of the political and policy challenges (Chandran et al., 2015), with the shared rhetoric arguably obscuring the tensions and obstacles that will need to be addressed if meaningful institutional reforms and the necessary joint action are to be achieved.

3.1 Tensions and gaps within the three agendas

A number of commentators have highlighted the challenges posed by the multiple goals and targets identified under the SDGs. The complex issues that the goals address and the multiple drivers associated with many of them mean

that outcomes are highly uncertain and conflicts highly likely, including competition for government resources across different goals and targets (Persson et al., 2016). There is also potential for conflict between some of the goals and targets and other policy regimes, for instance between Target 17.4 on long-term debt sustainability and the prescriptions of international financial institutions (Dasandi et al., 2015). There is a risk either of a retreat into policy silos, undermining the cross-cutting nature of many of the SDGs, or a tilt towards over-ambitious governance frameworks that achieve little in the way of concrete progress (*ibid.*).

In the case of the Paris Agreement, the quantifiable gap between the collective 2° target and the current NDCs can only be reduced by ratcheting up the NDCs, which may or may not materialise, and which may or may not deliver the promised reductions in future emissions. There is a chance, of course, that the ‘pledge and review’ process set up by the Paris Agreement will allow countries to promise too little and deliver even less, but as Kyoto-style mandatory targets are off the table, there is little alternative to the bottom-up mechanism that the Paris Agreement offers.

What could be described as the pick and mix governance framework promoted by the WHS perhaps presents less obvious potential for tensions or gaps, at least in theory, because it offers something for everyone, and participants in the summit are free to commit to whichever parts of the agenda they choose. As discussed further below, however, the assumptions underlying the call for closer integration of humanitarian and development action bring into focus the failure, long preceding the WHS, to successfully link humanitarian and development policy and practice, and the many arguments against trying to do this at all, particularly from the humanitarian side.

3.2 Tensions between the three agendas

As noted above, the SDG on climate change (Goal 13⁴) is dependent on the Paris Agreement, and so at the normative level the link between the two agendas is very explicit. At the institutional level, however, it is currently weak. To some extent, this reflects the fact that negotiators for the SDGs were not the same people involved in negotiating the Paris Agreement. There is little clarity about whether Goal 13 implies that governments should report to the HLPF (concerned with the SDGs) as well as the UNFCCC, or how the two processes should be linked. As the SDGs acknowledge that the UNFCCC is the primary global forum for negotiating on climate change, it is likely that governments will take their UNFCCC reporting obligations more seriously because of the binding nature of the Paris Agreement’s reporting

obligations. The bottom-up nature of both agendas could create opportunities for linking policy and monitoring, reporting and verification across the sustainable development and climate agendas at the national level, but for many countries this will require substantial institutional reform (Sharp and van de Kooij, 2015).

The many obvious links between the SDGs and the WHS core responsibilities, and the higher level of inter-governmental commitment and buy-in and higher profile of Agenda 2030, implies that successful implementation of the WHS commitments as a whole is highly dependent on the success of the SDGs. The complementarity of the two agendas, at least on the face of it, adds considerably more credibility to the WHS outcomes than would have been the case if the summit had been convened as a stand-alone exercise. Indeed, the WHS very much took Agenda 2030 as a given and as a base upon which to build the summit commitments. However, while the WHS is very explicitly tied to Agenda 2030, the SDGs make almost no direct mention of humanitarian concerns in return; although Goal 16 on the promotion of just, peaceful and inclusive societies is relevant to the many conflict-affected contexts that compel a humanitarian response, in the 17 goals and 169 targets, and in the 225 indicators that have so far been developed by the IAEG-SDG, refugees and internally displaced people are given only a brief mention as groups to report on under ‘leaving no one behind’, and humanitarian action and access are not mentioned at all.

To the extent that the WHS references Agenda 2030, this is most directly in relation to the humanitarian–development divide. This remains a highly contentious issue within the humanitarian camp because of the inherent tensions between the means of development action, involving close partnership with the state, and the core humanitarian principles of independent and neutral action. This debate dates back decades, and regardless of the way it is expressed – ‘linking relief, rehabilitation and development’, the ‘relief to development continuum’, ‘early recovery’ and more recently ‘resilience’ – shows little sign of being resolved without fundamental changes to the way humanitarian assistance is framed and financed.

3.3 Weaknesses and risks in follow-up and review arrangements

Despite the critical importance of monitoring, reporting and verification in the governance mechanisms that will underpin the Paris Agreement and the SDGs, neither is as yet supported by well-developed or well-worked-out arrangements for effective follow-up and review. Although the IAEG-SDG indicators represent an important step towards effective monitoring of progress towards the SDGs, 88 of the in-total 226 indicators

4. SDG 13: ‘To take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts’.

have no established methodology and standards to support them, or methodologies and standards are still being developed; for a further 57 indicators countries do not regularly produce data (IAEG-SDG, September 2016). Meanwhile, documents on SDG reporting and review mainly focus on how this might be arranged, and offer less detail on what needs to be followed up and reviewed, why and with what effect (Persson et al., 2016). As already noted, it remains unclear whether the Voluntary National Reviews to be undertaken through the HLPF should reflect the globally adopted goals and targets or nationally defined ones, or both; there is also a need to shift attention from a focus on monitoring the institutional incorporation of the SDGs into national frameworks and mechanisms to monitoring actual efforts to achieve the SDG commitments (*ibid.*). In the case of the Paris Agreement, it remains to be seen what future negotiations will deliver in the way of specific rules for monitoring NDC implementation and greenhouse gas emissions. Many countries will be very wary of giving away much control over what and how they report to the UNFCCC (Bailey and Tomlinson, 2016).

3.4 Institutional fragmentation

Many observers complain that the overall global machinery intended to support and deliver sustainable development, humanitarian action and climate change mitigation and adaptation are not fit for purpose. Fragmentation of the UN system is often singled out for particular criticism and concern. Although governments stressed the importance of an adequately resourced, relevant, coherent, efficient and effective UN system throughout the Agenda 2030 negotiations (UN Working Group on Transitions, 2015), there has been no fundamental change. Particular failings include a strategic gap (with little evidence of strategy encompassing political, security, development and humanitarian tools); a financing gap (with a lack of suitably flexible and dynamic mechanisms to support effective integration); and a capacity gap (in terms of leadership and implementation). In other words, the big problems facing the UN have not been fixed. Hence the capacity of the UN system to support governments' and non-state actors' efforts to achieve the SDGs and climate change targets and to improve humanitarian action seems limited without the kind of radical institutional reforms which have so far not figured in the negotiations or discussions associated with these three agendas. At the national level, where the focus of sustainable development and climate action is meant to be, the challenges of institutional fragmentation are probably equally problematic, albeit highly variable across different national and regional contexts.

3.5 Political risks and challenges

The central importance of political processes and political interests is implicit across all three agendas, to the extent that many of the challenges identified and the associated goals and targets agreed to tackle them involve political considerations such as inclusive domestic governance, support for peace processes, tackling inequality or focusing government public spending so as to 'leave no one behind'. Robert Falkner has noted that '[f]or most countries, the political challenges posed by climate change are daunting', as '[w]ithin most societies, the costs resulting from climate change impacts and mitigation measures tend to be unevenly distributed, which makes it difficult to apply straightforward calculations of aggregate cost and benefit to explain national climate policy stances, and significant roles are played by other factors such as societal perceptions of climate risk, environmental values, sectoral business interests and political institutions' (Falkner, 2016). The Paris Agreement is premised on an assumption of positive political momentum and progress at national level, particularly among the major emitters, but it would only take the failure of a small number of large emitters to implement ambitious NDCs to all but entirely derail the global effort to achieve the 2° target (Bailey and Tomlinson, 2016). Arguably, the non-binding nature of the SDGs, the breadth and complexity of the many goals and targets that they cover and the likelihood of political contention around any one of these make them even more prone to failures of political will and/or political process. All of the core responsibilities coming out of the WHS are inherently political in content and ambition – most notably, the commitments to prevent and end conflict through timely, coherent and decisive political leadership, and to respect the rules of war – and yet there is nothing in the governance mechanisms established by the WHS that provides any kind of credible framework to bring about the required political consensus and action.

3.6 Civil society monitoring and involvement of non-state actors

Because of the importance in both the Paris Agreement and Agenda 2030 of governments' accountability to domestic electorates and other stakeholders at the national level, monitoring national policies on sustainable development and climate mitigation and adaptation depends heavily on the capacity of civil society to engage and exert pressure on governments. In many countries, however, NGOs and CBOs with an interest in climate change and development – and humanitarian issues for that matter – operate with very little safe political space, and often face extremely draconian controls (Falkner, 2016).⁵ Without swift and concerted action by major

5. See also <https://www.theguardian.com/law/2015/aug/26/ngos-face-restrictions-laws-human-rights-generation>. Reported examples in recent years include the Indian government's targeting of Greenpeace, Ecuador's action to close down the conservation and indigenous rights group Pachamama, Pakistan's temporary expulsion of Save the Children, and the Hungarian government's harassment of organisations assisting refugees and vulnerable migrants.

governmental and inter-governmental players to protect civil society organisations and ensure the political space for them to operate safely, the Paris Agreement and Agenda 2030 will be dead in the water.

3.7 Global governance imperatives

As clearly articulated in the Paris Agreement and in the formulation of the SDGs, effective action to achieve sustainable development, control climate change and address the causes of humanitarian crises depends on concerted efforts by governments and non-state actors at the national level. However, as argued by Dasandi et al. (2015), ‘there is no getting away from the supra-national aspect of governance for sustainable development given the irreducibly global nature of the challenge’; indeed, ‘[m]any developmental issues from forest stewardship, to soil fertility, desertification and air pollution can only be addressed at the global level given their transboundary character’.

A recent report by the UN Committee for Development (2014) makes a very strong argument for closer attention to the global provenance of many of the ills that the climate, sustainable development and humanitarian agendas are concerned with, and the global governance responses they require. The committee emphasises the negative impacts of unequal access to key global decision-making fora, which marginalises many poorer countries – for example, the G7 and G20 can both be seen as examples of ‘elite multilateralism’ (Ocampo, 2011) – while global corporations have disproportionate access to these fora compared with trade unions, consumer groups and other civil society organisations (Transnational Institute, 2014). The committee also notes how the current global governance structure reflects the asymmetric or unbalanced character of globalisation, which has favoured the mobility of capital, goods and services over the mobility of labour. Even if there is the political will to act at national level, the weakness of and/or distortions in global rules and cooperation on matters such as tax and trade has the effect of constraining the action that governments can take to promote sustainable development. Goal 17 of the SDGs includes a reference to trade targets, and the 2015 Addis Ababa Financing for Development conference sought to tackle tax issues. Overall, however, the bottom-up processes that the Paris Agreement and Agenda 2030 promote arguably do little or nothing to address the global processes and constraints that directly affect sustainable development, climate change and humanitarian response at national level.

4. Next steps

The SDGs, the Paris Agreement and the WHS commitments may be championed as a ‘triumph of multilateralism’,⁶ but if triumph is not to be followed swiftly by tragedy, there is an

urgent need for action to maximise the chances of success and address the gaps and weaknesses that most directly jeopardise progress. There may be little to be done about the underlying political constraints that favour ‘soft’ bottom-up political agreements over the development of more binding obligations at the international level. Indeed, there is no good basis for assuming that more binding instruments would prove any more successful in bringing about the actions and changes needed to achieve climate, sustainable development and humanitarian goals, as illustrated only too clearly by the failure of the Kyoto Protocol. But whether the politics will support progress or failure will depend to a great extent on what action is taken over the next few years by governments, the UN Development System, the World Bank and other inter-governmental organisations and regional institutions to bed these instruments down in national governance arrangements and political processes. This must include support for the meaningful engagement of private sector and civil society actors at all levels, from local up to global organisations. The new UN Secretary-General will have a crucial role to play in promoting, catalysing and supporting the key institutional partnerships and concrete actions required at multiple levels, and in maintaining the strategic focus on ensuring effective efforts to address each of the governance priorities highlighted below.

4.1 Analyse and address the gaps and inconsistencies within and between the three agendas and the political challenges these pose

The UNFCCC has estimated that the NDCs submitted in the run-up to the Paris conference would result in global warming of 2.7% above pre-industrial levels, and this estimate is based on the very optimistic assumption that all national pledges will be implemented (Falkner, 2016). Although the earlier-than-expected entry into force of the Paris Agreement may increase the political momentum behind the international climate regime, going on his sceptical public statements on climate change Donald Trump’s victory in the US presidential election has the potential to burst the Paris balloon. As such, there is an urgent need to ramp up the ambitions of the NDCs as far and as fast as is politically feasible. As Bailey and Tomlinson (2016) caution, ‘a decade in which ambitions are not raised ... could sap the international process of the momentum that was achieved in the run-up to, and during, Paris’. The political processes determining NDCs and the decisions and actions of the major emitters will be critical. The European Union (EU) will need to broker a deal between its more ambitious and less ambitious member states; meanwhile, in the United States, any progress on climate change – perhaps particularly during the Trump presidency – will need to be championed by those US states most committed to controlling emissions (on the basis that sub-national actors

6. See the UN Secretary-General’s statement of 16 June 2016: <http://static.un.org/press/en/2016/sghsm17857.doc.htm>.

have a key role to play in committing to and implementing the Paris Agreement) (Averchenkova et al., 2016).

As regards the SDGs, Dasandi et al. (2015) recommend that governments and other stakeholders set about analysing the tensions between competing SDGs and associated targets and between SDGs and other goals and targets – for example, phasing out agricultural support subsidies while also seeking to ensure access to adequate, affordable, safe and nutritious food. Because the effective management of interactions between sectors and across different goals and targets is inherently a political question, both as regards the SDGs and climate change priorities, they argue that ‘[a]nyone interested in the success of the goals will need to engage in some serious political analysis’ (*ibid.*).

4.2 Strengthen follow-up and review mechanisms and focus on the efforts made, as well as the level of achievement

Given the extent of transformative action called for by the new agendas on sustainable development (and the associated prevention of humanitarian crises) and on climate change mitigation and adaptation, and the political and financial obstacles and setbacks that will inevitably be encountered, the efforts governments and other key stakeholders will need to be very closely monitored (Persson et al., 2016). Civil society will have a key role to play here, and needs to be supported and empowered to scrutinise the actions of governments and major corporations. At the national level, and in international review mechanisms including the HLPF, the identification of priority national targets in monitoring, review and verification processes may help to focus minds on implementation of the SDGs, while simultaneous alignment with global targets and indicators will support global monitoring and support mechanisms at regional level.

4.3 Address institutional fragmentation and build institutional capacities at international and national levels – including a focus on fragile and conflict-affected countries

A first step towards improving the institutional governance framework and reducing institutional fragmentation at the international level is to recognise the limitations of current arrangements and promote an open and frank appraisal among member states of the requirements for reform of the UN and other international institutions. Four years ago, the Delivering as One evaluation concluded that bold measures may be required to put the UN on a more comprehensive reform track, including rationalising the number of UN entities, reforming mandates, governance structures and funding

modalities and setting out a new definition of the range of development expertise expected from the UN system (cf. Chandran et al., 2015). Yet the 2030 Agenda sidesteps the question of UN reform on the basis that national efforts are primarily needed to achieve the SDGs. The WHS also failed to grapple with this challenge. Having signed up to the SDGs and the Paris Agreement, UN member states have the double challenge of tackling institutional fragmentation within the UN⁷ and tackling the inevitable institutional blockages and tensions that will impede integrated action and overall progress at national level. A key priority for the UN Development System, and for global or transnational corporations and other non-governmental and regional organisations, will be to support and strengthen the capacities of poorer countries to develop and implement the policy changes and innovations needed to achieve the SDGs and NDCs.

Nowhere is the need for an effective UN Development System – and effective UN support – greater than in the fragile states that account, globally, for around half of the world’s poor. Goal 16 – to promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels – is the only SDG that speaks directly to the needs of people in fragile and conflict-affected states, and of the 12 indicators developed by the IAEG-SDG to support implementation of the associated targets, only four are classified as Tier 1 (meaning that the indicator is conceptually clear, with an established methodology and standards and data regularly produced by countries) (IAEG-SDG, September 2016). The weakness and low profile of the WHS outcomes has done little to address the lack of attention to SDG implementation capacity in fragile and conflict-affected states. As such, the new UN Secretary-General, the UN Development System, the World Bank and other international institutions need to urgently focus joint efforts over the coming years on developing a feasible plan for delivering the SDGs in fragile and conflict-affected states, and to provide the level and quality of support that these countries will need. This will call for explicit links to be made between the SDGs and the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States (International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding, 2011; see also Hearn, 2016). To do this the UN needs rapidly to get its own institutional act together. The feasibility of these plans will depend on careful and robust analysis of the causes and dynamics of chronic poverty and fragile development and the drivers of conflict and risks to stability in the poorest and most crisis-prone countries (cf. Milante, 2016).

7. See, for example, the Independent Team of Advisers (ITA) working paper for the ECOSOC Dialogue on the longer-term positioning of the UN Development System in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 16 June 2016: <https://www.un.org/ecosoc/sites/www.un.org.ecosoc/files/files/en/qcpr/ita-findings-and-conclusions-16-jun-2016.pdf>.

4.4 Support and promote broad-based political engagement in and accountability for implementation of the SDG, climate and humanitarian agendas

As argued by Dasandi et al. (2015):

The SDG governance architecture is not simply a realm of harmonizing interests in pursuit of coordination. It is also going to require a serious engagement with politics and power. Key here are: political action by public authorities at all levels, the capacity to build broad-based and plural coalitions of support, and the deployment of a range of principled instruments, including legal instruments, to ensure sustainable development.

In national SDG implementation and international follow-up and review through the HLPF; in continuing efforts to ratchet up NDCs for climate action; and in any future implementation of the Grand Bargain, disability inclusion and other commitments and pledges made at the WHS, broad-based political engagement from the highest levels of government down to local civil society groups and interested individuals will be crucial for the continuing legitimacy of these agendas, and to drive progress in implementation. This, in turn, will depend on the maintenance, promotion and protection of safe and open political space and political opportunities for a wide range of stakeholders at national, regional and global levels. While it is not yet clear whether the mechanisms of inter-governmental peer pressure built into the Paris Agreement and Agenda 2030 will deliver a viable governance framework, what is certain is that this key component of the future governance of climate change and sustainable development will not function at all without an effective machinery of naming and shaming, which will depend to a great extent on the meaningful engagement of NGOs and other civil society groups and networks.

It may be relatively straightforward to create or support platforms to enable and promote the engagement of NGOs, corporations and other stakeholders that are already engaged and concerned about the sustainable development, climate change and/or humanitarian agendas. The HLPF, for instance, can create opportunities for linking with non-state actors through its review activities.⁸ An equally important and urgent but perhaps less straightforward challenge, however, is to inform and engage non-state actors that have not previously had any involvement in the development or implementation of these agendas. These are likely to include many government ministries and officials, business leaders (large corporations and small and medium-sized businesses), religious and cultural organisations and other actors that can all have

a substantive impact on progress towards achieving the SDGs and climate change targets, and the prevention of and response to humanitarian crises.

It is vitally important that non-state actors with particular responsibilities for monitoring and reporting on their own activities against the SDG and climate change targets are encouraged and supported to become integral partners in the implementation of these agendas. The business sector will be crucial in the development of new technologies and other innovations needed to achieve sustainable development and control climate change, but, just as importantly, their own activities will need to align with the SDGs and the Paris Agreement if these agendas are to have any chance of success. It is therefore urgent that partnerships with businesses – large and small – are established as swiftly and as comprehensively as possible, and that systems are created to extend monitoring, reporting and verification processes to businesses and other non-state actors. New reporting platforms set up by the UNFCCC, HLPF, OCHA and various non-governmental networks to record and monitor the commitments and actions of non-state actors on climate change, sustainable development and humanitarian issues will need to be actively promoted and supported by the UN Secretary-General, the wider UN Development System and other key stakeholders at the international level.

4.5 Give the global political economy and global governance imperatives the attention they warrant

Particularly given the bottom-up and therefore national focus of the Paris Agreement and Agenda 2030, it is important to keep in mind – and give due attention to – the fact that the drivers and implications of the many challenges that comprise the sustainable development, climate change and humanitarian agendas are not restricted to the national level. Investments in the implementation and monitoring and verification of national development and climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts must be matched with parallel and sustained efforts to diagnose and address those aspects of globalisation and global governance that currently undermine or jeopardise achievement of the SDGs, the mitigation of dangerous climate change and the prevention of and appropriate and effective response to humanitarian crises. Anyone concerned with tackling the challenges posed at the global level could do worse than study the conclusions of the recent report of the UN Committee for Development Policy (2014), which argues forcefully and convincingly that, in addition to national efforts, strengthened global governance is necessary in order to manage the increasing interdependence among countries more efficiently, to reduce inequalities and to

8. See, for example, <http://www.civicus.org/images/CivilSociety.HLPF.NationalReviewProcess.pdf>.

guarantee the necessary policy space for governments to pursue their own priorities effectively. Maintaining a focus on what can and needs to be done at the global level – ensuring that due attention is given to the global (and intertwined) dynamics that drive climate change and humanitarian crises and undermine sustainable

development, and ensuring that action is taken to reform and direct the machinery of global governance to respond appropriately – is a key responsibility of the UN Secretary-General and fellow architects and managers of the world's key governance institutions in the years ahead; without this, all else may fail.

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