

# **New Debates and Implementations of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): A Critical Social Anthropology Perspective**



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## 1. Introduction

*Tobias Haller and Jana Lamatsch*

The UN has initiated many activities since the launch of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 and has also asked scientists to present extensive reports on the transformative capacities of the goals (see Messerli et al., 2019). However, many important issues, which were debated at the Institute of Social Anthropology, University of Bern (Switzerland) in a participatory process with students after the launch of the SDGs, have not been discussed in such reports. The critical reflections took place at a seminar that was held at that time in 2016, which had the aim of discussing the current literature in social anthropology and human geography regarding how the SDGs mirror actual environmental debates and issues of socio-ecological relationships. Students were asked to propose reformulations of the selected SDG sub-targets based on that literature. These were then published as a working paper titled *Paradigm Change or Old Wine in New Bottles? Debating and Reformulating SDGs – An Experiment* (Haller et. al., 2018). This working paper, published in early 2018, was a first attempt to reflect on the formulation of the SDGs, which led to the following three reflections:

- 1) Many **development discourses are to be considered tools of powerful state actors, shaping the definitions of sustainability and development as well as defining the institutional set up or the ‘rules of the game’** (Escobar, 2012, North 1990). Those discourses can also create what Ferguson (1994) has called anti-politics machines in a world of ‘poor numbers’ (title of a book by Jerven [2013], referring to the fact that statistics, for example, based on GDP contain many mistakes, are poorly made or are even ‘guessed’ by rating agencies).
- 2) **Power-specific root causes of problems of distribution** (accumulation by dispossession and the reproduction of increasing economic disparities, as Harvey [2003] and Piketty [2015] described it), **as well as new politics of distribution as a rightful share are missing** (Ferguson, 2015).
- 3) **Potentials and pitfalls of new innovations in development are ignored** (such as the critical reflections on *vivir bien* and ecovillages, but also looking at new diverse options in democratic settings and bottom-up institution-building processes for the governance of the commons [‘constitutionality’; see Haller et al., 2016]).

The central conclusion was that **a new politics of distribution is required** and that there are four reasons for this:

- Compared to other development and social help programmes, it would more effectively combat poverty while also lowering the expenses associated with making such transactions.
- As everyone would unconditionally receive the same amount, it would reduce differences based on gender, finance and education.
- The stigma of being either rich or poor would be reduced because everyone would receive a rightful share of the wealth (Ferguson, 2015).
- It would reduce the double ecological planetary pressure of (a) the poor overusing resources due to their poverty and (b) the rich overusing resources due to their desire for high-gain investments (Haller et al., 2018).

The overall justification for such a new politics of distribution follows the arguments of the philosopher Kropotkin, who states that the distribution of a rightful share is necessary because it is ultimately very difficult to determine who has specifically contributed what to the global wealth on the planet as all humans have been involved in this process more or less intensively (see Ferguson, 2015).

As we continued the debate on the SDGs, we became aware of not only omissions within the SDGs (such as reflecting on power relations and a lack of recognition of common property; see also Larsen et al., 2022) but also the threat that SDGs might pose for their very purpose of sustainability. Therefore, there is a need to understand how the SDGs emerged, who had the power to define and formulate them and also used them later on. The course *New Debates and Implementations of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)* held in the spring semester 2021

also at the Institute of Social Anthropology, University of Bern focused on exactly these issues and led to this second student working paper. The idea of the seminar was to collect and discuss literature on the implementation and also on the strategic state and NGO-specific use of the SDGs and their respective targets. The course was built on the basis of the previous working paper from Haller et al. (2018) and its reflections and conclusions.

The present working paper takes these findings as a starting point and continues the debate whilst identifying the areas in which the SDGs are discussed in light of recent social anthropological work. The students were organised into ten working groups and actively took part in the seminar, during which they presented case studies and insights from the literature. These findings were incorporated into the essays written by the working groups at the end of the semester. All collaborators in these essays are therefore listed as co-authors of the working paper. The literature was selected by the editors of the paper, who also led the seminar. Students mostly addressed three aspects of the SDGs in the essays: first, a critical examination of the formulation of the goals; second, a literature review of what is being discussed from a social anthropological perspective regarding the specific goals; and third, the pointing out of specific examples. The overall focus of the working paper involves the question of the contexts and conditions under which the SDGs are used and legitimised.

At the heart of the discussion is the extent to which local knowledge, participation and historical power relations concerning globalised resource use and management are included in the SDGs. The students discussed specific examples and investigated the question of how development and environmental protection projects are legitimised by means of SDGs and which elements of James Ferguson's anti-politics machine are applicable (in the sense of a green anti-politics machine; see also Larsen et al., 2022). There was also a focus on local reactions and their analysis.

Several questions were tackled in the essays: What literature addresses the use of the SDGs? To what extent are the local knowledge, participation and historical power relations involved in globalised resource use and management included or not (e.g. debates about the commons, gender, indigenous peoples)? To what extent do the SDGs serve as green anti-politics to hide resource grabbing and, in the worst case, legitimise new forms of resource or commons grabbing (top-down institution shopping by states)? And on the contrary, are there examples in which the SDGs can also be used strategically by local actors (institution shopping from below)?

The working paper is structured as the SDGs are numbered, and the goals that share similar themes are discussed together. References are listed at the end of each essay, providing a selection of current critical literature related to the SDG presented. This paper will be of interest to students and scholars as well as to people interested in a critical engagement with the SDGs, the current implementations of SDGs and related issues.

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## 2. SDG 1: No Poverty and SDG 2: Zero Hunger

*Written by Lucy Sutter and Sophie Ashley*

### Introduction

We discuss the first two SDGs, No Poverty and Zero Hunger. We believe it makes sense to address these two goals in one chapter, since they are intrinsically connected. Their common objective is to cover the basic needs of all people. The two SDGs will be introduced and discussed separately, but the interim conclusion will show the connection between the two SDGs, and their joint issues.

#### *SDG 1 No Poverty*

The first Sustainable Development Goal set by the United Nations is No Poverty, and they have divided this goal in to seven sub-targets. The first target is to completely eradicate extreme poverty.<sup>1</sup> This is currently measured on a monetary basis, and set at a US\$1.25 per day minimum. This monetary approach has been criticised for various reasons. It is argued, for example, that the dollarisation of poverty allows the poor to be exploited by justifying a minimum wage set at this amount by large multinational corporations (Kamruzzaman, 2016: 94). The amount only allows people to afford a specific set of goods, even though the needs of people vary across different cultural backgrounds and living situations, such as the size of households. It also doesn't account for other dimensions of poverty, such as its social aspects (Laderchi et al., 2003).

The United Nations is not oblivious to the numerous studies by social anthropologists highlighting the serious social implications of poverty. They have included aspects of the ongoing discussions about the multidimensionality of poverty in the second target of SDG 1, which aims to address poverty in "all its dimensions". Here the goal is to halve the number of people affected by this kind of poverty, which is defined by "national standards". There are no further indications as to what these dimensions might be. Further targets of SDG 1 are to ensure that all people have access to what are referred to as "basic" services and "appropriate new technologies".<sup>2</sup> There is also room here for speculation about what the words "basic" and "appropriate" might mean in this context. There is also a discussion to be had about whether mere access to these technologies is enough to achieve the goal of ending poverty. As argued by Megwalu based on the example of Africa, it is not only the lack of infrastructure that is causing issues of poverty and hunger, but also the fact that the rural people of Africa have no control over their productive resources (Megwalu, 2020:157, see also Haller, 2019, on the different meanings of). Two of the targets also address the need to implement protection systems for vulnerable people and to increase their resilience to economic, social, and environmental shocks and disasters. Currently, foreign aid is seen by the United Nations as a central tool with which to combat poverty (Dhari, 2020: 732). Later in the discussion we will analyse why relying on international capital flow through foreign aid and investments is not a sustainable path to achieving these targets, even though these are the approaches generally chosen by the United Nations. We will also briefly discuss why there is a good-news narrative in order to convince people that this plan of action works, and for whom this narrative is of service. It can be concluded from the last two targets, which are concerned with the actual implementation of all the other targets, that the United Nations relies on development and foreign aid in their efforts to eradicate poverty. Here, the focus lies heavily on development as a strategy of poverty eradication. The United Nations acknowledges the need for gender sensitive development strategies by phrasing them to include men, women, and children throughout the targets. All these groups seem to be measured individually in order to avoid a disproportionate growth of wealth in one of the groups.

#### *SDG 2 Zero Hunger*

The second Sustainable Development Goal is all about ending hunger by improving the situation of small-scale food producers, and stabilising the world food market. It is divided into five sub-targets. The main goal of the SDG 2 is to end hunger by 2030, including the condition that all people have access to safe, nutritious, and sufficient food all year around, with a special focus on poor people and people in vulnerable situations, such as infants, pregnant women, and women in general. In order to achieve this state, they formulated a goal to double agricultural

<sup>1</sup> United Nations: Sustainable Development Goals. <<https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal1>> 17.08.2021.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations: Sustainable Development Goals. <<https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal1>> 17.08.2021.

productivity by 2030 under Target 2.3, and to ensure by then, the improvement of the income of small-scale food producers, including secure and equal access to land, productive resources, knowledge, financial services, and markets, with the main emphasis on women, indigenous people, family farmers and fishers. Target 2.4 explains that this improvement in agricultural productivity must take place with special attention to sustainable food production systems, which enable resilience to climate change, including the improvement of land and soil quality in order to resist extreme weather, floods, and other disasters.

By 2020 the UN wants to achieve a diversity of seeds through seed and plant banks to which all people have equal access. The United Nations formulated three targets to achieve these goals, and end hunger by 2030. First, there is a need to increase investments in rural infrastructure, agricultural research and technology. Secondly, it is important to correct and prevent trade restrictions in world agricultural markets. Thirdly, they see it as necessary to adopt measures to ensure the functioning of food commodity markets, to guarantee fair access to market information and avoid extreme food price volatility<sup>3</sup>. Many of the targets are phrased to include all people, with a focus on vulnerable persons like women and children. As in the first target, all these groups seem to be measured individually in order to avoid a disproportionate growth of wealth in one of the groups and to pay attention to the special needs of every group. What stands out in the formulation of the Sustainable Development Goal to end hunger by 2030 is that one of the biggest problems on earth is formulated in large and open terms, with no reference to responsibility. Although they formulate some solution approaches, they do so without addressing obligations or responsibility. Some critical views are therefore found in the literature about SDG 2. Our reading into this topic and the following plenary discussion brought forth several issues with the formulation of the Sustainable Development Goals 1 and 2. We identified four key issues.

## 2. Discussion

### *The UN's pursuit of a "good news narrative" concerning the implementation of SDGs 1 and 2*

The first key issue we identified is that the report can draw a false picture of the actual situation for some readers. The danger here is that the need for action will be underestimated in consequence. Because the deadline for the Sustainable Development Goals has not yet been reached, we will use the predecessor program to illustrate our concerns.

The final report of the Millennium Development Goals (the predecessor of the Sustainable Development Goals) also included the aim to minimise poverty and hunger, and came to the conclusion in 2015 that it had been "the most successful anti-poverty movement in history".<sup>4</sup> The report found that the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals had been so successful that global poverty had been halved since 1990. Global hunger had also been halved through the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals.

The media adopted this success story, with the consequence that a "good news narrative" was spread around the world (Hickel, 2016: 1). The media was full of headlines such as: "World's extreme poverty cut in half since 1990".<sup>5</sup> We identified some problems within this good news narrative, however, based on research by Jason Hickel, an anthropologist from the London School of Economics and Political Science. The Millennium Development Goals had actually reported a false number of people actually living in poverty and hunger by shifting the goalposts and redefining poverty. They related their calculations to poverty reduction only in "developing countries" (Hickel, 2016: 3). We see it as incorrect to speak about halving hunger and poverty in the world when only when only "developing countries" are included in the calculation. The definition of poverty needs to be addressed critically, because the baseline is defined by institutions like the World Bank which sets it as US\$1.25 per day. (Hickel, 2016: 4) We see problems in the fact that the number has been defined by the World Bank, as in our opinion there is a conflict of interest due to the current connection between the situation of hunger and poverty and capitalism as the main economic system in our world. The World Bank is a representative institution of that system, and therefore has a vested interest in the figures for poverty and hunger reduction telling a success story. Anthropologists and economists, for example, criticise the current baseline as too conservative. They suggest setting the baseline between US\$3.30 and US\$4.80 per day, depending on the country in which the analysis is made.

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<sup>3</sup> United Nations: Sustainable Development Goals. <<https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal2>> 21.08.2021

<sup>4</sup> United Nations: The Millennium Development Goals Report 2015. <[https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015\\_MDG\\_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20rev%20\(July%201\).pdf](https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20rev%20(July%201).pdf)> 17.08.2021

<sup>5</sup> The Wall Street Journal: World's Extreme Poverty Cut in Half Since 1990. <<https://www.wsj.com/articles/BL-REB-15781>> 03.09.2021



Another problem with using a baseline of US\$1.25 per day is that this does not take into consideration the individual situation in every country. It is a significantly simplified point of view. If analysts would use the alternatively suggested poverty line of over US\$ 3, the total number of people living in poverty would be three and a half times higher than the United Nations suggests (Hickel, 2016: 7). We also found inconsistency in the figures for hunger, and it is also important to question this definition. Hunger is defined as a calorie intake of less than 1600-1900 calories per day. These figures again do not consider people's individual situations. People suffering from poverty mostly work in highly physical jobs, which can require 2000-3000 calories per day. The Sustainable Development Goals also do not address the quality of calories, except to say that everyone should have access to "nutritious" food.<sup>6</sup> In our opinion it is not enough to look only at the number of calories a person has available. Hickel also criticises the change in the method used to measure the progress of the reduction of hunger through the Millennium Development Goals. Three years before Millennium Development Goals had to be achieved, the number of people suffering hunger was increasing due to the world economic crisis of 2008. Shortly after this number started to increase, the UN changed their methodology for the study. It's also very uncommon to change the method of a long-term study three years before its end, unless the changes are totally transparent (Hickel, 2016: 10). This all stresses the need for such good-news narratives to be examined critically. It's also important to question the definitions used to measure hunger and poverty. In our view it is difficult to find a way to quantify issues such as poverty and hunger, because there is danger in translating such problems into figures. The next section will consider this problem.

#### *The difficulty of finding a way to quantify the issues of poverty and hunger*

As we have seen, the method used in the Millennium Development Goals to measure hunger and poverty is not entirely adequate, and there is a risk that the number of people who are actually suffering from hunger and poverty will be obscured. The background to this problem is the big question of how phenomena such as hunger and poverty can be measured, and what a constructive interaction with the data collected could look like. There are two popular approaches to measuring hunger and poverty. The quantitative approach tries to translate hunger and poverty into numbers and encrypt them in categories. We would classify the method used in the Sustainable Development Goals for the implementation of their targets as a quantitative approach. They orientate their definition of hunger or poverty around fixed numbers, and use these numbers to determine who is poor or undernourished. The method used to measure poverty, for example, involves calculating a monetary value which corresponds to the cost of basic needs. In the Sustainable Development Goals, the decisive number used to measure whether someone is poor or not is the availability of US\$1.25 per day. We find this approach somewhat concerning, because the figure used to define hunger and poverty is the same for all countries, with no consideration of the specific costs of basic needs in each country. We also see a danger in that the definition of basic needs is formulated according to a Western perspective, with no regard to the actual needs of local groups around the world. This concern is shared by Megwalu (2020: 156), who concludes that the paradigms of the Sustainable Development Goals are in general too Eurocentric for implementation all around the world, and that they don't, in practice, satisfy the individual needs of every region. A setting which only considers how much money a person can use per day also risks overlooking aspects such as access to resources, which are just as important for the problem of poverty and hunger (see Haller, 2019, and a link to SDG 14 and 15).

There is another approach to measuring hunger and poverty, which in our opinion is underrepresented in the work of the Sustainable Development Goals. The qualitative approach is less focused on numbers, and considers development and poverty "from below", by taking the viewpoint of the local population (Jones & Tvedten, 2019: 158). This approach is embedded, for example, in social anthropology, and the studies involve fieldwork. Such qualitative studies address the case of Mozambique, where anthropologists tried to draw a holistic picture of poverty in different regions of the country. This example shows that the approach delivers a broad range of results which link poverty in Mozambique to kinship systems, mechanisms of social control, marginalisation and spiritual control (Jones & Tvedten, 2019). We will show why this holistic knowledge about the poverty situation in Mozambique is so important later, in an illustrative case. In our view it is necessary to integrate the qualitative approaches in the work of the United Nations in order to achieve sustainable progress in reducing hunger and poverty. The perspective of the local population in every country is very important, so as to identify key issues and to find constructive solutions. It is not target-oriented to fix the same numbers for every country, and to work with a single

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<sup>6</sup> United Nations: Sustainable Development Goals. <<https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal2>> 21.08.2021

approach. The key to finding good solutions and reaching sustainable progress is knowledge about every single region and their culture and traditions, and this is only achievable by integrating a qualitative approach.

#### *The call of the United Nations for a flow of international capital for the achievement of the goals*

During our discussion of the SDGs 1 and 2 in class, we found that the UN focusses too closely on strategies of development to combat the issues at hand. This development is to be achieved through foreign aid and investment, but it is necessary to question the role of international capital flow in the global fight against poverty and hunger. Dr Palash Kamruzzaman in particular has convincingly argued that the UN's approach to international capital flow is quite literally backwards. The United Nations argues that there is a need for international capital flow. Their argumentation is that poverty can be eradicated through development, and development is achieved through investment. The issue with this is that it is often foreign companies investing in this development, making them the owners of what is seen as the way out of poverty for many local people. Since their wages are set at such a low rate, however, individuals do not profit from these developments. This is one of the main reasons the actual positive effect that development has on the reduction of poverty is debated. The United Nations justify the need for development by claiming that poverty has been halved since 1990, but they are looking at poverty on a national level, which masks big differences within countries (Kamruzzaman, 2016: 100). These figures might be true in sheer numbers, but the distribution of this reduction is very uneven. Many of the countries that have been able to escape poverty as a whole nation have also seen a huge widening of the wealth gap within the country, and the situation might have even worsened for many individuals.

In addition to investment, international money also flows through foreign aid. The United Nations relies heavily on the distribution of foreign aid from richer to poorer countries. Kamruzzaman (2016: 104) estimates that the United Nations would need about US\$267 billion to end extreme poverty. Interestingly, this amount of money equates to only approximately a quarter of the amount that the targeted countries lose annually too illicit money flows. By proposing to solve the global poverty issue, they are basically proposing to fill a bucket which has a huge hole in its bottom with water. The United Nations, however, is either unable or unwilling to address the extent of this hole in the SDGs. While the SDGs do mention the issue of illicit money flows in the form of international crime, they do not mention the impact of international policies that make it possible for big corporations to exploit these developing countries, in particular through tax evasion. Development is seen through the good news narrative as a way for countries to escape poverty. As a result, big investors are able to convince governments of the benefits of their business brings to a country. They are then able to negotiate tax deals that are very beneficial to the investors. Kamruzzaman (2016: 102) argues that the core issue with international capital flow is the amount that is illicit. He shows that the amount of money flowing into developing countries as so called "aid" is completely overshadowed by the amount of money that these countries lose to crime, corruption and tax evasion. He further argues that there would be no need for international aid in the form of money if the underlying structural and political issues were properly addressed, particularly tax evasion by huge corporations, and arms trade policies, which lead to war, which is a leading cause of poverty (Kamruzzaman, 2016: 104). The approach taken by the United Nations to international capital flow fails to address its core issues. It reduces the issue of poverty to a monetary issue, when actually the problem is the unequal distribution of power and poor countries not owning means of production.

#### *The issue of security and the sustainability of the proposed implementations*

During our discussion of these SDGs, we also dealt with the topic of their sustainability, and whether or not they can be maintained long-term and are able to withstand certain shocks (the resilience issue). The global health crisis in connection to the spread of Covid-19 has shown that the current system does not handle shocks very well. Poverty has risen at alarming rates since early 2020.<sup>7</sup> This is partly due to the fact that a large proportion of people are currently reliant on global trade, particularly in developing countries.

Various studies show that the approach the world bank takes to the issue of food security through poverty reduction and freer trade, rather than food-self-reliance, is not sustainable (Megwalu, 2020: 155). While investing in the development of the agricultural sector in developing countries is key, not only for food security, but also poverty reduction in general, as it seems that the poorest people often work in this sector (Dhari, 2020: 759) it needs to be done properly, in order to achieve sustainable security within local communities. This implies firstly that the investment goes directly to the local communities, and secondly that the development is done in a way that is

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<sup>7</sup> United Nations: Sustainable Development Goals. <<https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal1>> 17.08.2021

sustainable not only for the people, but also for the planet. This argument is underlined by the fact that even though 80% of the population of Africa works in farming, the continent is still unable to feed everyone (Megwalu, 2020: 157). This is because food security is achieved not only through adequate food production, which provides the availability of the food, but also the purchasing power of the people who need it. It is also necessary to be able to access resources, and as property rights to resources, especially common-pool resources previously held in common property, are undermined by state and private actors, access to food and cash are also undermined in times of hunger (Haller, 2019). Because of the way investment is carried out in the current system, as described in the section above, this purchasing power is not available. Megwalu (2020: 156) thus argues that a reduction in external input will actually create more food security, if it leads to local populations being in charge of their own means of production.

The question of sustainability also pertains to the planet as a whole (Hickel, 2019:19), since human survival and well-being ultimately rest on the natural resources of the planet (Katila et. al., 2020:15). As mentioned above, the SDGs assume that development is necessary for achieving SDGs 1 and 2, but, as Hickel has found, the proposed development directly contradicts other goals that use the word “sustainability” in relation to the planet’s resources (Hickel, 2019: 19). Currently, much of the proposed development related to achieving SDGs 1 and 2 is at the expense of natural resources such as forest ecosystems (Katila et. al, 2020:20). Not only are these ecosystems natural insurance for local populations, by providing them with crucial goods such as food and energy through firewood, they are also responsible for balancing the climate, especially oceans and forests. This second aspect is crucial to poverty eradication, since there is a risk that much of the progress so far will be reversed if the global trend of climate displacements continues (Kamruzzaman, 2016: 101). In order for the achievement of SDGs 1 and 2 to become sustainable, the current system needs to be adjusted to provide individuals not only with access, but with ownership over sustainable production methods.

### **Example of implementation**

The solution promoted by the Sustainable Development Goals to reduce hunger and poverty is to make investments in the economy and infrastructure of affected countries, and to create access to food for everyone.<sup>8</sup> One implementation of the United Nations fight against global hunger is the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). This fund has existed since 1977, and was a response to the food crises in the early 1970s. It is still active today and is seen as a useful tool to help the United Nations reach the main goal of Sustainable Development Goal 2 by 2030 - zero hunger. The United Nations’ idea is that the IFAD makes investments in agricultural development projects with a focus on rural regions in “developing countries”.<sup>9</sup> The Niassa Agricultural Development Project is an example of such action. We have chosen the example of Mozambique again to illustrate why this form of implementation can be problematic. This example also illustrates our concerns, as mentioned above in the sections about quantifying poverty and hunger, and the need for international capital flow and the sustainability of the implementations. The “Niassa agriculture development project” started in 1993. With a budget of US\$20.1 million, they pursued the goal of strengthening road systems, building up an agricultural support service and starting community initiatives to improve the food and poverty situation in Niassa, a northern province of Mozambique. The fund followed guidelines to prioritise women, and people who work in the agricultural sector and associations.<sup>10</sup> The anthropologists Jones and Tvedten (2019) explain that the project failed and did not have the desired effect of improvement. They argue that there was no sustainable impact, because in reality those who profited from the fund were influential locals (mostly traditional authorities), male entrepreneurs and the Frelimo Party elite. This was possible through a complex system of informal regulations and bribes (Jones & Tvedten, 2019: 160). Jones and Tvedten (2019) show the limits of the quantitative approach here. The figures generated through a qualitative approach are important in order to measure the problems of hunger and poverty, but they are not useful when it comes implementing the policies themselves. Implementation requires qualitative data so as to avoid the problems the IFAD faced. If there is no “bottom-up” strategy integrated in such projects, then there is a strong probability of failure, because important insights about the functioning of a population are missing.

<sup>8</sup> United Nations: Sustainable Development Goals. <<https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal1>> 17.08.2021

<sup>9</sup> International Fund for Agricultural Development: History. <<https://www.ifad.org/en/history>> 08.08.2021

<sup>10</sup> International Fund for Agricultural Development: Republic of Mozambique: Niassa Agricultural Development Project. <<https://www.ifad.org/en/web/ioe/-/republic-of-mozambique-niassa-agricultural-development-project-nadp>> 09.08.2021

The project managers themselves also called the project a failure. In 2007, 14 years after the Niassa Agricultural Development Project started, the IFAD sent a team to Mozambique to evaluate the project's impact. The evaluation was undertaken through fieldwork and interviews. On their website they conclude: "Overall, the Niassa Agricultural Development Project has been moderately unsuccessful". The main reasons for the failure were seen as markets that did not function, and the production methods used by the local farmers.<sup>11</sup> They do not mention the distribution problems of the money that the anthropologists Jones and Tvedten (2019) see as an argument for the failure of the project. In our opinion this analysis of failure also shows the problem we identified with the Sustainable Development Goals in general. The concepts are based on Western approaches and strategies which are then to be applied throughout the world with no regard to the local conditions. Perhaps this is one reason why the project managers have overlooked the difficulty of selling the agricultural products generated under the program, given the very limited local market in Mozambique. In their analysis they also consider the effect of the missing bottom-up strategies to be small. They explain: "Finally, it is possible but far from certain that a better impact would have been obtained if the participatory approaches of the Niassa Agricultural Development Project design had been applied, including the establishment of 300 Village Extension Guides."<sup>12</sup> This example shows the importance of a participative bottom-up strategy, because it is the only way to reach the necessary knowledge for investments with a sustainable impact (although, as shown in the section on SDG 17, this kind of participation is not accounted for: see also Haller et al., 2018). In our view, the key to successful poverty reduction lies in the interaction with the local population and knowledge of their needs and their way of life, including an analysis of the local power structures. Only in this way it is possible to avoid the problems faced by the Niassa Agricultural Development Project.

### **Consequences and conclusions**

The UN's strategy to reach both SDGs 1 and 2 relies heavily on development, financed through investments and foreign aid. This strategy is not new, but has been followed in a similar way in previous attempts by the United Nations to formulate specific goals for the member states, such as the Millennium Development Goals. While this newest formulation of goals, the SDGs, put a strong focus on the inclusion of all age groups and genders, they fail to address the underlying power structures that lead to growing inequality around the globe. Instead, they follow a good news narrative, in which damning evidence of the rather limited success of their development-focussed strategies are hidden through picking and choosing the measurements and reference points.

One reason for the distortion between the published level of progress in SDGs 1 and 2 and the lived reality of people is that the United Nations chooses a quantitative approach to measuring hunger and poverty for the SDGs, as opposed to a qualitative one, which would include such lived realities. While the quantitative approach strives to turn the struggle of poverty and hunger into numbers, a qualitative approach would take more subjective aspects into account. As social anthropologists, we support a qualitative approach, since we believe it is important to take the social and economic realities of local communities into account when addressing issues of hunger and poverty. The United Nations does not seem to share this view however, surely on the one hand for practical reasons, since it would be difficult to realise a qualitative approach on a global scale, but based on the literature consulted for this essay, we believe it also has something to do with the fact that it is in the interest of big actors such as the World Bank to keep the development-positive narrative alive, since it is very profitable for them. We found that the proposed development often only benefits a select few, as shown in the example of Mozambique.

The current development strategy is contributing to widening the wealth gap, not only within so-called developing countries, but also between all countries. Approaching this issue through foreign aid incentives, as in SDGs 1 and 2, means that capital flow is only addressed in one direction, thus veiling the true issue, which is arguably the flow of money out of, as opposed to into, developing countries. This argument is supported by the fact that poor countries (as defined by the UN) lose approximately 10 times the amount of money through illicit money flow into developed countries compared to the amount these countries receive through foreign aid (Kamruzzaman, 2016:

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<sup>12</sup> International Fund for Agricultural Development: Republic of Mozambique: Niassa Agricultural Development Project. <<https://www.ifad.org/en/web/ioe/-/republic-of-mozambique-niassa-agricultural-development-project-nadp->> 09.08.2021

98). This is because large investors such as the World Bank are able to use the generally positive attitude towards development to negotiate tax deals that are beneficial to them.

The way the issue of international capital flow is addressed is connected directly to the issue of sustainability. According to Megwalu (2020: 155), sustainability for both the planet and people can be achieved through sustainable intensification. The issue with this is that intensification means that the land and resources are optimally used to produce a higher yield. New technologies are needed for this. The implementation of such technologies is expensive, and so it is often foreign, via already wealthy investors who are able to realise such intensifications. Local communities often lack the funds to make such projects happen, and end up being exploited as workers. Existing power structures are upheld as long as the people tending to the land are not also the owners of said land, and the technologies used. This is highlighted by the example used by Megwalu in Africa, where even though 80% of the population is working in farming, the continent is still unable to feed everyone (Megwalu, 2020: 157).

At the moment, the United Nations is self-admittedly not on track to reach these goals by 2030. They justify this as due to the global crisis caused by the spread of the Covid-19 crisis, but shouldn't the sustainable development they are planning be characterised by crisis resistance? We believe that in order for SDGs 1 and 2 to be achieved by 2030, there needs to be a refocus of the goals away from development and access, and towards the ownership of resources and production methods: away from external, global safety nets and towards stronger social networks. In conclusion, we believe that SDGs 1 and 2 are not formulated in a specific and binding enough way to define clear areas of responsibility. Participatory approaches are also underrepresented in the work of the UN, and we see conflicts of interest among institutions that help to design the Sustainable Development Goals. Institutions such as the World Bank have an interest in showing that the capitalist system works well in terms of reducing hunger and poverty. The issues at hand are reduced to quantifiable measurements. In doing this, the underlying issues of distribution, not of food and money, but of power, are lost in the process.

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### 3. SDG3: Good Health and Well-Being

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#### Introduction

SDG 3 is one of 17 global goals that make up the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The goal of SDG 3 is to “ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages”. Health is a fundamental human right and a key indicator of sustainable development. The UN has defined 13 targets and 28 indicators for SDG 3. Targets specify the goals, and indicators represent the metrics by which the world aims to track whether these targets are achieved. This SDG addresses occupational health and safety, access to affordable medicines, access to quality essential health care services, air quality and water quality. SDG 3 aspires to end the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and other communicable diseases by 2030. It also aims to achieve universal health coverage and provide access to safe and effective medicines, and vaccines for all. Supporting research and development for vaccines is an essential part of this process. Making achievements in reducing child mortality and improving maternal health is another goal. To support this, SDG 3 wants to ensure the universal access to sexual and reproductive health care services, including family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programs. Further it also aims to strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, including narcotic drug abuse, harmful use of alcohol and tobacco. Another concern is to reduce the number of deaths and illnesses from hazardous chemicals/air, water, and soil pollution, and contamination and injuries through road traffic accidents. The goal is therefore to strengthen healthcare systems, and substantially increase health financing and the recruitment, development, training and retention of the health workforce in developing countries. It is crucial to strengthen the capacity of all countries, particularly developing countries, for early warning, risk reduction, and the management of national and global health risks.<sup>13</sup>

Life expectancy is the most commonly used measure to describe a population's health. Child mortality and maternal mortality have also been crucial as indicators to improve life expectancy around the world. These three indicators do not take morbidity from disease and disability into account. The burden of disease is a related and different measure of health. It is calculated as the sum of years of potential life lost due to premature mortality, and the years of healthy life lost due to disease and disability. The burden of disease is therefore directly related to well-being and suicide rates. Another common way of measuring the evolution of diseases is to estimate the number and frequency of deaths caused by the diseases and the number of new cases.<sup>14</sup>

#### Debates about SDG3 in the literature

Liz Eckermann (2016: 253) promotes the translation of the SDGs into a more transformative action in an article written firstly for the Ninth Global Health Conference on Health Promotion in November 2016, and secondly because it coincided with the thirtieth anniversary of the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion. We mention this in order to show that there were other frameworks for health promotion research, policy and practice before the SDGs, for example building healthy public policy or reorienting health services towards the prevention of illness and promotion of health (Eckermann, 2016). Eckermann (2016) explained that the process of developing the 17 SDGs, as a democratic enhancement of the top-down Millennium Development Goal (MDG) planning procedures, provided an opportunity to reassess health priorities globally, and they succeeded in addressing the systematic social inequality resulting from gender, class and race relations in the SDGs.

According to Eckermann (2016), the interpretation of Goal 3 is more problematic for health promotion researchers and practitioners. Despite the improvements to the previous MDGs, the SDGs received criticism from many quarters. For example, *The Economist* stated in March 2015 that the 169 targets were sprawling and misconceived, and that they were “worse than useless”. Eckermann (2016) specifies that the public health and health promotion voices are quite strong but faint in the consultation process in targets SDG 3 (and SDG 8). The version of ‘development’, according to Eckermann, is designed to take the form of export-oriented growth in line with existing

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<sup>13</sup>United Nations. Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Sustainable Development <<https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal3>> 23 August 2021

<sup>14</sup> Esteban Ortiz-Ospina and Max Roser (2016) “Global Health” <<https://ourworldindata.org/health-meta>> 24 August 2021

neoliberal models of economic advancement. Hickel (2015: 2) strongly points out the attempt of the SDG's at "changing the world without transforming it". Eckermann (2016: 254) explains that the term "well-being" is used in a traditional sense to refer to life expectancy, and mortality and morbidity rates, rather than positive health. She further explains that the focus is on preventing death and 'sick-being' rather than actively promoting positive well-being by maximising healthy political, social and economic environments (Eckermann, 2016). Child health is given as an example. An SDG document boasts that 17,000 fewer children die each day than in 1900, and that measles vaccines have averted almost 15.6 million deaths since 2000. Eckermann (2016: 255) criticises the fact that no mention is made of the improvement in the quality of those children's lives.

### *Planetary Health Humanities as a Solution*

In the article "Planetary Health Humanities – Responding to COVID Times" Bradley Lewis tries bringing together health humanities, environmental humanities, and the planetary health movement, which are all interested in working together toward sustainable living. His conclusion contains an appeal to start organising planetary health humanities programs which can help us move in the direction of an art of living that is consistent with sustainable wellbeing (Lewis, 2020: 14).

Like the concept of planetary health, the SDGs show the interdependence of health and well-being on factors much larger than the individual. One hundred years of pursuing progress through economic and development practices has resulted in changing patterns of known diseases, and an increase in unknown diseases that may become pandemics (Lewis, 2020: 4-6). Additionally, the continuation of environmental devastation will result in damage to human health through climate change, biodiversity loss, undernutrition, contaminated water use, and soil degradation (Whitmee et al., 2015: 2015).

The SDGs are very comprehensive, and there could be a need to integrate concepts (Lewis, 2020: 6). The 2015 Rockefeller Foundation-Lancet Commission on Planetary Health (CPH) sees planetary health as especially helpful in this matter, because "[...] planetary health is the health of human civilization and the state of the natural systems on which it depends" (Whitmee et al., 2015: 1978). It could therefore help to integrate the idea of a sustainable improvement in wellbeing and healthcare with the preservation of important natural systems (Whitmee et al., 2015: 2015). To do this, the CPH builds on the work of an interdisciplinary review committee composed to identify "conflicts and synergies" between the goals (Waage et al., 2015: 251). The CPH considers wellbeing central, and therefore the central target for all seventeen SDGs. Each SDG either aspires toward wellbeing directly, or is a key support and framework for human wellbeing. We need to take care of our natural environment and of our infrastructure, and to promote post-human wellbeing with the help of SDG 1 to end poverty, SDG 3 to ensure healthy lives, SDG 4 to ensure education, SDG 5 to achieve gender equality, SDG 10 to reduce inequality and SDG 16 promote peaceful societies. Wellbeing thus becomes the key organising principle for future human development across all sectors (Lewis, 2020: 11-12).

The 2020 pandemic is the latest and so far, most widespread example of these emerging health effects. The Covid-19 crisis also provides stark evidence of the CPH and SDG's interlinking of planetary health and wellbeing with human political, economic, and social systems (Lewis, 2020: 6). We saw the consequences of the virus rapidly escalated by social determinants of disease (Braveman et al., 2011; Alegria et al., 2010). Sadly, the outcomes of Covid-19 are also shaped by poverty, as physical environment, race, and gender all have considerable effects on morbidity and mortality (Lewis, 2020: 6). As a consequence of school closures and job losses, especially in low-income communities, food insecurity increased, which led to malnutrition, which lowers immune responses and increases the risk of infectious disease (Lewis, 2020: 6). As a result, biomedical "undisciplined disease control strategies will never be truly sufficient to combat many infectious diseases, the underlying determinants of health also need to be addressed" (Butler-Jones & Wong, 2016: 19). In this context, Covid-19 should be interpreted not as an isolated event or a crisis from nowhere. Rather, it should be read as a wake-up call, meaning waking-up to the need to change our life at a fundamental level (Lewis, 2020: 4). This makes it crucial that we reorganise our value systems towards more sustainable definitions of wellbeing and the good life. The arts and humanities, which include social sciences, arts, languages and history, as well as critical thinking skills, analysis, research, and problem solving, are an invaluable resource that provides distinctive approaches. These help us understand environmental issues such as injustice, devastation, and the resulting pandemic destruction, but they can also help with healing and reorienting by directly promoting wellbeing through the creation of lifestyles. (Lewis, 2020: 13) Environmental issues, from an environmental humanities perspective, are problems that involve both science and the arts and humanities, since questions of nature and questions of culture are inseparable. For all these reasons Lewis says, "the potential that is given and the need are clear, the next step is to start organizing planetary health

humanities programs which can help us move in the direction of an art of living consistent with sustainable well-being” (Lewis, 2020: 14).

### *The Case of Neoliberalism*

Neoliberalism is often used as a tool to understand the political, economic, and social changes and challenges of our time. We also make use of neoliberalism too, or as a matter of fact the critique of it in order to address issues in the health sector. We first need to understand what exactly neoliberalism is, however, and what consequences it may trigger. According to Vicente Navarro (2007) the theory of neoliberalism consists of three parts. Firstly, it is the state’s responsibility to reduce its interventionism regarding economic and social activities. Secondly, in order to liberate the innovation of the markets, labour and financial markets need to be relieved from regulations. Thirdly, borders and barriers restricting the full mobility of labour, capital, goods, and services need to be eliminated in order to stimulate commerce and investments. The idea is that these three targets will prompt economic growth and social progress. In summary, neoliberalism follows the policy of deregulating the economy, liberating trade and industries and privatising state-owned enterprises (Ganti, 2014).

The rise of neoliberalist ideologies can be traced back to post-World War I Europe and the United States. They were originally developed to oppose collectivism, state-planning, and socialism as much as an alternative to classical liberalism (Ganti, 2014: 91). That being said, the main difference between neoliberalism and classical liberalism lies within the belief that the idea of a “good society” can only be achieved by collective political effort and mutual organisation, whereas the similarity lies in the common perception of markets as a more efficient mechanism to communicate information regarding supply, demand, and prices (Ganti, 2014).

Nevertheless, neoliberalism is not without its consequences. As stated above, one target is to reduce state interventionism, however, research suggests it in fact had quite the opposite effect, with state interventionism increasing during the time between 1977 and 2007. For example, a large amount of the growth of the US biomedical industry can be directly attributed to active state intervention which provided the necessary incentives (Navarro, 2007).

The goal of achieving economic growth and social wellbeing was also not attained. To give some perspective, the rate of economic growth in developing countries, as well as countries belonging to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), except China, was higher in 1960-1980 than in the years between 1980-2000 (Navarro, 2007). As a matter of fact, poverty increased worldwide, even in countries following neoliberal policies, without having a negative effect on the rich within each country<sup>15</sup>. Class inequalities can therefore be seen as another consequence of neoliberalism (Navarro, 2007).

Another consequence worth mentioning is that through globalisation, neoliberal policies support the formation of a class hierarchy between states (Navarro, 2007). For example, when new policies are introduced, they are presented as new policies coming from European legislation rather than from dominant states in the EU. This is used to show how responsibility is not focused on one government but rather on the collective EU. According to neoliberal ideals, no one state alone has all the power and influence, however, the hierarchy of states means that some are more dominant than others. These more dominant states form alliances with the dominant classes in other states. These alliances are reinforced by neoliberal ideology (Navarro, 2007).

Now to transition back to the subject of health care, we raise the question “what effects do neoliberalism or neoliberalist tendencies have on the health care sector?” If companies are enabled to make profit without the intervention of the government, their interest in a client’s health can be questioned. For example, if a government seeks advice on health issues regarding policy making for food regulations from representatives in the food industry, these representatives should work in favour of their shareholders, as their goal is to make profit. When applied to reality, this leads to situations such as the UK government inviting McDonalds and Pepsi to help arrange its food policy (Mooney 2012: 393). It is therefore a possibility that the interest of the market is included in policy making for industry. The reduction of state intervention as it is foreseen in neoliberal theory is not always existent. There are links between corporations and governments which possible negative effects on the public’s health are not just ignored but deliberately accepted.

Let us look at a more specific example. The privatisation of the health care sector can be seen as another side effect of neoliberal policies. This is the case with Ireland’s nursing homes, which have been turned from a mostly public system to a rather private, for-profit one. This development can be attributed to neoliberal policies, as economic efficiency, which privatisation allegedly promises, is regarded as an ideal (Mercille, 2017: 2 ff). The effect of this privatisation on the nursing homes is that the needs of the elderly are being treated as a means of profit.

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<sup>15</sup> As the text was published in 2007 it is possible that these statistics are outdated.



The neoliberal base which assisted in the privatisation of Ireland's nursing homes consisted of low government expenditure on social programs, flexible labour markets and light regulation of the financial system (Mercille, 2017: 2). Later in the process tax cuts were made in favour of the investors supporting private nursing homes. Together with the government's budgetary constraints, the additional positive groundwork of privatisation was laid, which allowed it to flourish (Mercille, 2017: 9). This privatisation has its side effects on the public sector too. Public economic spaces are mostly affected by public-private-partnerships (PPP) where the state and a private contractor come to a long-term agreement. As a result, there is less room for public economic investment (Mercille, 2017: 10). The private sector also secures the demand with their supply, as the public sector is neglected by the state and therefore underfunded.

Lastly, it is also worth mentioning that neoliberal ideas do not meet up to all their expectations. As most of the funding for nursing homes is provided by the state, it is only the ownership of said nursing homes that is privatised. So even though neoliberalism should be reinforcing the expansion of markets it would not be able to do so. Private profits still depend on the state's influence on the market, as it provides the necessary environment for a steady source of funding (Mercille, 2017: 10). In that respect neoliberal ideas fail, as they do not expect the state to intervene regarding the funding of markets.

### *Repercussions of Neoliberalism in Romania*

Privatisation as a side effect of neoliberalism can also be observed in the health care sector of Romania. In this case, neoliberal reforms did not come into force all at once. Instead, they steadily established themselves through the liberalisation of trade, the mass privatisation of state-owned enterprises and the retrocession of cooperative land. The latter implied an increase in workforce in the agricultural industry, often working informally or at a minimum wage. As a result, Romania began to be divided into a low paid rural lower class and an urban, rather thin, elite upper class (Stan & Toma, 2018: 3). The privatisation process in the health care sector manifested especially through the possibility that doctors were allowed to enter the private sector. Private-public partnerships were also negotiated (Stan & Toma, 2018: 4).

What we see in Romania can be compared with the effects of neoliberalism in Ireland's nursing homes, as private businesses in Romania also favour a certain degree of state intervention. Again, this is because it provides secure funding, especially regarding major health risks and their costs. Another result of neoliberalism in Romania, however, is the development of an undeniable class formation. As a consequence the more privileged on the social ladder choose private health care, and the poorer lower class either use public health care or none at all (Stan & Toma, 2018: 11). Neoliberal tendencies therefore enabled inequalities regarding access to health care.

### *The Dichotomy of the Private and Public Health Care Sector*

In order to illustrate the dichotomy between the private and the public health care systems we will take a closer look at Romania. The early 1990s can be taken as the starting point for the division of health care into private and public. The privatisation process started when Romania stopped being a socialist state, and can be observed in the health care sector, for instance. From the early 1990s doctors were allowed to offer their services in exchange for private funding. After the 2000s privatisation was encouraged by the government, as many legislative initiatives were put in place favouring the rise of private investment (Stan & Toma 2018: 4).

At the beginning of the 2000s Romania also introduced a national health insurance system which was funded by the National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF). It relied on public funding which was based on contributions from employers, and provided insurance to these "contributors" as well as their relatives and unemployed youth (Stan & Toma 2018: 4).

"Corporate" health care units also started to flourish in the 2000s, and mostly during 2006. This was mainly the consequence of new legislation which enabled public health care units to provide services for private health care units by working more closely with them. The same legislation also allowed private health care units to draw services from the NHIF. Consequently, the private and public health care sectors started to become more and more co-dependent (Stan & Toma 2018: 4).

Another ramification of the legislation was that access to public health care had been made difficult, as the number of people covered by the national health insurance had been lowered (Stan & Toma 2018: 4). As a result there were fewer people contributing to the NHIF, which led to a health care system which now suffers from underfunding. It can therefore be concluded that the continuous underfunding of the public health services means that public health care in Romania struggles with low quality services and inadequate care (Stan & Toma 2018: 5).

In order to discuss the dichotomy between the private and the public sector in Romania, we will now apply some of the questions asked by the article *Primary Health Care for Universal Health Coverage? Contributions for a Critical Anthropological Agenda* by César Ernesto Abadía-Barrero and Mary Bugbee (2019). One of the questions asked regarding the subject of private and public health care is “Where is the line drawn between public and private?” (Abadía-Barrero & Bugbee, 2019: 430). If we look at the health care system in Romania it becomes clear that the line between private and public cannot be clearly distinguished. This is because the neoliberal reforms which took place had the effect of both the public and the private health care sector becoming more and more entangled with each other (Stan & Toma, 2018: 8).

This blurring of lines can additionally be detected in the way that private and public funding interfere with each other concerning doctors’ wages. In villages and small towns their funding stems from the NHIF, which is publicly funded, however, they provide their services privately. In the city, however, corporate health care chains owe their funding to both private medical packages and the publicly funded services of the negotiated contracts with the NHIF. Moreover, many doctors work in public hospitals and private clinics, whereas public hospitals offer additional services in exchange for private charges. So, the offers of the health care sector are also becoming a combination of public and private, which can be traced back to the privatisation and dispossession of public care due to neoliberal reforms (Stan & Toma, 2018: 8).

That Romanian health care services are often a combination of private and public is also shown in how their services are accessed by the public. The option of relying only on one sector is at best given to the upper middle classes of Romania’s population (Stan & Toma, 2018: 9) who are able to connect to the private health care sector. The reasoning behind this is that their financial status means they are able to access a wider range of services which can replace the underwhelming or unsatisfactory care provided by the NHIF. These services then are covered by corporate clinics and hospitals with private care (Stan & Toma, 2018: 10).

Nevertheless, even for this fortunate social class it is not always possible to draw a clear line between public and private health care; for example, if the services required in the event of serious illness can’t be obtained by relying only on private care. Combining private and public services in order to acquire the best possible care is thus inevitable (Stan & Toma, 2018: 8).

Another question asked by Abadía-Barrero and Bugbee (2019: 430) is “How does private capital contribute to the hollowing out, discrediting and defunding of state enterprises in health?”. As already mentioned, a new legislative leap in 2006 began the co-dependence between the private and the public sector, and thus the defunding of the public sector. This was mainly due to the contracts negotiated between private health care chains and the NHIF. The money was generally contributed to the private chains through this collaboration, and therefore not in the public health care sector. Another side effect which led to underfunding was that certain categories of people were not able to access the NHIF and thus didn’t contribute to it. This lack of financial support was another factor which led to the underfunding of the NHIF, and in the same manner to the underfunding of the public health care sector (Stan & Toma, 2018: 4).

Private capital can also take the form of informal payment for public care, which is called *șpagă*. Private capital is given in exchange for better or quicker service. The use of *șpagă* is increasing, as is it used as a monetary payment rather than non-monetary contributions (Stan & Toma, 2018: 5 ff). It is not always an assurance of good quality care, however, because it depends on the quality of the service. Since the money is not directly converted into investments for the system, it also contributes to the underfunding of the public health sector. In that sense, *șpagă* is not a safety net against poor or unsatisfying care, as the quality of care is not affected through this informal exchange of private capital, it is just an addition to the hollowing out of the public health care sector. As demonstrated, the financial investment needed to improve the quality of the public health services is not ending up where it is required, but slips through the cracks of the system.

One final question that Abadía-Barrero and Bugbee (2019: 430) ask in their article is “How is the concept of PHC incorporated into and wielded by private enterprises, especially in service to UHC?” PHC, primary health care, means that everyone has the right to suitable care in their community<sup>16</sup>. UHC means universal health coverage, and means that every individual and community is provided with the services they need to achieve PHC<sup>17</sup>. When applying these concepts to the private health care sector in Romania it becomes clear that UHC cannot be provided as it is a service only accessible by the better-off classes of the Romanian population, and therefore does not meet the necessary requirement of being accessible for everyone (Stan & Toma, 2018: 5).

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<sup>16</sup> [https://www.who.int/health-topics/primary-health-care/#tab=tab\\_1](https://www.who.int/health-topics/primary-health-care/#tab=tab_1) (25.8.2021)

<sup>17</sup> [https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/universal-health-coverage-\(uhc\)](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/universal-health-coverage-(uhc)) (25.8.2021)

Romanian private health care is separated into two parts, regarding the incorporation of PHC in the private health care sector. On one hand there is a “corporate” sector with health care chains providing “private medical packages” which are mainly preventative. On the other hand, there is a “liberal” sector which mostly consists of small-scale entrepreneurial medical practices. Corporate private medical packages in particular are again not accessible for everyone, as they are offered to the employees of large and medium-sized private companies (Stan & Toma, 2018: 5). As can be seen, the private sector in Romania fails to provide PHC in order to achieve UHC due to its design, since not everyone can afford private insurance.

### *Financing in Low-and Middle-Income Countries*

According to Dao and Nichter (2015), the health system sector is a system of different components that function together for the provision of care. One component is financing, which refers to the mechanism by which money is mobilised, accumulated, and allocated to meet the health needs of both individuals and groups (Dao & Nichter, 2015: 3). Financing affects access to, and the equity of care because it determines the availability of money, who controls funds, who bears financial burdens and the control of health care costs (Dao & Nichter, 2015).

In order to address the subject of financialisation, which is connected to SDG 3 Health Care, we looked once more at Dao and Nichter’s article *The Social Life of Health Insurance in Low- to Middle-income Countries: An Anthropological Research Agenda*. Our aim is to answer some of Abadía-Barrero’s and Bugbee’s questions about a critical agenda for an anthropology of primary health care (PHC) under UHC (Abida-Barrero & Bugbee, 2019: 430-431).

One question asked is: “How are UHC reforms tied to the finance sector, and how can PHC be appropriated by financialized logics?” (Abida-Barrero & Bugbee, 2019: 431). The Declaration of Alma Ata in 1978 was founded in order to provide primary health care for all and make health a fundamental human right. This declaration resulted in a decline in state-based health spending. Market-oriented reforms, including structural adjustment policies (SAPs) continued to cut public expenditure for health, and shifted the responsibility for financing health care onto individuals and the private sector (Dao & Nichter, 2015:1). Furthermore, the introduction of user fees at the point of service proved detrimental for the poor (Dao & Nichter, 2015:1). When the failure of SAP was recognised, there was new interest in how to address health inequities through financial reform under policies for UHC. The concept of UHC is seen by major actors such as the Director-General of WHO, or the President of the World Bank as “the single most powerful concept that public health has to offer” and as a “key strategy to foster immediate, long-term economic growth”. The authors even explain that some go so far as to call financing reform in the service of UHC a “third health transition”. (Dao & Nichter, 2015: 2). UHC should thus be the answer to many questions regarding health care (Dao & Nichter, 2015).

Another subject mentioned by Dao & Nichter (2015) is the sustainability and role of global institutions when it comes to finance. Thailand, for example, is committed to universal health care and a set of nationally treatment standards. An increase in chronic disease would intensify concerns about revenue generation. Sustainability in financing is also tied to development aid. Many countries, such as Rwanda and Laos, depend on donor funds, which leads to their future uncertainty and having to make up shortfalls before being able to sustain services through insurance contributions (Dao & Nichter, 2015: 6).

As an overview of financialisation as a concept, Dao and Nichter (2015) give us three different examples of financing health care, with a focus on low-and middle-income countries. Tax-based financing in Thailand, as their first case in point, is run by the national government and collects money through the general taxation of the entire population. The amount of money which one individual must pay is often based on income (Dao & Nichter, 2015: 3). After achieving UHC in Thailand, co-payments were abolished and the population shifted to progressive taxation. A problem mentioned by the authors is that equity in service provision in Thailand did not increase after achieving UHC due to the unpreparedness regarding the new challenges that came with the newly covered patients (Dao & Nichter, 2015: 4). Furthermore, funds enter the general government budget and are distributed from there, and therefore they are subject to political manipulation. Politicians and interest groups influence the money that goes to the health care system (Dao & Nichter, 2015).

Social health insurance (SHI) in Vietnam includes revenues from employee payroll taxes (Dao & Nichter, 2015). Funds are thus protected from political debate over budget allocations. The country’s social health insurance plan was intended to curb out-of-pocket payments and delayed treatment. Nevertheless, the unemployed, children and those who are unable to work depend on a separate fund. According to Dao and Nichter (2015), this can lead to a two-tiered system of contributors and non-contributors. Another issue is that only 20% of private companies, which pay better wages, contribute to the SHI. The informal and rural sector is also not included in SHI.

Community-based health insurance (CBHI) in Rwanda is run by a nonprofit entity separate from the national government. It is often defined through a private and voluntary form of prepayment. Households in the community, such as villages, districts, geographical areas, socio-economic or ethnic groups finance or co-finance the current or capital costs associated with a given set of health services. This system is especially good for countries with political unrest, leaders who are not interested in health care or where the financial resources are limited. One advantage is their ability to mobilise resources more quickly, while also providing some financial protection for its members. In Rwanda CBHI covers 90% of the total population, and was complemented by external resources internationally, such as the World Bank, WHO and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Problems with equitable access, protection and financing persisted. Their dependence on donors also remained, since the least wealthy are uninsured without them (Dao & Nichter, 2015).

Another of Abadía-Barrero and Bugbee's (2019: 430-31) questions about research into UHC is: "How is financialisation internalised and experienced at the ground-level?". The part of Dao's and Nichter's work which we chose in order to answer this question sheds light on how insurance is understood, administered, used, and abused. As anthropologists, the authors could add depth to the understanding of the social effect of health insurance in LMICs (Dao & Nichter, 2015: 1). "Universal insurance coverage does not equal financial protection or access to health care", because of the limited benefits offered (Dao & Nichter, 2015: 6). An example mentioned is access to drugs. India's health insurance, for example, provides inpatient care, but the cost of drugs is mostly paid out-of-pocket, since drugs are not covered (Dao & Nichter, 2015: 6). Experiences with life and car insurance, as well as credit cards, also influence people's attitudes toward health insurance (Dao & Nichter, 2015: 8). Life insurance is therefore seen by many as an investment for which a return is expected, and they tend to treat insurance more like credit card (Dao & Nichter, 2015: 8). The authors mention that health insurance may lead to poorer quality health care. For example, in Vietnam and Ghana, insurance users experience mistreatment by medical personnel, or must wait longer. This causes little faith in universal health care which means that people do not access it, and believing that good health care involves paying out of pocket (Dao & Nichter, 2015: 8).

In order to show the problems of fragmented and piecemeal approaches to health care, Dao & Nichter (2015) explained that after health insurance was introduced in India, catastrophic spending among the poor increased. Private providers found it more lucrative to treat people with simple problems, and thus care was compartmentalised into secondary and tertiary level facilities, rather than making primary care stronger (Dao & Nichter, 2015: 6). Studies in Ghana, according to Dao and Nichter (2015) showed that differences in the enrolment and renewal of health insurance is based on factors such as gender, marital status, religion, ethnicity, class and perception of health status. In India, for example, it is unclear whether lower class women can pay into community-based insurance plans, as the money might otherwise be spent by their husbands for other reasons.

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Abadía-Barrero's and Bugbee's (2019: 431) final question is therefore: "As 'safety nets' (e.g., public hospitals) are defunded or tied up with financialization and privatization, what contradictions around care, coverage and risk are produced, and how are these contradictions experienced across different groups and levels (e.g., individuals, nations, migrants)?" Pfeiffer & Nichter (2008) write about this in their issue about global health. The authors explain that the flow of international aid from wealthier to poorer countries, as mentioned before, has increased over the last decade (Pfeiffer & Nichter, 2008: 410). Examples are the US: President's Emergency Plan for Aid Relief, the Global Fund and the Gates Foundation. Financing is especially critical in low-and middle-income countries, and should be looked at carefully. These high profile, public health efforts, lead to growing concerns regarding governance and oversight, and its impact on state health care systems. As mentioned before, the SAPs emphasised major cutbacks in public sector spending, including health and education. They also promoted economic privatisation to stimulate economic growth and repay debt. According to Pfeiffer & Nichter (2008), this deepened social inequality and insecurity. Overall, the removal of safety nets such as price controls or food subsidies, the promotion of the private sector, and therefore underinvestment in the public sector, has weakened the national health infrastructure. Global aid flows expanded, and new NGOs and donor pet projects have multiplied. According to Pfeiffer & Nichter (2008), altogether this leaves the global health system at a difficult juncture.

Pfeiffer and Nichter (2008) are concerned that there is growing recognition of the need to rebuild health systems, but that donors continue to promote specific projects which provide little in the way of institution building. As

mentioned before, the best public-private sector balance involves a central concern for bringing quality services to poor populations. Discussions about whether NGOs, private practitioners or a funded national public sector are the way to deliver basic primary health care services to the poor are still ongoing (Pfeiffer & Nichter, 2008). It is interesting that global health is deeply intertwined with matters of international relations. Pfeiffer and Nichter (2008) even state that effective global health action means getting political.

### *Participatory Approaches in Health Care*

The Alma Ata Declaration emphasised the importance of community participation in the planning, organisation, delivery, and monitoring of primary health care (WHO, 1978). SDG 17 addresses strengthening the means to implement and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development. Strong global partnerships and collaborations are needed to achieve the SDGs. Inclusive partnerships at the global, regional, national, and local levels must be built on principles and values, as well as a shared vision and common goals, to put people and the planet first.<sup>18</sup> Community participation and empowerment can improve access to health services and health outcomes (WHO, 2015). Participatory approaches become necessary in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. These emphasise that all institutions in societies must be involved in sustainable development. This means that all people must have access to justice, and that efficient, accountable and inclusive systems must be built at all levels. (Ombere, 2018: 142) Participatory approaches have emerged from the realisation that top-down approaches are inadequate. The ostensible goal of participatory approaches is thus to put people at the centre of development. (Ombere, 2018: 139) In addition, it aims to bring about broader social and political change through social processes. It focuses on the lack of resources and social injustice as causes of poor health (Ombere, 2018: 142). A participatory approach sees community participation and seeks a more equal distribution of power within and among communities, health professionals, and the state. At the same time, it builds the capacity of individuals and groups to participate in the change process by improving their own health either directly or through community development activities (Ombere, 2018: 142). They should be encouraged to participate in actions that affect them, and over which they have had limited control or influence (Ombere, 2018: 139). There is thus an opportunity for the socially and economically excluded to become more involved in decision making about their own lives (Ombere, 2018: 139). Local involvement in decision making can also lead to people being more likely to develop a sense of "ownership" of those decisions (Ombere, 2018: 140). This "ownership" means they will probably provide better information, and become more engaged in implementing, monitoring, and enforcing such rules. Stakeholders themselves influence development policies, decisions, and resources that affect their lives. The openness of decision making allows marginalised groups to exert greater influence on local policies, leading to greater equity (Ombere, 2018: 140). Because local knowledge reflects local power, participatory approaches to development policy are justified in terms of sustainability, relevance, and empowerment (Ombere, 2018: 140). Several factors are needed to achieve greater community participation. The pre-existing intrinsic motivation of people in the community is important, as is trust at the community level. There are also strong external connections and supportive institutional processes, such as decentralisation reforms and engagement in social movements (Ombere, 2018: 141). According to the economist Elinor Ostrom, decentralisation leads to local knowledge being incorporated into the decision-making process through broad-based local input and influence, which should lead to more targeted policies and lower information and transaction costs (Ombere, 2018: 140). When the affected community is actively involved in health policy, it thus promotes people's participation and encourages them to take an interest in improving health. They want to contribute, and thus take some responsibility for it (Ombere, 2018).

### **Examples of implementation**

#### *How Free are Maternal Health Services in Kenya?*

The aim of Ombere's thesis (2008) was to explore local perceptions of social protection schemes in maternal health in Kenya. It was based on nine months of ethnographic fieldwork in rural villages in Kilifi County in coastal Kenya with the focus on the views and experiences that poor women and health practitioners have of maternal healthcare initiatives and its contradictions (2018: v). It focuses on two social protections for women, maternal vouchers and

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<sup>18</sup> United Nations. Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Sustainable Development < <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal17> > 26. April 2022.

free maternity. We will discuss the key points of Chapter Three and Chapter Eight, and give examples that link SDG 3 to discussion in medical anthropology.

According to Ombere (2018), the two programs, free maternity services and maternal vouchers had good intentions from the emic perspective, however, maternal vouchers were not accessible to the poorest women as they had low bargaining power. Free maternity was also never free, as mothers had to incur hidden costs that made them sink deeper into poverty. Health workers were displeased with the unclear policy guidelines for the package of free maternity. The money meant for maternal vouchers was not mainly directed to public health services, but rather to private clinics. When free maternity began in 2013, public health facilities were entirely overloaded, creating resistance from the health workers. Many other reasons, such as delays in the reimbursement of funds, corruption in the health sector, burnout, shifting blame, a long-term strike of health workers and the politicisation of free maternity meant that the sustainable development goals could not be achieved.

The health care system in Kenya relies heavily on out-of-pocket payments as the primary source of health care funding, despite the free maternity policy as a social protection mechanism (Ombere, 2018). The program is meant to encourage women to give birth at health facilities under skilled personnel, and it aimed to reduce all charges for care in public health facilities. Why then did only 61% use the program in 2016?

The quality of a public health system is affected by the amount of funding from international donors. International aid is funnelled through local ministries of health and into the public health system in the hope that it will reach the poor (Ombere, 2018). We are dealing with multiple layers of institutions when it comes to the goal of reducing maternal mortality, and these include the international donors, the Kenyan national government, the county governments and the local people (Ombere, 2018). According to many women interviewed in this work, money had still not been paid and as the health workers were on strike the personnel would not get paid. This let them believe that free maternity was not a serious policy initiative. Ombere (2018) furthermore argues that free maternity services (FMS) are a neo-liberal policy that fakes the government's involvement in development and decentralisation, masks the low financial basis and independence of counties, and helps the national elite meeting global health development expectations and goals. This is, according to James Ferguson (1990) an anti-politics machine. FMS is used as a scheme to reduce maternal mortality in Kenya, as a development project, but according to local women FMS ended up being extremely political, and involved the expansion of institutional state powers under the cover of a neutral and technical mission (Ferguson, 1990). Ferguson (1990) claims that state services are never merely services, but they have hidden goals. Free maternity turned out to be expensive for poor mothers, even though the Kenyan government received large funds from donors to support the program.

Local perceptions of health risk and prevention influence an individual's decision-making to use health care service (Ferguson, 1990: 1). Different cultural beliefs understand, shape, and manage birth in different ways. An emic perspective is necessary to analyse the locals' understandings of social protection schemes in maternal health (Ferguson, 1990). For example, there is a preference to deliver firstborns at home, since parents want to bury their placenta in the ancestral soil. This calls for a bottom-up institution building approach. Anthropologists such as Haller, Acciaioli and Rist (2016) used their concept of constitutionality to show that is vital for local people to develop a sense of ownership in the institution-building process in order to create a successful bottom-up institution building process. Communicative-strategic actions for resource management which emphasises the views of local actors regarding participation are needed. Constitutionality helps to understand local perceptions, interests, positions, practices and processes, and bears in mind the role of external interventions such as the state or international organisations (Haller, Acciaioli & Rist, 2016).

#### *Mobile Phones for ASRH Information*

We want to present an example of a participatory approach based on the study conducted by Stephen Okello Okumu (2020). In his project report *Development and Evaluation of an Health based Multi-Intervention Service for Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health Promotion* Okello discusses how information regarding sexual and reproductive health can be provided to adolescents through mobile phones.

Taking the SDG 3.7 as a point of reference, he introduces the idea of a mobile information system as a solution to the present problems. The goal of SDG 3.7 includes the aim to achieve universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services such as family planning, information and education, and to integrate reproductive health into national strategies and programs (Okello, 2020: 10). Adolescents in developing countries are confronted with poor access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) information, and so they make choices which leave them with negative health outcomes. This behaviour could be changed by providing accurate SRH information, which would

lead them to make better decisions, and could, for example, prevent them from engaging in sex at an early age (Okello, 2020: 11).

Mobile phones are used at a rate of 90% in Kenya, and so they seem to be the easiest way to reach many young people. They provide an efficient and suitable means of communication and reach, in order to engage adolescents in SRH issues (Okello, 2020: 12).

We will repeat a few of the reasons mentioned by Okello (2020) to further illustrate why it is necessary to find a way to provide information about SRH. The WHO states that STI incidence is highest among adolescents compared to any other age group. Adolescents are additionally confronted with unintended pregnancies through sexual abuse, which leads them to unsafe abortions or STIs such as HIV. On top of that, one out of every five adolescent girls in Kenya is expecting her first child or has already given birth. Access to accurate SRH information is accompanied with major difficulties (Okello, 2020: 15).

There is also a problem of access regarding the acquisition of contraceptives or other family planning services. Existing laws prohibit and restrict the access given to young girls, for example by requiring spousal or parental consent for being given contraceptives. There is also a mistaken belief that family planning will contribute to irresponsible sex, hindering this acquisition (Okello, 2020: 14).

Young people report stigmatisation, discrimination and a lack of privacy and confidentiality when reaching out to health facilities. The problem of stigmatisation and lack of anonymity could be resolved using mobile phones. Mobile phones provide the anonymity that young people look for (Okello, 2020: 17).

The design of a service that can be used to change the behaviour of adolescents was based on two main theories: the information-motivation-behaviour (IMB) skills model and social cognitive theory (SCT). Generally, these theories try to explain how a person's behaviour can be influenced and changed by external and internal factors, and what eventually motivates a person to maintain the change. According to the IMB model, information about HIV motivated by personal or social reasons contributes to a sustainable behavioural change. Information about the subject, and the support of the social network, as well as tools and strategies for the change are therefore required. The SCT states that behaviour is learned through the observation of models, personal experiences or media influence, as well as the belief in a solution to a problem or a result in a specific outcome. The implementation of this theory would mean that setting goals, identifying and overcoming barriers and providing instructions should be encouraged (Okello, 2020: 20 ff). There was a focus on ASRH education in the final design of the app, weekly quizzes were tracked through successful completion, links to ASRH services were provided, a mode through which users could chat and follow each other's progress was installed, and last but not least motivation was upheld by earning points and participating in ranking between peers (Okello, 2020: 31 ff).

The results showed that 78 out of 85 participants created a profile and completed the survey, and 53.7% of those 78 interacted with the app for three weeks. The feedback suggested that the app was a good source of SRH information, and was believed to help people make positive SRH choices. The participants also stated that they would recommend the app to friends, as it was relevant to their age group. They also pointed out that the awards and quizzes at the end of a task kept them engaged (Okello, 2020: 38).

Although the study could not directly link any behavioural changes to the use of the app, it still seems to be an accessible way for young adults to learn about SRH. Connecting the mobile phones that all participants possessed with information through interactive quizzes, meant that these young adults were included in a participatory approach regarding SRH.

## Conclusions

We have illustrated what SDG 3 health and wellbeing includes, and the current debates surrounding it. We established that inequalities surrounding the access to health care and the privatisation process can be attributed to neoliberal ideals. A closer look at the privatisation process and its promise of economic efficiency showed how neoliberal policies enabled the dichotomy of private and public health care to develop. The intertwining of these two sides of health care is also an example of how neoliberal ideals such as the reduction of state interventionism have failed to be executed properly. As demonstrated by PPPs, the interference of the state is received gladly, as a certain degree of secure funding.

These partnerships however also show that the private sector is becoming more and more self-sustaining. As we saw with the *șpagă* in Romania, contributions to the private sector in order to gain access to better services come in monetary and non-monetary payments. These non-monetary payments can take the form of goods such as coffee, or locally produced cheese. In this way people try to acquire the better services provided by the private sector. As the *șpagă* can also be monetary, finance is given directly to the private sector, which then further increases the

defunding of the public sector. Even though the money does not support private infrastructure, favoured treatment can be achieved through these monetary contributions.

With achieving UHC many anthropological questions about how to generate the health care needs in different low- and middle-income countries appeared. According to Dao and Nichter (2015), the majority of health care is still paid for out of pocket (OOP) and to private health care providers. This causes serious household impoverishment, and prevents many people from getting health care in time. In Kenya the health system relies heavily on OOP payments, as the primary source of health care funding. They do not offer any financial risk protection and make low-income families more vulnerable to impoverishment, even forcing them to sell valuable household items. The response to, and use of, health insurance differs in various social groups, and calls for more population-based data. The goal of reducing OOP in Kenya was not achieved through the free maternity policy.

Both financing and the respective medical offers take on an important role when it comes to PHC and UHC. As PHC is necessary to achieve UHC there is difficulty due to the ways they can or cannot be accessed. If PHC is not guaranteed, for example by not having a health care service that provides reasonable quality primary health care, then the goal of providing UHC to everyone cannot be established.

If the problems arising in the health care sector can be traced back to neoliberalism is there a need to rethink its political worth? According to Bradley Lewis (2020) it is necessary to demand political change and new legislation. The COVID-19 pandemic needs to be understood as a wake-up call for more sustainable living, and not only a current medical and public health crisis. If humans continue living in ways which do not support sustainable living, a larger and more significant crisis will be needed to enforce social and political change. Lewis (2020: 14) suggests that the most promising path to mitigating this inevitable crisis involves creating a basis of ideas and practices which promote sustainable wellbeing. He believes that the arts and humanities are an invaluable resource which can help us understand environmental issues such as climate devastation or general injustice to promote wellbeing through the creation of new lifestyles. When it comes to neo-liberal policies, Ombere (2018) showed us that public health sectors are highly dependent on external funding from international donors. Multiple layers of institutions, including international donors, the Kenyan national government, county governments and the local people play important roles. Only 61% of women in 2016 used a free maternity service that was supposed to encourage women to give birth at health facilities by eliminating all the charges for care in public health centres. Why so few? Based on the voices of many women, the author argued that FMS is a neo-liberal policy that faked the government's involvement in developing, masked the low financial basis, and gains the elite political meeting global health development expectations and goals. According to Ferguson these policies are an anti-politics machine in which sensitive political operations are hidden under cover of neutral government services (Ferguson 1990).

The improvement of living standards or even secure access to medical services is not always a given. The importance of taking place, people, their needs and culture into consideration when discussing long-term solutions therefore becomes abundantly clear. An emic perspective is vital to analyse the understanding that local people have of, for example, maternal health. According to Ombere (2018), this calls for a bottom-up institutional building approach such as Haller et al's concept of 'constitutionality' where it is important that local people develop a sense of ownership in the process (Haller, Acciaioli and Rist 2016). It stresses an approach where the views that local people have on participation, politics and practices are included, bearing in mind external interventions such as those by the state or international organisations. As our Western views are not always suitable for application in all areas it is invaluable to search for individual solutions and reinforce participation. For instance, a participative approach could include active involvement and consultation with the affected people. Engagement makes it possible to generate more motivation, and the overall motivation for participation grows. As seen in the example given by Okumu (2020), adding quizzes to an app kept the younger people engaged. The app enabled access to important information about sexual and reproductive health. In this way, equality in terms of knowledge and education could also be better ensured. These are important aspects of participatory related efforts.

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#### 4. SDG 4: Quality Education and SDG 5: Gender Equality

*Written by Alexandra Kingsley, Lorena Müller and Anaëlle Vögeli*

##### Introduction

“Ultimately, we recognise that gender justice requires fundamental social change in multiple areas and at multiple levels, starting in childhood.” (Harper, 2018: 20)

In this quote, Caroline Harper explains that the process of achieving gender equality starts in childhood, because gender justice is a social transformation. Our children are the future society, and if social behaviour is to change, this future generation must be sensitised to social issues. This quote shows how closely education and gender equality are linked. What is learned as a child is later reproduced. Education and gender equality are two of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

According to Fukuda-Parr (2016) the SDGs should balance the economic, social, and ecological dimensions of sustainable development. The SDGs address many issues that civil society groups or developing countries advocate to address power structures that produce and reproduce poverty and inequality, including shifts in economic models. (Fukuda-Parr, 2016: 48) We argue that the connection of the two goals, and of the two goals to the other 15 goals, has been neglected. For example, education is not mentioned at all in Goal 17 (which is about achieving the goals). In our opinion it is important to consider the individual points as interrelated, and to view sustainable development as something all-encompassing.

We focus on Goal 4, quality education, and Goal 5, gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. Goal 4 should ensure inclusive and quality education for all, and promote lifelong learning. But this ignores that education and provision of knowledge entails issues of power as the English philosopher Francis Bacon<sup>19</sup> outlines. The problem is that it is structurally and socially unevenly distributed, enabling more powerful actors to benefit. What is then highly valued is ‘rational’ and ‘logical’ knowledge, based on ‘reproducible facts’, especially in the form of Western natural science, which is valued more highly than, for example, local, context-bound knowledge. However, this kind of local knowledge is important, but it is threatened as Kopnina (2020) highlights: Indigenous learning and traditional ecological knowledge are as threatened as some species and habitats, which entails a big danger as traditional ways of dealing with the environment might offer alternatives for the possibility of sustainable development in gender and education related contexts.

When we look at statistics which show that men often have a higher educational status it becomes clear that rational and scientific knowledge is often attributed to men, and that emotional thinking is attributed to women. “At UH universities, a steady increase in the proportion of women has been observed for the past thirty years, both in terms of admissions and degrees. However, the proportion of women continues to decrease slightly as the level of study increases. They are lowest at the doctorate level.”<sup>20</sup> (Marti, 2011: 7)

In Switzerland, according to the Federal Statistical Office, more men than women achieve a high university degree,<sup>21</sup> and so they have a position of power in science. The question “Who does science and determines what is learned?” is superfluous. Although science has addressed gender inequality, it is still not equal. It should be recalled, however, that the knowledge which science accumulates and processes, is also part of cultural processes and knowledge appropriation and selection. Thus it is often related to gender specific power asymmetries, which might reproduce a gender related imbalance in within universities systems, despite this challenge is being debated. Gender inequality affects more than only education and science. It is something that is present in almost all sectors and institutions in our system. The patriarchy and power relations are based on the evaluation of gender, pigeonholing, attributions and outdated thought patterns and concepts. Conservative notions of gender and biological explanations are dangerous, because they make gender roles seem rigid and unchangeable. We pass on such thinking to our children. We argue that as gender inequality permeates all areas, the most effective way to change it is

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<sup>19</sup> National Library Of Medicine. Knowledge is power.

<<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29967839/>>. 01.09.2021

<sup>20</sup> Männer und Frauen an Schweizer Hochschulen. <[https://www.swissuniversities.ch/fileadmin/swissuniversities/Dokumente/Forschung/Chancengleichheit/F\\_und\\_M\\_Hochschulen\\_D.pdf](https://www.swissuniversities.ch/fileadmin/swissuniversities/Dokumente/Forschung/Chancengleichheit/F_und_M_Hochschulen_D.pdf)> 13.09.2021

<sup>21</sup> Bundesamt für Statistik: Bildungsstand nach Geschlecht und Altersgruppen  
<<https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/de/home/statistiken/wirtschaftliche-soziale-situation-bevoelkerung/gleichstellung-frau-mann/bildung/bildungsstand.html>>. 06.09.2021

to teach our children to think differently. In the following essay, we will therefore discuss the relevance of the two SDGs for the achievement of the other SDGs, and how this relevance is neglected in the SDGs. The focus of this essay is on Goal 4 and 5, as they could contribute greatly to the achievement of the other goals. We discuss whether the individual points are adequately connected. In the following main section, we will first discuss the role of gender in education, because as mentioned earlier they are closely connected. Then we will argue that the achievement of the two goals is a multidimensional process that cannot be separated from the other 15 goals, and we will use illustrative examples for discussion and implementation. Finally, we will analyse the consequences; the elements of green anti-politics.

Goal 5 reflects gender equality and women's empowerment as a multidimensional process. The process goes beyond that single goal, and it is clear that it is related to gender-based violence, harmful practices, unpaid care work, voices, sexual and reproductive health and rights, economic resources, technology, and legislative change. Crucially, gender-related issues are not limited to Goal 5, but should also be considered in other goals. (Fukuda-Parr, 2016: 48)

We assume a so-called "naturalisation" of gender issues in the SDGs. According to the way the SDGs are formulated, gender issues should automatically be included in all goals, but they are included implicitly without addressing what is specifically wrong. Structural sexism and structural racism are not duly highlighted. The question of who makes which decisions is not investigated thoroughly enough. Issues of power and violence in the private and public sectors are addressed far too non-specifically, and the question of the basis for balanced participation is neglected.

### Debates in the literature

We will discuss the connection between Goals 4 and 5. Even today, in global terms, many girls do not go to school. They do not have the same opportunities for a quality education as their male counterparts. We will then go further and discuss the connection with the rest of the SDGs.

The EDA Department (Eidgenössisches Departement für auswärtige Angelegenheiten) writes in the agenda for the SDGs 2030 that gender inequality is one of the biggest obstacles to sustainable development, economic growth and poverty reduction. Gender equality leads to a better functioning society. It would serve everyone if gender justice were implemented. This also applies to gender equality in education. Target 4.5 directly addresses gender inequality in education.

Target 4.5 is: "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".

According to the sustainable development website worldwide 750 million women and girls were married before the age of 18 last year.<sup>22</sup> A married woman is often an important labour force for a family in the global South. It would be a waste of a family's resources to pay for an expensive education for their daughter when she would earn only a fraction of what a brother would earn anyway? Girls and women are expected to stay at home and take care of the household, grandparents, and children. Women do most of the so-called care work, which is invisible work at home that is not paid, but even outside the family, women often take on poorly paid and devalued care work. This framing on women towards care work is argued by Firtzsche (2019) to lead to social injustice: She outlines that 70% of the staff in social and care professions worldwide are female and thus cementing the gender bias in this regard. Both areas of work are marked as female, and consequently devalued. The Covid-19 crisis showed that these so-called systemic professions maintain a system that works to their disadvantage: poor pay, overtime, and dangers to the woman's health. The exploitation is thus gendered (Julia Firtzsche 2019: 16).

We think everyone should have the same career options and opportunity to be financially independent. It is difficult to graduate from high school if one is already married at the age of 18 and absorbed in raising children, but even in countries where child marriage is prohibited, women are discriminated against. Exploitation based on gender is a global problem, and, for example, affects women in Switzerland. In Switzerland, every woman theoretically has the same opportunities as a man to follow an academic career at a university. Despite this, many women unfortunately must still ask themselves the question at some point in their lives: family or career? It is not enough to give women the opportunity to have a career at a university. Most unpaid work is still done by women, which gives women a double burden: making a career, and at the same time doing all the unpaid care work. This double burden

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<sup>22</sup> United Nations. Département des Affaires Économiques et Sociales Développement Durable  
<<https://sdgs.un.org/fr/goal>> 08.09.2021

is also considered in the gender goal of the SDGs. Target 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"<sup>23</sup>. This target addresses the fact that invisible work, such as raising children and cleaning, but also care work in general, should be remunerated. As Dr Jürg Marti Director of the Federal Statistical Office - who I quoted above - explains, more men achieve a doctorate than women. Could this be because at a certain point women must choose raising their children over their doctorate? Many women earn less because they don't have a higher degree. Many women with the same degree as their male colleagues also earn less than they do. Many women cannot support themselves without the financial support of their partner. In order to be financially independent, a person must work for their living, but there is a pay gap between the sexes. Women in Switzerland earn about a fifth less than men, according to the Federal Equality Office. This means that every woman loses out on an average of CHF 600 a month.<sup>24</sup> Many families thus still enact an outdated division of family work. It simply makes more sense when the parent who earns more is the parent who goes to work, and unfortunately, this is still mostly the father but as even statistics for such a 'developed' country as Switzerland shows<sup>25</sup> and based on these findings it seems difficult that more widespread new role models within families can be established. We argue that a different division of roles within the family would give men and women the opportunity to live out new and different sides of their identity. Many men unfortunately suffer from not being able to spend enough time with their children and family. As Ferguson outlines many men (not just in Western societies but also in the global south) still do not see themselves in jobs related to raising children, care work or cleaning but rather in the role as 'bread winner' (Ferguson 2015). Following and thinking Ferguson's model of a rightful share in the direction of a 'rightful care', care professions would have high prestige, and even people who strive for prestige would consider them something with high status. After all, what is meaningful? I believe that in order to drive sustainable development forward, one must deal empathically and carefully with oneself and one's environment, as well as with other people. We conclude that gender equity in education would also contribute to poverty reduction for women. Here, too, Goals 1 (end poverty everywhere and in all forms), 4 (education) and 5 (gender equality) are closely linked.

As we have mentioned, we believe that the 17 goals are very closely intertwined. They influence each other genetically. Gender-equitable education also contributes to the achievement of other goals. It would also help to achieve Goal 3, good health and well-being. As Logan Cochrane and Nitya Rao write: "The educational attainment of mothers is one of the most significant indicators in terms of both access to health services and the health status of children" (Cochrane & Rao, 2019: 14). Cochrane and Rao (2019) analyse sixteen infant and child health metrics across different dimensions of potential social differentiation: gender, location, wealth, education, and regional states in Ethiopia. A qualitative education also contributes to health. They also point out that the specific issues that contribute to social inequality cannot easily be viewed in isolation from one another, but are intertwined: Our point was not to suggest that one manifestation is more important than another by comparing the extent of disparities. The point is that focusing too strongly upon only one potential domain of social differentiation may reduce our collective ability to understand the diverse causes, manifestations and impacts of social inequalities. Understanding disparities and marginalization based on sex and gender is important, and must translate into more informed policy, programs and practice. (Cochrane & Rao, 2019: 15) Only by understanding the different causes of inequity and by seeing that many social injustices could be reduced by connecting gender equity and quality education, as well as the other SDGs, is sustainable development possible.

### Examples for illustration

As we've seen, SDGs 4 (quality education) and 5 (gender equality) are very closely linked. The examples below can be used for illustration, on the one hand, to show the relevance of the two SDGs, and on the other hand, to emphasise the connection between them, and with the rest of the SDGs.

<sup>23</sup> EDA. 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development <<https://www.eda.admin.ch/agenda2030/en/home/agenda-2030/die-17-ziele-fuer-eine-nachhaltige-entwicklung/ziel-5-geschlechtergleichstellung-erreichen-und-alle-frauen.html>> 09.09.2021

<sup>24</sup> Bundesamt für Statistik. Lohnunterschied <<https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/de/home/statistiken/arbeit-erwerb/loehne-erwerbseinkommen-arbeitskosten/lohniveau-schweiz/lohnunterschied.html>> 10.09.2021

<sup>25</sup> Bundesamt für Statistik. Lohnunterschied <<https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/de/home/statistiken/arbeit-erwerb/loehne-erwerbseinkommen-arbeitskosten/lohniveau-schweiz/lohnunterschied.html>> 10.09.2021

It is not news that, there is limited or no access to education in many parts of the world, especially for girls. This not only supports gender inequality but also has a devastating effect on the lives of girls and women all over the world. Gender and education are two very important aspects of attaining the Sustainable Development Goals, and they go hand in hand. As we will see in the following section, SDGs 4 and 5 can and should not be seen separately from the other 15 SDGs. Two examples to show why this is the case are given below.

*Example No. 1: The Covid-19 pandemic*

Why do we need to discuss the Covid-19 pandemic? As shown on the official website of the UN, the Covid-19 pandemic affected people all over the world, but mostly girls and women: why is that?

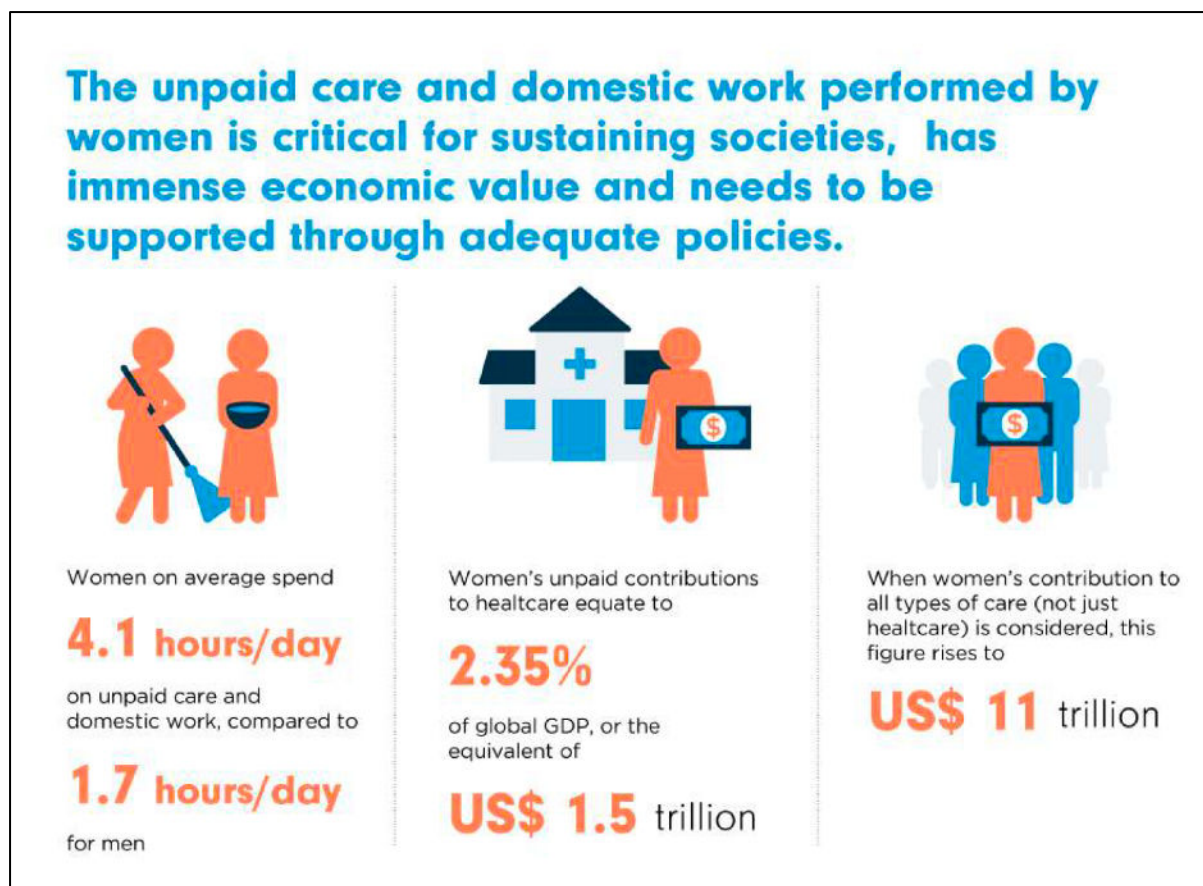
As the UN policy brief *The Impact of COVID-19 on Women* shows, one reason for the enormous impact of the pandemic is that "compounded economic impacts are felt especially by women and girls who are generally earning less, saving less, and holding insecure jobs or living close to poverty." (United Nations, 2020: 2). This means that women are generally more vulnerable when the economy is in danger of collapsing, as is the case during a pandemic. It also shows that girls and women are usually more affected by poverty and hunger, which are both part of SDGs 1 and 2, but we will come to that again later.

Another issue raised in the policy brief is that a pandemic can have a significant effect on women's health. "Globally, women make up 70 percent of the health workforce and are more likely to be front-line health workers, especially nurses, midwives and community health workers" (WHO 2019), and this may be one reason. Another reason is that the pandemic situation meant that women may have had even less access to health care than usual. The following quotation may shed more light on that: The diversion of attention and critical resources away from these provisions may result in exacerbated maternal mortality and morbidity, increased rates of adolescent pregnancies, HIV and sexually transmitted diseases. In Latin America and the Caribbean, it is estimated that an additional 18 million women will lose regular access to modern contraceptives, given the current context of Covid-19 pandemic. (United Nations, 2020: 10) Not only are women at more risk of becoming sick, but they are also trying harder to help people recover their health. This proves once again the prevailing gender injustices.

The UN report points out that a huge part of the formal economy is based on the unpaid and invisible work of women and girls, meaning the work they do at home, including all kinds of household chores, and of course childcare. This has been strongly demonstrated by the Covid-19 crisis. Women's work increased considerably, especially when schools had to close and the children thus had to stay at home. Since unpaid work was already primarily done by women before the pandemic, this inequality was only exacerbated by the pandemic in many parts of the world, and especially in Latin America. Since the pandemic has also reduced the number of opportunities for out-of-town care, women living in rural areas were even more stressed. Women have thus been required to do even more unpaid work than they already do. This issue and its reach is also shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*The Cost of Women's Unpaid Care and Domestic Work*



*Note.* Reference: UN (2020).

"Evidence from past epidemics shows that adolescent girls are at particular risk of drop out and not returning to school even after the crisis is over" (United Nations, 2020: 14).

This quotation shows the connection between gender equality (SDG 5) and quality education (SDG 4), but there is more to it. The risk of school dropout is even higher for girls already living in poverty, which is included in SDG 1, and inevitably linked to SDG 2. The ways in which this connection leads to greater damage and deepening inequalities is described in the following second example.

Another highly problematic issue often unspoken is that the pandemic has led to a higher rate of domestic violence against women and children. This is connected with the fact that the restrictions to daily life meant that families had to stay at home together and therefore people spending a long time in close contact exacerbates the problem of conflict and violence. A further explanation could be that the pandemic led to greater unemployment. Various studies have shown that there is a significant connection between unemployment and domestic violence against women (Kourtis, A. et al 2021).

*Example No. 2: When girls are denied access to quality education*

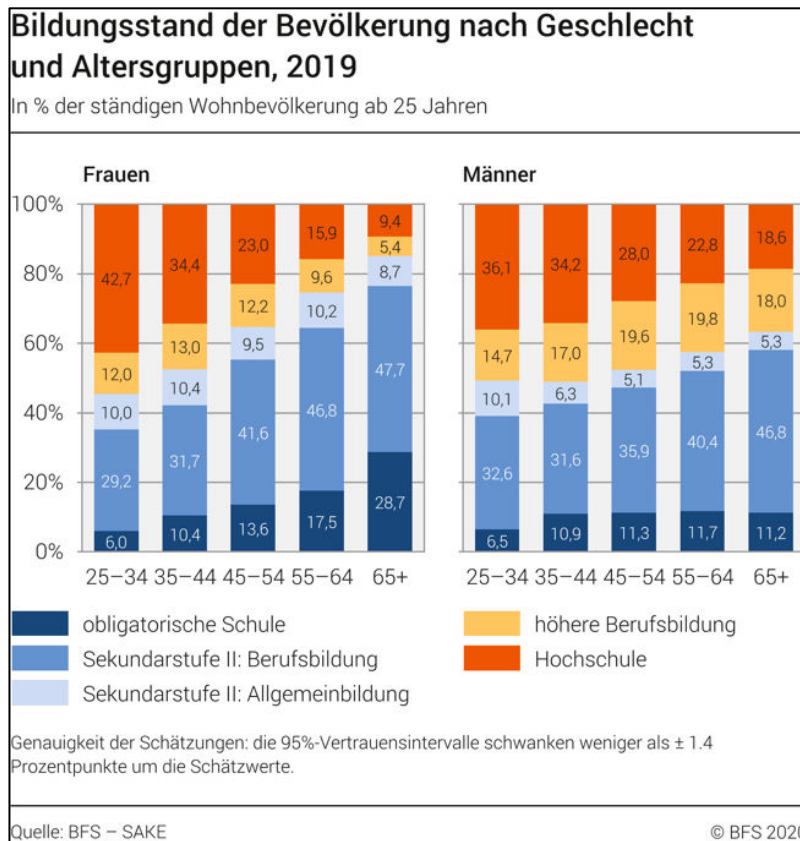
Of course, being denied access to education may have bad consequences regardless of gender disparities at first glance. However, the figure 2 shows that gender is still an important factor with regard to gender related disparities: The table shows the educational level by gender and age in Switzerland in the year 2019 (women on the left, men on the right). It quickly becomes apparent that the distribution of educational levels is increasingly unequal the



higher it progresses. There are various reasons underlying this uneven distribution. A very popular explanatory approach involves so-called educational decisions.

**Figure 2**

*Level of Education of the Swiss Population by Gender and Age Group*



*Note.* Reference: Swiss BFS-SAKE (2020).

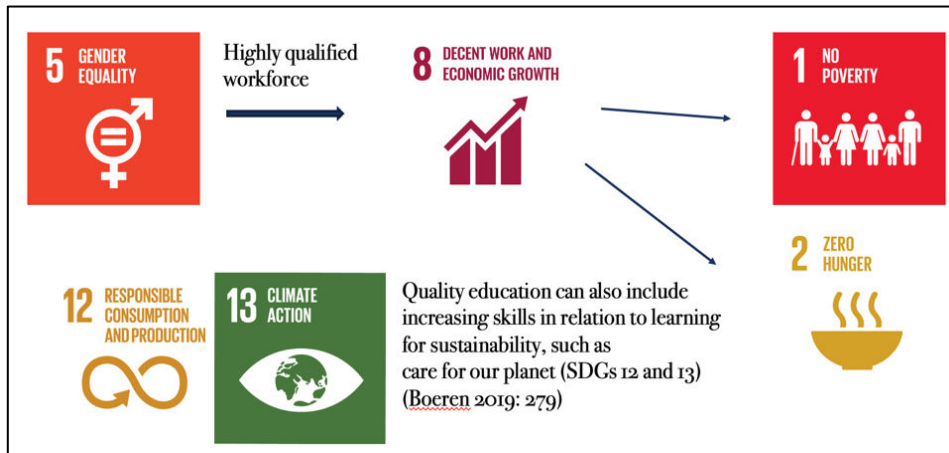
Figure 2 shows for Switzerland that women generally invest less in their education due to their anticipation of future social roles: This means, for example, that girls start thinking about the direction of their education at a young age, as they have been socialised to start a family earlier in life, and stay at home to take care of the household and the children. Of course, nowadays this is a rather outdated, traditional family model, however, in many places around the world, this is still exactly how it is. There is also partly a legal or political basis for this. The point is, that girls don't think about education in the same way boys do. This is the first problem.

A second problem goes hand in hand with the first. It is that there is segregation in the labour market. There are typically women's and typically men's jobs. As we've seen in the first example, many workers in health or child-care are women. This is connected with how people are socialised, but also with the fact that these professions offer the possibility of part-time work. This is less the case in male-dominated industries. This brings us back to Figure 2, because there are fewer opportunities for advancement in the female-dominated domains, and therefore there are also far fewer female management personnel. This explains, at least in part, why women earn less.

So, we see now that girls and women lose out in many ways. Denying girls access to education leads to a bigger economic problem for all of society. Not only does this lead to a lack of nursing staff, but it also leads to more poverty and hunger. This in turn leads to more school dropouts. This is a vicious circle, and it's therefore very important to see the SDGs as connected. Another example that may bring this closer is shown in figure 3.



**Figure 3**  
*Connecting the SDGs*



*Note.* Reference: Figure own elaboration.

There is even more to add to the graphic, however. If the achievement of SDGs 4 and 5 means that poverty and hunger can be beaten, then there would be more health and well-being as a result. An Australian paper showed that the connection between SDG 5 and SDG 6 is very important.

Female farmers, fishers and household water managers hold critical ecological knowledge, which can be used to advance wastewater systems in order to increase water security and safety. Women's active participation in decision-making processes is necessary to ensure that water resource management decisions are reflective of the whole community, and to ensure that effective and legitimate legal and institutional arrangements are put in place to manage water resources sustainably. (Grant et al., 2016: 6).

The issue that the authors address is that in many places, women don't have the right to participate in political or social manners. This may lead to a loss of very important knowledge. Neglecting SDG 5 thus has negative consequences for SDG 6, and in the broadest sense even for SDGs 1 and 2.

Hopefully, it should now be clear that our concern is to show the importance of the connections between the SDGs, and that sustainable development can only happen if the 17 goals are understood as one big, interlinked goal. In the next section, we will see examine the consequences and the problems that arise in the development of such global goals.

### **Consequences: Elements of Green Anti-Politics**

The 2030 Agenda is highly ambitious, as it wants to start the improvement of our world. It wants to "consolidate universal peace in greater freedom," free humanity "from the tyranny of poverty" and to "heal and protect the planet" (United Nations, 2015).

Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development was created in 2015 to end poverty and create equal opportunities for all. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) replaced the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These were criticised for not being specific enough with their eight sub-goals, and for being based on the idea of linear development. The 17 SDGs and 169 sub-goals call for a transformation of the financial, economic, and political systems that govern our society today; they have an extremely high level of ambition, making them both more specific and broader in scope than the MDGs. In contrast, other goals have been combined into a single target.

Agenda 2030 has succeeded in thinking about the future development agenda and the environmental discourse together, however, a quick look at the global political reality is enough to see that the wish or goal, and the reality, are far apart.<sup>26</sup> The SDGs have been criticised as a development policy agenda for only superficially addressing global issues and for failing to grasp their complexity.

<sup>26</sup> Bertelsmann-Stiftung

<<https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/de/themen/aktuelle-meldungen/2019/juni/viele-worte-wenig-taten-un-nachhaltigkeitsziele-koennten-scheitern/>> 09.01.2022

By emphasising that there can be a more just, sustainable, and peaceful world order, the shortcomings of governments and the existing world order can be better identified and overcome in a further step. As reference points, the 17 goals can thus help both the environmental agenda and the development agenda to be better implemented, as the deficits of the current government become even clearer, and a redirection is more likely to be possible. (Fukuda-Parr, 2016)

The agenda presents goals without legally binding force, however. The goals are deliberately set high so that efforts will be greater, however, there is no indication that the goals must be met in their entirety. Despite having sub-goals, the detailed debates cannot all be mapped. Many different goals, which are debated individually in the different countries, are now summarised. The individual goals lose importance, and are only considered in connection with the other goals. This results in the danger that individual sub-goals are completely unfocused, and are disadvantaged rather than promoted. From this perspective, there is a disadvantage to merging the development and environmental policy discourses. Countries need specific guidelines in order to act accordingly. Analysing the Sustainable Development Goals in more detail reinforces this view. It becomes clearer that the goals are not as innovative as the preamble to the resolution would have us believe. Many of the goals have been repeated over and over for years, in various international contexts, so they are neither novel nor particularly rigorous. International politics needs a framework that is as binding and precise as possible to achieve the goals, or even just to work towards them, and this is missing from the SDGs (Fukuda-Parr 2016).

Sustainability binds the goals together on a conceptual level, in that the sustainability of all measures can only be achieved through universal validity. The SDGs, which are rightly criticised in many places, thus at least go a step further conceptually than previous development goals, and open new ways of thinking about development. First, the SDGs can be said to systematically address inequality issues. The MDGs already addressed relevant dimensions of gender inequalities in health and educational opportunities,<sup>27</sup> but they were not formulated as both overarching and stand-alone goals, or with the same clarity as the SDGs, with gender as a cross-cutting category. Goal 10 of the SDGs addresses very different forms of inequalities - for example, inclusion, equal opportunities, income, representation in (global) institutions, and the inclusion of migrants - but they are not connected to each other. Goal 10 thus refers to many phenomena, but less to the underlying and sometimes very different causalities. Income inequalities, for example, do not necessarily have the same causes as inequalities of opportunity, or the political exclusion of certain groups, although they may overlap.<sup>28</sup>

The SDGs focus too firmly on the problem rather than the causes of problems. Causality is often assumed, and so individual triggers are ignored. This means that a number of problems cannot be solved, or can only be half solved, because their cause remains unknown. There is also a need for political action in and towards the countries of the Global North, which are challenged in many ways by such inequalities (Ferguson, 2017).

The SDGs are based on the abstract idea that development is only possible universally, and thus sustainably, without the persistence of permanent inequalities. The global nature of the 17 goals stems from the universality of their applicability, as all goals, even to varying degrees, must in principle be as relevant to developed countries as they are to developing countries. The targets of SDG 4 and 5 seem only to be feasible, if in a global involvement not just focussing on states, but also many non-state actor groups whose inclusion is required by the SDGs. Regarding the implementation, however, governments are required to develop their own action plan for the SDGs, and to determine how the goals will be adopted in their own country. On the one hand, some countries have much greater opportunities and possibilities to create and strive for such a plan than others and achieving the goals is therefore not of equal difficulty for all countries. On the other hand, there is the issue that norms and values related to what development means in the SDGs 4 and 5 much also raises the question regarding the 'Western' hegemonic definition and therefore 'universalisation' of development models originating from the global north and imposed on the global south as discussed critically by Escobar (2012).

In the abstract, the SDGs thus assume that a good life for everyone in the world, no matter where they live, requires similar basic conditions. These must either be created first or made possible again and again, including in the more developed countries of the Global North. This in turn also means that inequalities between people in the same country are just as relevant under the claim of universal development as inequalities between different countries. In order to achieve these goals, the local context of different countries must be carefully considered. Despite similar basic needs and requirements, these look different from country to country. It is important to have data that allows differentiated comparisons of people and groups in different countries regarding specific goods, such as the

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<sup>27</sup> From MDGs to SDGs

<<https://www.who.int/news/item/08-12-2015-from-mdgs-to-sdgs-who-launches-new-report>> 11.01.2022

<sup>28</sup> SDGs <<https://sdgs.un.org>> 5.02.2022

financial situation of all single mothers in the world, or the dental health of all children. In this notion the issues are hidden that development might be reduced as 'help of the poor' and not how does poverty emerge as defined locally. This is because they are increasingly complemented by a view of inequalities within and between countries. This could spur more action regarding the targeted redistribution of wealth and possible sacrifice of consumption.

The SDGs are not equipped to deal with extreme states of exception in the world. They are geared toward a "stable" world where there is capacity to strive for improvement. The 2020 Sustainable Development Goals report, using the latest data, shows that progress on the 17 goals has been mixed. COVID-19 is making it enormously more difficult to achieve the goals. It threatens health, the economy, and social life and also seems to have exacerbated 'Western' gender specific role models regarding care work related to women and notions of 'Western' framed development, again re-strengthening hegemonic views on development power specific asymmetries are reproduced (see Escobar 2012).

In 1990, James Ferguson provided a famous example of the dismantling of the hegemonic discourse of development. Ferguson attempted to explore how exactly that development discourse works. He examined the language and practices of development specialists and development practitioners, paying attention to how they influence the ways in which development is accomplished and the consequences they produce. Ferguson introduced the concept of the anti-politics machine through the publication of a book on "development," de-politicisation, and bureaucratic power in Lesotho. Ferguson assesses the discourse of development in Lesotho, a landlocked country in southern Africa, and argues that development agencies produce a narrative that ignores the political and historical processes of colonial and neo-colonial exploitation and dependencies. Instead, they favour apolitical and technical rationales that reduce the political and structural causes of poverty to the individual level, thereby making it a mere matter of educating people (Ferguson, 1990). Ferguson does not ask about the achievement of the official goals of development programs, but points out the instrumental side effects of such development projects. They have the effect of obscuring political and economic interests while expanding bureaucratic state power. Ferguson's primary concern is not to show that development discourse is wrong, but to show how the institutionalised production of certain kinds of ideas and discourses has important and real social consequences (Ferguson, 1990). This is important for the SDGs in that it recognises the causes of global problems and calls them by their names. In doing so, no euphemisms should be used, no details should be disregarded, and first and foremost, there should be no looking the other way. Different countries must act differently. Deep-seated structures must be recognised and changed to promote the goal of sustainable development. The hegemonic system must be broken, and only then will the SDGs have a chance to make a difference. For example, women and girls are faced with new obstacles and dangers, and the rate of domestic violence and the additional burden of unpaid care work is steadily increasing (see also Backe, 2020).

Turning the focus on root causes and using the lens of the gendered anti-politics machines shows that implementing the SDGs must not be narrowly focused on achieving specific indicators but rather addressing the way care work and the notions of gender insensitive models of development are not addressed but rather reproduced because the broader societal contexts is not considered. Otherwise, there is a risk that the goal of equal opportunities between and within genders will be missed in favour of quick and narrow solutions, as happened with the MDGs.

Certain narratives within the development discourse gain importance and thus outrank other narratives. This helps to create an image of the so-called Third World to outsiders (Escobar, 1995). Development is a system of relationships between different elements that establish a "discursive practice that sets the rules of the game: who may speak, from what point of view, with what authority, and according to what criteria of expertise" (Escobar 1995: 41). This development discourse emerged from the "Western" idea of modernisation, a vision of steady progress toward an increasingly urban and industrialised society. The countries of the global South stand in contrast to this. In the article *Education for the future? Critical Evaluation of Education for Sustainable Development Goals* by Helen Kopnina, she argues that education for sustainable development and education for the SDGs, which were written by UNESCO, involve some contradictions. The education addressed in the SDGs is based on the broader goal of sustainable development. This tends to often focus on economic measures to improve health and reduce poverty, but pays no attention to slowing population growth and the growth of consumption. The SDGs often prioritise sustainable, inclusive economic growth, but critical discussion of education that promotes environmental integrity is sparse. Kopnina therefore believes that "universal education based on faulty premises and the economy-centered anthropocentric bias of sustainable development is problematic." This type of education endangers indigenous learning, as well as traditional ecological knowledge (Kopnina 2020).

## Conclusions

As should be clear by now, there is no way to achieve the goals formulated in the 2030 Agenda without linking the SDGs to one another. Neglecting SDGs 4 and 5 thus inevitably leads to deepening existing inequalities, and to the deceleration of the other goals. In our opinion the only way to sustainably address these goals is to see the whole thing together – as one big goal. Poverty and hunger cannot be fought without enabling equal access to education for every gender no matter what age, race, colour, religion, or ethnicity. The same is true when it comes to infrastructure and economic growth. It is all linked together. It is like a big machine. If one cogwheel falls away, the whole thing stops.

We have tried to clarify how important it is to see all 17 SDGs together when it comes to achieving them. Equally important is the fact that the SDGs are formulated in a manner that is too unspecific and too encompassing ('we need' as well as 'all women' etc). They are written in a very global and generalized way, and its implementation on a national level is either uncontrolled or in the worst case in the definition power of a respective government. The issue is also the formulations do not leave much room of strategic use from the bottom-up. It remains to be seen if empirically women's organisations and interest groups will be able to make strategic use of the two goals and sub-targets. What may be of great importance for one country has a completely different significance in another. We personally would therefore find it more sensible to divide the different goals in such a way that each country works on what it can, or understands, best.

The local context and the local knowledge of the population is often neglected, and it would make the most sense to use this local knowledge, because only together can the world become a better place that offers all people what they need and deserve.

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## 5. SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation and SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy

*Written by Deborah Németh and Kristelle Plüss*

### Introduction

The United Nations (UN) introduced the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 as guidelines for “peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future”<sup>29</sup>. Within these SDGs, SDG 6 was defined as addressing sustainable water production, usage, and distribution.

#### *Sustainable Development Goal 6: Water*

The global distribution of access to drinking water is unfair. Today's problems of climate change do not facilitate this access. The SDGs address the issue of water (and its increasing scarcity) in the sixth goal.

The first two targets deal with achieving uniform and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water, and adequate, as well as equitable, sanitation for all. It is important to note here that it is never stated that access should be free of charge, only affordable. As the work progresses, it will become clear that it is primarily the impoverished population that struggles with the cost of access to water or sanitation. Improving water quality is addressed in Target 6.3. An increase in efficiency in the use of water in all sectors, including a significant increase in sustainable abstraction and the supply of freshwater is required by Target 6.4, which aims to reduce water scarcity for all people. As an indicator, water use efficiency as it changes over time, and the degree of water stress (freshwater withdrawals relative to available freshwater resources) should be measured. Target 6.5 addresses promoting the adoption and implementation of integrated resource management systems and principles. It is concerned with integrated water resource management at all levels, including transboundary cooperation. Indicator 6.5.2 says that transboundary basins should be measured with an operational agreement on water cooperation. Who will establish these agreements, and how this will be managed, is not explained. Target 6.6 is about the protection and restoration of water-related ecosystems, using ecosystem change as an indicator.

Target 6.a is relevant to this discussion, and reads: "By 2030, expand international cooperation and capacity-building support to developing countries in water- and sanitation-related activities and programs, including water harvesting, desalination, water efficiency, wastewater treatment, recycling and reuse technologies".<sup>30</sup> Here, the indicator is official development assistance, which is part of a government-coordinated spending plan. Excitingly, governments are involved. It is not clear whether every government has such a development assistance and the required resources. The last target is about supporting and strengthening the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management. The local administrative units with established and functioning policies and procedures, are the indicators here, however, the extent to which local communities really have the opportunity to contribute to the improvement of water and wastewater management will be discussed in more detail below.

Essentially, SDG 6 is about creating access to water and sanitation for all, as well as generating a sustainable use of resources and the environment (Chitonge et al., 2020: 208). It is important, however, that as a resource *water* is properly managed, because without enough water resources, it will become increasingly difficult to provide water in the long term (2020: 208). The other goals of the various SDGs can also only be achieved together with the SDG 6. For example, water is a key component in producing energy. The interconnectivity of the two resources leads in both cases to power struggles between governments, organisations, and in the long term, also populations. If this interconnectivity is not managed in an adequate manner, the resource production and transport will not be sustainable or manageable. We will address this issue in more detail later in this paper.

#### *Sustainable Development Goal 7: Energy*

As part of the Sustainable Development Goals Project, the UN defined SDG 7 as encompassing sustainable, affordable, and reliable energy. This goal includes the following three targets in its indicators. Indicator 7.1 describes

<sup>29</sup> Sustainable Development Goal 2030. United Nation. Official Department of Economic and Social Affairs. <<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>>. 13.09.2021

<sup>30</sup> Sustainable Development Goal 2030: SDG 6. Official Department of Economic and Social Affairs. <<https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal6>>. 13.09.2021



the goal of ensuring universal access to affordable, reliable, and modern energy services by 2030. The indicators clarify in detail what this goal entails. First, 7.1.1 describes the proportion of the population with access to electricity. The goal is that everyone has access to clean energy and to electricity. 7.1.2 addresses the proportion of the population who rely primarily on clean fuels and technology.

The United Nations defines what the involved actors need to aim for in Goal 7.2, in order to “increase substantially the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix” which includes Goal 7.2.1, which sets out to define the proportion of renewable energy necessary in the total final energy consumption.

The last target, 7.3, aims to double the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency with an indicator that measures energy intensity in terms of primary energy and gross domestic product (GDP). They further plan to improve international cooperation to facilitate access to clean energy research and technology, including renewable energy, energy efficiency and advanced and cleaner fossil-fuel technology, and to promote investment in energy infrastructure and clean energy technology by the year 2030. This goal includes international financial flows to developing countries to support clean energy research and development, and renewable energy production, including in hybrid systems.

The SDGs mean to expand infrastructure and upgrade technology in order to supply modern and sustainable energy services for all in developing countries, and in particular the least developed countries, small island developing states, and land-locked developing countries, in accordance with their respective programmes of support.

This paper thus aims to elaborate the intersectional implementation difficulties that face the Sustainable Development Goals, more specifically SDGs 6 and 7. In this context, intersectional/intersectionality means the problems that people face regarding their age, gender, social background, and economic status et cetera, in regard to their ability to achieve their part of the goals set by the UN. Research on SDG 6 will first be presented, according to Srigri and Dombrowsky (2021), Van Rooyen (2017), Suter (2020), Chitonge et al. (2020), and Pharmuele (2019). Secondly, the paper will elaborate on research conducted for SDG 7 according to the research of Carvalho and Sparatu (2018) and Buechler et al. (2020).

This paper will address political, social, and economic approaches to the implementation of SDGs 6 and 7 in rural and urban locations in Africa, the United States of America, Mexico, and Bangladesh, with the case studies published by researchers such as Van Rooyen (2017), Suter (2020), Carvalho and Sparatu (2018), Buechler et al. (2020), and Chitonge (2020). These examples will further be analysed, and the consequences of the political, social and economic actions explained in detail. The further necessary steps for a socially, politically, and economically acceptable implementation of the SDGs will be introduced in the concluding section of this paper.

## Literature Review

Access to water was adopted as a human right in the UN in 2002, because water is essential in order to live a life with human dignity (Chitonge et al., 2020: 207). It is therefore valuable that there are goals such as the SDGs to ensure access to resources such as water. Water, which is a *common good*, is, however, increasingly privatised. It is apparent that the private and public spheres are becoming more separate in terms of resource distribution. One approach to this is presented by Van Rooyen in her 2017 research into Rand Water (a South African state water utility) and the new public management (NPM). NPM is a vision that comes from the private sector, and is applied in the public sector (Van Rooyen, 2017: 73). NPM provides space for actors other than just the government to provide public services, but to create a competitive environment it then needs the state to play an active role in deregulating and re-regulating (Bakker, 2003, McDonald & Ruiters, 2005, in: Van Rooyen, 2017: 73). NPM is purely market-based, and is not democratic governance (Van Rooyen, 2017: 73). It is crucial to determine whether it is reasonable for a commodity such as water not to be governed democratically.

Van Rooyen's paper (2017) also addresses the political order experienced in a corporation. The political order, the systems or the power of the government, is supposed to be run from corporations. This turns out to be rather difficult with water, because the actual resource, the water, is increasingly lost in the Rand Water organisation, as a result of NPM. On the one hand, these partnerships help to achieve the SDG Goals; on the other hand, they are characterised by disadvantages for society. Increasingly public-private-partnerships (PPPs), the forerunners of public-public-partnerships (PUPs) arise around resources such as water. Sarah Suter (2020) wrote her master's thesis on the K-RAPID Project (Kenya Resilient Arid Lands Partnership for Integrated Development), as an example of collaboration regarding water as a resource, and private actors. She shows how in Kenya, and specifically in the K-RAPID project, PPPs are used to provide access to sanitation, water, and water treatment (Suter, 2020: 2). The idea behind PPPs is to increase investment for development projects by involving private sectors (Suter,

2020: 2). Suter conducts a field study in Isiolo Town, and shows how the local population perceives the project, and how access to water changes through such PPPs (Suter, 2020: 5).

The K-RAPID project involves various powerful actors, governments, NGOs, and companies (Suter, 2020: 24), however, the focus is on the SDGs and the implementation of these water goals. There have been projects in Kenya that involve the local population and help improve access to water (Suter, 2020: 5), however, this is changing. In larger cities, water rights are increasingly given to private companies (Suter, 2020: 5). The field research found that such companies were making access to water more difficult. Africa in general is severely affected by water shortages. There has been progress to ensure access to safe water sources and sanitation, but this is not the case in all countries in Africa (Chitonge et al., 2020: 209). Although overall access to safe water sources in Africa increased by 22% between 1990 and 2015, access to sanitation only increased by 8% (Chitonge et al., 2020: 209). The work of Horman Chitonge et al. (2020) shows that access is unfairly distributed in rural and urban regions (209). For example, in countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, Madagascar, and Mozambique, less than one-third of the population living in rural areas had access to safe drinking water (2020: 212). It is evident that the distribution of water and sanitation is focused in urban areas.

Srigiri and Dombrowsky (2021) believe that in order to achieve SDG 6 it is important that different goals are worked on in collaboration. They use the water-energy-food (WEF) nexus as an example (Srigiri & Dombrowsky, 2021: 1). For this nexus to work at all, it is important that different types of actors (state, private sector, civil society), and different scales (political/administrative or environmental), and sectors (mainly water, food, and energy) are included (Srigiri & Dombrowsky, 2021: 2). That is also the idea of Target 6.a, that the majority of the above mentioned actors cooperate and support each other. However, analysis shows that the collaboration between the actors does not work in favour of improvement in terms of a sustainable resource management. The methods and tools for quantifying and assessing the WEF nexus have been underdeveloped, and lack connections to the dependent subsystems (Srigiri & Dombrowsky, 2021: 4). A published WEF-Nexus study by Albrecht et al. (2018) found that the methods used were mainly from economic and environmental management disciplines (Albrecht et al. (2018), in: Srigiri & Dombrowsky, 2021: 4). The approaches to using the nexus system were thus not yet fully elaborated. A nexus approach imperatively requires understanding the interconnectedness between key nexus sectors in order to advance WEF security and resource sustainability (Srigiri & Dombrowsky, 2021: 4). It is also essential in nexus thinking to include the government and the political economy, however, a focus on the government has been missing so far, even though the government can strongly affect the whole nexus system (Srigiri & Dombrowsky, 2021: 6). A greater focus on government, cross-sector coordination, perspectives on different levels, and better communication should be crucial in nexus analysis (Srigiri & Dombrowsky, 2021: 6f). The polycentric WEF governance system is proposed as an approach by Srigiri and Dombrowsky (2021: 9/23) in order to drive more WEF governance analysis. It is evident here that systems for progressive thinking are being developed, but the problem still lies in computation and collaboration. There is no regulatory system that already works perfectly. While Srigiri and Dombrowsky focused their research on the WEF nexus, Carvalho and Sparatu (2018) reported on the water-energy nexus in Brazil. They state that increasing heterogeneity, meaning the growing differences and inequalities regarding gender, age, socioeconomic status and so on, means that it becomes more and more difficult to manage “common-pool resources” (Carvalho & Sparatu, 2018: 278) such as water and energy. The environmental and socio-political changes in recent years have made it even more challenging to establish sustainable energy and water systems.

Carvalho and Sparatu (2018) also looked at the connections between the SDGs, and explain that the SDGs contain “crosscut goals” (Carvalho & Sparatu, 2018: 279) that have positive but also negative effects on each other, because they address economic, social, and environmental issues. On the one hand they introduce the positive multilateral interactions which “involve cases where connections between water and energy targets could support a relevant goal and the advancing of such a goal could also support water and energy targets (SDGs 4, 5, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 16)” (Carvalho & Sparatu, 2018: 287). For example, in order to advance and achieve SDG 2, which addresses the end of hunger worldwide, there must first be sufficient access to water resources (SDG 6). There is therefore a need to also advance the goal to establish sufficient water systems available for everyone. On the other hand, there are negative multilateral interactions that involve “the case in which advancing the targets for water and energy could potentially compromise referred goal and vice versa.” (Carvalho & Sparatu, 2018: 288). As mentioned above, it is crucial to take the interconnectivity of the two goals (6 and 7) into consideration when planning the implementation of the measures provided by the UN. Without this consideration, the two goals will not be implemented for full effectiveness.

Carvalho and Sparatu (2018) argued that when implementing the SDGs, actors within governments must not find trade-offs but synergies in order to find a happy medium between the competing interests. Carvalho and Sparatu



(2018) call this synergy the nexus approach. One argument in their explanation shows that “the guiding principles of the nexus approach (efficiency and effectiveness) have become essential to the progress of SDGs (Weitz et al., 2014, in: Carvalho & Sparatu, 2018: 279), which means that it is essential to find the aforementioned happy medium. As Sparatu and Carvalho (2018) state, this process requires a “move away from the existing institutional silo mentality in policy-making” (2018: 280) into establishing a hand-in-hand co-operating policy-making that facilitates the implementation of the SDGs in the most favourable and multilateral way for all the SDGs.

Unfortunately, there are still disconnections between the nexus literature, SDGs and the decision-making and policy-making processes, and as a result they argue in favour of guiding principles that counteract power imbalances amongst the different policies regarding the SDGs, mostly because the approach to govern goal by goal instead of a sector-by-sector is no longer suitable and is not sustainable for a project on the scale of the SDGs, from any perspective (Carvalho & Sparatu 2018).

In addition to Carvalho and Sparatu’s (2018) approach to the difficulties of implementation from a policy-making and decision-making perspective, Buechler et al. (2020) take a feminist political stance to explain the use of solar energy in rural and urban areas in Mexico and the United States. They highlight the importance of including (elderly and vulnerable) women and children in the narrative of renewable energy. Women and children are the main users in households that need clean and renewable energy resources in order to have access to clean cooking, educational tools, warm water and so forth. While taking a gender-sensitive approach, the researchers take a closer look at the experiences of

1. “Female solar energy users who serve as role models for the promotion of community and household-based sustainability initiatives (including around water) and for livelihood activities such as agriculture.
2. male, self-taught energy innovators and potential benefits they offer female RE users; and
3. elderly women’s access to existing solar energy programs.” (Buechler et al., 2020: 2)

Buechler et al. (2020) explain that challenges emerged, such as the size of the rural population in the research sites. They found that the “women’s ability to access RE [*renewable energy*] varied by type of activity” (Buechler et al., 2020: 7). The importance of synergies between the communities and other organisations is made clear. The organisations made efforts to bring their solar energy access project to the “vulnerable groups” (Buechler et al., 2020: 8), which means to the elderly, and to women and children. This helped the groups to become more independent and to have a greater choice of action in the field of energy sources, but, in many cases, the women had to rely on the knowledge of men to gain expertise in the field. Buechler et al. (2020) explain that recent studies on the subject revealed that “men sometimes act as important allies by becoming transmission agents in sustainable development initiatives” (2020: 5), but that these studies have revealed existing and remaining “gender, social class, and age issues in technology transmission” (2020: 5). Even though Buechler et al. (2020) describe the interactions as “positive” (Buechler et al., 2020: 8), there should be more female instructors and innovators in the near future. This encouraging approach will also help to reduce gender role stereotypes and increase the empowerment of women in the sector.

## **Examples regarding discussion and implementations**

### *A way towards affordable and clean water*

In South Africa, Uganda, and Zambia, safe drinking water and access to sanitation is very unfairly distributed across rural and urban areas (Chitonge et al., 2020: 213). Water policy in the three countries is primarily state led. In Zambia, for example, there is a difference of 34.3% in access between urban and rural areas (2020: 214). Urban dwellers in Uganda travel an average of 0.2 km to reach a water point, whereas in rural areas the average distance is 1.5 km (Chitonge et al., 2020: 214). Studies also show that 47% of water sources surveyed are non-functional (Chitonge et al., 2020: 214). These statistics suggest that governance over water use is not firm enough. On the one hand, there is a lack of money, but on the other hand, there is a lack of water. The statistics may indicate an increase in water access, however, the measurements are too inaccurate, and obscure the fact that access in rural areas is rarely expanded. Chitonge Horman’s (2020) clear criticism of SDG 6 is that access levels are a reoccurring problem of implementation. Furthermore, Indicators 6.1.1 and 6.2.1 for the first two targets are not clear enough to be implemented properly. Some studies show, that safe water access is improving, but often the measurements do not show whether the water access is really safe, or works at all. Water resources in Africa are also mainly used in agriculture (Chitonge et al., 2020: 214f). The way in which water is distributed is often not mentioned. Questions

immediately arise about who benefits from the agricultural products produced. After all, there are also private companies in Africa that invest in water resources, but have little reason to do so (Chitonge et al., 2020: 213).

Problematically, many of the investors do not necessarily want to expand to rural areas because their main objective is to make a profit, and not to provide public goods (Johnson et al. (2016) in: Chitonge et al., 2020: 216). As a result, the population, which should be the primary concern, suffers. In her master's thesis about Isolo Town, Suter shows how the local people are affected by partnerships and projects.

Isolo Town, in Kenya, has for many years used the Isolo River as its main source of water supply (Suter, 2020: 40). For the past 15 years, however, the population has not been able to rely on the river for its water supply, although it still serves as a source of water for IWASCO (a government company responsible for water distribution in the country) in the surrounding area (Suter, 2020: 40). One issue with the lack of water in Isolo Town is that the river is already being siphoned away from localities by users further upstream (Suter, 2020: 41). IWASCO must keep the water distribution fair, because there are often water shortages due to water abstraction upstream, and the environment (Suter, 2020: 44). SDG 6 requires clear cooperation to achieve its goals, however, this is difficult because water is highly contested, not only by the local population but also the government and private organisations. The K-RAPID project, which was started in 2016 by Catholic Relief Services (CRS), meant that boreholes and, accordingly, kiosks were built, which should give the population more water (Suter, 2020: 46). The problem is that this is only possible through private investment such as that of the K-RAPID project (Suter, 2020: 45). The population can access the created kiosk water through pre-payment (Suter, 2020: 46). They are often connected to a borehole, but the problem is that the boreholes are not deemed sustainable, because the impact that these boreholes will have in the future cannot be foreseen today (see: Suter, 2020: 45). Target 6.4 sets the goal of generating sustainable water withdrawals, however, this is rather difficult because there is too little water, and the boreholes are a manageable solution in short term, but not sustainable. Many chemicals are also used for water treatment, which can cause damage to nature and people.

In Isolo Town, a person's access to purified drinking water is related to their wealth. This is because it is necessary to pay large amounts of money for a water connection to be installed in a household (Suter, 2020: 63). IWASCO rationed water access (Suter, 2020: 64), which meant that people had to obtain water tanks. as the kiosks are thus an alternative to a water connections in the house for the less wealthy part of the population (Suter, 2020: 65). This does not mean that the water is clean or equally accessible to all, however. It is still expensive to obtain water at kiosks (Suter, 2020: 65). Unfortunately, the kiosks are even more expensive since their source is limited, unlike piped water in households (Suter, 2020: 67).

Near Isolo Town, in Mwangaza, a kiosk that was normally run by a person sometimes gave water without providing change, and so was replaced with a fully automated kiosk (Suter, 2020: 46). Every drop of water has to be paid for, even if something spills over from the jug (Suter, 2020: 46). This is difficult for people who do not always have money. The advantages of the kiosk are that people are not dependent on opening hours, can fill large amounts of water faster, there is less waiting time and it is mostly sustainable and clean (Suter, 2020: 46f). Nevertheless, it is problematic that kiosks are built for the people who have little money, and that these people have difficulty using the kiosks.

Depending on how much infrastructure is needed for water access, water prices become higher (Suter, 2020: 67). This in turn means that the poorer classes of people must pay the most for the water of lowest quality (Suter, 2020: 67). People use different water access depending on how much money they have. Boreholes can only be financed through partnerships that only open them when there is a profit to be made. This is probably another reason why the kiosks are so expensive, but that doesn't help the poor population.

Kiosks changed to pre-paid kiosks because the operators of the K-RAPID project are rather judgmental about the population of Isolo Town. The K-RAPID project believes that water can only be sustainable if every drop is paid for (Suter, 2020: 59). It is often assumed that the population is corrupt, and so they rely on new technology (Suter, 2020: 59). Indicator 6.4.2 says that the change in water use efficiency over time is important. The question remains whether this helps when people can no longer afford water, or have too little money for a pre-paid kiosk?

Funding for aid projects is rather scarce (Suter, 2020: 58). The futuristic technological water treatment is supposed to help, but it must be financed first. It is difficult to find funding in any project in this sector, and funding is also difficult to find in Isolo Town (Suter, 2020: 58). According to Target 6.b, the local population should help, but there is no personal connection between the population of Kenya and the companies. There is a lack of cooperation with the population because they want their own boreholes, from which they can manage access to water themselves (cf. Suter, 2020: 78). Communication in these situations, however, is always through the aid projects, which then communicate with others, and so it becomes difficult for wishes to be fulfilled.

The water points are also not all equally resourceful. All water access points must be chemically treated. This unfair distribution of clean and unclean drinking water can affect a person's social status in their own community. People who only have access to unclean water are excluded from certain social community activities (Pharmuele, 2019: 30). In Leeuwfontein, public yoyos (water points) are accessible to all (Pharmuele, 2019: 56), however, they are not always functional and can belong to private people or to the government (Pharmuele, 2019: 56). The problem in Leeuwfontein is that one tank can only hold 200,000 litres of water (Pharmuele, 2019: 56), and because people do not take care of each other, the tanks are often empty before everyone has had the opportunity to get water (Pharmuele, 2019: 57). There are still public taps, but they are usually further away (Pharmuele, 2019: 57). There is less dispute at the public taps, in contrast to the yoyos. It is mainly the younger people who go there, as they are less willing to fight for the water as people do at the yoyos (Pharmuele, 2019: 57). There are also groups of people in Leeuwfontein who fetch water from a river and then sell it in the city (Pharmuele, 2019: 60). The problem here is that the water is not purified, so it may be toxic (Pharmuele, 2019: 60). Some people need to use this water, however, because there is no other access to water. This is a big problem when implementing access to water for all.

The people who suffer most from a lack of, or expensive, access to water are women and children (Pharmuele, 2019: 22). Women and children are responsible for water supply, and according to Asaba and colleagues (2013), in South Africa they need about two hours a day to collect water for different households (Pharmuele, 2019: 22). The task of collecting water means that children in some households cannot go to school (Pharmuele, 2019: 22). In 2019 the K-RAPID project built a borehole in a school in the sub-area of Bula Mpya, in the Bulla Pesa ward (Suter, 2020: 81). It was built so that the children could cook and eat at lunchtime (Suter, 2020: 82), however, the borehole only provides water once a week, which is not enough for the whole week, and in turn means the children have to carry a lot of water or go hungry (Suter, 2020: 82). The distance to a water point can vary from 200 meters to 8 kilometres (Pharmuele, 2019: 22).

#### *A way towards affordable and clean energy*

In their case study, Katekar et al. (2020) give an account of, and compare, the progress in the creation of affordable and clean energy sources in Bangladesh with other South Asian countries. They state that Bangladesh was one of the world's fastest-growing economies in 2019. Despite its economic success, the country was and still is facing challenges such as "poverty, overpopulation and energy scarcity" (Katekar et al., 2020: 421). They argue that "energy is a driving force to the socio-economic development of every country" (Katekar et al., 2020: 421). With the "population of the country [...] growing at a rate of 1.1% per annum" (Katekar et al., 2020: 422), Bangladesh, similar to other countries, faces the challenge of poverty and a "scarcity of energy for households, transport, agriculture, and the industrial sector" (Katekar et al., 2020: 422).

Bangladesh mainly uses gas as source of energy generation, but its fast-growing population mean that the need for more energy is evident. Katekar et al. (2020: 425) report that by 2026, "the natural gas reserve of the country may end". This would lead to a reliance on oil sources and coal, resulting in an expanding carbon footprint and further environmental damage that may be irreversible. This is why Bangladesh is establishing "the 2400 MW nuclear power plant" (Katekar et al., 2020: 424), which comes with its own dangers and environmental challenges. Katekar et al. (2020: 431) state that the share of renewable energy will unfortunately remain at a marginal level, compared to other sources of energy: "Currently, the renewable energy share is less than 2% in the primary energy mix". Even though Bangladesh has great potential for solar and wind energy, which are reportedly the "most useful renewable source of energy sources to generate electricity" (Katekar et al., 2020: 431), it is not being used at its full capacity. Moreover, Katekar et al. (2020) also highlight that "despite abundant renewable energy sources available across the country, the share of renewable energy in the primary energy mix is found to be very low as compared to other South Asian countries" (433). They further add that "countries like India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan have more than 100 million people without access to clean cooking energy source" (Katekar et al., 2020: 433).

Katekar et al. (2020) explain that there will be future challenges at the policy level, such as poor execution of renewable energy policies or the handling of information about renewable energy in policies, and they will hinder the implementation of the SDGs. They also disapprove of the "unnecessary fossil fuel financial subsidies" (Katekar et al., 2020: 436) given by the government, and the overall "lack of incentives for participation in renewable energy programs" (Katekar et al., 2020: 436). Lastly, the researchers stress that there is only a "limited technical capability to design, install, operate, and maintain renewable energy services", and also other technical and economic challenges such as insufficient knowledge and financial support for programmes that wish to introduce renewable

energy sources (2020: 436). Since the launch of a country-wide program in 2015, more than 1.6 million stoves have been installed in households, in order to reduce and prevent dangers due to indoor pollution. The government's goal is to install another 30 million clean-energy cookstoves by 2030, thus reducing the use of firewood by 58%.

Similarly to Katekar et al.'s (2020) report, Buechler et al. (2020) explain that renewable energy, compared to fossil energy sources, can be produced in a decentralised manner. Such decentralised production opportunities allow individuals and communities to produce their own sustainable energy source, instead of having to depend on other institutions and corporations. In their feminist political approach to the SDG implementation projects, Buechler et al. (2020) state that this independence allows women and individuals from vulnerable groups to produce their own energy for the household, and child- and eldercare which is "critical to well-being" (2020: 2). Without the constant threat of indoor air pollution, individuals in the vulnerable groups would be able to focus on more important activities such as income generation, education, and leisure (see SDG 7.1), but there is still a "lack of attention to women's needs" (Buechler et al., 2020: 2) as the energy sector is one of the "least inclusive sectors for women" (2020: 2). They further state, that this issue hinders the policy-making and introduction of technologies that women need to achieve independence. Buechler et al. (2020) claim that "a gender-sensitive approach to energy planning is essential" (2020: 2) because they found that "women were found to be proactive users and knowledge brokers for both domestic and small-scale agriculture RE use" (2020: 5), meaning that they are important actors in the use and generation of renewable energy for the household and the community.

In order to explain their claims, the researchers conducted studies on the use of solar energy in communities in Arizona, one of the fastest-growing US states, which thus has a rising energy demand. They also conducted research in two neighbourhoods of the Zacatecas state in Mexico. While Arizona already has a high amount of renewable energy production through household solar panels, households in the Zacatecas states are falling behind due to financial impasses. According to Buechler et al. (2020), however, the prognosis is that solar panels will in the future become more affordable, and will thus be installed in more households. Buechler et al., (2020) found different forms of solar energy generation and usage in domestic small-scale solar projects in Tucson and Cascabel, including "passive solar, rooftop solar and solar water heaters" (2020: 5). They further observed that "in Cascabel and Tucson, solar users were more likely to harvest water, practice composting, and grow crops as additional ways to conserve energy" (2020: 5).

## **Consequences**

### *Discussion of gender, policy-making processes, and program planning*

Buechler et al. (2020) argue that "very young women were not found to have access to RE [renewable energy] thus future social science research should focus on this age group to better understand this dynamic" (Buechler et al., 2020: 9). This argument shows that the dynamic between vulnerable groups such as the elderly, women and (young) children, and governments needs improvement, through well-founded research, because as mentioned by Buechler et al. (2020), women need to be included in the implementation of the SDGs, and there is a need for equal access to clean energy and water for everyone. They state that "urban and rural women and girls are predominantly responsible for household work and child and eldercare; thus, energy access is critical to well-being" (Buechler et al., 2020: 2). Accordingly, women and girls need to be included in the policy-making and policy-implementation processes of government, in order to reduce the power imbalance between policy-making and the affected groups. Cooperation between the vulnerable groups and organisations already helps improve the lives of many. For example in rural Cascabel, women gained access to RE through a local non-profit organisation that runs a community garden (Buechler et al., 2020: 7), as well as through cooperation with some of the neighbourhoods in Tucson, where middle-class women have received access to sustainable housing (2020: 7). All in all, gender role stereotypes, age and ethnical inequalities need to be dissolved. Unfortunately, this is not yet the case in all the countries that participate in the SDG movement.

Knowing "women community leader's active roles as change agents in shaping solar energy technology use in their communities", Buechler et al. (2020: 9) propose the following actions:

"...decision-makers globally collaborate with female community leaders and female and male innovators. Long-term government support of online and in-person RE training programs to increase numbers of female innovators and encourage progressive rounds of technology development could also enhance women's lives and livelihoods." (Buechler et al., 2020: 9).

Even though their proposal seems feasible on paper, they mention themselves that “discussions on gender, policy and program planning related to transitions to RE are still at a nascent stage” (Buechler et al., 2020: 1). Carvalho and Sparatu (2018) have demonstrated that the policy-making and decision-making processes are too time consuming and thus too slow for immediate change in the collaboration between the government actors and (female) innovators. Governance regarding different resources such as water and energy is essential, due to their reciprocal dependence on each other’s complex systems that produce services and goods. Those systems create advantages in the field, such as clean water access and the creation of electricity (Carvalho & Sparatu, 2018: 277). The same authors explain that unfortunately, the implementation plans for SDGs 6 and 7 reveal conflicts of interest. For instance, whenever countries are dependent on water-based energy production to push renewable energies (Goal 7.2), they use the water resources of different users and regions, leading to a lack of water resources for private use. When implementing measures to achieve SDG7, they have to consider the risks that go hand in hand with achieving SDG 6; fair and universal access to water (Goal 6.1) (2018: 281).

The reversal of gender stereotypes not only takes political intervention but also a considerable societal effort to be sufficiently successful and lasting. Carvalho and Sparatu (2018) argued that there are still “disconnections between the nexus literature, SDGs and the decision-making and policy-making processes” (Carvalho & Sparatu, 2018: 283).

Even though the SDGs focus on the “integration of economic, social and environmental dimensions” (Carvalho & Sparatu, 2018: 279) the goals remain quite superficial in the definition of the mentioned dimension. For example, the social dimension includes what has been introduced as *intersectionality*, but this term - as well as its individual subcategories (age, race, socioeconomic background, geographical placement) - has not been included in the definition of the Sustainable Development Goals. This shortcoming introduces difficulties not only in policy-making but also in the implementation process. This is because lower-class individuals or underdeveloped countries often simply do not have the financial, political, or personal resources to implement what the SDGs direct. There is thus not only an interdependency between the different SDGs, but also between the aforementioned dimensions and their subcategories.

#### *Power inequalities, gender inequalities*

The consequences of partnerships can vary. As seen with Suter (2020), projects can have a positive effect on the one hand, because they help to get water, however, often the poorer population continues to have issues accessing water. The distribution of water is another major problem. It turns out that the distribution between rural and urban populations is unfair. Unfortunately, partnerships can also have a negative impact. Project Rand Water is a solid example for this. Rand Water was established in May 1903, is one of the oldest public utilities, and is now also the largest water board in South Africa (Rand Water, 2006: 4, in: Van Rooyen, 2017: 75). Its tasks are the purification, distribution, and extraction of drinking water in large quantities (Van Rooyen, 2017: 76). After the corporatisation of the company in the 1980-90s the organisation changed (Van Rooyen, 2017: 77). The company was transformed from a bureaucratic public institution into a business-like public enterprise through the NPM model (Van Rooyen, 2017: 78). The principles of the organisation changed towards efficiency, effectiveness, and innovation, which in itself would be an improvement, however the focus of efficiency was not on the resource of water, but on operational efficiency (Van Rooyen, 2017: 78). Rand Water over-generated water over the years, and there was more infrastructure and more consumption, which led to over-capacity in the water supply system (Van Rooyen, 2017: 79). Van Rooyen summarises the process “To sum up, in the case of Rand Water NPM led to the intensification of corporatization, opening up water provision to capital accumulation by the state, and ultimately being a tool for accumulation by dispossession.” (Van Rooyen, 2017: 82). Rand Water shows that the public must be named in PUPs, and care must be taken not to promote the private sector, and that it is still about the public and the resource (Van Rooyen, 2017: 85). The NPM system is not the best tool for public utilities for the implementation of SDG 6 (Van Rooyen, 2017: 87). This is why investments in water production have to be reconsidered, so that a system such as NPM does not result in the overuse of water.

Not involving local people in projects is detrimental to those projects, because the locals then do not feel responsible for anything (Sutter, 2020: 83). They must be involved, as Target 6.b requires, but numerous studies have shown that the willingness to cooperate is lower in projects that are privatised or supported by private funds (Strang, 2009: 228, in: Sutter, 2020: 83). Not only are privatised projects not the only way to achieve the SDG goals, but they also create power imbalances between the local people and the government.

It is almost more important to mention that the rights of water are not named. By giving water rights to companies, the local community is deprived of the right to decide what happens to the water (Suter, 2020: 89). This is called

water grabbing (Suter, 2020: 89). It clearly shows that the local community has to fight for their water. Access is not easy, and is not made easy for them. There are currently land rights, but water rights do not exist yet (Suter, 2020: 89). Collaboration and investment are emphasised in SDG 6, however, the issue of property rights is not addressed. Nature is transformed from associations between people and the natural environment into market transactions (Castro, 2007: 757, in: Pharmuele, 2019: 24). Nature is thus transformed into tradable commodities. The lack of involvement by the local population in projects is therefore harmful to the projects, because they do not feel responsible for anything (Suter, 2020: 83). They must also be involved, as Target 6.b requires, however, numerous studies have shown that there is less willingness to cooperate in projects that are privatised (Strang, 2009: 228, in: Suter, 2020: 83).

## Discussion and Conclusions

As per the SDG 6 and 7 official websites, there is still a lot of work ahead in order to achieve both of the SDGs, in accordance with each other's requirements. The major and thus most important goal of SDG 6 is the sustainable use of water. The only problem here is that the pathways to this sustainability are not all favourable. It is clear that funding is needed for projects such as water treatment, boreholes, water distribution and water harvesting. This creates the abovementioned partnerships, which have their respective advantages, however, more attention must be paid to the various collaborations between organisations, governments, and individuals. As Carvalho and Sparatu (2018: 287) stated, "although their planning and policy processes tend to be structured and operate within silos, with corresponding multiple and separate objectives, when seen as a whole or in relation to each other, policy conflicts and the great potential for trade-offs can be identified, raising resource allocation issues." Such trade-offs mostly lead toward an advocacy of market ideologies, where the financial aspect is prioritised and not the resource. This then leads to the suffering of the people for whom the whole concept was intended in the first place. Factors such as climate change and environmental change must be included in SDG 6 (see Chitonge et al., 2020: 216). The increasing problems that accompany climate change mean that there is global warming on the one hand, but also more rainfall, which can lead to flooding, on the other hand (Chitonge et al., 2020: 216).

The SDGs should be much more adapted to the geographical, social, and political needs of countries, instead of defining goals for all countries all at once. This includes the greater involvement of the countries' populations, resulting in reduced social and political power imbalances. It would also be important to take a bottom-up approach to the policy-making and decision-making process, therefore furthering the integration of the population and their culture and rituals into the implementation of the SDGs, not only for Goals 6 and 7, but also for the rest of the SDG goals. Although technologies have been invented which treat water and energy and improve distribution, the whole world should learn a new way to handle water and energy. For example, water is not yet scarce in the Western countries, but these countries suffer in part from polluted water. This should not be forgotten.

As seen, the SDGs need to work together, and this is crucial. Goals 6 and 7 cannot be achieved independently of each other. Water is needed for energy, and energy is needed for the distribution of water. The SDGs need to work in a less sector-oriented way and make sure that the goals do not harm each other.

While there has been progress in the past few years, there remain too many reports and academic documents showing inequalities between the genders when it comes to sufficient access to clean energy, and the knowledge and financial resources to use the means presented to them. The implementation processes of SDGs 6 and 7 should include more attention to inherent gender inequalities, which are central issues for the two SDGs, but often overlooked. Only through advances in this sector can the implementation progress of any Sustainable Development Goal be facilitated.

Despite the fact that "the process of determining the SDGs was more inclusive and collaborative than the formulation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), in that it included not only the world's wealthy nations, but also middle-income and low-income countries" (Van Rooyen, 2017, p. 3) there is still a long path between the progress made so far and the actual achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. It is of utmost importance that the actors involved in implementing the SDGs also approach the SDGs with intersectionality in mind. By this we mean that social class, age, ethnicity, race, and geographical location have to be included when planning and structuring the implementation process for the SDGs in every government. Clean energy and water usage can only be adapted and adopted in an efficient and sustainable way through this approach.

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## 6. SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth and SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

*Written by Jana Lamatsch and Lena Weber*

### Introduction

SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth and SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure are closely linked through the nexus of industries, work, growth and development. The two SDGs combine the promise of achieving decent work conditions and poverty reduction through economic growth and by advancing sustainable industrialisation. We will introduce them separately and then discuss the social anthropological literature that critically examines the way in which the SDGs are shaping the discourse around sustainability and (industrial) development as well as the dangers of doing so. This is particularly relevant against the backdrop that states or larger companies can use the SDGs strategically to pursue mainly economic interests or if, through the orientation towards the SDGs' goals, negative impacts of development projects are masked by often well-intentioned activities 'in the spirit of sustainable development (see Larsen et al., 2022). In a further section, we provide a number of examples to illustrate some of the arguments from the literature, discuss the consequences and develop an outlook on further discussion.

### SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

The main goal of SDG 8 is formulated as follows: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. Basically, SDG 8 assumes the possibility of green growth, which means decoupling economic growth and environmental degradation. It should be achieved through technical innovations, which lead to higher economic productivity (and thus poverty reduction) and at the same time to more efficient, sustainable resource use. This so-called decoupling hypothesis has been the subject of much debate in recent years, with the clear dominance of green growth advocates in policy-making to date (Parrique et al., 2019). On the other hand, advocates of post-growth approaches have tried to show how unlikely decoupling is. The European Environmental Bureau concludes in its report *Decoupling Debunked*: 'Not only is there no empirical evidence supporting the existence of a decoupling of economic growth from environmental pressure on anywhere near the scale needed to deal with environmental breakdown, but also, and perhaps more importantly, such decoupling appears unlikely to happen in the future' (Parrique et al., 2019, p. 3). A major criticism of the decoupling hypothesis is problem shifting: through focusing on technological solutions – such as the development of 'sustainable' industries through new green energy production methods – new problems arise. There are many cases of green energy projects (such as large-scale biofuel, solar and wind energy) and its related economic growth, which are summarised in several newer publications that show how the production of green energy raises serious concerns about land use and land rights (Achiba, 2019; Bersaglio et al., 2020; Haller et al., 2020; Haller, Pase, et al., 2023; Haller & Weissman, in press; Marfurt et al., 2019; Ryser, 2019). We will also illustrate this with three examples in the section below.

Sub-goal 8.1 explicates further the notion of development and growth: sustain per capita economic growth in accordance with national circumstances, in particular, at least 7% gross domestic product growth per annum in the least developed countries. The direction of development is clearly defined: so-called 'less developed' countries are to develop along the lines of the 'developed' countries of the Global North. Growth is measured exclusively on the basis of GDP figures. Additionally, scholars question if the numbers regarding GDP can be measured correctly (see Jerven, 2013). It should be examined more critically where statistics originate and how accurate they actually are – particularly considering the massive impact they can have regarding goal definitions for a specific region, funding possibilities or the implementation of projects. Moreover, many development theorists criticise this definition of development because the power to define what should be developed and in which direction is exclusively based on the ideas of the Global North and the logic of global capitalism (e.g. Ferguson, 2015). Colonial history and the resulting relations of exploitation that made the industrialisation and 'development' of the Global North possible in the first place are ignored and colonial relations are reproduced. Decolonial perspectives that deal with the ongoing consequences of colonialism and thus bring the dark sides of industrialisation and development into the light are completely neglected in the two SDGs.

Sub-goal 8.3 reads, 'Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation (...). This also includes the development of so-called corporate social



responsibility (CSR) policies, which are discussed below. It is striking that the development of policies is demanded, but it is not further defined to what extent these policies have to be of binding character. In addition, the policies must be clearly ‘development-oriented’, which, considering the main goal of SDG8, means economic growth.

Sub-goal 8.8 calls for ‘labor rights and the promotion of safe and secure working environments’ with a special focus on women migrants. This not only lacks an intersectional perspective on the issue. Unfortunately, the sub-goal does not define how this protection is to be made possible and who is responsible for protecting labour rights. As for other goals, it is evident that the SDGs are very vague in attributing root causes and responsibilities (see Haller et al., 2018; Larsen et al., 2022).

## **SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure**

Neither infrastructure nor industry were explicitly referenced in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) the predecessor of the SDGs (Bersaglio et al., 2020). When pursuing the MDGs, infrastructure and industry were recognised as central to poverty reduction and achieving sustainable development (United Nations-Habitat, 2015). SDG 9 is embedded right in the middle of the 17 SDGs. Politically more liberal positions and advocates of green growth promote technical inventions as the best solution for combating the climate crisis. There is also a growing consensus in global development circles that infrastructure and industry have a positive effect on all three pillars of sustainable development, in a direct way on economic and indirectly on environmental and social sustainability (Bersaglio et al., 2020). Additionally, the global agenda has a specific narration of justice, namely that less developed countries should catch up to the model of the more developed countries. Thus, SDG 9 is directly linked to SDG 8, in which these ideas of decoupling and development of the ‘less developed’ countries are already anchored. SDG 9 is, so to say, the application of these ideas to the area of infrastructure and industrialisation, and the main goal is formulated as follows: build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation (UN, 2015). It sees three tasks – to build, promote and foster – but who exactly organises these tasks? They are not directly addressed.

The first sub-goal is to build high-quality, operationally safe, sustainable and resilient infrastructures, including regional and transnational infrastructures, in order to promote economic development and human well-being, with a focus on affordable and equitable access for all. The goal continues that remote places should be able to participate in global trade, which promises to bring added value for them as well as for the involved traders (UN, 2015). This connection also creates a certain alignment: cooperation but also a certain dependency. The desirable values that have been set are according to the model of the Global North. The idea is to first catch up with the more developed countries with infrastructure and employment and only in a next step to add the environmental protection component, if the resources, mostly financial, allow it. The fourth sub-goal of the eight sub-goals states: ‘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’ (UN, 2015). The words ‘upgrade’ and ‘retrofit’ also emphasise once again that the path they agreed on is to first build the infrastructure without particular regard for the environment, following the example of the Global North, and to add the sustainable aspects later when the people can afford it. Even if it was, of course, possible to build in an environmentally friendly way the first time.

The third task, fostering, is emphasised in Goal 9.5, which aims to enhance scientific research and again upgrade the technological capabilities of industrial sectors in all countries and, in particular, in developing countries. It also encourages innovation by increasing the number of research and development workers and investing in public and private research and development. The goal also requires support for domestic technology development as part of the mega-infrastructure projects, such as solar panels, sewage and information and communication technology, in order to connect them to the infrastructure and equip small businesses (Sturup & Low, 2019).

To summarise, we can see that SDGs 8 and 9 are based on the ideas of green growth, a Western definition of development and industrialisation which lacks consideration of decolonial perspectives. Both goals are based on the hope that technical innovation will lead to a more sustainable production and through that to sustainability and justice. Responsibilities related to who should implement policies regarding social and ecological responsibilities are not clearly defined, yet the SDGs assign an important role to the private sector as an engine of economic growth and job creation. In the following, we critically question from a social anthropological perspective to what extent such an alignment can contribute to social and ecological sustainability.

## Debates on SDGs 8 and 9 in the Literature

Sturup and Low explain the following:

Sustainability, the noun, is the property or quality of being able to be sustained – a property of a thing, a species, a process, a culture, a society etc. Sustainable, the adjective, is the measure of the degree to which something can be sustained. In proper use then, sustainability requires an identification of what is to be sustained and a normative idea of how and to what extent it should be sustained (2019, p. 9).

They also compare the concepts of Dobson, which he established on questioning what, why and how something should be sustained. He develops the following three types of sustainability: accommodating, communalist and deep ecology. Accommodating sustainability means ‘human welfare comes first, not just material needs but also spiritual and aesthetic needs’ (Sturup & Low, 2019, p. 9). According to Sturup and Low (2019), people accommodate themselves to nature to prevent irreversible damage, and they can therefore continuously benefit from the ecosystem services that nature provides for humans. This is an absolutely anthropocentric approach because nature is only looked after because humans depend on it, and the goal is that people are as well off as possible. In communal sustainability, people have a stewardship responsibility for nature, and it ‘should be protected for their own sakes from irreversible processes of destruction’. The deep ecology approach assumes that the conservation of nature is more important than people, as it is not anthropocentric. It boils down to the fact that humanity is dependent on being able to inhabit the planet. It is therefore important that no irreversible damage is done and that the planetary boundaries are not exceeded because a severely damaged environment also harms people (Rockström, 2015).

So, who provides what for whom? This is not defined in the SDGs. Investors in the private sector can take action, but what is their motivation? They have not necessarily committed to the SDGs as governments have, and so they remain in their niche of building and cannot be held accountable in social responsibility questions, but they are interested in building infrastructure and the incorporation and expansion of the future market. The participants for whom the infrastructure is provided should certainly be the citizens, but whether it is really what they need the most can only be answered if they are directly involved in the planning and are interrogated about their problems and needs. The investors are definitely cherry-picking and prioritising which investment will have the most immediate result, namely economic output, for them. This is not entirely consistent in relation to all the SDGs and does not look at it holistically. Instead of renewable energies, raw materials and fossil fuels are extracted. The calculation is that a thriving economy will trickle down to the social dimensions.

As we can see, the neoliberal development discourse attributes quite a big role in poverty reduction to the private sector. The SDGs state that governments and development agencies cannot achieve the 2030 goals alone but that the private sector has the capital, resources and power to play a central role in poverty reduction (UN, 2015). Here the so-called CSR comes into play: CSR policies should take the ethical, social and environmental impacts of what business are doing into account, which should be implemented and regulated through the business itself. The anthropology of development investigates among other topics how the sustainability discourse is exactly used in the CSR apparatus and what the implications of this are. Spencer (2018) summarises various results of researchers and concludes that the private sector gains more and more the role of an actual agent of development. Private businesses are no longer only tools against poverty reduction. Instead, they position themselves as ‘consciously engaged agents’ of developments. Through signing CSR policies, private businesses become self-disciplining moral actors, who are contributing deliberately to sustainable development (Rajak, 2011, as cited in Spencer, 2018).

From an anthropology of development perspective, this is problematic due to three main things (Spencer, 2018). Firstly, this is problematic because of the unclear definition of what sustainable development means and who is in a position to decide about it. Secondly, behind the big role of the private sector for poverty reduction lies the assumption that economic growth actually goes hand in hand with poverty reduction and sustainable development. As explained above. This is seen as very unlikely from a post-growth and anti-capitalistic perspective. Thirdly, this is problematic because of the unintended consequences of CSR activities: the effects of CSR policies have to be looked at critically in each individual case. Often the interests of companies and goals of social and ecological justice are quite different – even if this is presented differently in the formulations of CSR policies. Because they are not legally binding, there is a danger that the CSR policies become more like an authorisation for doing what the private sector thinks is beneficial – all under the guise of sustainable development. Instead of actually introducing ecological sound solutions and social justice activities, companies in the private sector are mainly interested

in economic profit. This is not to say that all CSR policies are like this but to emphasise the danger that comes with the unclear assignment of responsibilities and top-down definitions of what is sustainable.

Additionally, according to Sturup and Low (2019), sustainability cannot really be measured. Unsustainability, on the other hand, can be measured quite well; the best example is CO<sub>2</sub> or greenhouse gas emissions (Sturup & Low, 2019). In fact, CO<sub>2</sub> is included as an indicator in SDG 9.4.1. The CO<sub>2</sub> emissions per unit of value-added CO<sub>2</sub> is measured, but the unit 'value' is not specifically mentioned. This is very poor transparency, and it could vary for different countries. It is entirely possible that a megaproject can improve material prosperity and economic growth while simultaneously doing serious damage to the global ecology. Such a project may also improve social cohesion and welfare (or not).

### **Examples of Discussion and Implementation**

We discuss in three different contexts (Mexico, Ghana and Kenya) some of the points mentioned above and illustrate related SDG issues. Ramirez (2019) shows in the context of Mexico how the government enables foreign direct investment with reference to sustainable development: the wind energy farm at the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in Oaxaca, Mexico should contribute to the development of the local communities in order to reduce poverty and to fight climate change as an environmentally sound technology. One could assume that groups like the local indigenous people would support wind energy farms like that because unlike fossil fuel, wind energy investment does 'theoretically' not include environmental (in)justices, such as the mining industry. However, Ramirez's (2019) results indicate that while these wind energy farms also have large economic interests, their implementation fails to protect basic land rights and rights of self-determination of the local people. It also has a big impact on the local economy, which was not seen as positive in this case. It is very likely that relations of domination and colonialism are perpetuated through projects like this (for another example in the Norwegian context, see Fjellheim, 2023), especially when the private sector interests are shielded by the government and its ambition to implement ecological sound technologies. These outcomes suggest that achieving the SDGs, particularly Goals 7, 8 and 9 through investments in wind energy or other innovative technologies is quite naïve.

With their research on female migrant workers in Ghana, Achana and Tanle (2020) demonstrate that the implementation of sub-goal 8.8 is not on a good track. The example shows that especially in the informal sector, the implementation of hard regulations by the state would be necessary to guarantee fair labour rights for female migrant workers. The authors clearly call for tough regulations and that the state should take responsibility. It shows that social responsibility issues cannot simply be shifted to the private sector via CSR. This makes it clear that strict legal regulations should be guaranteed by the state instead of soft regulations. It also confirms the critical assumption of many development-critical research studies that the introduction of CSR and codes of conduct has so far not led to any convincing improvements in global commodity chains (Fischer et al., 2021).

As a third example we look at two corridor megaprojects in East Africa, where development planning is dominated by infrastructure and industry planning (Bersaglio et al., 2020). The two corridors, named LAPSSET and the Central Corridor, are considered an important part of achieving Goal 9, but as Bersaglio et al. (2020) show, the megaprojects are not without trade-offs involving new hazards and risks for communities, ecosystems and livelihoods. Construction on LAPSSET (Lamu Port and Southern Sudan-Ethiopia Transport) began in 2012, three years before the SDGs were enacted. Most of the corridor is planned for completion by 2030. While the corridor was conceived decades ago, a resurgence of interest in investing in infrastructure and recent discoveries of oil and gas in the region have made the project feasible. The corridor has improved access and is the conjunction between Kenya, South Sudan and Ethiopia. The final intention is that LAPSSET will be a transition from Kenya to Cameroon, linking the east and west coasts of the continent via an expansive network of transport infrastructure. The transport corridor includes multiple components, including a crude-oil pipeline, a highway network, standard gauge railway (SGR), electrical power lines and fibre optic cables. In the wider economic corridor, tourist resort cities, special economic zones, export processing zones and agricultural growth zones are planned, which are meant to attract further investment to the corridor. The construction of dams near the corridor has also been proposed and planned to supply electricity and water to development zones, such as resort cities. LAPSSET is the Kenyan government's flagship project to reach Kenya's Vision 2030, the national development strategy to transform Kenya into an emerging middle-income country by 2030 (Bersaglio et al., 2020).

LAPSSET is not finished yet. Even at this early stage of operation, participants reported that the corridor is making it significantly easier and faster to travel and transport livestock to markets. Jobs were created during the construction, but once LAPSSET is finished, these jobs will vanish again, and people will need to find other economic opportunities, although the persons affected are optimistic because they can start with the money they earned

during the construction. The jobs are paid over the poverty line, but working conditions have been criticised, with suggestions that workers received neither training nor safety equipment and that women experienced sexual abuse and harassment (Bersaglio et al., 2020). China is very interested in participating in the construction of the new corridors, as these projects fit perfectly with China's own plans for its expansion of global infrastructure, namely the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), with the result that China is the single largest investor (Bersaglio et al., 2020). In 2017, leaders pushed for LAPSSET officials to consider changing the route of the corridor, arguing it would save the federal treasury billions, expel land speculators, preserve the existing wildlife corridor and reduce border tension in counties such as Isiolo and Meru. The CEO of LAPSSET refused to change the plans (Kazungu, 2018). This shows that not everybody benefits from the mega infrastructure project. The corridor required private, community and public land, and some people were displaced, and only landowners were compensated. The new infrastructure increases the value of the nearby land and arouses the interest of investors. The last negative effect is that every community has lost livestock to road-crossing accidents on the highway, and at least one person in every community has been killed during road-crossing accidents (Bersaglio et al., 2020). The undermining of local resources held in common before was also the case in the Port Lamu area (see Werthmüller, in press).

The second mega infrastructure project is the Central Corridor. It connects the landlocked countries of Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to the Tanzanian Port of Dar es Salaam on the Indian Ocean. It is a multi-modal transport route consisting of five components: port facilities, inland waterways, roads, railways and one-stop border crossings. The Central Corridor is managed by the intergovernmental organisation, Central Corridor Transit Transport Facilitation Agency (CCTTFA). Its investors include the African Development Bank, European Union, TradeMark East Africa, Japan International Cooperation Agency, New Partnership for Africa's Development and the Kuwait Fund (Bersaglio et al., 2020). 'The renewed interest and investment in the Central Corridor can be attributed to two key developments. First, new mining investments throughout the Great Lakes region have increased demand for efficient and reliable transport and energy infrastructure. Second, the Central Corridor received an additional boost when Uganda decided to export crude oil through Tanzania rather than Kenya' (Bersaglio et al., 2020, p. 8). The Tanzanian government estimates that this will contribute to improving the economy and increasing socio-economic development, and thus reduce poverty on a large scale. It is planned that the Central Corridor will connect small-scale and subsistence farmers to new value chains by providing safer and faster roads to market centres. The downside of this is that the more roads there are, the more they are used, and if it is not electric cars on the roads, then the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions increase rapidly (Sturup & Low, 2019).

In order to be part of and to benefit from the new infrastructure and the economy, people will have to move near the corridor. Indicator 9.1.1 measures the proportion of the rural population who live within 2 km of an all-season road (UN, 2015). This could result in living conditions based on informal settlements where people live because it is close to where they can earn money, but the conditions of the houses are precarious, and lifestyles are poor and only focused on making money. Instead of megaprojects such as the corridors, where people have to move to live nearby, the infrastructure could be brought to where people already live. Sturup and Low describe a model called 'concentration-distribution' or the 'big project': 'These are megaprojects that concentrate resources on a particular part of the system, backed up by widespread networks to disperse the value generated by the megaproject' (2019, p. 17). Another approach to independence is to equip houses, or at least communities, so that they can gather or recycle their own water, process their own sewage and generate their own electricity: this was successful, for example, in Sydney, Australia (Sturup & Low, 2019). This approach would probably also be more sustainable and eco-friendlier, and as the word 'independent' already suggests, the people would not depend on a mega-infrastructure and foreign investments. The question is whether investors or other states might suddenly have more power than the government. Therefore, the government should be able to create and enforce a tax system in order to maintain the infrastructure.

### **Consequences: Elements of Green Anti-Politics**

Regarding CSR policies in the context of green energy production and mega-infrastructure projects, the anthropology of development challenges the assumption that CSR leads to actual community involvement and an improvement of the situation for local people. It needs to be carefully evaluated in each context because CSR policies come with the danger of ignoring ambivalences and competing values, goals or ways of working among different actors/stakeholders and the tensions that exist in partnerships. These are, as anthropological research often points out, for example, different ontologies regarding conceptions of nature from the private sector and local communities (especially in the extractive sector) (Niederberger et al., 2016; Spencer, 2018). Furthermore, as scholars and

activists describe in a variety of different geographic contexts, there is the danger that CSR policies and codes of conduct are used to discursively ‘reshape development agendas according to corporate values and interests’ (Rajak, 2011, as cited in Spencer, 2018, p. 10) despite companies appearing as neutral actors in the development context. This masks the great power imbalances between companies, the government and the local population, which often lead to inequalities regarding the benefits and disadvantages of corporate activities. Against this background, companies with their CSR policies can become anti-politics machines: the introduction of CSR policies prevents political interferences as corporate activities are depoliticised. CSR has the potential to diminish ‘questions concerning the inequitable distribution of wealth ... as poverty is recast within this depoliticised framework as due simply to a lack of market opportunity’ (Rajak, 2011, as cited in Spencer, 2018, p. 12). Additionally, with respect to the masking of power issues and unevenly distributed disadvantages, this neoliberal approach to reduce poverty ignores all the critical voices since the 1990s that doubt whether economic growth can actually contribute to poverty reduction and provide decent jobs and working conditions. On the contrary, many anti-capitalist and decolonial approaches assume that global capitalism and the transnational division of labour are based not only on the exploitation of labour in the Global South but also on what has been called the production of ‘surplus’ working population, who are completely excluded (see Ferguson, 2015; Li, 2010) and who also lose the last part of their often previously communally organised access to resources via this expansion (see Haller et al., 2020).

Some of these aspects exist also in the context of the two mega-infrastructure projects in East Africa: the local people have not been included in the planning from the beginning and have not been able to contribute their needs and ideas. What is even more serious is that comparative work on mega-infrastructure projects also in other contexts shows that SDG 9 is able to legitimate land and commons grabbing to a large extent without respecting local land and resource rights, while costs of the loss of access to common-pool resources, such as land, water and pasture fisheries is not compensated. Mega-infrastructure projects all over the globe, including the Belt and Road and also other initiatives in Africa (SAGCOT, different solar and wind energy projects, etc.), the Americas and Europe are more easily implemented due to the green legitimacy which SDG 9 provides (see Haller, 2023b; Haller, Pase, et al., 2023; Haller & Weissman, in press a, in press b). Ferguson (1990) criticises the idea of externally directed Global North-defined ‘development’ that goes hand in hand with industrialisation and argues that the process does not take proper account of the daily realities of the communities it is intended to benefit. Instead, it often prioritises technical solutions for addressing poverty and ignores its social and political dimensions, so the structures that these projects put in place often have unintended consequences. Ferguson (1990) suggests that until the process becomes more reflective, development projects will continue to fail.

Basically, it is Eurocentric to speak of ‘development’ and ‘least developed countries’. It prioritises the Western model and denies the Global South countries their own development. It suggests they have to change according to the Western model. In the process, imperialist history is neither illuminated nor processed but continues with the same hegemony.

## Conclusions for Further Discussion

Placing economic growth and infrastructure at the centre of the discussions is quite interesting because it seems as if other goals are prioritised, but industrial and non-sustainable interests may also be veiled. Everyone agrees that fighting hunger and poverty is the most important thing, and since there are so many goals and they are interwoven, only a close look can reveal that some actors are being cherry-picked because they are more appealing for the economy.

The governments who approved the SDGs have major responsibilities. They are responsible for reconciling the interests of the investors with the interests of the communities. They are responsible for the long-term maintenance of the infrastructure, and they have to deal with possible damage to the environment and society, which could be irreversible.

The main question remains regarding what is the more Eurocentric approach. We can either argue, on the one hand, that countries in the Global South are not obliged to take a diversion via non-renewable energies, which allows them to have a less environmentally friendly infrastructure and retrofit them later when they have enough money or, on the other hand, to say that they are not allowed to make the same mistakes as the Global North and should build properly and in a more eco-friendly manner now. Countries in the Global South have so far produced fewer emissions than the Global North, and to say they must reduce them further now, for the sake of the Global North, is quite unfair. So, it would be good if the environmentally friendly inventions which are now active and were invented in the Global North could be implemented in the Global South with the Global North paying for the implementation. As the comparative literature shows, both strategies are used by governments and investors: in

the case of a non-environmentally friendly infrastructure, the argument is to blame the Global North for the damage it has caused and claiming the same ‘right to pollution’. However, if an environmentally so-called sound energy infrastructure is planned (large-scale solar or wind energy as in North Africa or East Africa), the commons grabbing is hidden by referring to the ecological soundness with climate change arguments. In both processes, commons and green energy grabbing procedures are often the same but with different arguments (see Haller, Joniak-Lüthi, et al., 2023; Haller, Pase, et al., 2023; Haller & Weissman, in press a, in press b). At the same time, social inequality and environmental damage have been central themes in the development discourse at least since the Brundtland Report in the 1980s. As a neoliberal response to this, CSR policies and codes of conduct have been introduced in order to reconcile social and environmental responsibility with economic interests. But as we showed above, CSR policies resemble more a ‘patch’, trying to hold everything together in order to keep the current power network and hierarchies as they are. Alternatively, there could be more emphasis on real collaboration with local communities and using their knowledge about the circumstances, the risks and the possibilities of technologies and infrastructure that is tailored to and with them individually because they will later be responsible for the maintenance on their own. Not only should there be an examination of whether the infrastructure is really solution-oriented and addresses the existing problems without creating more, but there should be a more in-depth examination of the origin of these problems. The colonial remnants in the system particularly need to be examined and addressed.

Fortunately, there are already a lot of interesting ideas and future pathways on the table, stemming from activists, anti-capitalistic theories or the whole post-growth debate. Ferguson (2015), for example, proposes with his ‘new politics of distribution’ a way to fundamentally rethink contemporary capitalism. He calls for a ‘rightful share’ distributed to everybody in the form of direct income payments. These are distributed not on the base of labour but only membership (of the global society). Behind this lies the idea based on the thoughts of the philosopher Kropotkin that value is not only created by labour in the narrow sense but by society as a whole. This considers not only the current production of wealth but also past labour and suffering, which is seen as equally important as current labour. Approaches like this do not try to pull together a fundamentally unjust system like the CSR patches but to build up a more equitable global society, taking into account past and current contributions of *all* people to the global wealth.

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## 7. SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities

*Written by Ruben KleeB and Till Lüthi*

### Introduction

Global inequalities are very large, and one of the biggest obstacles to sustainable development and poverty reduction. Inequalities within many countries have increased in recent years. These increasing inequalities limit the opportunities of social groups to participate and contribute meaningfully to social, cultural, political and economic life. The inclusion of an explicit goal that tries to tackle inequalities around the globe was of central priority in the debates and formation of the 2030 Agenda. This was almost completely missing from the Millennium Development Goals, and was part of the reaction to the criticism that the MDGs suffered. While progress was made in the different goals during the period of the MDG Agenda, significant disparities remained, and even widened between and within countries. Income and wealth inequality reached new and unprecedented levels (Saiz & Donald, 2017). The formulation of SDG 10 is a reaction to these growing disparities. Some argue that SDG 10 is one of the most ground-breaking elements of the 2030 Agenda (Donald, 2016), especially when compared to the Millennium Development Goals. These elements are found in the different goals to which the 10 targets of SDG 10 aspire, as it sets its focus on reaching marginalised individuals and groups. SDG 10 wants to reduce inequalities in income, as well as inequalities based on age, sex, race, disability, ethnicity, origin religion and economic status within a country. It also addresses inequalities among countries relating to migration, and political and social representation, as well as development assistance. It recognises different dimensions of inequalities such as economic, social and cultural inequalities at different levels of society.

SDG 10 is closely related to almost all the other SDGs. Without achieving greater equality, it will be more difficult to achieve the other goals. It is widely recognised that the poorest and most disadvantaged groups are the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, natural disasters and resource scarcity (Winkler & Satterthwaite, 2017). *Leave no one behind* was set to be the overarching call of the SDG agenda (Donald, 2016), but whether the SDGs, and SDG 10 in particular, will truly 'leave no one behind' depends not on the language that the various targets and indicators strive for, but whether that language is reflected in the implementation of the targets, as well as in its translation into the indicators. In the next section, we will take a closer look at the different targets and their indicators. We provide examples of the shortcomings of SDG 10 by examining the recent literature.

### Leaving no one behind: Shortcomings and debates in the literature

#### *Income inequality*

SDG 10 sets its focus on battling income inequalities within countries, demonstrating synergies with SDG 1, as ending poverty cannot be achieved without tackling income inequality. Target 10.1, to "progressively achieve and sustain income growth of the bottom 40 per cent of the population at a rate higher than the national average", directly addresses income disparities. The corresponding indicator measures the "Growth rates of household expenditure or income per capita among the bottom 40 per cent of the population and the total population". By only concentrating on the income disparities of the bottom 40% of the population, it ends up being a target for pro-poor growth rather than stating the problem explicitly. Even when the target is achieved, the income disparities between the poorest and wealthiest will probably stay the same. Tackling income inequalities will require the redistribution of wealth, rather than leveraging the poorest to a higher level (Donald, 2016). SDG 10 recognises different dimensions of inequalities with Target 10.2, to "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", but the translation to the corresponding indicator, 10.2.1 the "Proportion of people living below 50 per cent of median income, by age, sex and persons with disabilities", completely leaves out race, ethnicity, origin and religion. The target aims for the social and political inclusion of all, but the only dimension measured in the indicator is that of income.

#### *What is left behind in SDG 10*

The SDG Agenda 2030 recognises that poverty and underdevelopment are connected to environmental problems. Human well-being cannot be achieved and sustained on a planet that is in an ecological crisis (Hickel, 2019). Although the Agenda recognises this, there are two sides to the SDGs that are in conflict. One side wants global

economic growth to continue at existing levels, or even higher. The other side calls for action on climate change and protecting the planet. This creates tensions. Sustainability and economic growth do not go hand in hand, as a higher income often leads to a higher consumption of non-essential goods. Trade-offs between the different goals will be inevitable, and will probably tend to favour growth rather than ecology (Hickel, 2019).

One major flaw of SDG 10 is that trade is not mentioned at all. Although regulated, equally distributed and safe trade could contribute to lessening inequalities within and between countries. At the moment the opposite is true, as the global trading system leads to inequalities between and within countries (Basnett et al., 2020). One example here is found in forest resources market. Many different actors are involved, from states to non-governmental organisations, to the private sector and civil society. As prices rise, there are more and more wealthy participants pushing the smaller ones out of the market. New laws and policies aimed at protecting participants or strengthening environmental sustainability make it more difficult for smaller producers, because they must acquire different licenses to distribute their resources on the market (Basnett et al., 2020). Inequalities embedded in global trade have led to more social and environmental injustices.

As well as not mentioning trade, SDG 10 also does not mention caste as a fundamental part of social exclusion. It affects 20-25% of the world's population, even though caste is prohibited by human rights laws (Mosse, 2018). This throws up the question of whether caste should be treated as an internal cultural system beyond the reach of global development agendas. The capital wealth in countries such as India is held by the upper castes. Lower castes participate in the economy only as wage labourers. The caste into which a person is born determines this person's opportunities. Social and development policies largely overlook caste as a cause of continuing inequality and poverty (Mosse, 2018).

### *Monitoring progress*

Saiz and Donald (2017) point out that there is no international or national institution whose role is to drive action, monitor success, and hold decision-makers accountable for a lack of progress in SDG 10. Target 10.4, "Adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality", does not specify what kind of actions can progressively achieve greater equality. Migration was incorporated into an international development agenda for the first time. Target 10.7, "Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies," sees migrant remittances as a way to address inequalities between and within countries. The corresponding indicator measures the number of countries that have introduced such policies, but does not define how these policies should be structured and constituted. The SDG 10 targets cover important areas relevant to addressing inequality, such as improving financial market regulation, strengthening the representation of developing countries in transnational financial institutions, introducing safe migration and mobility policies, and focusing development assistance on the regions and states that need it most (Saiz & Donald, 2017), however, the ambitious goals lack the appropriate indicators with which to measure international action and progress. Several indicators do not show what actions individual actors need to take. These actors can thus easily absolve themselves of responsibility when progress is disappointing or non-existent. As a result, the policies and systems that drive inequality remain largely unmeasured (Saiz & Donald, 2017).

Another important aspect, which has not received enough attention, relates to the collection and monitoring of data. No one will be left behind only when policies, programmes and specific measures to eliminate discrimination and advance progress for marginalised groups are adopted (Winkler & Satterthwaite, 2017). Indicators have the power to concentrate effort and attention, and thus data, indicators and disaggregation play an important role in facilitating and enabling the adaptation of such measures. A proper tool for monitoring inequality is essential. Disaggregation in race, origin, religion and ethnicity has been ignored in the first few years of SDG monitoring (Winkler & Satterthwaite, 2017). Marginalised groups are often not included in the monitoring effort, and they are therefore excluded from data gathering and rendered invisible in the analysis of the data. Indicators have a significant effect on what data is collected. This data will determine what stakeholders, governments, development partners, institutions and people know about inequalities, discrimination and marginalisation (Winkler & Satterthwaite, 2017).

The most marginalised people are often the poorest, and the world's poorest often live beyond the reach of statistical measurement. Economic inequalities correlate with marginalisation. Addressing economic inequality based on wealth or income is central to SDG Target 10, but economic inequalities are not the only ones. The poorest people are not randomly distributed across different castes, ethnicities, races, or genders, and poverty is often the

result of multiple intersecting forms of discrimination and exclusion (Winkler & Satterthwaite, 2017). It is therefore important to look at and monitor other inequalities, as well to address economic inequalities.

### **Examples of complications in implementations and further interventions**

In the following section, we try to resume the discussion of the shortcomings of SDG 10, by providing paradigms and approaches to solving them. We consider a case study from rural Rwanda which further highlights the importance of monitoring and the disaggregation of data. By examining different forms of mobility, we discuss whether the movement of people or labour can contribute to sustainable development and reducing inequalities. Finally, we try to measure the implications of the Covid-19 pandemic for SDG 10, and showcase interventions to accompany the SDG 10 targets.

#### *Importance of data disaggregation*

We talked above about the importance of data collection and monitoring. The article *Leaving no one Behind? Social Inequalities and Contrasting Development Impacts in Rural Rwanda* (Dawson, 2018) takes a look at the most marginalised groups in Rwandan society, and how these groups have been left behind in recent development policies. Through an in-depth analysis of data collected through household surveys, this study sheds light on the importance of the language of indicators, what they are trying to measure, how new policies are perceived by citizens, and what really matters to the diverse rural population. Rwanda's development policies have achieved some growth in economic development and improvement in the living conditions of its citizens in recent decades, however, the modernisation measures introduced and implemented to achieve political and economic goals have had a negative impact on the freedom of Rwandans, and have placed a heavy burden on the poorest in Rwandan society. Studies that sought to monitor progress in Rwanda's post-genocide development focused on aggregate national-level data, or disaggregated data focusing on socioeconomic indicators (Dawson, 2018). These limited analyses do not allow a deeper understanding of the different cultural and ethnic groups, and the interactions between them.

This article reports on an in-depth quality study of two sites in rural western Rwanda. The areas had almost no paved roads and only limited access to public transport. Labour was focused mainly on agriculture. The study distinguishes between three different socio-ethnic groups inhabiting the two rural areas: the Batwa, long-term rural inhabitants, and returnees from the Democratic Republic of Congo. House surveys and interviews were undertaken. Focus groups were formed with a random selection of interview participants in each village. The goal was to understand local conceptions of wellbeing. Four categories of socio-economic groups were identified during the interviews: 1. lower-paid, 2. higher-paid, 3. trading own farmed crops, and 4. professional occupations. Conceptions of wellbeing included land, livestock, employment, social relations, sharing, and autonomy over land use and investment decisions. These conceptions clearly differ from common and widely used indicators, such as the Human Development Index (Dawson, 2018).

Recently introduced policies such as the Rwanda Land Policy and the subsequent Program of Crop Intensification have placed a heavy burden on the lowest socioeconomic groups. Their landholdings declined. They could not afford fertiliser and had to resort to conventional farming methods, reducing production rates and increasing fears that the government would reallocate land to wealthier households that could meet policy expectations for higher productivity. The cost of living increased due to the need to purchase health insurance, the cost of school supplies, and the purchase of food that people could no longer produce themselves. Village development policies aimed at relocating the entire rural population resulted in higher costs for moving people to central towns against their will. Anti-deforestation policies forced the Batwa, who made a living from forest resources, into villages. They were provided with land and housing, but adapting to become farmers was difficult. They were not treated as equals by other rural inhabitants, and suffered discrimination. They were able to acquire jobs as agricultural workers, but not as higher paid labour.

The newly introduced policies to promote equality, improve well-being, and reduce poverty meant that marginalised groups such as the Batwa experienced an amplification and increase in inequality. Herein lie the opportunities that SDG 10 offers to help such groups. Under Target 10.2, the political inclusion of all, the Batwa would be represented in government policy-making. Implementing Target 10.3 would mean the equal distribution of opportunities for the Batwa, as they do not have the same opportunities as others to access work. An equitable forest policy could provide the Batwa with access to forest resources. This case study is an example of how disaggregated data collection can bring real inequalities to light, and how aggregated data at the national level can reflect progress even when there is none (Dawson, 2018). Policies appear to succeed only under the influence of limited

assessment, leading governments and development partners to believe that progress is being made when the opposite is true. Measuring poverty, inequality, and well-being based on income does not reflect the factors that are important to the lives and well-being of Rwanda's rural population (Dawson, 2018).

### *Mobility equity*

The movement of people often creates or reinforces inequality, as we saw in the case of the Batwa, but inequality is also often one of the driving forces behind movement (Hackl, 2018), but can human movement or mobility also erase inequalities between and within countries? To examine this, we take a closer look at the article "mobility equity" (Hackl, 2018). Hackl presents three different forms of mobility and how they can contribute to reducing inequality and increasing positive development outcomes. Social mobility, human mobility, digital mobility see movement not just as migration, but go beyond it. Equity in mobility is about the freedom to move or not to move, rather than having the opportunity to do so (Hackl, 2018).

Inequalities between countries are the strongest pull factor driving migration, but there is also migration in countries from rural areas to towns and cities, and it can therefore increase inequality within countries. Whether human mobility reduces inequality is dependent on various factors, such as who moves and who does not, how movement and labour are regulated, what flows back to home areas, such as in the form of remittances, and what can be lost regarding human and economic potential (Hackl, 2018). Human mobility in terms of migration has both disadvantages and advantages. On the one hand, migrant remittances can close income gaps in the home countries or areas, and can thus provide an ideal form of bottom-up development (Hackl, 2018). Migration can lead to brain gain as returning migrants can bring home accumulated knowledge and skills. On the other hand these remittances can put significant pressure and burdens on senders. Emigration often removes some of the most skilled and productive age groups from the local market. This process is called brain drainage. It leads to low economic growth and is involved with brain waste, as immigrants often only receive low-skilled and low-paid labour (Hackl, 2018). Social mobility describes an upward movement in social and economic classes. Mobility equity takes people's access to social mobility as a starting point to tackle inequalities. Archaic social systems such as the caste systems in India and Nepal set limits on the extent to which social mobility can contribute to sustainable development. Inherited circumstances, ethnicity and race can limit one's access to being socially mobile. The disadvantage that people inherit reinforces poverty. Implementing caste into the development agenda provides a new step towards tackling inequalities all over the world (Mosse, 2018). Paying the same kind of attention to caste as has been paid to gender, race and ethnicity means that innovative policies can be put into action. Caste is embedded in cultural systems, and can't be changed quickly. Changes must come with time, and must redistribute and equalise opportunities and representation for lower castes.

Digital mobility offers a new way of creating income. The digital labour market increased as more and more people access the internet. This mobility of labour provides new opportunities for workers in marginalised regions of the world. A wide range of new jobs are being created. Platforms allow workers to remain at home and access labour at a distance. This can overcome local constraints such as discrimination, or not having a legal working permit. People who are not qualified to work in their traditional local labour market can gain access to new possibilities (Hackl, 2018). Digital mobility provides people with the freedom to choose whether to move or not to move, but this rise in technology also destroys jobs along with those it creates (Hackl, 2018). At the moment, it is almost only the big actors that participate and provide jobs in the digital labour market. Most of these are located in the global north, resulting in marginalised groups doing outsourced labour for the profit of large companies. There are no international laws that regulate the digital economy (Hackl, 2018). The different platforms do not comply with the rules of the different countries. Many digital workers will have to undertake underpaid or unsuitable jobs. The digital economy and the mobility of labour will only lead to a further increase in sustainable development if policies are introduced that regulate the market, otherwise inequalities will persist.

### *Covid-19 implications and interventions*

We have discussed how most of the SDG 10 targets and indicators do not provide direct guidance regarding the types of actions that should be implemented, and how they should be implemented. The paper *Addressing Inequality: The First Step Beyond Covid-19 and Toward Sustainability* (Ashford et al., 2020) discusses several interventions that provide direct instructions for governments and development partners regarding how to steer policy-making processes away from the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic and toward sustainability. The SDG Agenda calls for action by all countries, and every country is obliged to implement the same targets as the others, but circumstances depend on location, especially during and after the pandemic. The connections between targets

vary by geography, governance structures and available technology, revealing the importance of nations being able to provide their own solutions based on their own priorities (Ashford et al., 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic has affected billions of lives and exacerbated social and economic inequalities. It has also exposed the weaknesses of economic and social systems around the world, showing how these systems are designed to benefit the rich and profit from the poor, reinforcing an economic model that was flawed from the start. It is a system that does not address the inequalities it creates. The pandemic has complicated the challenge, but the solutions remain the same (Ashford et al., 2020).

A question remaining is whether inequality can be addressed directly or whether it is part of a larger transformation process. This article offers several promising interventions that could drive such a transformation process. These interventions are a step in the right direction to providing decision-makers with a comprehensive portfolio of options and actions (Ashford et al., 2020). These measures are more direct than the SDG targets. They explain what needs to be done to move closer to achieving the SDGs.

### **Consequences and risks of SDG 10**

There is a risk of conflicting targets between the SDGs. SDG 10 makes a smaller contribution to environmental goals, and remains disconnected from other SDGs that aim for environmental sustainability (Basnett et al., 2020). If the global monitoring of inequalities focuses only on economic inequalities and fails to capture processes of marginalisation and discrimination, then such outcomes will fall behind. If data is not disaggregated, properly monitored and analysed, Goal 10 will fail to leave no one behind. This is because it cannot provide insights into where ethnic and racial populations are being left behind in the first place, where progress is most needed, and whether the policies and actions put in place to achieve the SDGs are successful (Dawson, 2018). The SDGs were developed in the Western context. Widely used indices such as the HDI do not measure what is important to different cultural groups because they have a conception of wealth, well-being and inequality that is different from our own.

SDG 10 does not talk about wealth distribution. It does not measure income growth at the top. 82% of the wealth generated in 2017 went to the richest one% of the world's population, and the poorest half of the world saw no growth in their wealth (UNDESA, 2019). This risk economic disparities around the world staying the same. Target 10.1 is almost reminiscent of Monty Python humour, as it implies that all the poor have to do is get rich and then they won't be poor anymore. Migration Target 10.7 can be seen as a response to the growing fears about the migration crisis in Europe, North America, and Australia, rather than managing safe migration for socially just and sustainable development (Basnett et al., 2020).

### **Conclusions**

The SDG 10 indicators do not meet the expectations raised by the targets. Their ambitious language is poorly translated into the indicators. There is no measurable target indicating the extent to which each country needs to reduce inequality in its multidimensional nature. The interventions presented above could go hand-in-hand with, or complement, the SDGs. Interventions that focus on income growth should always be accompanied by interventions that focus on health security and the environment in order to avoid conflicting goals and trade-offs. As we have already discussed, sustainable development is not the same as economic development; it goes far beyond that and cannot be measured by economic indicators. Implementing equitable mobility policies that ensure the safe regulation of migration, the possibility of social mobility, equal opportunities for all, and safe access to a regulated digital economy could help to reduce inequalities.

Equality of opportunity means that reducing inequalities must focus on the equal distribution of opportunities and political representation, not income inequality. From an environmental justice perspective (Basnett et al., 2020), it is important to recognise who the marginalised are, and what perpetuates their marginalisation. The SDGs should focus on the distribution of social, economic, and political resources and opportunities by including marginalised social groups in decision-making processes, not just on addressing income inequality. Extreme income inequality arises from the laws, policies, and practices that have dominated the global development agenda in recent decades. Inequality is reinforced by the system that created it (Donald, 2016). Without addressing the existing power structures, it will be impossible to achieve equality.

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## 8. SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

*Written by Ruben Kleeb and Till Lüthi*

### Introduction

“Sustainable development cannot be achieved without significantly transforming the way we build and manage our urban spaces” (UNDP 2018: Goal 11 targets).

This quote illustrates how important sustainable urban planning has become in the discourse of global sustainable development. As the world's population continues to grow, more and more people are moving to cities, making urbanisation a major challenge for sustainable development in the twenty-first century. While 746 million people lived in cities or urban areas in 1950, the number of urban dwellers had increased more than fivefold to 3.96 billion by 2015 (UN-Habitat, 2015). Already, more than half the world's population lives in cities, and the number continues to rise. According to the International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning, this number is expected to reach 60% by 2030 (UN-Habitat, 2015). While cities only occupy about 3% of the Earth's surface, 80% of global economic activity is concentrated in these places, and at the same time, cities are also responsible for 75% of final global energy consumption and carbon emissions (EDA, 2020). In addition to the many possibilities and opportunities that cities offer, they also pose enormous challenges. According to Bai et al. (2016), the collective action of cities will determine how the world as a whole will move towards economic, social and environmental sustainability.

SDG 11, which was formulated as part of the 2030 Agenda, addresses the challenges facing cities and human settlements and defines the following overarching goal: “Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable” (UN, 2021: Goal 11 Targets).

At the level of environmental sustainability, the aim of the SDGs is to reduce the enormous per capita environmental impact of cities, with particular attention to air quality and waste management. Access to green and public spaces should be ensured for all, efforts to protect the world's natural and cultural heritage should be intensified, and the risk of natural disasters should be reduced.

On a socio-economic level, the housing situation will be improved with a focus on slum rehabilitation and access to public transport. This is to be done through participatory, integrated and sustainable settlement planning in order to make urban development more inclusive and sustainable (UN, 2021).

**Figure 1**  
*SDG11 Targets and Indicators*

	<b>SDG 11 TARGETS (grey) AND INDICATORS (white)</b> <b>Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable</b>
Target 11.1	By 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums
11.1.1	Proportion of urban population living in slums, informal settlements or inadequate housing
Target 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
11.2.1	Proportion of population that has convenient access to public transport, by sex, age and persons with disabilities
Target 11.3	By 2030, enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanisation and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries
11.3.1	Ratio of land consumption rate to population growth rate
11.3.2	Proportion of cities with a direct participation structure for civil society in urban planning and management that operate regularly and democratically
Target 11.4	Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage
11.4.1	Total expenditure (public and private) per capita on the preservation, protection and conservation of all cultural and natural heritage, by type of heritage (cultural, natural, mixed and World Heritage Centre designation), level of government (national, regional and local/municipal), type of expenditure (operating expenditure/investment) and type of private funding (donations in kind, private non-profit sector and sponsorship)
Target 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
11.5.1	Number of deaths, missing persons and persons affected by disaster per 100,000 people
11.5.2	Direct disaster economic loss in relation to global GDP, including disaster damage to critical infrastructure and disruption of basic services
Target 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
11.6.1	Proportion of urban solid waste regularly collected and with adequate final discharge out of total urban solid waste generated, by cities
11.6.2	Annual mean levels of fine particulate matter (e.g., PM2.5 and PM10) in cities (population weighted)
Target 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



11.7.1	Average share of the built-up area of cities that is open space for public use for all, by sex, age and persons with disabilities
11.7.2	Proportion of persons who are victims of physical or sexual harassment, by sex, age, disability status and place of occurrence, in the previous 12 months
Target 11.a	Support positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning
11.a.1	Proportion of population living in cities that implement urban and regional development plans integrating population projections and resource needs, by size of city
Target 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.b.1	Proportion of local governments that adopt and implement local disaster risk reduction strategies in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030a
11.b.2	Number of countries with national and local disaster risk reduction strategies
Target 11.c	Support least developed countries, including through financial and technical assistance, in building sustainable and resilient buildings utilising local materials
11.c.1	Proportion of financial support to the least developed countries that is allocated to the construction and retrofitting of sustainable, resilient and resource-efficient buildings utilising local materials

*Note:* Reference: UN (2021)

The previous Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) did not define a separate target for cities, so the only directly urban indicator within the MDGs was defined on Goal 7 (environmental sustainability): “The proportion of urban population living in slums in developing regions” (UN, 2015). Compared to the MDGs, SDG 11 pays greater attention to the structure and dynamics of cities and urban areas, and their global effects at social, environmental, and economic levels (cf. Simon et al., 2015). There is also another crucial difference: in contrast to the MDGs, the SDGs also include the cities of the global North in a sustainable development agenda. This is essential, because, for example, according to the 2019 *SDG Index and Dashboards Report for European Cities* (SDSN, 2019), high CO2 emissions per capita mean that European cities perform poorly in SDG 13 (climate action), which is closely linked to SDG 11. All Northern European cities included in this report, except Oslo, received a red rating in the SDG 11 score, meaning that major challenges remain. Sustainability problems therefore also affect the global North, and in this respect it is also important to address these global and closely globally-linked problems worldwide.

### Targets and indicators

The selection of indicators, their meaningfulness and their measurability are crucial in order to be able to measure the progress of the targets. This raises the question of how significant a single indicator can really be for a broadly defined target, and whether large areas of a target are left out of view due to a lack of indicators. For example, Target 11.1 aims to ensure access to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services for all, and to rehabilitate slums, but Indicator 11.1.1 is limited to the proportion of urban population living in slums, informal settlements or inadequate housing.

The international research centre on urban sustainability - Mistra Urban Futures - conducted a pilot study in five cities to test the relevance and feasibility of measuring the proposed targets and indicators (Simon et al., 2015). They expanded indicator 11.1.1 in their study, and included a second indicator that additionally measures the

proportion of the population that spends more than 30% of its income on accommodation (Simon et al., 2015). This extension also allows housing affordability to be measured.

A major problem that becomes apparent in connection with the SDG 11 targets and their indicators is the collection and quality of data. While some indicators provide cross-city and cross-country data, and can thus identify sustainable development issues and targets, there is little or no consistent data for other indicators. World data collected by the SDG tracker thus only shows performance for 4 of the 10 targets of SDG 11: housing and basic services (11.1), disaster-related loss (11.5), air quality and waste (11.6) and regulations to manage disaster risk (11.B) (SDG Tracker, 2021).

According to Devisscher et al. (2019), the lack of cohesive data collection and common methodological practices is responsible for creating gaps and biases related to specific targets. On the one hand, they argue, this imbalance of targets goes back to what the UN really can monitor in the first place; on the other hand, it also represents the prioritisation of different targets by different countries based on their needs. They see a risk in this prioritisation, that targets which address ecosystem services are not given enough attention (ibid. 2019). For example, although urban forests, green spaces, and cultural heritage make important and diverse contributions in terms of ecosystem services and well-being, few countries so far have made efforts to implement Target 11.4 (the protection of cultural and natural heritage in and around cities) and Target 11.7 (to provide safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces) (ibid.).

In addition to data gaps and the prioritisation of certain goals over others, another difficulty arises: while limiting indicators to a small number simplifies their measurability and allows for national and international comparison between different cities on the one hand, on the other hand it risks diminishing the validity and policy relevance of the indicators. The aforementioned five-city study by Simon et al. (2015) found that because some of the indicators are difficult to operationalise and not always well aligned with their respective targets, what is measured is not always what is relevant to the target, but what is easier to measure. Moreover, uniform and standardised metrics also do not exist in the vast and complex field of urban development, with its multitude of actors (from the government level, to local authorities, NGOs, the private sector and citizens). The search for data that can actually be integrated into the planning process by local actors and help to implement the targets thus remains a key challenge for them (ibid. 2015).

### **Synergies and trade-offs**

Cities cannot be considered self-contained areas due to their complexity and enormous impact at the environmental, social and economic levels. Their sphere of influence extends far beyond the city boundaries to rural areas and oceans. They have a great impact on the natural environment, consume enormous amounts of resources, and many of the problems addressed in the 17 SDGs can be located in cities. Accordingly, Urban Target 11 is closely interwoven not only in its sub-targets but also with the other SDGs, and although these interactions are well known in the SDG framework, many have not been sufficiently explored to date (Devisscher et al., 2019). In order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, synergies within and among the targets must be built upon, and trade-offs must be minimised where possible. Devisscher et al. (2019) summarise the following identified problems in the implementation of the SDGs, which are not only, but also especially evident in urban planning: "policymakers and planners often operate in silos with limited budgets; different public and private entities with competing priorities manage the sectors; and evidence is lacking on interventions that may help or hinder SDG integration" (Devisscher et al., 2019: 354). With a focus on effects on forests, they go on to identify some relevant strategic interactions between the SDG 11 targets and other SDGs that could create synergies and affect each other positively (cf. ibid. 2019).

The first area that generates synergies involves the interactions between SDG 3 (health and well-being) and Target 11.1. While access to safe drinking water has improved in many countries, cities still pose a major problem for the implementation of SDG 3. This is because, in addition to water shortages in urban areas, poor disaster risk management and inadequate basic services in slums pose other major challenges to the health and well-being of all people. Since it is slum dwellers who are most affected by urban health risks, implementing Target 11.1. in slums would have a positive effect on SDG 3. Targets 11.4 (efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage) and 11.7 (access to safe, inclusive and accessible green and public spaces) can also contribute to health and well-being. Urban forests and green spaces can positively affect human health through various ecosystem services. For example, they can play a regulating role by reducing heat, a cultural role by providing space for recreation, stress reduction and gathering, and a provisioning role by providing food for survival.

## Difficulties and case studies

Following up on the five-city study conducted by Mistra Urban Futures in 2015 (Simon et al., 2016) in which the potential targets and indicators for SDG 11 were tested, another study on the transdisciplinary co-production of knowledge was conducted between 2017 and 2019 by the Mistra Urban Futures international research centre on urban sustainability, with seven cities on four continents (Valencia et al., 2019). In each case, a researcher or team of researchers worked on the ground with municipal officials from local authorities. The following aspects were tracked and analysed in all cities (Buenos Aires, Argentina/Cape Town, South Africa/Gothenburg, Sweden/Kisumu, Kenya/Malmö, Sweden/Sheffield, United Kingdom/Shimla, India) (Valencia et al., 2019):

- The city's level of awareness and commitment to the SDGs and the New Urban Agenda (NUA),
- the guidance and interaction between the national, regional and local levels in the implementation of the two agendas,
- the governance mechanisms and strategies developed to work with the agendas,
- and the relevance and availability of data to monitor progress following the SDGs indicators as well as the national and city-level adaptations of the SDG indicators, with a focus on SDG 11.

The first difficulty they identified was the current delimitation of cities, as cities and urban areas are defined in different countries, making it difficult to conduct a uniform analysis with regard to the different implementations of the SDGs. The delimitation of cities is also necessary in order to know which authorities are responsible for the area. While in Kenya a city is defined by a population of at least 250,000, the definition of a city in India is as follows: "places with a municipal corporation, cantonment board or notified town area committee, or places which fulfil the following criteria: (a) minimum population of 5,000; (b) at least 75% of the male working population engaged in non-agricultural pursuits, and (c) a density of population of at least 400 persons per km<sup>2</sup>" (Valencia et al., 2019: 7). This dichotomy illustrates the challenge of measuring and comparing progress on the SDG targets, as there are already significant differences in the definition or delimitation of area.

These boundary definitions are crucial in determining which government agencies are responsible at the local level, and thus which SDG targets are identified at the local level. There are also large differences globally in the responsibility of different governance levels (ibid. 2019): for example, in Sweden, municipalities are responsible for physical planning and education at the elementary school level, regional governments regulate public transport and basic services, and the national government is responsible for education at the post-secondary level. In India, it is mostly parastatal organisations rather than local municipalities that are responsible for urban planning, the regulation of land use, and even some areas of housing and transport provision, although there are differences even within the country.

Collaboration and governance at different levels is necessary in order to achieve sustainability at the environmental, social, and economic levels. In line with SDG 17 (partnership for the goals), partnerships between the different actors and levels of government institutions (e.g., national, regional and local) are the basis for integrated governance, and should be encouraged. It is important to promote cooperation not only between different actors and institutions at the same level (horizontal) and at different levels (vertical), but also between actors of different types, such as civil society, politics and the public sector (one could say diagonally). In order to address sustainability comprehensively in city government, the different sectors and departments thus need to communicate and work closely together, but "most city operations are structured in topic or theme-based sectors, leading to institutional silos and barriers to cross-sectoral work" (Valencia et al., 2019: p. 11).

An illustrative example of this is the two Swedish cities in the study (Gothenburg and Malmö), which differ in the way actors and institutions work together. In the case of Gothenburg, although municipal staff are encouraged to collaborate with other departments, policy committees and boards are still thematically structured or separated (Valencia et al., 2019). This siloed work can be a difficulty, particularly for issues such as the sustainability goals, which link social and environmental domains, as the respective actors focus on targets that are directly relevant to their domain. Great differences can arise between the different actors due to the different interests and priorities.

In order to avoid such direct conflicts and working at cross purposes, Malmö established a sustainability unit in 2017 to support the city office in planning and implementing municipal initiatives and programs within the SDG framework. In doing so, the 2030 Agenda, and sustainability in general, are to be incorporated into ongoing city planning processes and the city budget (Valencia et al., 2019). The following planned and ongoing processes are presented in the City of Malmö's (2018) report, *Malmö stads långsiktiga arbete med Agenda 2030*:

- The integration of the global targets into regular governance and management systems. The global targets will be aligned with the situation in Malmö through a gap analysis, and priorities will be identified and incorporated into the city council's current targets.
- Sustainable development is worked on with regard to future generations through operational systems, development processes and networks throughout the organisation.
- Awareness and knowledge is promoted through a communication strategy shared by all administrations on working with the SDGs, with a focus on participation and anchoring.
- Knowledge about, and the skills of politicians, managers and employees in dealing with the SDGs are specifically promoted through training initiatives and seminars.
- New forms of collaboration where Malmö acts locally are sought and implemented through active partnerships at local, national and international levels. For example, the city works closely with the business and academic sectors to provide a testing ground for urban innovations and systems, while also engaging communities.

Since there is strong municipal autonomy in Sweden and municipalities can levy taxes themselves to implement projects and contracts, Swedish municipalities are in a good position to implement the global agenda at the local level (Malmö stad, 2021). Even though the targets are national, it is generally the municipalities that bear the responsibility for planning, implementation and financing. Since, according to the “United Cities and Local Governments” (UCLG), 65% of the 169 SDG sub-targets cannot be achieved unless municipalities are given a clear mandate and role in implementation, Swedish municipalities (as in the example of the City of Malmö) have the mandate, incentives, will and resources to contribute to the 2030 Agenda (Malmö stad, 2021). Nevertheless, the problem remains that the indicators formulated for the SDGs are considered difficult to measure for the many city stakeholders because there is often not enough meaningful data available. For example, none of the five cities in which the applicability of the indicators was tested in 2015 found the indicator set for SDG 11 to be straightforward and important, or appropriate (Valencia et al., 2019).

## Conclusions

Even though the targets are very broad and ambitious, the SDGs, together with the New Urban Agenda, provide a good basis for making urban planning and development more sustainable. Even if the targets are not achieved by 2030, they will certainly help to rethink urban development as an important aspect of environmental, social and economic sustainability. The difficulty lies in getting the various actors at the different levels and with their different interests to commit to a sustainable strategy, and to work together to implement it. Each city is different, and sustainable urban development should be determined more by the actors in a bottom-up approach, instead of applying prefabricated approaches according to the top-down principle across cities. For example, Amman and Förster (2018) describe African cities in their diversity as fluctuating between chaos and creativity, and hardly to be understood or captured by Western urban images, and they caution against basing interventions and actions on examples from Western history.

Furthermore, there is a lack of sufficient and meaningful data and a more specific formulation of indicators to measure the achievement of the targets. It is therefore important to measure what is actually important and can be operationalised.

Basically, it seems that the SDG 11 targets can hardly be considered individually, but are very closely related to targets such as reducing inequality (SDG 10) or strengthening partnerships (SDG 17). It thus seems important that cities, as vast entities with huge influence, take a broader view on all SDGs and do not focus only on the targets within the urban target, otherwise, this could result in progress in one sub-target but regression in other targets, in the form of trade-offs.

One important point of overlap between SDGs 10 and 11 can be found in the definition of inequality. This does not take into account the emic perspective of those affected. We are talking about a top-down definition which is also reflected in the SDGs. This is crucial to whether the SDGs can contribute to sustainability. The current lack of a bottom-up definition of inequality, the non-inclusion of power inequalities within the urban environment but also the global context, the missing reflection of power-relations between the rural and urban, as well as the South and North, mean that SDGs 10 and 11 fail to contribute significantly to sustainable development.

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## 9. SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production and SDG 13: Climate Action

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### Introduction to the SDGs discussed

In this chapter, we discuss SDGs 12 (sustainable consumption and production) and 13 (climate protection). The central thematic elements, key terms, and formulations of the two SDGs are first shown. In a next step, the debate, especially the critical discussion of SDGs 12 and 13, will be explained. We then look more closely at the efficiency strategy as an example of the strategies pushed by SDGs 12 and 13. We show some of the weaknesses of this strategy, and explain why it does not lead to a sustainable future. After this rather unsatisfactory example, we move on to an encouraging one, which is about combining two types of knowledge with different backgrounds. The effects of the examples and putative power relations, especially between the global north and global south are discussed, integrating the debate about green anti-politics is integrated. Finally, the outlook, with recommendations for future research in this context, is suggested.

As mentioned above, SDG 12 addresses the issues of sustainable consumption as well as sustainable production. The following formulations are addressed: a reduction of the material footprint; increase in resource efficiency; reduction of food waste, both at the end consumer and at the production level, along the entire production and value chain; reduction of the use and release in nature of chemicals of all kinds; further development and expansion of recycling infrastructure and regulations; dissemination of knowledge and awareness around the subject of sustainability at all school levels; promotion of sustainable innovations; promotion of tourism models that support local and sustainable offers and infrastructure; reduction of the use of renewable energy sources; reduction in the use of renewable energy sources; reducing the use of fossil fuels both at the end-user and production level; and the increased taxation of non-sustainable forms of energy while protecting the affected and poor population groups. There is something striking about these formulations: the terms sustainable, sustainability, resource efficiency, affected and poor are not further defined, and it is thus questionable how the achievement of these goals at the local level can be verified. There will be more on this in the next subsection, *Debates on the SDGs in the Literature*. SDG 13 deals with the subject of climate protection. The central formulations here are: reduction of natural disasters via medium and long-term local prevention programs; communicative as well as operational implementation of local strategies to reduce greenhouse gases and mitigate climate change while ensuring food production; national communication of strategies to reduce impacts on nature and adapt to climate change-related changes, raising awareness of these strategies at all school levels; and collecting US\$100 billion to support developing countries in the above implementations. Mechanisms need to be built to provide a support capacity for developing countries in financial, educational, as well as infrastructural terms, with a focus on female, young, and marginalised subgroups of these countries so that they can also cope with the above implementation goals. Again, several intrinsically important terms, namely climate change, impact on nature, climate change mitigation, awareness raising, and marginalised are not further defined. As with SDG 12, therefore, the question of the traceability of the successful implementation of the goals at the local level also arises with SDG 13. This and other points of criticism are addressed in the following subsection.

### Debates on the SDGs in the literature

SDGs 12 and 13 were presented in the previous section. This second part is now about scientific papers on the UN goals, and especially critical papers. Before going into detail, we must introduce two very important terms in order to fully understand the following critique. “The term “weak sustainable consumption and production” has been increasingly associated with the policy approach of “ecological modernisation”. Viewed from this perspective, the focus of ecological modernisation is on sustaining economic growth using efficient consumption and production techniques, including, for example, technological improvements, product design, a decoupling of energy use, and targeted consumer behaviour changes. Critics of ecological modernism contrast this approach with “strong sustainable production and consumption,” where consumption is significantly reduced in a wider context of reducing overall rates of material growth and ecological degradation.” (Hayward & Roy, 2019).

Bengtsson et al. (2018) have already dealt with SDG 12. Their main criticisms relate to the unclear, vague formulation of the goals and the lack of guidance or instruction regarding specific implementation. The various

formulated goals of SDG 12 are first discussed: changing consumption patterns, resource efficiency gains, energy storage, sharing of consumer goods, and the use of higher quality products with associated longer life cycles.

According to Bengtsson et al. (2018), the UN ignores the fact that increased demand for sustainable products tends to increase overall material and energy consumption instead of reducing it. The economic perspective on the consumer as a purely economically motivated actor constantly concerned with their costs and benefits has led to a neglect of the social and contextual factors affecting consumers. Development over the last two decades has shown that the approach focused on technological innovation and efficiency improvements is necessary, but at the same time insufficient to drive the necessary progress towards sustainable consumption. Bengtsson et al. (2018) refer to these types of interventions as weak approaches. These weak approaches, they argue, are only interested in improving the situation in relative terms, rather than focusing on absolute ecological limits, such as directly reducing greenhouse gas emissions to stabilise the climate. They suggest that a reduction in overall consumption is needed to meet the latest Paris climate agreement. Another example of the weak approach, for example by the UN, is the automotive industry. While the UN's goals are limited to making the fuel consumption of passenger cars more sustainable, a so-called strong approach would be interested in fundamentally questioning and transforming mobility in order to reduce emissions. Minor adjustments to the current system - often focusing on technological innovations - are simply insufficient to achieve the formulated goals, according to Bengtsson et al. (2018). The SDG lacks a systemic perspective. This systemic perspective would allow adjustments to be made not just at a few specific points, but along the entire production and consumption chain.

Another point of criticism is the view of developing countries. In the decades following the Second World War, a tendency developed to attribute emerging environmental problems at the international level to rapid population growth. This led to the assumption that responsibility for the overexploitation of material resources was to be laid on the developing countries. According to Bengtsson et al. (2018), this form of deflection from the role of industrialised countries is pure calculation. The subject of intergenerational and intercontinental distribution and fairness is addressed in SDG 12, but it is hardly about the fair distribution of consumption opportunities in today's world. It does address wealth distribution and income inequality as a problem, but without even mentioning inclusive growth or a redistribution of resources as possibilities. According to the UN, the path to the goal should be achieved through fundamental growth, and not through a redistribution of existing resources, of which there are actually already enough for all people. In principle, most of the goals listed under SDG 12 do not address a new issue, but rather are a confirmation of various decisions already made years ago about sustainable future efforts.

One of the biggest criticisms, as already indicated in section 1, "Introduction to the SDGs discussed", is the very unclear formulation of the goals and the lack of guidelines or specific absolute target values. A goal for formulating and disseminating national action plans is thus called for, without even hinting at these programs, their content or their hoped-for specific effects. The mere assumption that such action plans would be effective or would be implemented effectively is illusory, according to Bengtsson et al. (2018). Sub-goal 12.2 also fails because of its formulation. It is emphasised that the management of natural resources should be made sustainable, but that the use or consumption of these resources should primarily be efficient. Again, no absolute targets are formulated for the year 2030; the desired direction of development is not even specified. The short-term intermediate steps to achieving the vaguely formulated target are also disregarded.

Sub-goals 12.3, 12.4, and 12.5 address waste. No changes to existing systems are required in any form, nor is the volume or composition of consumption addressed in any way. There are also no references made to possible interactions with other SDGs, such as the one dealing with global hunger. Moreover, Sub-goal 12.4 is a mere confirmation of an agreement already negotiated in 2006 on the strategic international management of chemicals. In Sub-goal 12.5, the only measurable target is the recycling of waste, although this is the most suboptimal solution from an environmental perspective, according to Bengtsson et al. (2018) this preference, in combination with the technology- and efficiency-based approach, is another sign of a weak, rather than a systemic approach.

Points 12.6, 12.7 and 12.8 deal with the encouragement of sustainable rethinking and action by a wide range of actors. Sub-goal 12.6 focuses on companies, especially large international corporations. The associated goals again focus on efficiency improvements and are, all in all, vaguely formulated. Sub-goal 12.8 is aimed at providing as many people as possible with the necessary information, and raising awareness of sustainable developments. Surveys have shown, however, that this alone is not sufficient to bring about the desired changes in behaviour, according to Bengtsson et al. (2018).

According to Bengtsson et al. (2018), the argument of technological innovation and development as the forerunner of sustainability is almost ironic. After all, it is precisely the technologically more developed wealthier countries that have a higher per capita consumption of resources and the associated impact on nature. Technological progress therefore does not necessarily lead to sustainable consumption and production patterns, on the contrary. The

constant formulation of desired or undesired conditions as "sustainable" or "unsustainable" is also fatal, as it allows nations to interpret these terms as they wish, and to continue their denounced practices.

Mathai et al. (2021) also deal with SDG 12 and possible points of criticism published only this year. The problem of socio-ecological, system-inherent inequalities, which is only insufficiently or not at all addressed, is dealt with right at the beginning. As in the publication by Bengtsson et al. (2018), the authors also mention that an increase in energy and resource efficiency does not go hand in hand with an overall reduction in resource consumption; on the contrary. Mathai et al. (2021) see the production side of the production-consumption dynamic as the leading side, and that it concentrates power and is the source of injustice and resource depletion. Despite all the technological innovations and awareness campaigns to change unsustainable consumption patterns, resource consumption continues to rise steadily in absolute terms - beyond global boundaries. Consumption is too much a social activity, embedded in structures of social organisation. The dynamics of unsustainable production-consumption systems, on the other hand, are shaped in the most fundamental way by capital and the logic of the competitive market. Most intervention programs - such as SDGs 12 and 13 - focus on practices to change consumption behaviour at the individual level. In doing so, they ignore the drivers of production and unequal distribution of opportunities - thus limiting the impact of these programs.

Mathai et al. (2021) see the problem in the scientific approaches that contributed to the creation of the SDGs. For example, political economy treats politics and economics as separate entities, whereas the authors see these two fields as inseparably linked. The assumption that individuals are purely rational cost-benefit calculators, which is virtually omnipresent in economics, should also be deeply questioned. Rather, these individuals are integrated into a complex network of social relationships, different identities, values and power relations, which significantly influence their actions, decisions and attitudes. The political-economic approach pays too little attention to these systemic backgrounds to human action. At the same time, the focus is on the symptoms of global inequality, and not on its underlying structures. Mathai et al. (2021) hold the so-called politics of productivity responsible for this. These politics is so successful and omnipresent in environmental policy because negotiations and agreements on production and efficiency are much easier to arrange than resolving political differences between races and classes (Mathai et al., 2021).

Last but not least, we highlight the report by Hayward and Roy (2019), and its criticisms of SDGs 12 and 13. The first criticism formulated is directed at the global division into a North and South. This, they argue, has consistently failed to allow scholars to fully comprehend the complex, multidimensional nature of poverty, and always categorises inequality on the basis of income or wealth. This text also denounces the vague formulation or lack of explanation of the path to the relevant goals, and criticises the focus on supposedly rationally acting individuals. This focus on consumption overlooks the concepts of sufficiency (frugality instead of growth) and justice, and a deeper understanding of collective, sustainable ways of life. They explain that as early as 1992, UN member states committed to efforts toward a sustainable future. In what has now been nearly three decades of de facto unsuccessful efforts, they say that responsibility has shifted more and more from producers to individual consumers. Hayward and Roy (2019) also use the term "weak sustainable consumption and production" in this context. In contrast to the currently prevailing goal of maintaining economic growth in combination with efficient production and consumption patterns, strong sustainable production and consumption are necessary. This means the significant reduction of material consumption, characterised by the absolute reduction of resource and energy consumption in a larger, global context. Political measures that would do justice to this "strong" approach are, however, very rare in the current political landscape.

The sufficiency principle already mentioned above is one of Hayward and Roy's (2019) central criticisms of the UN approach. It is precisely this principle of sufficiency that would drive the necessary processes, namely the fundamental reduction of global consumption and resource use. However, the UN - exemplified by SDGs 12 and 13 - always sees the core of the solution in the consumer, who can and must simply rethink and thus influence the market. Hayward and Roy see an additional critical note in the SDGs, in the view formulated in SDGs 12 and 13, that the expanding middle class of the global North has a significant positive influence on the newly emerging economies of the global South, while at the same time it is precisely these emerging economies of the global South and their increasing resource consumption that are classified as a threat to sustainable aspirations.

This assessment is simply wrong, given the fact that industrialised countries in particular are responsible for the majority of global emissions due to their existing consumption and production patterns. There is also no reason to believe that the scale of emission and consumption reductions needed can be achieved through efficiency improvements, technological innovations or individual behavioural changes alone. There is a conflict of goals between SDGs 12 and 13 that is simply not addressed by the UN. For example, efforts to raise the standard of living for the



world's most financially disadvantaged go hand in hand with a massive increase in emissions and resource consumption (Hayward & Roy, 2019).

### **Examples of implementation**

We have explained the debates in the literature, and will now go on to consider two examples of discussion and implementation. There are many critiques to SDG 12 and 13, and we want to pick out one example that has been strongly criticised and one example that is a part of a solution to one SDG. These two examples have a strong connection to SDGs 12 and 13. The first example is more closely connected to SDG 12, responsible consumption and production, but the outcome of it also affects SDG 13, climate action. The second example is just about SDG 13. As we have seen in the previous section, the efficiency strategy is pushed by SDG 12, but the efficiency strategy is not a strategy that will help to ensure a sustainable future. I will show that this is the case below, and explain it with an example.

As a short reminder, efficiency is the concept that goods can be produced or used in the same amount but with fewer resources. This concept is often used in the global north, and used to make production patterns seemingly more sustainable and to make more economic savings, but there are several problems with this concept. First there is the rebound effect, which I explain with the following examples. When someone buys a new car which is more efficient than their old car, this might be a good thing as an efficiency strategy, but there is a problem with it. Because the owner thinks it is now more efficient to use their new car, because it is more energy efficient, they may use the car more often. Whereas they would have travelled by foot or by bicycle for short distances before buying their new car, or used public transport for longer distances, they now drive. This greater usage minimises the saved resources which came with the efficiency. Sometimes the resources used on the rebound even overtake the resources saved in the efficiency process. This is then called “backfire”. Despite the intention of doing something good by producing something more efficient, even more resources are used (Umwelt Bundesamt, 2019).

If the old car in this example still worked, then replacing it would also be bad from a sustainability perspective, because the material resources used for building a new car are greater than the resources saved by driving a more efficient car.

The rebound effect works on a psychological level, so that consumers think they are doing something sustainable, but in reality, are increasing the use of material resources. Rebound effects are often not calculated in the outcome of an innovation, and so the resource savings of the innovation are calculated on a false basis.

Another problem with the efficiency approach is that many technical innovations which were made and used to address a problem which society had at that time, created new problems. These new problems were not foreseen, and therefore not addressed by the technical innovation.

The efficiency approach also involves the question of distributional justice. This can be on a national level, so that countries which have more wealth can invest in new technologies and have more efficient infrastructure. Countries with less wealth do not have the capacity to make their infrastructure more efficient. It is then often said that “less developed” countries should be more sustainable, because they do not have the most efficient machines and infrastructure.

This question also arises at an individual and social class level, however, because more efficient technologies cost more money and result in a society in which it seems as if only rich people can live sustainably. This is only the case with the efficient paradigm, however. There are many other strategies for a sustainable society, such as the sufficient strategy, which is based on less consumption and less production.

One last problem with the efficiency approach has already been introduced in the example. Sometimes it is forgotten that when something less efficient is replaced by something more efficient, it is still being replaced. The material resources used in the less efficient item are thus being wasted. Recycling could be a solution, but it is not yet so advanced that things which are still working can simply be discarded, and this may never be the case.

We will discuss the consequences of the problem with the efficiency strategy and its rebound effect later, but after this negative example we first want to discuss an encouraging example, connected to SDG 13. This example is from Ombati (2017), about how rainmaking rituals work together with modern science. It is an example regarding climate change from the global south, and involves rainmaking rituals and their adaption to climate change. I will describe this example in the next section and connect it to SDG 13, and then discuss why it is an encouraging example.

The example is located in the global south, on the continent of Africa, in Kenya. It is about how African indigenous knowledge can contribute to the effect of climate change in Africa. Ombati (2017) sees climate change in Africa not only as the greatest challenge that humanity has ever faced, but also as a tremendous opportunity to move

towards a resource efficient and sustainably developed society. Because African agriculture mostly relies on rain-fed production, the farmers are dependent on the weather and weather forecasts. It is very important for the farmers to know in advance when they should plant their seeds and when they should expect a drought.

As Ombati (2017) argues, there are strategies with two different backgrounds regarding how to deal with the climate and the change we are facing now. One is the indigenous knowledge which an African community has developed and handed down through generations. It includes knowledge about local ecology, know-how and technology, rites and rituals, social organisation and institutions and more. One method in this indigenous strategy is the rainmaking ritual. This ritual is often attended by the whole community, and organised and guided by a spiritual leader, a rainmaker. The specific ritual is different in different places, I will describe a ritual from the Akamba community of Kenya, where they perform the so called “Kilumi dances”, which are led by a rainmaker to “invoke the blessings of water spirits and deities”. The participants are obligated to offer excellent performances because they believe that unseen rainmaking ancestral spirits are attending the dance. They also offer sacrifices, because drought was seen as a curse for wrongdoing. After the Kilumi dance, the community hold celebrations in the expectation of imminent rain comes. According to Akong’a (1987) and Korster (2011) it never failed to rain after these rituals (as cited in Ombati, 2017: 82).

The second strategy for dealing with the climate and its change has a modern science background. This strategy uses models and measured values to calculate data for different weather scenarios with computers. The scenario with the highest probability is investigated. Meteorologists analyse this data and make predictions about the weather in the coming days. The local Akamba community find it very difficult to comprehend this strategy.

Each strategy has some issues. Neither strategy includes all the people in the community. The rainmaking rituals are very locally connected, and not interconnected with the rest of the country. The modern science approach on the other hand is not rooted in a traditional system and therefore not accepted by all the local communities. Furthermore, the modern science approach loses probability over time, so only predictions about the near future have a high probability of coming true.

But in Kenya, they achieved nevertheless a hybrid system which includes the two different strategies. The collaboration between the Nganyi rainmakers, meteorologists, modern scientists and weather forecasters addresses climate change and predict the weather more accurately. The Nganyi rainmakers make their forecasts in a shrine, which is a treasure trove of biodiversity with many different plants and animals. They have perfected the science of rainmaking in advising local communities about when and what to plant based on weather patterns (Ombati, 2017). Scientists have set up a resource centre near the forest shrine. There, learners, trainees and researchers can learn about the indigenous meteorology which also helps to bring the two different approaches together.

The Nganyi and scientists come together, and each side presents their weather prediction. If both sides agree, the forecast is released to local communities, in local languages, through radio, community-gathering points and by word of mouth (Ombati, 2017). This communication strategy seems very important, as it is how local communities share their knowledge and create a trustworthy platform. The local communities are dependent on reliable weather predictions, because many are smallholder farmers and are facing issues due to climate change. These communities are vulnerable, and will become even more dependent on weather predictions with the increasingly extreme weather conditions due to climate change yet to come, and the fragile food security in Kenya.

One big advantage of the combined strategy is that more people trust this weather prediction than either of the uncombined approaches. Smallholder farmers who are directly dependent on the predictions, profit from their exact nature, and from a communication strategy wherein the predictions reach them as soon as they are released. Another advantage is that the combination of knowledge from different backgrounds leads to more acceptance of the other form of knowledge. This is important because usually knowledge of only one background is used to address problems, and other knowledge is dismissed. Especially in times of misinformation, fake news and the degradation of knowledge, it is necessary to accept and understand knowledge from different backgrounds, and distinguish it from non-knowledge.

This acceptance and combination of knowledge from different backgrounds leads to another advantage. It helps to create truly sustainable practices, because one type of knowledge worked for thousands of years, and the other can adapt quickly to changes. These two properties combined are an important tool for the challenges we face within SDG 13.

## Conclusions

We will first summarise our paper and then suggest the important messages, and what is relevant to further discussions on this subject. SDG 12 addresses sustainable consumption and production, whereas SDG 13 notes drastic

climatic changes that need to be slowed down. As shown, SDGs and their subordinate targets mainly talk about behavioural changes at individual level in order to pursue the sustainability goals. There is criticism of the vague formulations and the lack of specific steps to follow at national level. The terms “weak” and “strong” sustainable approaches are crucial in the relevant literature. In this case, “weak” approaches focus on improving sustainability in ecological modernisation, and more precisely on sustaining economic growth using efficient consumption and production techniques, including, for example, technological improvements, product design, decoupling of energy use, and targeted consumer behaviour changes. In contrast the approach of “strong sustainable production and consumption” points out the need for global consumption to be significantly reduced in the wider context of reducing overall rates of material growth and ecological degradation. This “strong” approach is largely about a systemic perspective, meaning the consideration of global interrelationships and interactions. In particular, the chronic patronisation of the global North regarding the global South plays a central role. In the context of the SDGs, the UN repeatedly emphasises this geographical and cultural boundary, as illustrated by supposedly different stages of development. After discussing the literature, we took the efficiency approach as an example of a weak approach and showed its problems. The rebound effect and the question of distributional justice are two important points in this critique. We also showed a more encouraging example of how to face the problem of climate change through cooperation between modern science and traditional knowledge. In this cooperation meteorologists share the weather forecast with the local community, and this first creates more precise forecasts and secondly leads to an acceptance of both modern science and traditional knowledge in the society.

Social and cultural anthropology, with its broad repertoire of techniques, can strengthen our understanding of these systemic relationships. As demonstrated countless times in research, social anthropology is a central element in international understanding. Participatory research in particular can reveal other practices for promoting sustainability that may be unfamiliar, or seem ineffective, to the global North. It is also important to look close at what story is told by whom regarding SDGs 12 and 13 and whether it fits with reality. This close examination is something many policy makers and scientific researchers do not do, but is the task of social anthropologists. It is also important to point out encouraging examples in research, and not just criticisms, to help spread transformative ways of creating a sustainable world.

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## 10. SDG 14: Life below Water

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### Introduction

Oceans have a vital function for humans in several ways. Firstly, about 80% of CO<sub>2</sub> is absorbed by the oceans. The increasing acidification of the oceans will prevent an equal amount of CO<sub>2</sub> from being absorbed in the future. This will have devastating consequences for the environment and the climate. Secondly, the ocean is the world's largest source of food. Over one billion people feed themselves directly from the sea. Overfishing and the pollution of the oceans threaten this food security. Lastly, the growth of commercial fishing is depriving small-scale fishers of their livelihoods. Thousands of people are denied several human rights, such as the right to work. SDG 14, about life below water, formulates goals for the sustainable conservation and use of the seas and oceans. By 2025, all types of marine pollution should be significantly reduced, and ocean acidification should be minimised. Marine and coastal ecosystems should have already been sustainably managed and protected by the end of last year. Fishing activities should be effectively regulated. In order to stop the overfishing of the seas, illegal and unregulated fishing and destructive fishing practices should also have been ended by 2020. Certain forms of fishing subsidies should have been prohibited by then. The individual targets can be summarised into three broad goals:

#### Reduce ocean acidification

Ocean acidification results from the increased uptake of CO<sub>2</sub> in recent years. This means that fish and other marine life need more energy which should be used for their growth or reproduction. The ocean, as a CO<sub>2</sub> reservoir, is not infinite. As soon as the oceans are no longer able to absorb CO<sub>2</sub>, there will be drastic consequences regarding climate change, and thus also for life on land. Only one target in SDG 14 addresses ocean acidification. Target 14.3 aims to minimise ocean acidification and to combat its consequences. This is “including through enhanced scientific cooperation at all levels” (UN, 2021).

#### Regulation of fisheries and use of marine resources

Commercial fishing greatly alters the natural composition and the dynamics of the marine food web. Subsidised fisheries target larger fish. Over time, natural predators are absent, leading to an imbalance in the ecosystem. Commercial fishing is still heavily subsidised. This results in much overfishing. On one hand, this reinforces the unequal ecosystem, and on the other hand, it is the reason that the fish stock on the coast is becoming smaller and smaller. The fish stock on the coast is the income and thus the livelihood of small-scale fishers. Several targets have therefore been formulated for SDG 14 to regulate fisheries and make better use of marine resources. Targets 14.4 and 14.6 aim to end overfishing and “restore fish stocks in the shortest time possible, at least to levels that can produce maximum sustainable yield as determined by their biological characteristics”<sup>31</sup>. More specifically, they call for the standardisation of fishing activities in order to prohibit illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, and its subsidies. Targets 14.7 and 14.b promote the benefit of marine resources for small island developing states and the least developed countries. The focus lies on the access to marine resources for small-scale fishers, and access to the global market. Targets 14.a and 14.c call for the expansion of scientific knowledge. This includes the least developed countries and the small island developing states. The goal of this scientific work is the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, as stipulated in the International Convention on the Law of the Sea<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> United Nations. Department of Economic and Social Affairs: Sustainable Development. The 17 Goals. <<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>>. 1. September 2021.

<sup>32</sup> WWF Deutschland 2021: Überfischung: Bald drohen uns leere Meere. <<https://www.wwf.de/themen-projekte/meere-kuesten/fischerei/ueberfischung>>. 1. September 2021.

### Expansion of coastal and marine protected areas

Marine and coastal protected areas are areas in the ocean where human activity is severely restricted. The exact regulations vary from area to area. Everything from restricted fishing methods to closed seasons to a complete ban on the taking of any marine life is possible. Protected areas contribute to the conservation of marine resources. Biodiversity is many times higher in a protected area. Protected areas are more resilient concerning climate change. They can counter ocean acidification. That is why Target 14.2 and 14.5 calls for sustainable management and an expansion of coastal and marine protected areas<sup>33</sup>.

### *Relationship to other SDGs*

Most of the ten targets are strongly interlinked and the achievement of individual targets has a synergistic effect on the other targets. This is actually a good prerequisite for meeting SDG 14, but one problem is that SDG 14 is strongly influenced by the implementation of many other targets. There is a reciprocal connection between SDG 2 and 14. On the one hand, less polluted oceans lead to less polluted seafood, which is much healthier for humans. On the other hand, increased food production may increase ocean pollution. SDG 6, about water, also has a variable impact on SDG 14. SDGs 8, 9, and 11 clearly have a negative impact. Urban pollution from industrialisation and economic growth also generates less clean oceans<sup>34</sup>. Depending on which goals one focuses on for achieving the SDGs, SDG 14 could be achieved much more easily, but the opposite is also true, that the life below water SDG is difficult to achieve if the focus is on achieving SDGs involving economic growth.

### *Formulation of SDG 14*

Overall, SDG 14, including all targets, is very vaguely formulated. There is a lack of clear targets with clear figures. This may partially be because it is very difficult to collect precise measurements and then present them in a comprehensible and not overly complex manner. However, this is almost certainly also partially since it is thus easier to present a positive development. It is not clear in any of the targets who is responsible for their implementation. No responsibility for the implementation of the SDGs is specified, or at least it is not clear from the wording. On the one hand, responsibility can thus simply be shifted. On the other hand, it is difficult to hold anyone accountable at all, since no one is really responsible. This shows that the SDGs are not binding for the member states. There is also no mention of the consequences of climate change. This plays an important role in life underwater, and should therefore be a key concept. The near future regarding climate change may have significant consequences for the marine ecosystem. Nevertheless, climate change is not mentioned as the root of the problems of underwater life, nor is a clear goal for dealing with global warming formulated. In summary, SDG 14 was formulated very vaguely, and important key concepts were not mentioned. This creates opportunities for states to ignore SDG 14.

### **Debates on the SDGs in the literature**

Two different perspectives are presented in more detail below in order to analyse the progress made in the implementation of SDG 14. The latest report of the UN Secretary-General *Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals from 2021* will be examined in more detail. Secondly, a 2020 report by the nature and environmental protection organisation WWF will be presented. This should help to include different perspectives on the progress made in order to be able to conclude about a constructive balance.

### *Report of the UN-Secretary-General 2021*

Efforts to reduce nutrient inputs to coastal areas are showing success in some regions. Algal blooms, however, show that coastal eutrophication remains a challenge. Globally, anomalies of chlorophyll-a, the pigment

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<sup>33</sup> Gastautor 2016: 3 Gründe, warum wir jetzt Meeresschutzgebiete brauchen. Greenpeace Blog. <<https://blog.greenpeace.de/artikel/3-gruende-warum-wir-jetzt-meeresschutzgebiete-brauchen>>. 1. September 2021.

<sup>34</sup> Le Blanc, David, Clovis Freire & Marjo Vierros (2017). Mapping the linkages between oceans and other Sustainable Development Goals: A preliminary exploration. United Nations.

responsible for photosynthesis in all plants and algae, decreased by 20% in national exclusive economic zones from 2018 to 2020.

Ocean acidification is caused by the absorption of atmospheric carbon dioxide by the ocean, resulting in a declining pH. Marine organisms and ocean services are thus threatened. A steady decline in pH has been observed at a limited number of long-term monitoring sites in the open ocean over the past 20 to 30 years.

Globally, the average protected area coverage of key marine biodiversity areas has increased from 28% in 2000 to 44% in 2020, however, there are significant geographic variations in this progress, with Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand) still having less than a quarter of its key biodiversity areas protected.

Better regulation, combined with effective control and monitoring, has been effective in restoring overfished stocks to biologically sustainable levels, however, such measures have generally been slow to be implemented, especially in many developing countries. The average level of implementation of international instruments to combat illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing improved globally between 2018 and 2020. Nearly 75% of countries achieved a high level of implementation in 2020, compared to 70% of states in 2018. Between 2018 and 2020, the world made progress in implementing regulatory and institutional frameworks that recognise and protect access rights for small-scale fisheries. At the regional level, North Africa and West Asia have made this progress, while the regional score for Central and South Asia has dropped from 3 to 2. There is thus a need to redouble efforts there, and show that there is no room for complacency.

Sustainable fisheries accounted for about 0.1% of the global GDP in 2017, and accounted for more than 0.5% of the GDP in specific regions and least developed countries. The sustainable management of fish stocks remains critical to ensuring that fisheries continue to generate economic growth and support equitable development. The long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on fisheries pose significant challenges which threaten to undermine sustainable fishery management and profitability.

On average, only 1.2% of national research budgets were allocated to ocean research between 2013 and 2017, with amounts ranging from 0.02% to 9.5%. Given that the ocean's estimated contribution to the global economy was US\$1.5 trillion in 2010, this is a very small share.

Many states have ratified or acceded to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and its implementing agreements. A number of states have implemented these instruments through legal, policy, and institutional frameworks, but further progress is needed in some developing countries, and particularly in the least developed countries (UN, 2021).

#### *WWF Report 2020*

The WWF report criticises the lack of progress in achieving SDG 14. WWF's assessment shows that three of the four SDG 14 targets which should have been achieved by 2020 have not been met. These are SDGs 14.2 (Manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems sustainably and take measures to restore them to achieve healthy and productive oceans), SDG 14.4 (effectively regulate fisheries, end overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and destructive fishing practices, and implement science-based management plans to restore fish stocks as soon as possible), and SDG 14.6 (prohibit certain forms of fisheries subsidies that contribute to overcapacity and overfishing, eliminate subsidies that contribute to illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, and refrain from introducing new subsidies of this type). The fourth of these targets, SDG 14.5 (conserve at least 10% of coastal and marine areas in accordance with national and international law and based on the best available scientific information) is expected to be only partially achieved. The WWF report further shows that progress is only visible in two of the six targets related to conservation and the sustainable use of marine biological resources. The lack of monitoring and accurate reporting, however, remains a critical problem in measuring success in achieving all ten SDG14 targets and the 2030 Agenda in general.

The WWF accuses EU Member States of a clear failure to make provisions for biodiversity conservation, healthy marine ecosystems, and sustainable and viable fisheries. The lack of effective protection of marine ecosystems through sustainable management plans, the failure to match EU fleet capacity with fishing opportunities, the reintroduction of harmful fisheries subsidies, and continued overfishing all indicate critical gaps in compliance with existing EU legislation. Following the adoption of the European Green Deal in 2019, all EU Member States will need to step up their efforts to ensure the sustainable use of marine resources and the ecosystem-based management of seas and fisheries in line with SDG14 and the 2030 Agenda.

SDG14 is interrelated with all other SDGs. 38% of all 169 SDG targets can only be achieved if SDG14 targets have been successfully met, particularly SDG1 (no poverty), SDG2 (no hunger), and SDG13 (climate action).

Despite the importance of the marine environment for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, political will and financial resources remain insufficient.

The EU, as the world's largest market for seafood, and with a marine area of over six million square kilometres in four different marine regions, is therefore called upon by the WWF to lead by example and stand by its commitments to all life above and below the water. A transformation of EU and international maritime policy is urgently needed in this regard. In the EU, this starts with the development of a coherent, overarching strategy to ensure that all the Sustainable Development Goals are achieved (WWF, 2020).

#### *Evaluation of the two reports*

The UN does not comment on all targets in its reports, and they lack detail. It is repeatedly reported that positive developments have taken place, but that more still needs to be done to achieve SDG 14. What really needs to be done, however, to fully achieve all targets, is not mentioned. Furthermore, no specific dates or details are given: “successes have been made”, “it has worked”, “progress has been made”, “more progress is needed” and “improved”. There is a lack of ambition and motivation in the language. There is no mention of the unmet targets of 2020 in any sentence, and no great comment on the lack of progress. Compared to the UN report, the WWF mentions more specific results of the implementation of SDG 14. Whether the goals have been achieved or not is clearly shown on a graph, and commented on. The WWF report also addresses the specific problems in the implementation of the measures and makes constructive proposals for solutions and demands to the EU.

#### **Case studies of water grabbing and conflicts over common pool resources**

*“Water grabbing refers to situations where powerful actors are able to take control of or divert valuable water resources and watersheds for their own benefit, thereby disadvantaging local communities whose livelihoods often depend on these resources and ecosystems.” (Gasteyer et al., 2012, p. 18).*

Water grabbing, like land grabbing, is the territorial expropriation of indigenous peoples by large, often international, investors. An additional difficulty of water grabbing compared to land grabbing is that the seas are often common pool resources. They are not separated from each other by clear national borders like nations, but are accessible and usable for everyone. It is also extremely difficult to control the laws that apply to open waters, as vessels are difficult to reach on the high seas. Water grabbing is therefore even more difficult to control than land grabbing. Such grabbing is justified by the fact that powerful actors have the necessary capital to use the resources more efficiently and sustainably. This is claimed to bring wealth and development to the affected country (Gasteyer et al., 2012). Although there is an impression that waters and lands are abundant in certain countries, this is usually only partially true, because in many cases the land is already being used by local people. These pre-existing land uses often go unrecognised because they are not recorded in formal land rights and laws (Gasteyer et al., 2012). Water grabbing can have extreme environmental and social impacts on the affected areas, and lead to major conflicts. Local people may be deprived of their livelihoods. Sub-goal 14.7 addresses sustainable fisheries, the overfishing of the oceans and the severe decline of fish stocks. The benefits of marine resources are mainly promoted for developing countries. The focus is on the access of small-scale fishers to marine resources. The main cause of overfishing is the efficient fishing methods used by commercial fisheries. Small-scale fishers, who have earned their livelihoods through small-scale fishing for several centuries, often suffer from a diminishing fish stock. They are displaced by large-scale fishing and no longer have access to the resources they were accustomed to. This is explained below using the example of the indigenous people of the Sami coast.

The Sami are an indigenous people living in the north of Scandinavia. They can be divided into two groups, the reindeer Sami and the coastal Sami. While the reindeer Samis in the interior earn their living by breeding reindeer, the coastal Samis mainly live on local fishing of the rich cod stocks in the fjords. They are seasonal part-time fishers who also hunt and farm. Compared to the reindeer Samis, fishing was never considered a particularly traditional occupation for the Samis, as there are just as many Norwegian small-scale fishers (Gasteyer et al., 2012). The coastal Sami assimilated into Norwegian culture through the national movements from the 1850s, and later after the Second World War, and their own culture, mother tongue and identity as a group was increasingly lost and forgotten. The Sami culture was considered primitive and backward and did not fit into the nationalist mindset. This phenomenon of adapting to Norwegian culture was particularly noticeable on the coasts of the fjords, where the Sami were in close contact with Norwegian fishers. It went so far that parents no longer told their

children about their Sami origins because they were afraid that their children would be discriminated against (Lätsch, 2019).

The reconstruction of Norway after the Second World War meant that more emphasis was placed on all ethnic groups within a country having equal rights and opportunities (Lätsch, 2019). This integration of the Samis led to them becoming less socially and economically independent, and further removed from their Sami identity. The Alta conflict in the 1980s can be seen as a turning point in the relationship between the Samis and the Norwegians, as it resulted in the so-called "Sami Paragraph of the Norwegian Constitution", which recognised the reindeer Samis as an indigenous people. The coastal Samis remained excluded. The Norwegian state guaranteed that the Samis could develop their own society and culture in the country. In 1987 the Sami inhabitants of Norway elected a Sami parliament, which advocated for the concerns of the Samis at a political level. For a long time, the right to fish in the fjords was reserved for the inhabitants of the Scandinavian coast, which gave them extensive access to cod stocks. This changed in 1990, however, when the coast became state property. At the same time, modernisation began and the state invested large amounts of money in more effective fishing methods. New economic structures meant that the Samis' fish stocks in the fjords were disputed by commercial fisheries. The Samis warned of overfishing due to the more efficient fishing methods, but were not taken seriously by the government. The government argued that the overfishing of rich cod stocks was not possible. The concerns of local fishers were overlooked, as they considered traditional local knowledge not scientifically proven. In 1989, the Samis' fears came true, and there was a dramatic decline in cod stocks. The government then introduced a quota system for fishing vessels that only allowed the large industrial cod-dependent fishers to catch these fish, virtually excluding the small-scale Sami fishers from the fishery. The coastal Sami lost their livelihoods, although they were hardly complicit in the overfishing. These resource conflicts triggered an identity issue among the Samis. The coastal Samis banded together as a result of this deprivation and became politically active. The question now is how the Coastal Samis can manage to make themselves strong as a minority (Lätsch, 2019).

*"Events may provide symbolic material which invite interpretations that subsequently change concept about social identities and relationships."* (Lätsch, 2019, p. 224).

Political events such as the Alta conflict and the quota system for fishing vessels, where many people are affected by the same hardship, can be the trigger for people to unite and build or reconstruct a common identity. The Samis organised public meetings of various local organisations which worked closely with the Sami Parliament. The parliament functioned as a kind of pressure group to bring the concerns of the coastal Samis to the attention of the government. The local media were also an important tool with which to strengthen communication and cooperation between the local people, local organisations and the parliament. The media provided space for discussion and public debate (Lätsch, 2019).

This strengthened the coastal Sami as a group, and made them reflect on their common history and culture. By reconstructing their Sami identity, they were able to make their voices heard by the government, and some, though not all, of their concerns were implemented by the government. They were granted local fishing rights and the fish resources needed by the Samis were considered. However, they were denied the privilege of fjord fishing and recognition as indigenous people. The majority of the Samis were disappointed with the results and would have liked more concessions from the government. Nevertheless, their success should not be ignored, as they managed to present themselves as a group in the public eye and to become stakeholders in the fishery (Lätsch, 2019).

This case study is of particular social anthropological interest, as the coastal Samis were able to make themselves strong through bottom-up organisations. Institutions were formed from the bottom up through collective consciousness, and the concerns of the Samis and their regional knowledge were heard and taken seriously in public debates. The Norwegian state was able to make large profits through commercial fishing, but with little regard for sustainability or the welfare of the local population. The traditional Sami way of fishing means seasonal local fishing, and on the other hand, considers the ecosystem and gives the fish stocks enough time and space to recover. This approach is based on centuries of experience and oral knowledge about the fjord ecosystem. As mentioned, local knowledge is often neglected because there is too little scientific evidence to support it. This is because the knowledge of the local population is often very closely related to their history and culture; their knowledge is passed on from generation to generation, and is not officially and formally recorded (Lätsch, 2019).

*I see (ethnic) identity as an important precondition for the increased use of the powerful concept of 'indigenous' in the process of recognition, empowerment and entitlement* (Lätsch, 2019, p. 224).



Conflicts over common pool resources such as in Scandinavia can be found all over the world, especially often in developing countries and emerging economies. Would the example of the coastal Sami be a good model for other affected areas to become politically strong by reconstructing an ethnic identity and claiming rights to common pool resources?

In contrast to Norway, an industrialised country, it is much more difficult to form bottom-up organisations in developing countries, and to be heard by the government, as the countries often do not have a democratic constitutional state (Petretto, 2010). One of the best-known examples of this is probably Somalia. Somalia has been at war for more than two decades. Its state structures are accordingly unstable and rudimentary. The economy lies idle, and more than half of Somalia's inhabitants, over four million people, suffer from food shortages (Petretto, 2010). A large part of the Somali population, like the Samis, lived on small-scale fishing. International fishing fleets engage in illegal fishing in Somali waters and rob the coastal inhabitants of their livelihoods. Somalia is an extreme example that shows how devastating the social impact can be on the local population. The financially poor small-scale fishers are forced to look for other ways to ensure their survival. One of these is to take their small fishing boats further out to sea in the hope of finding larger schools of fish. The problem, however, is that the small fishing boats are only built to fish along the coast, and often capsize in the open sea. Many Somali fishers drown at sea every year. Another option, which probably attracts the most international attention, is to resort to piracy. The majority of Somali pirates used to make a living from fishing, and resorted to illegality due to the lack of fish stocks (Klein, 2012).

*"However, as long as Somalia does not have a judiciary, there is no option but for other states to take up the problem [...]" (Petretto, 2010, p. 15).*

In a politically unstable country, it is very challenging to raise local concerns, as the government is either constantly changing or simply does not exist, however, the statement that Somalia cannot solve the problem by itself, and that other countries must take over this task, is only partially true. The top-down political influence of other countries can quickly exacerbate conflicts without taking the locals into account. Some steps have already been taken. For example, the EU has called on the mandate of Operation Atlanta to monitor fishing in Somalia more closely. It remains very important, however, to involve the local population as much as possible in such decisions, and to inform them publicly (Petretto, 2010).

### **Consequences: Elements of Green Anti-Politics**

The individual targets of SDGs are being pursued. This can be seen in several ways. For example, marine and coastal protection areas have increased significantly and there are also more and more food labels representing sustainable fishing. New legal foundations have been created for the protection of the sea, and various agreements signed. Nevertheless, the implementation of SDG 14 targets remains poor, and insufficient to bring about real change for life underwater. The goals are often pursued for reasons other than the implementation of SDG 14. These intentions are disguised and not easily transparent to society. Sustainable fishing labels, in particular, are a good example of this. Organisations such as the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) issue certificates to fisheries for sustainable fishing. The aim of these certificates is to make it visible to society which fish comes from sustainable fisheries. The certificate is issued subject to compliance with the following. The fishery avoids overfishing and population extinction. The ecosystem is preserved despite fishing, and the rules and procedures of fishing that are implemented ensure the previous points, and thus sustainable fishing. However, the label disguises poor certification, conflicts of interest with the industry, and the lack of a social factor. Fisheries with fishing methods that have been declared destructive by other environmental organisations, are certified as sustainable. Even fisheries with a high bycatch have already received such certification.

The process for obtaining the certificate conflicts with the industry, to the detriment of nature. It has been shown that over two-thirds of the MSC's revenue comes from certification fees. This means that the MSC has to issue a certificate to new fisheries in order to continue to exist. On the one hand, nature suffers from this, as certificates are issued much more quickly, and on the other hand, the question arises as to how incorruptible the MSC is in reality. The label also lacks the social factor. Instead of many small fisheries from developing countries receiving the certificate, many large, commercial fisheries are certified and thus promoted, since the population already pays attention to whether fish bears the desired sustainability seal (Greenpeace, 2017).

These problems are in conflict with the achievement of SDG 14, and this is despite the fact that labels certifying sustainable fisheries are considered to implement SDG 14 and should actually serve the continuation of life below water. It's an example of greenwashing and prioritising economics at the expense of the environment.

It is not only in the case of labels such as those of the MSC where consequences are glossed over and seen solely as progress towards achieving SDG 14. The positive consequences of creating legal foundations or international conventions are strongly emphasised in the UN report of 2020, but even there, some negative consequences are obscured. The Agreement on Port State Measures (PSMA) serves as an example here. This is a binding international agreement regarding illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. It sets minimum requirements for information from fishing boats before they are allowed to dock in port. Where there is suspicion of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, access to the port must be denied and the vessels inspected by the local authorities. This agreement aims, on the one hand, to detect and investigate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. On the other hand, follow-up actions and reporting should also draw attention to the incident. In this way, the fish from illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing should not enter the legal lucrative international market.

More and more states have ratified the PSMA. This already had a positive effect on dealing with illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. It also, however, shifts the responsibility to mainly less developed coastal states. They must create a legal and institutional framework for the required measures to work. This requires financial as well as human resources, which are not necessarily available in less developed coastal states. Accordingly, the PSMA can be used as a pretext to shift responsibility to less developed coastal states. It seems unclear what real effect the agreement will have on illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (FAO, 2021).

The implementation of the individual targets of SDG 14 also intensifies the problem of "green-grabbing". The term "green-grabbing" is a political term that describes the appropriation of land, water or other resources in the name of nature conservation. This appropriation results in the displacement of local populations and their loss of access to resources essential to their survival. Similarly, in order to protect the ocean, local groups can be deprived of their ocean resource, which is essential to their survival. On the one hand, this can happen by increasing the number of marine and coastal protected areas, denying local people access to a resource that is vital to their survival (Vesper, 2016). On the other hand, newly created, national legal bases can lead to local populations no longer being able to fish even though this might be their livelihood. The required identity cards, the permitted equipment or other necessary papers cannot be acquired by the local population groups. Often, the necessary financial resources are lacking. Exactly these points have also been shown in the example of the Samis, above. In this case, the implementation of the targets represents a double problem for life below water. It deprives the local population of its vital resources and allows commercial fisheries with more financial resources to continue fishing, which has not led to the desired recovery of fish stocks.

It is clear, from the examples given, that the will to achieve SDG 14 is not the prerequisite for implementing most of the targets. The basic intention is to preserve the sea as a resource. Today's capitalist society demands huge supplies, and this is also true for the supply of marine products. Capitalism encourages overproduction, or in this case, overfishing of the seas. Nevertheless, this huge supply should still be able to be guaranteed, the capitalist economy should continue, and the resources of the oceans should remain accessible to Western society. Although the environment, sustainable development and people are likely to suffer more in the future as a result of not implementing the goals set, the priorities are clearly placed on the economic benefits of implementing SDG 14.

### **Conclusions for further discussion**

The urgency of implementing the goals of SDG 14 is very clear in ecological and economic, as well as social areas. Firstly, the oceans absorb the vast majority of CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere, so failing to protect the oceans would have devastating consequences for climate change. However, the oceans have already absorbed too much CO<sub>2</sub>, which has led to their acidification. This acidification of the oceans must be reduced so that fish stocks and other marine life can survive and reproduce. Commercial fishing also leads to the overfishing of the world's oceans through its efficient fishing methods. The demand for fish has grown in recent years. Large fishing nets, which are not used close to the coast, can meet this demand and bring in huge yields, however, these methods are not sustainable, because, on the one hand they involve a very high percentage of by-catch, and on the other hand the large catches lead to the disturbance of the ecosystem. Fish stocks are dwindling and do not have the opportunity to recover, and many species are threatened with extinction or are already extinct.

Ultimately, the livelihoods of many people depend on the oceans, as they are the largest source of food in the world and they provide many jobs. As fisheries are run by fewer and larger players, however, many small-scale fishers are being deprived of their livelihoods. Commercial fishing brings fewer fish to the coast and makes it impossible for local people to make a profit, which can have a strong social impact, as shown in the example of the coastal Sami.

Often subsidised, industrial fishing is, as explained, mainly responsible for the overexploitation of marine resources and ultimately harms both biodiversity and local fisheries. The question is therefore how to deal with the problematic growth of industrial fisheries and how to strengthen local fisheries. One possible approach would be to ban fisheries subsidies for industrial fisheries as well as subsidies that contribute to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. The knowledge of local people should be included in discussions and debates on fisheries management, and receive appropriate preferential treatment.

The importance of using the oceans sustainably is clearly presented in SDG 14, however, it remains to be critically questioned how comprehensive and complete the goals are. For example, none of the targets in SDG 14 deal with the effect of global warming on life under water, and how to deal with it. This is despite the fact that global warming is a current problem and will have devastating consequences for underwater life. In general, the wording of the objectives lacks precision. The generalised wording often leaves out the who, and specifically how, of the problems to be tackled. The vague wording leaves more room to show the evolution of the achievement of the goals. The extent to which the sustainable use of the oceans has already been achieved is interpreted and presented very differently (WWF, 2020).

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## 11. SDG 15: Life on Land

*Written by Jana Lamatsch and Tobias Haller*

### Introduction

A critical engagement with the universalist ambitions of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations 2030 Agenda (UN, 2015) is essential from a social anthropological perspective. SDGs are important because they define consensus norms and thus shape the notion and standards of how sustainability and development are to be understood. Even though the SDGs are not legally binding, they have created and continue to create narratives about the problems of our time, the options for solving them, and the direction in which the transformation of our world should ultimately take place (Fukuda-Parr & McNeill, 2019).

This essay deals with SDG 15 "Life on Land". It is centrally related to issues of biodiversity loss and strategies for conservation, but mainly focuses on notions of "pure nature", making a division between nature and culture and not recognising that humans have for centuries transformed and created what we call nature, and which is in fact cultural landscape ecosystems, including biodiversity. The aim of this essay is to show the new critical debates on these subjects in the literature. First, we will discuss SDG 15 and its formulation, and refer to some accompanying difficulties. Second, we outline current critical debates in the literature on SDG along three key issues: the notions of environment, property rights and power relations. Subsequently, we show two examples from different regions of the world to demonstrate how the discussed key issues can show up in practice. Third, the possible consequences of the SDGs will be discussed with a theoretical reference to James Ferguson's Anti-Politics Machine. We conclude by arguing why SDG 15 is the most logical and important SDG for including ideas of common property and a more-than-human /co-world perspective on what we call "nature".

### SDG 15: "Life on Land"

The conservation and sustainable use of resources are critical to social and economic development and human survival. When SDGs were adopted by the UN in 2015, all indicators suggested that life on Earth was in decline, eroding the ability to meet human needs. It is evident that even today, the pressure of population growth, economic development and increased consumption will only intensify the challenges for the maintenance of life on land. A recent study by Pricewaterhouse Coopers (PWC) found that SDG 15 and SDG 14 (life below water) are getting less attention than other SDGs in many countries (Scott & McGill, 2018). The problem here is that the development and conservation of nature are viewed as being in competition: there are many trade-offs between SDGs, as is often noted. For example, making more spaces for agriculture to end hunger as required by SDG 2, means that achieving SDG 15 regarding forestation is endangered (Sayer et al., 2019). However, "life on land" is the essential environmental foundation for human existence. There is therefore call to integrate ecosystem health (SDG 14 and 15) into the UN agenda as a basic prerequisite for achieving all the other goals. This would be the only way to reach all five branches of development (clean energy, water security, food security, lives and livelihoods, governing for sustainability) (see for example Reid et al., 2017). There is also the danger that the ideology of 'pure nature' to be conserved in relation to issues of biodiversity and strategies in order to stop degradation processes is based on a related discourse of extending protected areas as a legitimacy for conservation actors and state actors. As mentioned above, this ideology does not recognise that territories commonly owned by different local groups, mainly in the global south, have often been shaped by them centuries ago. The diversity found – and about to be lost – was the product of these engagements (see also Galvin & Haller Eds., 2008; Brockington et al., 2008). The ideology that we are dealing with pure nature, combined with the narrative that this nature is endangered by local actors, consequently leads to the conservation extension discourse. This then acts as a major legitimacy for extending protected areas – and therefore the removal of people living in these areas, who are accused of doing harm to biodiversity. This process has great potential for green grabbing (Fairhead et al., 2012) and the SDG 15, containing such argumentations, is exacerbating these options (Fairhead et al., 2012; Larsen et al., 2022).

In the following section we will discuss the formulation and content of SDG 15. The goal reads as follows: "Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss" (UN, 2015). The goal is divided into nine sub-targets. The first sub-target refers to the "conservation, restoration and the sustainable use of ecosystems" (UN, 2015). This approach has been criticised for various reasons. The main reason is that only "terrestrial eco-

systems” are mentioned – there is no notion of cultural landscape ecosystems. This is criticised especially from a social-anthropological and human geographical point of view, because this formulation compromises the (Western) dualistic idea of a (pure) nature/culture dichotomy, ignoring that much of the earth’s nature has been strongly affected by humans for centuries, and is now a cultural landscape ecosystem (Ellen, 1982; Fairhead & Leach, 1996; Haller et al., 2018; Larsen et al., 2022). The interrelations, interconnections and effects of humans and non-humans on land are not taken into consideration.

Sub-target 15.2 deals with the "implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests". Here, too, the above-mentioned dichotomy becomes visible, since it is assumed that forests (or deserts in Sub-target 15.3) can be managed by humans. Furthermore, especially from the perspective of New Institutionalism Political Ecology, it is criticism that no references to collective property relations are made. This completely neglects the fact that many natural resources in the world are managed by common property institutions (see Haller, 2019 for an overview and discussion below on the key issue power relations in the age of neoliberalism. This is reflected again in Sub-target 15.5, which deals with the "reduction of the degradation of natural habitats". It is assumed that natural habitats are separate from humans - this combines the pure nature view and an ignorance of common property institutions that are often involved in such habitats.

The construction of nature as a “commodity” becomes particularly visible in the formulation of Sub-target 15.4: “ensure the conservation of mountain ecosystems, including their biodiversity, in order to enhance their capacity to provide benefits that are essential for sustainable development”. This formulation is characterised by the idea that the “mountains” must have certain “functions” or even “benefits” for “development”. As Escobar (1999), for example, has already pointed out, it is questionable whether such a neoliberal-influenced idea of the relationship of humans to nature can really contribute to a paradigm shift, because it does not address the root causes of degradation, such as market validation and the power asymmetries of resource users. Sub-target 15.6 addresses the fair distribution of benefits arising from the use of resources, and the regulation of equitable access to resources. This seems to be a particularly important sub-target, as it has the potential to redress unequal power relations. The benefits of land use until now often do not remain with the local population, but are redirected to big companies (see the discussion on Key Issue 3 below). This again has to do with ignorance about collective property rights, such as the role a local population plays in the conservation of biodiversity and the development of a cultural landscape (e.g., Haller et al., 2018; Haller, 2019).

Sub-targets 15.7 and 15.8 deal with the management of protected and invasive alien species. Again, top-down management is proposed here, which does not consider the role of local people. Sub-target 15.8 deals with ecosystem values: “integrate ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning, development processes, poverty reduction strategies, and accounts”. Here, it would be particularly important to define exactly what is meant by “ecosystem and biodiversity values”. Integrating the ecological knowledge of the local population, and spiritual insights with scientific knowledge is important. Otherwise, there is a danger of hegemonic representation by (Western influenced) natural sciences, as has often been criticised (Berkes, 1999; Descola, 2013).

Finally, Targets 15 a, b, and c focus on the financial means for the conservation and protection of biodiversity, forests and protected species. It is not clearly defined who can own and who should have access to these resources. This means that the institutional question regarding property and the regulation of use is not clear, and not at all seen as being in the hands of local actors.

In summary, SDG 15 can primarily be criticised regarding three issues. First, there is the idea of pure nature/ecosystems that can be managed by humans, secondly, collective ownership is not addressed, and thirdly, power relations and the root causes of problems such as the degradation of forests are not mentioned. These three issues have also been defined by Haller et al. (2018), and will now be critically discussed in the light of recent literature.

## **Debates on SDG 15 in the Literature**

### *Key issue: Notion of Environment and Managerialism*

Rival (2017) considers the concept of sustainability as connected to the relationship that humans have with the natural environment. Following Sachs (2015), she starts from the assumption that sustainable development is a central concept of our time, a way of understanding our world, and at the same time a method for solving global problems. Sustainable development is thus a normative outlook on the world, and how we should aspire to reach which specific goals. The relationship between societies and their natural environment should therefore be seen as a value that can change, and is shaped by current conditions such as economic development and globalization. This can be seen as a criticism of the SDGs in that the underlying values and norms are not clearly articulated in

the formulation of the goals, but are presented as universally valid. As Rival shows in her ethnography, the future of resources is largely dependent on how these are conceptualised – and who has the power to do so. Conceptualisations of resources are always framed through enduring discourses on nature, society and development, which often thwart individual and collective attempts to break away from dominant forms of world inhabitation. Taking Fukuda-Parr and McNeill's (2019) above-mentioned argumentation into account, the SDGs are a powerful tool in the creation of certain discourses on sustainability and development.

Another key issue is seen in the question of who owns and who is responsible for green areas. Often, no public authority or private actor is willing to assume the cost or the responsibility of protecting the natural environment (Rival, 2017). This also applies on a larger scale to the SDGs: responsibilities and ownership are not specifically defined. Various research has shown that the local population is often quickly blamed, while more powerful actors often get off unscathed (e.g., Sayer et al., 2019; Haller & Merten, 2008).

What Rival (2017) points out in her ethnography, Ødemark (2019) elaborates on in the example of the UN's understanding of sustainability. He examines the anthropological and culturally historical assumptions that underlie the *Our Common Future* report. This report, produced by the UN in 1987, had a major influence on the SDGs that exist today, as it was the first time the two concepts of "development" and "sustainability" were merged and formulated as global goals and policy. Through a close analysis of the report and the language used in it, Ødemark (2019) comes to the following conclusion: the report constructs indigenous cultures as living examples of sustainable living on the planet. This is done by contrasting indigenous cultures with humanity as a whole. This can be seen, for example, in the following formulation:

"Their (indigenous and tribal peoples) disappearance is a loss for the larger society, which could learn a great deal from their traditional skills in sustainably managing very complex ecological systems" (Ødemark, 2019: 3). This understanding of indigenous people is clearly an essentialist understanding of culture - intrinsically linked to an understanding of what "Indigenous people really are". Such understandings have also been produced in the human sciences, such as anthropology. Newer tendencies in the discipline strongly criticise such notions of cultures as bounded entities.

The construction of "culture" and "ecological" wholes enabled a translation between different scales: between the local, the bounded indigenous cultures and the earth as "the bounded habitat of humanity". This has the following consequence in relation to the understanding of sustainability: how nature is "managed" on a small scale by indigenous cultures can also be applied to the whole of humanity. Humans are thus constructed as destroyers and saviours at the same time: a "global manager" who can manage the earth according to the model of indigenous cultures. The view of nature is thus still strongly influenced by a dichotomous perception of nature and culture, and the notion of humans as global managers inserts humanity in a position of dependency on nature and above nature (Ødemark, 2019).

Ødemark (2019) also shows how an understanding of cultures as bounded entities can lead to the obscuring of current political struggles on the ground. Indigenous people are not just "disappearing" because of some historical-cultural developments but because of power relations, colonialism and on the ground political circumstances such as the dispossession of local people through colonialism and neoliberalism.

The idea of humans as "global managers" is clearly seen in SDG 15, for example in the formulation of Target 15.2: "implementation of sustainable management". Humans are clearly depicted in a position of power in opposition to the environment, but as we will show for many societies and their cultures, humans are an important and not the only part of the environment, but are shaping what can be called cultural landscape ecosystems based on a communal ownership of land and land related resources. These local groups often have a different ontological relationship, however, as they see all living and non-living things as being part of the "environment" as a "co-world" which is also seen in their different religious belief systems. Rules and regulations to govern the common property are often embedded in this ontology (see Haller, 2019).

#### *Key Issue: Property Rights and the Question of the Commons*

A frequently mentioned criticism of SDGs is the fact that ambitious goals are set, but with no reflection or recognition of the root causes of problems (e.g., Fukuda-Parr & McNeill, 2019). Various studies in the field of geography and anthropology have shown the central role of common property institutions for management issues of energy, climate, biodiversity and food security (see Haller et al., 2018, Larsen et al., 2022). Ostrom (1990) showed that, contrary to Hardin's theory of *The Tragedy of the Commons* (1968) the collective use of resources does not have to lead to overuse, and that commons can be sustainably managed by local institutions. Two aspects have been added to this perspective. Haller (2012; 2019) and Ensminger (1992) call for the inclusion of power analysis

and the view that local institutions govern cultural landscape ecosystems (Ellen, 1982; Fairhead & Leach, 1996; Haller et al., 2018).

It is also considered necessary to look at historical developments in order to understand contemporary conditions, problems, and root causes. Colonial and neoliberal expansion and external changes in relative prices and power constellations lead in many African contexts to institutional change from common to state and private property/open access, and forms of institutional shopping by powerful actors and overuse (Ensminger, 1992; Haller, 2010; Bakker, 2011; Mansfield, 2011; Haller, 2019). This new combined approach is called New Institutionalism Political Ecology (NIPE), and investigates such processes.

Haller (e.g., 2019) describes three phases in the development of property rights in the African context. In a first precolonial phase, land was administered as common property. In a second colonial phase, the Western categories of state and property laws were introduced. The state was often not powerful enough to enforce these laws, which often resulted in legal and institutional pluralism. The result was often de facto open access. In a third, postcolonial phase, this pluralism continued to prevail. Processes of neoliberalisation led to further privatisation, which facilitated the access of powerful actors to resources, while weaker actors were further excluded from the commons.

Such processes can be described not only as land grabbing but also as commons grabbing (Gerber & Haller, 2021). Various studies also point out that so-called “green grabbing” is taking place under the guise of the SDGs, especially in the context of agrarian green energy provision: companies can use CSR policies to legitimise their land use and further exclude the local population. Since vulnerable groups are particularly dependent on the use of common-pool resources in times of crisis, Haller (2019) speaks in this context not only of commons grabbing but also of resilience grabbing processes. In their critique of the SDG discourse, Larsen et al. (2022: 22) identify the reason for these developments in the absence of root causes and responsibilities for environmental problems in the SDGs: “As the most powerful actors in these sectors are not explicitly identified as causing environmental problems, they can even use the SDGs as a basis of legitimacy to expand their operations” (see also Niederberger et al., 2016; Gerber & Haller, 2021).

Facemire and Bradshaw (2020) also join the ranks of scholars who seek to understand property rights as a product of multiple, overlapping resources, rights and governance structures. They offer a critique of the traditional two-dimensional understanding of property, and argue convincingly how property relations need not be viewed as merely bilateral between two landowners or as landowner-government; this is over-simplified. They link their new theory of “mismatched property” rights to the problem of biodiversity loss: contrary to the common narrative that land development leads to habitat loss, which in turn leads to biodiversity loss, they see the cause of the issue in the fundamental problem of competitive resource use by humans and wildlife. This is especially important in the context of wildlife resource uses, because two-dimensional property regimes only define rights to resources for humans - the use of animals is not taken into account. This idea is also evident in the SDGs: non-humans are only mentioned in the sense of “species and fauna” to be protected or “invasive alien species” to be controlled - but not as actual co-users of the “ecosystem”. This differs, for example, in indigenous animistic and totemistic ontologies, in which the commons are linked to a more than human worldview of cohabitation between the humans and other beings, and especially also the spiritual world (see Berkes, 1999). These worldviews are also related to local knowledge and institutions, as these groups seek to set the rules of the game of environmental use in relation to all actors that they perceive as active. It is therefore rather a notion of a co-world and not just an environment, and often perceived as a larger commons than just among humans (Berkes, 1999; see also Haller, 2019).

As a possible strategy, Facemire and Bradshaw (2020) propose the tool of stakeholder collaborations. These can be working groups consisting of people with different interests in land and resources. Stakeholders can also be defined for non-humans, who then advocate for their rights and claims to resources. Facemire and Bradshaw (2020) are thus concerned with actors who are potentially excluded from resource use and are not represented in traditional property rights regimes, because, as in the case of wildlife, they cannot own resources.

The theory of mismatched property rights is an interesting complement to the NIPE approaches described above, which also include non-humans in the institutional and legal context. A relational notion of property that respects the interconnected web of interests and rights would need to be integrated into SDG 15 to eliminate the risk that certain actors are completely excluded when it comes to a reconfiguration of the “management” of resources. The strategic use of common property rights could, however, be an important strategy to give room to a more than human perspective, as local groups would then have the right to include the more than human, and also the spiritual world if they had common property acknowledged, and thus the right for self-determination in their area (see also the case of the Wampi in Peru (Niederberger, 2021) and also the case studies below).

### *Key issue: Power Relations in the Age of Neoliberalism*

Pokorny et al. (2019) examine the myriad forest governance initiatives that have emerged since the introduction of the SDGs in terms of their effectiveness, management approaches, monitoring and control mechanisms, and key channels of influence. What is interesting here is that the fundamental explanation for the challenges facing international forest governance is considered to be “at least two different sets of actors and institutions with their conflicting mind-sets.” This set of actors consists, among others, of powerful economic users who exploit forest areas for timber and other biological resources, and, on the other hand, commoners who defend various environmental and social concerns. Often, the use of biological resources such as forests is the productive basis of powerful economic sectors that tend to resist the effective integration of environmental concerns into their sectoral policies. This can also be understood in the context of the processes of commons-grabbing, as described (see also below). Due to the institutional change described above, there were a number of dis-connections between the local population and common-pool resources in favour of nationalisation, privatisation or open access relationships (Haller, 2019). Often, the former common-pool resources are now owned by actors whose main interest is economic profit (these can be outsiders, locals or administrators), and therefore lead to overuse and biodiversity loss as described by Pokorny et al. (2019). This is not a “tragedy of the commons” according to Hardin, but rather “the drama of the grabbed commons” (Gerber & Haller, 2021). While the local population loses more and more rights to the land, more powerful actors generate profit and contribute to the degradation of the land, the consequences of which are primarily faced by the local population. Pokorny et al. (2019) therefore call for “a greater visibility of forest issues in the SDG agenda, and addressing and managing underlying trade-offs between environmental protection, social equity and economic development in the quest for global sustainability” in relation to SDG 15.

There is also a risk, especially in the context of large scale land acquisitions (LSLA), that through the use of corporate social responsibility (CSR) policies it appears as if companies are sacrificing (a part of their) profit and accounting for the social costs that they generate. But this was recognised early on in many cases of “greenwashing” (Greer & Bruno, 1996). This means that it is very important to confront the “win-win-win” outcomes of CSR policies in specific cases with empirical research (see example below). Here, the model of New Institutionalism (Ensminger, 1992; Haller, 2019) offers a way to analyse the external factors such as economy, legal context, natural environment, immigration and technological change that shape a local setting, including the issues of bargaining power among actors and ideologies.

### *Examples of illustration: Zambia and Yukon*

We offer two case studies from Zambia and Canada to illustrate the approach, and related SDG issues. The common property institutions and their change in the Kafue Flats floodplain in Zambia is illustrative of the way common property institutions have worked and are changed (Haller & Merten 2008; Haller, 2012). This seasonally inundated area, with rich pastures, fisheries and wildlife in the southern province of today’s Zambia, was in pre-colonial times the common property of local agro-pastoral and fishing (Ila and Balundwe) and hunting/gathering (Batwa) groups organised by big men and group heads who - based on their relationships to the spiritual beings of the territories - were legitimated to coordinate the use of these common-pool resources during the annual cycle. All members of the communities, and also invited members of neighbouring communities (based on rules of reciprocity), were allowed to use these commons under conditions of strict rules for the use and distribution of the resources. The group heads specially coordinated the access to and use of pastures, and collective hunting and fishing events (including monitoring and sanctioning and the view of a more than human ontology, integrated in rules of collective use via ritual activities that also helped to coordinate activities). From this developed a peculiar cultural landscape ecosystem in interrelation with fauna and flora in the area. During colonial times these landscapes were labelled “pure nature” by the British, their ownership went to the colonial state, and after that to the post-colonial state administration, who – while installing chiefs for taxing and administrating local groups – claimed that the resources of the territories (fisheries, pasture, wildlife, forestry) were owned and regulated by the state, including first protected areas. After colonial times this view was extended by installing national protected areas blocking the coordination and co-use of resources, and mobility related to the flooding pattern. This could be financed up to the mid-1970s, but after that the Zambian state was no longer able to provide financial means for the governance of the protected areas and their resources, because the copper price, which was the main source of state revenue, fell drastically. As a consequence, these protected territories and related common-pool resources became de facto open access, leading to overuse because many people employed in the mining sector went into the fisheries and hunted, as well as buying cattle as an investment. This then allowed these powerful actors to claim free access to the resources of the flats, while the state was unable to provide control and locals were subject



to what can be called commons grabbing, because their rights to control these resources were removed. External actors, on the other hand, had great bargaining power using the discourse of being citizens, and thus claiming to be the rightful users – but were not controlled, even though the state was formally present (paradox of the state being present and absent at the same time). Without guaranteed commons property, the local people could only watch the resources being removed, because the state was physically absent. The consequence of this process was a massive reduction in fisheries and game (especially lechwe antelopes) in an area that was once described as the land of milk and honey. A further issue was that this not only reduced biodiversity and the stock of common-pool resources, but in conjunction with dams, large-scale plantations of sugar cane and protected areas meant fewer options to be mobile and use multiple niches, reducing the resilience of local people (the poorer sections of Ila society, the Batwa hunting and fishing people, and in the context of fisheries access to resources for women). Protected areas, which are in line with SDG 15, did not solve, but reinforced and still reinforce, the problem, because they lead to exclusions from access to resources, loss of a sense of ownership and also common poverty across territories and resources. There was an attempt to co-manage hunting and conservation in order to solve this issue, but it failed as the various local interest groups were not involved, and this led to a conservation disaster, such as in projects involving the Zambian Wildlife Authority (ZAWA) and the WWF. On the other hand, a small-scale project for the bottom up development of fishery by-laws was successful insofar as local people could be actively involved, and gained a sense ownership of the institution building process because they regarded developed by-laws as theirs. This process - called ‘constitutionality’ (Haller et al., 2016) - resulted in the partial recovery of the fishery resources for a certain time. Unfortunately, the by-laws were never ratified by the state, but the state gave people their agency back to decide on the rules of their commons (see Chabwela & Haller 2010; Haller & Merten, 2008; Haller & Merten, 2018; Haller et al., 2016).

This case study shows how protected areas and the state’s control of life on land via protected areas and the state ownership of wildlife and inland fisheries leads to not only a reduction of fauna and flora, but also to the loss of cultural landscape, which has to be used in order to remain intact and flexible. The Kafue Flats as such are no longer used as a common property and thus no longer regulated by locally-based institutions. The case study shows that these cultural landscapes could be re-established again if local people were involved in the rule making, and regaining the commons.

Current approaches in the Dawson region of the Yukon, a province in northwestern Canada, illustrate an attempt to combine the viewpoints and interests of different local groups regarding land management via the tool of co-land management plan, the so called “Dawson Regional Land Use Plan”. The landscape of the area is characterised by various activities, such as industrial and placer mining, subsistence hunting, fishing, gathering and trapping, forestry, recreation, and tourism. It is also a landscape with important cultural value, and an important habitat for fish and wildlife (Dawson Regional Planning Commission, 2019).

The designated Dawson Region as a planning region falls within the Traditional Territory<sup>35</sup> of three self-governing First Nations: the Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in First Nation, Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation, and the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun. Only the Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in has Settlement Land within the region, which means they have certain rights to make decisions about the management of the land and the resources<sup>36</sup>. The region also includes public lands which are administered by the Government of Yukon. Since time immemorial, Tr’ondek Hwëch’in and other First Nations traditionally occupied, travelled or harvested in virtually every corner of the region. They still maintain strong cultural connections to the land and use the area for subsistence purposes, such as subsistence hunting for key-stone species like moose and caribou, fishing, gathering and trapping and berry-picking. These activities are an important source of cultural value and social well-being which are not easily quantifiable in a capitalist economic sense. The economy in the region is closely linked to its mineral deposits. Hard rock and placer mining, and to a lesser extent the oil and gas industry are particularly substantial in the economic development of the region. Almost 10% of Dawson Region resident employment is in non-renewable resources. The land is now being degraded due to mining activities, and climate change is already happening, and it is expected that this effect will be even bigger in the future (Dawson Regional Planning Commission, 2022a).

<sup>35</sup> Traditional Territory in this context means a specific type of territorial designation and is written in capitals as it is also a legal term. The concept of a Traditional Territory appeared during the decolonization movement and the Land Claim Agreements negotiations from the 1970s onwards. Before, these territories have been not territorial divided but used by various groups for harvesting and dwelling. This is also illustrated in the long process of designation and overlaps of the Traditional Territories today. It is important to note that this is not an empty term, and it does not necessarily refer to what First Nations understand as their “traditional”.

<sup>36</sup> It is important to note, that the portion of Settlement Land is usually minimal compared to the overall designated Traditional Territory. This implies different levels of entitlement for decision making over the land use.

The case is particularly relevant because different groups in a de-colonial context are trying to regulate the use of their commons - and this under the guiding principle of sustainable development. The Yukon context is different from many other contexts where Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships are discussed, because the relationship between the Yukon First Nations and the regional and national government is formalised through Land Claims Agreements and the associated legislation that were signed from the 1990s onwards. To understand this peculiarity, an abbreviated discussion of the most important historical developments and their significance for the management of the commons will be presented below (see also Nadasdy (2003) for further details and implications of co-management in the context of the Yukon Land Claims).

The intended Dawson Regional Plan is based on the First Nation Final and Self-Governing Agreements, in which a land use planning approval process was established. This should support reconciliation through clearly defined opportunities for First Nation participation in land, water and resource management (Dawson Regional Planning Commission, 2022a). The basis for this current situation was the Umbrella Final Agreement (UFA), which was signed in 1993 between all Yukon First Nations and the governments of Canada and Yukon. It is not a legal document but it is a “political agreement” between the three parties. On this basis, 11 of 14 First Nations in the Yukon have achieved land claims and self-government agreements. The so-called First Nation Final Agreements have been agreed between the individual First Nations and the government, and include a Self-Government Agreement. Under the Self-Government Agreement a First Nation has the power to make and enact laws in respect of their lands and citizens, and also to manage or co-manage lands and resources (Council of Yukon First Nations, 2023).

In the Dawson case, the new land management plan refers to Chapter 11 of the Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in First Nation Final Agreement, which was signed in 1998. One of the goals formulated in the agreement was to “minimise land use conflicts within the settlement and non-settlement lands” and recognise the cultural values of Yukon First Nations, and their rights and responsibilities towards land use. In Dawson, access and rights to common-pool resources on Settlement Land are regulated by the Natural Resource Department, which is a part of the self-government agreement of the Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in First Nation. The Fish and Wildlife branch is responsible for protecting, preserving and improving the fish and wildlife resources and habitat within the Traditional Territory. The Land and Resources branch of the Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in Government is responsible for managing Settlement Land, developing and implementing legislation and policy and assisting Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in First Nation citizens in applying for land use permits on Settlement Land, and participating in development assessment and land use planning. The exact rules are determined by various acts and regulations (Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in, 2015).

Despite the achievements through the Land Claim Agreements, there are also critical voices that question the potential of the current Land Claim Agreements for the self-determination of First Nations. As Nadasdy (2003) points out, current co-management strategies may be less empowering for First Nation peoples in the Yukon than it is often supposed. Instead, existing power relations can be reproduced because of the still-underlying Western notions of property and what is understood as scientific knowledge. This issue is reflected in current controversial discussions of whether environmental knowledge should stem from the hard sciences, or if Indigenous Ecological Knowledge – or in the best case the integration of both knowledge systems – can serve as a valuable basis for co-management (for further details see Doering et al., 2002; Degai et al., 2022).

This is because the participation of First Nation peoples in land claim negotiations and co-management has forced them - at least in some contexts –to also adopt Western worldviews and environmental ontologies toward land and human and more-than-human species. Nadasdy’s (2003) argument here is that the decolonial process of installing First Nations self-governments meant that a re-colonisation by decolonial politics emerged through the top-down installation of a Western type of bureaucracy and a political and administrative system in the form of the colonising state, and which has no link to organisational and political systems in the traditional Indigenous way. The ontology of living as a human together with the non-human world is also not integrated at the basis of these institutions. As outlined above, these contradictory re- and de-colonial politics are reflected in the co-management system of the commons, in the question of how diverse worldviews can be integrated. At the same time, these discussions also give space for negotiations about how to conduct this co-management in a form that goes beyond such contradictions. This also aligns with voices who see the example of the Yukon nevertheless as a major step forward regarding the inclusion of Indigenous peoples in the design of land management.

As the short (and simplified) overview of the negotiations and processes over the land claim agreements showed, this whole reshaping of the legal and political landscape over the decades triggered the development of the Dawson land management plan. It is apparent, that this plan is not just a result of pure willingness of the involved people but is also marked by frictions and interest groups’ pressure. This has to be kept in mind not meaning that there is no true willingness to co-produce the plan.

The Land Use Management Plan can be seen as an attempt of bringing together the complex ownership and institutions involved in land use (for further details see Nadasdy, 2007). The goal of the Development Plan is to include the perspective of all resource-users. This should be possible through public participation such as participatory workshops and public information meetings. This is also in line with the rights for consultation as outlined in the Final Agreements.

Three aspects related to the sustainable development and related issues discussed above are of interest in this plan. First, sustainable development is not only defined ecologically, socially and economically, but also refers to the cultural value of land: “The future of the region will include a diverse economy, rich cultural legacy, healthy environment with shared and respectful use of natural resources.” (Dawson Regional Planning Commission, 2022a: 9). Heritage and cultural value is associated with specific parts of the region, according to Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in culture and values (see Gartler et al. (2019) for a discussion of the notion of cultural sustainability in the Arctic). Second, the plan integrates the concept of stewardship, which is an Indigenous concept of how to care for the land. Stewardship, as it is lived and understood by Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in, is an ancestral and spiritual responsibility to live with the land in a good way. More broadly, “community stewardship is about having a sense of responsibility to the land, water, and animals” (Dawson Regional Planning Commission, 2022a: 7). Thirdly, the land use plan includes some elements of the constitutionality approach: participatory methods such as public workshops, discussions and surveys have been used since the very beginning of the planning process (Dawson Regional Planning Commission, 2022a).

This points out that sustainable development as conceptualised locally is seen as a shared goal of the different parties, and - which is especially important - supplemented by the cultural value of land. It is a local supplement to the SDGs which could lead to a more inclusive definition of what sustainability means, one that is not based on a pure nature ideology. Second, incorporating the concept of community stewardship means that communal property ideas are at least somehow considered. Lastly, there are participatory elements apparent, already in the development of the plan.

At the same time, it becomes apparent that SDG 15 as it is currently formulated, does not fit in complex situations, and is not entirely helpful in strengthening the position of Indigenous groups in their fights for land claims and the recognition of self-governance. Here, the above-mentioned deficits of SDG 15 become apparent. Especially the lack of acknowledgment of property rights and the lack of addressing root causes such as colonialism for existing land use conflicts. If these aspects were integrated into the formulation of the SDG goals, the position of Indigenous people could be further strengthened. However, the plan is also referring to the UN-led sustainable development discourse and states that “sustainable development opportunities and activities” should be both “monetary-based and traditional” (Dawson Regional Planning Commission, 2022a). This clearly shows that structural transformation is not necessarily the main goal of the plan and that there is a real danger the capitalist framing of the environment will be continuing.

Taking Nadasdy's critique into account, it would be of great importance to have a close look at power relations and the bargaining power of the different actors in every individual case. Here, approaches such as New Institutionalism Political Ecology (see the section “Key issues: Property Rights and the Question of the Commons”) could be useful tools of analysis.

### **Consequences: Elements of Green Anti-Politics**

SDG 15 is at the centre of the debate on landscapes which are not pure nature but derive from human interaction with themselves and their living environment, which is also often locally perceived as being a co-world with living and non-living rather than just human beings. This does not mean that local people are ecologically noble, but just that they own resources and territories in commons together with all the living and non-living beings they see, and the institutions to coordinate use and governance are related to this view and to issues of seasonality and reciprocity. This means that interrupting commons property institutions not only removes rights to land, food and also means to fight hunger and poverty but also undermines the landscapes themselves. This means that grabbing the commons from local actors involves undermining their options to adapt to these environments, to coordinate use, and to defend them against extensive inside and outside use with the result of changing the quality of the landscape and the life on land. However, this is not perceived in SDG 15 as it does not recognise local collective ownership of resources, although SDG 15 would be the most obvious goal in which to include commons and common property ideas, and would relate this to “leaving no one behind”, and SDG17, on participation.

Conversely, there is a danger that SDG 15 in particular will turn into a green Anti-Politics Machine at work. As neither commons nor common property is mentioned, there is a simple justification to do the contrary: to grab

even more of the commons which were operating until now because these were economically and politically of less interest, and are even more endangered than before (see Larsen et al., 2022). Although the old commons are destroyed, new commons in the form of work and the facilities of modernity (infrastructure, schools, hospitals etc.) often do not materialise; new commons do not just appear, and the communal property of the landscape is lost (see also Gerber & Haller, 2021). The green anti-politics machine thus operates in the way also seen by Ferguson (1990) in the previous form of anti-politics machines regarding development: Conservation and related development projects and promises provide a “smoke screen” that hides political power relationships and administrative power, which govern the resources now and exclude local resource users, because it is said to provide development for people (modern means of living) while it also protects “pure nature” at the same time. The case studies show that the opposite is the happening, however. As Larsen et al (2022) put it: “We argue that the consensual design of goals and the (in/cap)ability of existing conservation and development institutions and practice for disruptive change instead favours ‘development as usual’.” However, despite this development as usual, we not only see a ‘Tragedy of the Grabbed Commons’ but also a ‘Drama of the Grabbed Commons’ as many of the cases also highlight local responses in diverse ways, from weapons of the weak (stealing and “poaching”) to political and legal moves, and the development of new institutions related to life on land (see the “constitutionality” concept).

### Conclusions for further discussion

SDG 15 is the goal in which the issue of the commons is mostly and centrally missing, although it would be the most logical of the SDGs to include the commons and commons property as the incorporated backbone of the conservation of life on land: not to “conserve” and separate it from local humans, but to let them continue to govern commonly owned and co-regulated resource use and governance in a sustainable way. For most societies on this planet whose cultures are different to Western post-industrial society, it is absurd to say that what we call “nature” is unaffected and void of humans and their relationship with all the living and non-living beings in their environment. Most humans interact with non-human beings in a space to which both humans and non-humans belong, based on “animistic” or “totemistic” ontologies (Descola, 2013), and humans are a part of this. These – and thus the view – have been engaging with all of life – including the lives of spiritual beings in a cultural landscape - which is the basis for their life on land: life on land therefore means the continuous use, co-habitation and care for something that was co-created a long time ago, and based on locally commonly developed rules of co-use. SDG 15 could therefore act on the one hand as a tool of destruction of the idea of the commons if followed on a Western-driven “naturalist” ontology (dividing nature and culture), and at the same time – if used strategically – as the main paradigm change for engagement with life on land, if seen as locally commonly owned, and institutionally governed. The above outlined cases show that such an approach is feasible if states provide security for commonly owned land and land related resources, and let local actors arrange themselves in a participatory way for new interrelationships. Without this, many of the other goals are not achievable, and the big issues of biodiversity loss and climate change resilience also cannot be tackled.

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## 12. SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions and SDG 17: Partnerships

*Written by Lisa Bindschedler and Leo Bornhauser*

### Introduction

This essay closely and critically examines the sustainable development goals SDGs 16 and 17, namely justice and participation on the basis of current debates. They were probably formulated with good intentions, nevertheless they contain challenges and dangers as well. It is therefore important to consider the different perspectives of all groups of people who are concerned. SDGs 16 and 17 are linked, insofar as participation is linked to equitability. This becomes evident in the formulations of the implied SDGs. Goal 16 aims to “promote peaceful and *inclusive* societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and *inclusive* institutions at all levels”.<sup>1</sup> (own emphasis) We believe the term “inclusive” implies the participation of civil society. This SDG means, *inter alia*, to reduce all forms of violence, torture, corruption and organised crime, to promote non-discriminatory laws and strengthen national institutions through cooperation (SDG 16.1 - 16.10). The latter also indicates a form of participation. This specific aspect is formulated as Target 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”.<sup>1</sup> (own emphasis) This target must be examined mainly in the light of the different interest groups. Furthermore, the formulation “international cooperation” raises questions, mainly in respect of power dynamics. We will also look closely at another target of SDG 16, Target 16.3: “Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all”.<sup>37</sup> Menton et al. (2020) show by reference to current examples, that the rights of local people are often bypassed, especially with regard to larger (economical or environmental) projects. Haller and Merten (2018) suggest “constitutionality” as an effective solution, “the empowerment to design and enforce bottom-up institutions as commonly shared and owned rights and rules” (3).

The purpose of Goal 17 is to “strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development”.<sup>1</sup> Some difficulties are also found in this formulation. A critical and decolonised process of participation is needed. For instance, participatory processes such as enabling local actors to decide themselves, are missing. This is eminently obvious in Target 17.15: “respect each country’s policy space and leadership to establish and implement policies for poverty eradication and sustainable development multi-stakeholder partnerships”.<sup>1</sup> Although the formulation “multi-stakeholder partnerships” sounds promising, the term “implement” implicates, in our opinion, a top-down approach. As counterpart, we introduce Haller and Merten’s (2018) concept of “constitutionality” which includes the formation of local institutions acquiring control over their issues. Targets 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”,<sup>38</sup> and 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”<sup>2</sup> seem to represent a Western mindset. Fair profit appropriation must be achieved, and local acquirements and technologies must be incorporated.

This essay is structured in four parts. After the introduction, an overview of the current debates concerning SDGs 16 and 17 is given, followed by examples. Finally, possible consequences for the population are revealed and conclusions are drawn.

### Debates on the SDGs in the Literature

First of all, Menton et al. (2020) discuss the premise that many environmental problems are accompanied by problems of justice. They establish the term “environmental justice”, which basically means “the human right to a healthy environment” (1622) but also includes multiple dimensions and pillars containing the main principles of environmental justice. These are, amongst others, the “affirmation of the sacredness of Mother Earth and the right to be free from ecological destruction; affirmation of people’s right to self-determination; demands for rights of participation and enforcement of principles of informed consent; as well as rejection of military occupation, repression and exploitation of lands, people, and cultures, and other life forms” (First National People of Colour

<sup>37</sup> THE 17 GOALS: United Nations. <<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>>. September 27th 2021.

<sup>38</sup> THE 17 GOALS: United Nations. <<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>>. September 27th 2021.



Environmental Leadership Summit 1991, cited by Menton et al., 2020: 1623). Menton et al. (2020) also reveal several contradictions between the SDGs and environmental justice. For instance, they see the trend of promoting environmental sustainability within a framework of GDP growth as conflicting. In 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”, their main points of criticism are firstly, that the term “justice” is neither defined nor does it address environmental justice. It rather refers to the “rule of law, issues around human rights and legal justice in general, without attention to procedural justice or recognition within the ‘justice’” (Menton et al., 2020: 1626). Power dynamics and structural conditions which conflict with justice are also not considered. Finally, the term “violence” in SDG 16 refers only to physical violence. Except for one mention of psychological violence (in 16.1.3 “Proportion of population subjected to physical, psychological or sexual violence in the previous 12 months”<sup>39</sup>), other forms of violence such as slow violence, violence linked to resource extraction and economic growth, and psychological violence, are not addressed. These arguments suggest to Menton et al. (2020) that the focus is mainly state-based.

A related approach by Halvorsen (2017) concentrates on knowledge production and usage. Halvorsen states that implementing the SDGs means at the same time considering new kinds of knowledge. He raises the question: “If knowledge has been a driving force in creating a world that is no longer viable, should we then place our hope for a better future in the hands of the very same knowledge producers and professionals?” (16). According to Halvorsen (2017), the SDGs mean a commitment to the “notion that everyone has the right to a decent life” (16). Similar to Menton et al. (2020), Halvorsen (2017) describes a discrepancy which is the basis for inequality: “[...] the real challenge facing the world is a global economy that promises prosperity for all, in fact, destabilising the earth’s heat balance, causing mass extinctions and leaving more and more people vulnerable to poverty” (17). His perception of injustice is also seen when he cites the studies of Bonneuil and Fressoz (2015) who show that crucial knowledge choices have massively affected the environment (Bonneuil & Fressoz 2015 cited by Halvorsen, 2017: 19). Such choices mean that the wealthiest 1% of the world’s population consumes (or wastes) “one-and-a-half times what the planet is able to annually produce in a sustainable way” (Bonneuil & Fressoz, 2015 cited by Halvorsen, 2017: 19). As attributable to this huge consumption, they name, inter alia, the “building of dams at massive environmental cost”, “the emission of excessive amounts of greenhouse gas”, “the overfishing and acidification of the ocean” and “the generation of massive amounts of plastic and other waste that is contaminating our rivers and water supplies” (Bonneuil & Fressoz, 2015 cited by Halvorsen, 2017: 19). Subsequently, Halvorsen’s (2017) critique is stated clearly: “Human ‘needs’ – and the associated resources needed for their satisfaction – are of course very *unequal* in the world, as are the consequences for energy consumption and pollution. On average, US citizens consume many times more energy and resources and create many times more carbon emissions and other waste than Amazonian Indians for example (who consume next to nothing)” (23, own emphasis).

Thirdly, Haller et al. (2018) offer criticism of SDGs 16 and 17. On the one hand the formulation to “strengthen relevant national institutions” (SDG 16a)<sup>4</sup> could be interpreted as the promotion of “control mechanisms over national institutions”, and thus they suggest to specify in this manner: “strengthen relevant national institutions (*including indigenous and local institutions*)” (33, own emphasis). Another critique concerns the expression “through international cooperation” (SDG 16a)<sup>4</sup> which could be “interpreted as Western hegemony” as a way to approach the problems prioritised in the Western world (32). They would rather emphasise the “*institutional capacity* at the national and international levels to address problems of crime and violence” (33, own emphasis). Regarding SDG 17: “Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development”<sup>40</sup>, Haller et al. (2018) criticise the absence of bottom-up, participatory processes. This portends a power imbalance. They suggest the reformulation “*enabling the capacity of all interest groups* to address their views, needs and knowledge by being open to fusing old and new rules” (34, own emphasis). Furthermore “global partnership” does not imply the different types of partnerships which result from participatory processes.

In this context, Haller and Merten’s (2018) bottom-up approach of *constitutionality* is introduced to give an example of participation. At the Kafue Flats in Zambia, Haller and Merten (2018) provided a platform for meetings and exchange between local groups, as well as officers of the Department of Fisheries, in order to craft new by-laws. The main issue was that the fishery suffered from overfishing since the Department of Fisheries gave commercial fishers and outside traders access to the grounds. By including knowledge of local communities, the analysis of power hierarchies and accepting pre-existing institutions, it was possible to create new sustainable regulations. Having discussed power diversities, the participants of the project created new regulations for fishing. The whole

<sup>39</sup> THE 17 GOALS: United Nations. <<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>>. September 27th 2021.

<sup>40</sup> THE 17 GOALS: United Nations. <<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>>. September 27th 2021.

process, called constitutionality, “has facilitated the cooperation of heterogeneous (local) actors on fisheries management” (10). It gave stakeholders a “sense of ownership of the institution building process and later its implementation” (11). The new regulations were based on local knowledge and experiences. They integrated various interest groups by allowing participants to take part on an equal basis. Even though the project failed to be incorporated into a larger system, namely at the level of the district, it was a success. The local groups and the officers regained responsibility. Fair access to the fishery was thus made possible.

Georg von Schnurbein (2020) suggests SDG 17 as a “driver to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals” and pleads for strong partnerships (1). “While the sixteen goals before are directed towards concrete areas of action, SDG 17 serves as a convener and facilitator for all the other goals” (1). Despite the fact that collaboration was seen as crucial for the success of the SDGs, the number and quality of partnerships still remain critical (8). Von Schnurbein’s (2020) research collection offers a discussion of, and several promising approaches to, “how different combinations of partnerships should be embedded in order to achieve the targets of SDG 17” (xi). One of those studies is Enechi and Pattberg’s (2020) research into the participation of Nigerian stakeholders. They analysed the manner, the inclusiveness and the value of multi-stakeholder partnerships in Nigeria, and ascertained that participation deficits exist particularly in the Global South. They determine the important role of participation at the subnational and local levels, and argue for the need of “a deliberate policy strategy targeted at mobilising and enabling stakeholders at these levels to participate” (44).

Involving institutions of higher education to implement the SDGs is crucial for their achievement. SDG 17 in particular stresses the importance of revitalising global partnerships, in which academic networks of researchers and institutions are included. An Associate Professor of Development Studies at Nelson Mandela University in South Africa has dealt with the opportunities and difficulties of the North-South academic collaboration. Mago (2017) investigated whether the North-South collaboration approach improves knowledge transfer in an effective way, which factors of geopolitics affect it, and which possible challenges are faced by academics due to the SDGs. The author generally sees a particular benefit in the opportunity to transfer funds from North to South using the North-South collaboration, referring to an example in which a Tanzanian university benefited from monetary support from northern institutions and nations (Mago, 2017). The literature review of an effective North-South research collaboration is on the one hand promising, and brings the chance to narrow the academic research divide between the North and South through shared knowledge and resources (Mago, 2017). On the other hand, there are voices warning of an emerging imbalance of power due to geopolitical factors accompanying research collaborations between northern and southern institutions. The economic strength of the northern countries and the ability to transfer monetary and scientific resources to the southern countries in order to conduct research can lead to a “situation where Southern partners are viewed as ‘receivers’, while Northern partners are viewed as ‘givers’ in research collaboration arrangements” (Binka, 2005 cited by Mago, 2017: 166). Mago also describes another kind of limitation for southern academics, namely the unequal opportunities for different nations to be part of transnational research: “South Africa is the only southern African country with advanced research facilities” (Mago, 2017: 164). Consequently, only a minority of the African countries profit from funds nowadays. It would therefore be necessary to promote the establishment of research facilities in those countries (Mago, 2017: 164). Finally, he identifies specific challenges for collaborative research regarding the SDGs. He lists the following key aspects: “the need to embrace e-learning; the need to advance South–South collaboration; the need for democracy and good governance, and the advancement of regional co-operation, which is a precursor for research collaboration” (Mago, 2017: 171). His analysis shows that improved research collaboration can facilitate the realisation of the SDGs, and is beneficial for all actors, but only if risk factors such as power imbalances are considered and diminished.

Finally, Lempert (2017) criticises the way in which the SDGs were developed and defined. In his opinion, there is a lack of professional review of essential definitions of terms and concepts, based on professional standards and benchmarks. Lempert conducted a comparative analysis of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the SDGs, using three categories: 1) sustainable development, 2) poverty reduction, and 3) development. In doing so, the comparative categories were operationalised with professional and legal indicators from social and management sciences as well as international law. Based on the results of the analysis, the author concludes that the SDGs and MDGs differ only slightly in terms of content, ideology, and implementation approaches, and that both fail concerning the professional and legal indicators. Instead, large sums of money – managed by a small group of actors – are used to fulfil an agenda to encourage globalisation, urbanisation, and assimilation processes (Lempert, 2017: 118).

Specifically, Lempert criticises SDG 16 for mentioning “access to justice”, “transparency” and “accountability”<sup>41</sup>. These seem to apply especially to local actors, and they lack clearly described approaches to how they are to be achieved. For this reason, Lempert (2017) sees a potential danger in these aims, especially enabling international corporations to enforce top-down processes, and thus neglecting the rights and empowerment of individual citizens. He further points out that political and cultural equality, as well as federalism and cultural autonomy, are not mentioned, nor are the rights of indigenous people or communities. For these reasons, Lempert (2017) sees the promotion of globalisation and standardisation on a cultural and economic level in SDG 17, and that subsequently the sustainability of cultures and the traditional production are endangered. He also calls the reader’s attention to the incongruity between the idea of environment protection which is included in SDGs 12-15 and economic growth, which is promoted in SDGs 2, 8, 9, 10, 11 17.<sup>5</sup> According to Lempert (2017) a sense of a balance between sustainable consumption and production is not prioritised. This is mainly due to international actors, who are realising that “developing countries do not have to follow any of these protections and can focus on consumption and exploitation of resources (SDG 12), and noting that these goals for protection have no priority since the goals of resource exploitation are to be treated ‘as of equal weight’ (SDG 17) [...]” (Lempert, 2017: 123-124). Governments are also enabled to pursue SDGs selectively in reaction to and the given financial incentives without any moral or legal duty. In a further step of the analysis, Lempert (2017) compares the SDGs with the ideas of French colonialism in Southeast Asia. The author recognises a parallel between the concepts of “peace” and “justice” emphasised in SDG 16<sup>5</sup> with the idea of the forced peace-making and international control, which characterised French colonialism. This foregrounds the idea of hegemony, while empowerment in financial, cultural, and other aspects is missing. Analogous parallels are found in SDG 17, specifically regarding the promoted technology transfer<sup>5</sup>: “building technical schools and institutes, offering scholarship and work permits to France, to turn colonies into models of contemporary French production and consumption” and the promoted globalisation: “‘civilising’ the locals was all based on a concept of globalisation / French ‘civilising’ mission that promoted trade and assimilation, as do the MDGs and SDGs” (Lempert, 2017: 153).

Lempert (2017) concludes that the UN deviated strongly from an international legal consensus, and from scientific standards regarding development, sustainability, and poverty reduction, when drafting the SDGs. Instead, the new dogma of the SDGs encourages a “sustainable globalization-homogenization-industrialization-urbanization” (158). The names of the SDGs therefore do not seem to match their content: “They not only fail to target the problem of unsustainability but seem likely to make it worse” (158). Further, the wide flexibility of the nations when implementing the SDGs leads to a focus on their own economic and political interests, while the actual long-term sustainability and poverty reduction are missed. Finally, Lempert (2017) raises the question of why the UN needed to develop new goals when it already had sustainable and development-related approaches defined in their international treaties.

## Examples

This section illustrates the difficulties of SDGs 16 and 17 by reference to current examples. SDG 16 which “provides access to justice for all”, seems to be in conflict with many other SDGs. Menton et al. (2020) demonstrate this notion pertinently. We emphasise three main examples, beginning with the case study of the Tuxá in north-eastern Brazil in the 1980s. At this time, the Itaparica dam was built along the São Francisco River in Bahia. On the one hand the dam could be justified because it created hydroelectricity and supplied water for irrigation. Although at this time the SDGs did not yet exist, legitimisation for the construction of the dam would today be found in SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy), in SDG 6.5 (integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate) and in SDG 2 (zero hunger).<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, SDGs 3 (good health and well-being), 15 (life on land) and 16 (justice for all) were violated by the dam project, as 834 km<sup>2</sup> land was flooded, and thousands of families, including the Tuxá indigenous people were displaced and faced multiple injustices and human rights violations. “They were promised agricultural lands that never materialised, suffering in turn from cultural loss, mental anguish and health problems over the 3 decades which they have been in resettlement village” (Menton et al., 2020: 1627). The principal injustice, however, lies in the inequitable distribution of the benefits and costs of the dam: “While the benefits accrue to industries and large-scale farmers away from the river, the costs were borne by the Tuxá” (Menton et al., 2020: 1627). A similar injustice is briefly illustrated by three other case studies. One case involves the oil extraction in Ecuador since 1972 which leads to deforestation,

<sup>41</sup> THE 17 GOALS: United Nations. <<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>>. September 27th 2021.

<sup>42</sup> THE 17 GOALS: United Nations. <<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>>. September 27th 2021.

loss of biodiversity, pollution and human health hazards (Menton et al., 2020). Again it is the indigenous communities who are most heavily affected. According to census data, the Amazon region remains the poorest in the country (National Census Data 1990, 2001 and 2010, cited by Menton et al., 2020: 1632). Another case worth mentioning is that of the Bwindi Impenetrable National Park in Uganda (1991), which was established to protect mountain gorillas. The forest-dependent Batwa communities which lived there for over 4800 years, thereby lost their land and resources. “Many evicted Batwa never received compensation or alternative land” (Menton et al., 2020: 1630). The third case involves the wind farms in Oaxaca, Mexico (2019), as they indeed provided green energy and jobs. Nevertheless, they exacerbated the existing problems and inequalities of the indigenous people. Private companies owned the wind farms, controlled the area and prevented natives from their ways of life (Menton et al., 2020: 1629). Power imbalances and a lack of local bargaining forces become obvious in all the above incidents.

The second example demonstrates the conflict between SDG 16 and SDG 13 (take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts)<sup>43</sup> and is of a more general nature. Menton et al. (2020) criticise the inequitable distribution between contributors to and sufferers from climate change. Global warming is mainly caused by the rich countries, whereas the poorest areas of the world are affected, “especially Africa, where a rise in temperature, together with drought, has proved devastating for farming” (Menton et al.: 1632). Further damage results from the export of solid waste and toxic liquids. Multinational companies “operate in less-developed countries in ways they could never do at home” (Menton et al.: 1632). Consequently, Menton et al. (2020) believe that in SDG 13 polluters are not made accountable enough for their contamination, and the measures are insufficient and not mandatory. SDG 13 not speaking about limiting fossil-fuel extraction and production. This whole aspect results in another discrepancy, a contradiction to SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), as growth is hardly compatible with sustainability. The unequal distribution will persist because the Keeling curve, which depicts the increase in atmospheric carbon dioxide since 1958, will continue to rise with economic development.

These examples can be transferred to the difficulties faced with SDG 17: “Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development”.<sup>44</sup> As mentioned in the introduction, Haller et al. (2018) suggest specifying the revitalisation of the global partnership. They argue for including addressing the opinions, requirements, and knowledge of all interest groups. The implementation of such a right to a say, namely local bargaining power with states and companies, would directly lead to more equitability. If the indigenous communities could have participated in the projects of the dam, the oil extraction, the gorilla protection and the wind farms, completely new ideas and ways of coping with the resulting inconvenience may have resulted. These minorities may also have felt that they were being taken seriously, and were able to influence their own destiny. This attempt could have prevented or at least mitigated their suffering. This all demonstrates that the implementations of SDG 17 and 16 behave reciprocally. The participation processes which are promoted in SDG 17 need to be decolonised, and power hierarchies adjusted.

The third example regarding SDG 17 is offered by Franco and Abe (2020), who specifically conducted research about the theory and practices of accountability in the context of corporations. While examining the practical implementation of accountability, they examined companies from the Asia-Pacific region as case studies. They argue that accountability is essential to achieving SDG 17 – and especially its targets 17.16 and 17.17, which are concerned with multi-stakeholder partnerships and data, monitoring, and accountability. Considering that environmental protection is of great importance for the achievement of the SDGs, corporate accountability plays a central role, however, implementation in practice proves difficult. According to the authors, two main causes are responsible for this. First, companies have only limited capacities for external accountability, and secondly, there is a lack of government support to promote accountability in practice. As a result, there is a gap between sustainability mandates and sustainability practice. While the companies in the case study proactively adhered to the sustainability mandates, they were never required to fully account for their sustainability performance nor report on it. Franco and Abe (2020) therefore call for governments to engage in developing more effective regulatory frameworks to support companies in complying with international sustainability requirements, and in reporting on sustainability. In this way, and with the expanded capacity of companies, they can be held accountable for the impacts of their business, and thus take more responsibility for both external stakeholders and the environment in which they operate.

<sup>43</sup> THE 17 GOALS: United Nations. <<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>>. September 27th 2021.

<sup>44</sup> THE 17 GOALS: United Nations. <<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>>. September 27th 2021.

## Consequences: Elements of Green Anti-Politics

Referring to James Ferguson's Anti-Politics-Machine (1990) some elements of opacity or veiling can be identified in SDGs 16 and 17. As the examples in section three show, projects which violate SDGs 16 and 17 can be legitimised by other SDGs. Decisions and actions are often directive, without any consultation of the affected people. Good intentions may lie in the promotion of "inclusive societies" (SDG 16), "international cooperation" (SDG 16.a), "the rule of law [and] [...] equal access to justice for all" (SDG 16.3), as well as "global partnership" (SDG 17).<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, practice shows that such cooperation is often unequal or non-existent, and follows a certain power hierarchy. The aim is to "prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime" (SDG 16.a)<sup>9</sup> but when it comes to major projects of international or public interest, violations of the law concerning the local people are common, and even accepted by some. In some cases, indigenous communities even participate, although it is only implemented pro forma. For instance, during the wind farm project in Oaxaca "FPIC [free, prior and informed consent of indigenous people] and consultation processes were delayed and embedded within state-corporate power dynamics" (Menton et al., 2020: 1629). Powerful actors thus veil inequitable behaviour with legitimisation (by public interests), as well as through duplicitous participation processes. Instead of admitting that many communities live sustainably, and that we could use their knowledge in that area, such communities are often disrespected and marginalised. Halvorsen (2017) writes:

However, no mechanism exists to equal things out in a way that values or protects the lives of Amazonians or their environment. So, while real living alternatives to consumerist culture still exist, they tend to be portrayed either as fringe elements or as lost and vulnerable communities that need to be rescued and set on the path towards the kind of 'freedoms' enjoyed by high-end consumers. (23)

This devaluation of people who already live sustainably is in our opinion a form of veiling too.

Lempert's (2017) critical analysis regarding nature of the SDGs also sheds light on hidden motives and loopholes that could hinder their achievement, or make the situation even worse for some members of local communities. As described in the "Debates on the SDGs in the Literature" section, there is a risk due to the lack of accountability and liability of the various actors and a distinct flexibility in target prioritisation (Lempert, 2017). There is therefore a missing mandated priority for the environmental protection and preservation of cultural autonomy. Considering that SDG 16 does not mention indigenous people's rights, and SDG 17 promotes globalisation and technological transfer, "the right of indigenous peoples and other cultures to cultural protection of their production and consumption choices, within their resource bases" is threatened (Lempert, 2017: 135). In many aspects, protecting people is essential to sustainable development, especially when it comes to maintaining sustainability within specific ecosystems. In this sense, "green grabbing" is facilitated and worsens the situation, in particular for indigenous communities.

## Conclusions for further discussion

Conclusions drawn in the current debates in the literature mostly point in the same direction. They agree that participation is a desirable way to face injustice and to gain alternative knowledge. Consequent and successful implementations of the SDGs only become possible through participative processes with all interest groups. Menton et al. (2020) propose convivial conservation, when it comes to conflicts between justice for local people and the conservation of nature. Concerning environmental justice, they suggest an orientation towards "just sustainability" (1627). We interpret this notion as a pure form of sustainability, specifically sustainability without compromises. The furtherance of renewable energies, for example, is often at the expense of rural areas and their inhabitants. Concomitant with "just sustainability" is the proposed solution of "sustainable degrowth" which means to acknowledge the limits of global resources and to shift society's consumer behaviour downwards (Menton et al., 2020: 1632-1633). Halvorsen (2017) sees the exchange of knowledge between different interest groups and its integration in implementation processes as essential to sustainable living, as well as "*ethics*, based on a democratic polity and processes of popular participation" (16, emphasis in original). He emphasises the importance of moving away from an understanding of nature as a resource to be exploited "towards an understanding of how humanity and nature coexist" (27). Haller and Merten (2018) define the term "constitutionality" which stands for a bottom-up approach and leads to co-decisions considering plural perspectives, including local meaning and pre-existing institutions. Enechi and Pattberg's (2020) research shows that the key to achieving the goals lies in multi-stakeholder partnerships, and Mago's (2017) work lays out the opportunities and difficulties of expanded academic research collaborations, and defines key challenges that need to be addressed. He concludes that "North-South

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<sup>45</sup> THE 17 GOALS: United Nations. <<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>> September 27th 2021.

collaboration and partnerships will not be a ‘magic bullet’ for the achievement of the SDGs” (Mago, 2017: 179). Social anthropology could therefore particularly contribute with participatory field research to collect data on-site in northern, and in southern, (academic) institutes to investigate the key factors enhancing or constraining a functional collaboration which results in value for all parties. In this context it is important to address the southern countries’ lack of equal opportunity, to even participate in academic research collaborations. Social anthropological researchers could examine approaches which improve the motivation for southern countries to commit themselves to southern-southern collaborations, and weaken the cross-national competition among academic institutions for resources (Mago, 2017: 170). This would be helpful in order to understand how to establish an effective north-south partnership, as the UN-slogan aims to “Leave No One Behind”<sup>46</sup>. Lempert (2017) has taken a holistic approach to critically examining the SDGs. He showed that the SDGs were unprofessionally drafted, and points out that they do not fulfil scientific and international law standards. Instead, the SDGs seem to him like a stepping stone to processes such as globalisation, homogenisation, industrialisation, and urbanisation (Lempert 2017: 158). In this sense it would be helpful to develop an interdisciplinary framework with professional, scientific and international law-based definitions of the fundamental concepts, which are crucial for the SDGs. This could be used as a measurement to validate the SDGs and their targets, in order to point out discrepancies in a standardised manner. Lempert’s (2017) systematic and holistic approach could therefore serve as a role model. Finally, Enechi and Pattberg (2020) suggest further research to examine suitable platforms “for galvanizing and mobilizing participation” as well as ways “to increase participation and inclusiveness” (45).

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### 13. Conclusions

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We will first present a brief summary of the key points emerging from the essays on the SDGs before highlighting some common elements.

The discussion of *SDG 1 (No Poverty)* and *2 (Zero Hunger)* demonstrated that the underlying power structures driving increasing global inequality are not addressed by the SDGs and that the issue of 1% of the richest individuals and families on the planet controlling the largest amount of GDP is not mentioned at all (see also Haller et al., 2018). There are no goals concerning tax justice or a fair system of redistribution included in the SDGs, although the current global wealth is not the work of these few individuals. Instead, the UN selectively uses reference points to advance a good news narrative and the story that development via investment is the way forward. The authors conclude that the SDGs do not specify distinct areas of responsibility in a tangible and binding manner. Furthermore, participatory methods are underrepresented in the work of the UN. It was also shown how organisations such as the World Bank have an interest in demonstrating that the capitalist system is effective in eradicating hunger and poverty based on debatable quantitative measures, which hinders systemic transformation, but ‘leaving no one behind’ would necessitate a debate on the root causes of poverty and hunger and on who defines what poverty and hunger means. The SDGs are also used to push the myth of hunger due to a lack of technology for intensification and to local incapability, and there are no attempts to value local ecological knowledge and communal property regimes. Equally, there is also no critical engagement with the colonial and post-colonial past and with the undermining of local property rights for access to resources for food production and for building up resilience (see, for example, Haller, 2020, 2022) and in this sense both SDGs in their strategic use serve as an anti-politics machine regarding the classic ‘development’ issues without discussing the basis of these problems.

The section on *SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being)* showed how neoliberal values might be used to explain disparities in healthcare access and privatisation. When talking about long-term solutions, it is crucial to focus on local people in their socio-cultural contexts, addressing their specific needs, which also shape the local understanding of definitions of health issues and possible solutions. Without such knowledge, it is difficult to develop any positive means for SDG 3, and this also requires a bottom-up institution-building approach, in which it is crucial that the community members develop a sense of ownership in the process of building new institutions related to public health. However, SDG 3 does not address this, nor does the implementation and development of national and international policies. Conversely, the examples discussed show that SDGs focus instead on neoliberal health policies rather than collective participatory approaches to healthcare. This, as the examples show, leads to the defunding of the public sector for the gain of the private health-care sector. One could therefore argue that SDG 3 involves the danger of undermining community-driven public health-care strategies. This also leads to out-of-the-pocket payments, which are devastating for households in low-income countries. The Covid-19 pandemic can also be seen as a wake-up call for the Global North in this regard. In order to address the weaknesses and dangers of SDG 3, it is necessary to strengthen public health financing systems, which is the co-responsibility of governments in combination with bottom-up initiatives.

Discussions and examples related to *SDGs 4 (Quality Education)* and *5 (Gender Equality)* show that the two are interconnected and should not be addressed separately. Unfortunately, this is not done either in theory or in practice at the moment. While the paper states that all SDGs must be much more interconnected, the issue of quality education is only addressed with a Western bias on education, and there is no reference to local or gendered knowledge. At the same time, access to different systems of knowledge is key to gender issues, which is not addressed either, but it is, as the literature shows, is a key element in gender equity. The interconnection reflected in the text on the two SDGs refers to the fact that access to formal and local education is not equally distributed between men and women and that formal education requiring the involvement of cash is problematic in many social contexts of, for example, early marriage. At the same time, the cited example of the impact of Covid-19 on gender indicated that care work is massively increasing for all women – irrespective of where they are – while simultaneously pressure to be active in the formal system is increasing. This is shown in the second example in the text, indicating that girls are often faced with difficulties in accessing formal so-called higher education, even in Global North cases, such as Switzerland. Socially constructed gendered jobs and education are not addressed in the SDGs discussed because they are not related to the other SDGs (such as 1, 2 and 8, for example). The contribution also indicated that there is an anti-politics machine at work with regard to gender as with other SDGs. In



practice, the separation of SDGs 4 and 5 and the lack of a connection with other SDGs lets governments tackle issues in isolation and also helps them to argue that they are doing their best while concealing power-related underlying problems. As Covid-19 and the issue of higher education in Switzerland shows even here, SDGs 4 and 5 will not be used to change the root causes of sustainability issues, but rather they exclusively analyse an isolated problem, which might exacerbate pressing gender and education issues. What the chapter omits to discuss, however, are issues of intersectionality and diversity (LGBTIQ+ issues).

*SDGs 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) and 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy)* are closely related to the discourse regarding the development of infrastructure, as the chapter indicates, and this requires funding, which is often labelled as needing to be done in ‘partnership’. As the cases show, however, this is done, as Carvalho and Sparatu (2018) put it, ‘in silos’ and not in the context of a sensitive partnership related to planning and policy processes, especially regarding issues of resource allocation. Again, as with other SDGs, a neoliberal way of thinking has taken the lead here, and this means that many actors are left out in the process of water and sanitation provision and with green energy provision. The problem of unequal access to water and sanitation is also exacerbated by climate change issues that are not addressed by the SDGs. These also do not pay attention to local knowledge and property rights to water (for example, common property institutions managing water access). The goals should also be more flexible and adapted to regional and national needs, with more participatory planning and a bottom-up approach to the policy-making and decision-making process. Furthermore, and similar to the previous paper, it becomes evident that SDGs 6 and 7 need to be connected, as they are intertwined. This is not reflected in the respective SDGs, however, and the different intersectional power options to gain access to the water and energy nexus are not reflected. On the contrary, the sectoral focus might justify leaving intersectional issues out of the implementation process. This process was also far from being inclusive, especially in energy planning processes. Having green energy does not mean that participatory planning took place, and it also often fails to address the questions concerning who has the power to define what clean and green energy means and how related projects are implemented and financed, as the cases in Kenya and Norway (wind energy) show. This issue furthermore relates to the neoliberalisation of such processes, as illustrated in the case of the privatised *Rand Water Project* in South Africa, which is more of a hindrance to fair access to water and energy than an opportunity for local access to water, but at the same time the SDGs provided the option to legitimise such privatisation as sustainable and just. Again, the issue of an anti-politics machine emerges.

*SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure)* both deal with a kind of green anti-politics machine, which claims that central root elements of the environmental crisis – economic growth and industrial production, technological innovations and extension of infrastructure often installed to increase gains in the capitalist system – can be given green goals and do not need some more political changes to stop the root causes of many environmental issues, resulting in accumulating gains and also often externalising environmental costs. Both goals deal with the most powerful private sectors and provide opportunities to hide exploitation and degradation processes. While SDG 8 deals with the issue of decoupling green growth from issues of degradation and exploitation often via technical innovations, leading to higher economic productivity (and thus poverty reduction) and at the same time to more efficient, sustainable resource use, SDG 9 explores one of the most central and powerful sectors that controls many of the SDG-related processes. SDG 8 claims that exploitative work can be abandoned only if there are investments in green energy without discussions on how the labour conditions do not necessarily change in neoliberal and green technology working conditions. So, the coupling hypothesis is in itself an anti-politics machine myth which tries to hide the state of dependence that workers are in despite working in green sectors. SDG 9 then conceals that this is the area that attracts the most interest among the corporate private sectors as it is at the heart of large investments.

The previous chapter related well to *SDGs 10 (Reduced Inequality) and 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities)*, in which the prerequisite for reducing inequalities and urban life is related to transport and urban life. SDG 10 pushed the slogan of leaving no one behind, but the chapter indicates what is mainly left behind: the trade-offs between economic growth and inequalities are not addressed. While some regulation of the market system is required, it remains unclear who will drive this and who will do the monitoring and sanctioning. Even more problematic is that more regulations will exclude smaller producers. The chapter criticises the strategy of measuring and developing indicators which are not suitable for detecting marginalisation because this cannot be measured by the indicators adopted. There is no class or intersectionality indicator, which would show disparities or could be adapted to different local disparity conditions. The chapter thus concludes that without disaggregated data, properly monitored and analysed, Goal 10 will fail to leave no one behind as it will be unable to show where ethnic and racial populations are being left behind (Dawson, 2018). Similarly, the aim to make urban development more sustainable lacks data and specific contextualisation, as power asymmetries within and between urban

communities are not tackled. The chapter claims that more bottom-up processes are needed in each urban context (see also Haller & Weissman, in press), but SDG 11 instead advocates a top-down green process. As Förster and Amman (2018) show, African cities represent huge diversity, fluctuating between chaos and creativity, and are hardly to be understood or captured by Western urban images of smart city development. It also seems – as in other SDG contexts – that these goals cannot be analysed and adopted separately and that local participation would be key. This is against the state-driven approach on the one hand, however, and the paradoxically neoliberal ambitions on the other hand that the SDGs and its applicants endorse and which are apparent in many of the goals. Chapter 9 then tackles the two great ecological elephants in the room: *SDGs 12 (Responsible Consumption)* and *13 (Climate Change)* are at the basis of the above-mentioned contradiction: while they are major drivers of a systematic nature and related to the economic growth paradigm, individuals should save the planet by individual consumption actions that should also be shaped to solve the climate crisis. SDG 12 mainly targets talk about behavioural changes at an individual level while containing vague formulations and missing specific steps to follow at national level. The critical literature includes terms such as ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ sustainable approaches: weak approaches deal with sustaining economic growth using efficient consumption and production techniques (via technological improvements, product design, decoupling of energy use and targeted consumer-behaviour change), while strong approaches advocate for a paradigm change in consumption. The ‘patronisation of the Global North over the Global South’ and the SDGs evocate a kind of Orientalism of different stages of development. On the one hand, the rebound effect and the question of distributional justice are two important points in this critique. On the other hand, as the chapter also shows, climate change issues can be tackled if natural science and local ecological knowledge are able to be combined. However, the SDGs do not address this possibility. Beside this rather negative example, the authors use an encouraging example to show how to mitigate the negative impacts of climate change with cooperation between modern science and traditional knowledge (combining weather forecast techniques). Social anthropology, according to the authors, could provide research tools and local insights that show specific power constellations, but as this is not addressed in the SDGs, they instead serve as a top-down norm framing the use of states and companies.

Specifically, this can also be shown in *SDGs 14 (Life on Water)* and *15 (Life on Land)*. SDG 14 deals with protection measures for life under water, especially targeting fisheries. The labels specifically analysed, however, show that often large-scale fisheries are receiving certifications and labels and can pretend to be sustainable. They serve a market with very weak control measures, while local fisheries do not have access to labelling and are also pushed aside by the bigger fishing industries (see debate on MSC label). The ‘Agreement on Port State Measures (PSMA)’ is another case in point: it was set up to sanction illegal fisheries so that they cannot dock at a port. The transaction costs of monitoring and sanctioning are very high and aren’t feasible for ports in the Global South, thus making them attractive for fraud, which then paradoxically undermines local fisheries. SDG 14 may also cause green grabbing by implementing coastal protected areas from which local fishery people are expelled. Similarly, states creating a fish quota often exclude local users, as the example of Sámi fishers in Sápmi on the Norwegian side shows. Such strategies mainly fail to recognise that these areas are the common property of local groups and are subject to clear rules and regulations developed locally. The same is true of what is discussed in Chapter 15, which focuses on the biological diversity at the centre of the SDGs regarding the conservation of life on land. The chapter shows how the notion of a ‘pure nature’ to be protected by the nation states does not recognise that local people created cultural landscape ecosystems with their biodiversity over millennia everywhere on the planet and that these were mostly common property before colonialisation and post-colonial state control. Cases from Zambia and Canada illustrate that a local understanding of an integrative use of territories as commons with different animistic and totemistic ontologies of communing with all living beings and a well-coordinated set of common property institutions (locally developed rules of when and how to use fisheries, wildlife, pasture, forestry and water), is not only not recognised by the SDGs, but, even worse, the SDGs involve the risk of giving states additional anti-politics-machine power to green grab these commons as elaborated above.

Finally, the last chapter on *SDGs 16 (Peace)* and *17 (Participation)* summarises the major issue that peacekeeping and participation are defined top-down and act as an anti-politics machine insofar as they call for peace and fair participation, but that in specific cases, as illustrated in the chapter, such as a wind park in Mexico and other similar projects, the directives are top-down and can be used by states rather than by local people. The issue of a peaceful implementation of such projects in a participatory way based on free and prior informed consent usually seems to be no more than lip service and is often not controllable. As Halvorsen (2017) argues, there are very few mechanisms protecting indigenous people in the Amazon when local governments want access to their resources. Local land rights are not valid and are not an integral common property, including what is under and above the land. Only integral common property rights can guarantee that there will be no danger that these resources will be

grabbed soon as they are of interest to powerful actors in the capitalist system. There are also many loopholes in both SDGs: 16 does not mention indigenous legal institutional laws, and SDG 17 still promotes a top-down idea of participation in order to participate in the economic system controlled by the state and private sector. The livelihoods of local people are thus also threatened by making use of the SDGs (Lempert, 2017). The alternative would be to allow for a real participatory process whereby local actors are able to craft local institutions by also being aware of historically driven internal asymmetries of power and incorporating local common property institutions (see constitutionality approach, Haller et al., 2016; see also Haller & Merten, 2018 for a specific example). Regarding the question of the extent to which local knowledge, participation and historical power relations are present in the SDGs, the following key issues can be identified:

- 1) Overall, it has been shown that local agency is not considered in the SDGs. The SDGs focus strongly on states, companies and NGOs but not on local-level actors, their knowledge and resource rights. What makes this problem even worse, or carries it on almost ad absurdum, is the fact that responsibility for problems does not lie with the mentioned powerful actors, such as states, companies and NGOs. Rather, the question of root causes remains completely untouched. The formulation of the SDGs instead presents problems and goals for solving them as an individual problem that ‘everyone’ can solve themselves. This does not consider the complex interconnections between capitalism, environmental problems and property rights.
- 2) With regard to the implementation of projects in connection with the SDGs, the case studies presented in the working paper mostly show the same picture: true local participation is not involved in most cases but must always be fought for by local actors. One of the reasons for this is that local people do not even exist in the SDGs. The working paper *Paradigm Change or Old Wine in New Bottles? Debating and Reformulating SDGs – An Experiment* demonstrated that a reformulation of the goals that integrate this understanding of local actors and their scope of action in the development of solutions and innovations would be quite possible.
- 3) A colonial framing is apparent in the SDGs. This becomes particularly clear in SDGs 1 and 2: strategies to solve problems of poverty and hunger rely mainly on financing from investment and foreign aid. Colonial entanglements and the resulting responsibility of the Global North to actually shift investment flows are not represented. This is despite the fact that for some time now there have been voices offering alternative solutions, such as a new politics of distribution as a rightful share (Ferguson, 2015).
- 4) A Western view is also visible in relation to ‘nature’ and land management. In the SDGs, only the Western, post-industrial ontology of what we call nature is present. Understandings that are present in many cultures all over the world, and which instead perceive the environment as a co-world, are not represented. This reproduces an understanding of nature that sees the environment primarily as a resource to be either exploited or completely shielded from humans in order to be protected. This is a questionable approach because in reality nature is never untouched but embedded as a cultural landscape in historical and contemporary contexts. The understanding of nature as a co-world, as present in many local and indigenous societies, could incorporate these realities from the beginning. We believe that this would lead to a more socially just and also ecologically ‘sustainable’ implementation of projects.
- 5) A particularly important point is the total absence of recognition of common property rights. This idea is completely excluded from all SDGs, and it shows how difficult it is for countries to recognise a property relationship other than private and state ownership, as this seems to threaten state sovereignty. As a result, exclusion and local claims to resources and land rights can be better ignored as well as the central importance of undermining local livelihoods and resilience capacities, which are part of the extensive varieties of local common property institutions (see Haller, 2022).
- 6) Even if the ‘participatory’ involvement of the local population should often be integrated in projects, numerous examples show that the real profits and benefits ultimately do not remain with the local population. This means that the local population is not necessarily interested in participating in such projects. This is where the constitutionality approach comes in (see Haller et al., 2016), which considers the importance of involving the local population at the very beginning of the conception of new institutions.
- 7) Regarding gender equity and diversity, it is important to state that no intersectional approaches have been discussed in the SDGs so far. The working paper has only mentioned these in a few places. Further work is needed on this issue and how the SDGs affect this debate.
- 8) Further conceptualisation and strategic use: the cases discussed in the working paper show a recurrent pattern, which ignores the following issues: root causes of power asymmetries, local agencies, knowledge

and bottom-up participation, non-Western framings and ontologies regarding cultural landscapes and common property institutions, colonial and post-colonial impacts on resource use, ownership and governance as well as tenure change, issues of critical reflections on modernities and intersectionality. In addition, the cases and examples show that SDGs are not used in practice to address challenges in a participatory manner but rather in a top-down manner (SDGs 1–5) and also lead to the justification of grabbing processes (6–15), ignoring a broader dialogue between powerful state and companies as well as NGOs and international actors on the one side and the ‘rest of humankind’, so to speak, on the other side (see also Larsen et al., 2022).

Overall, the discussion of the literature has shown that Ferguson's anti-politics machine is present in many cases. This increases the risk that the SDGs will not only be very limited in their effectiveness in terms of the desired transformation towards a more sustainable world but that their side effects will reinforce social inequalities, colonial power relations and environmental degradation.

Further questions, however, to be discussed, which are also in line with the critical literature on land and commons grabbing as not a tragedy of the grabbed commons (analogous to the commons grabbing debate in Gerber & Haller, 2021) but rather a drama, are which local reactions are triggered and what are the strategies used in local responses. Similarly, there is a need to research if, when and how local communities make strategic use of the SDGs in the sense of sneaking into the system and using them for their own interest. In Switzerland, local commoners and researchers are discussing to whose attention to bring the issue of the importance of the commons for the SDGs and whether to have the government declare that the commoners (who own 1/3 of all alpine pastures and forests in commons) should co-decide on the implementation of the SDGs at the Swiss state level (for example related to SDGs 6 (*Water*), 7 (*Clean Energy*), 9 (*Infrastructure*), 12 (*Production*), 13 (*Climate*), 14 (*Life in Water*), 15 (*Life on Land*) and 17 (*Participation*); see Haller et al., 2021). Such an approach could give some hope for other commoners worldwide.

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