Policy coherence for sustainable development (at global level)

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Since the beginning of the 2000s, scholars of global politics have recognized that international problems could not be studied in isolation from one another anymore, contrary to what the international regime approach of the 1990s was supposing. Rather, concepts such as 'institutional interactions', 'regime complexes', 'global governance architectures' and more recently 'complex systems' and 'adaptive systems' have been coined to describe the cross-cutting institutional arrangements that form the structures that manage (or at least try to) global governance (Day 2024). These arrangements are made of many different international institutions such as international organizations, international treaties and international partnerships across several international regimes on a wide diversity of problems. Since these structures are formed by many different elements, the issue of their coherence has been at the centre of attention in global politics since the 2010s (Morin and Orsini 2013).

Adopted in this context, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were meant to enhance policy coherence at the global level. Firstly, by including more topics compared to the Millennium Development Goals, they took a much more comprehensive approach to sustainable development. Their key overarching principles of people, prosperity, planet, partnership and peace (5 Ps) were already integrating the different goals into a coherent agenda of integral development (de Jong and Vijge 2021). Secondly, the SDGs not only detailed several targets within each goal, but the precise analysis of such targets reveals the existence of a network of targets across the goals, with specific targets being in practice related to several goals (Le Blanc 2015). Finally, to be sure that the goals would be understood in a coherent manner, policy coherence has been explicitly mentioned three times in the adopted text, with one specific target, Target 17.14, precisely entitled 'Enhance policy coherence for sustainable development'. These targets are key to avoiding the cherry-picking of objectives within the goals and are meant to consider them as *Nexus Governance*.

Actual coherence of the goals at the global level is confirmed by discourse analyses: compared to the Millennium Development Goals, the SDGs produce a much more coherent discourse with inclusion, human rights and action beyond economic priorities as important moves forward (de Jong and Vijge 2021). Coherence of the goals has also been confirmed by scholars using *Network Analysis* as a research tool, despite a few gaps (Le Blanc 2015). To the contrary, researchers who looked at their practical implementation with the measurement of targets' progression with relevant data are less convinced by their coherence as trade-offs have appeared across the goals (Coscieme et al. 2021, 1). In particular, environmental goals are found to be less coherent than social and economic goals as their targets are less clear and interrelated. Orchestration seems like an important strategy to correct these drawbacks.

More importantly, scholars recognize that 'policy coherence for development is not merely a technical tool, but rather a normative and political construct' (de Jong and Vijge 2021, 2). The Policy Coherence for Development agenda dating back to the

1990s and embraced by many countries which negotiated the goals, including member countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and the European Union, is not free from power relations and tends to reiterate a domination of the North on the South (Zeigermann 2018). Rather, a variety of perspectives about policy coherence for development should be used when implementing the goals (Tosun and Leininger 2017). Studies of the normative coherence of the goals at the global level are also lacking, while there is a risk that the SDGs still correspond to the global norm of neoliberalism, giving upfront importance to economic development at the detriment of alternative models of human rights or gender equality (De Jong and Vijge 2021).

While they were precisely designed to improve policy coherence at the global level, the promise of the SDGs for such coherence should therefore stay at the centre of attention for academic and civil society.

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Political impact and steering effects

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Ever since the United Nations General Assembly adopted the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), there have been questions about their political impact on national and global governance, especially in addressing critical issues such as poverty, social justice and environmental protection. A 2022 meta-analysis of over 3,000 studies aimed to assess the SDGs' political impact and identified three types of possible effects: discursive, normative and institutional (Biermann et al. 2022a, 2022b). Discursive effects involve shifts in global and national debates, while normative effects reflect the adoption of policies inspired by the SDGs. Institutional effects involve the creation or restructuring of