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Orchestration: an instrument for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals

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Orchestration: An Instrument for Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals

Summary

From 25 to 27 September 2015, governments will meet at the United Nations (UN) in New York to adopt the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As the list of 17 goals is now on the table, attention is shifting to the next phase of the new framework for global development: implementation. The UN Conference on Financing for Development in Addis Ababa in July 2015 has already laid some groundwork, but challenges remain.

One major challenge will be to meet the growing demand for cooperation arising from the transformative and universal nature of the SDGs. The economic, social and environmental sustainability goals will not be limited to developing countries but apply to all countries in the world. In addition to national and local implementation, international cooperation must play a far-reaching role. This is especially true for goals such as a stable climate, sustainable consumption and production patterns, global health and security that can only be achieved through coordinated cross-border or global action.

At the same time, the conditions for global collective action have changed substantially. The international system is now more multipolar due to the rise of emerging powers. Important multilateral processes are stalled or advance only slowly. In contrast, transnational networks have become a central feature of global governance and allow actors from civil society, the private sector, ministries, agencies, cities and municipalities to assume a global role. Successful examples such as the C40 Cities, the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative and the Global Vaccine Alliance (Gavi) demonstrate that such networks can make important contributions to global sustainable development.

These networks do not always emerge on their own and must overcome obstacles to cooperation. In various areas of sustainable development, such as environmental, health and development policy, approaches to foster global networks already exist under the catchword "orchestration". Yet these efforts are still very piecemeal. Governments and international organisations should develop orchestration more systematically into an integral part of the instruments used to achieve the SDGs.

An orchestration instrument for the SDGs would initiate, support and shape global networks. In addition, the instrument could specifically promote networks that integrate actors from middle-income countries into new cooperation initiatives for global public goods. The instrument would have two different objectives: firstly, mobilising contributions to global sustainable development (financing, sharing and co-creation of knowledge, standard setting, etc.) and, secondly, improving conditions for international cooperation as a whole (e.g. by reducing fragmentation or improving linkages between domestic and global policy processes).

Government departments and international organisations from different policy areas could have a role in managing orchestration for the SDGs. In principle, development cooperation actors are in a position to play a leading role in getting such an instrument up and running. They have a number of relevant assets on which they can draw as orchestrators (financial resources, operational capacity, etc.). The orchestration of global networks might, however, stretch the existing limits of bi- and multilateral development cooperation (e.g. eligibility for official development assistance, the need to use certain implementation mechanisms).

A new agenda for global development – addressing gaps in implementation

At the end of September 2015, governments will adopt the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the United Nations (UN) in New York. As the summit draws nearer, the question of implementation has been receiving increasing attention, not least at the UN Conference on Financing for Development in Addis Ababa in July 2015.

Given the transformative and universal nature of the SDGs, implementation will be highly demanding in terms of required collective action at all levels. The goals do not only refer to problems in developing countries. They will encompass aspects of economic, social and environmental sustainability relevant for all countries, such as the reduction of inequality and access to energy. In addition to national and local implementation in all countries, international cooperation must play its part to the full. This applies especially to those goals that relate to global public goods (e.g. a stable climate, clean oceans, and global health) and therefore require, by definition, cross-border solutions.

Development cooperation has been at the heart of international efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Under this framework, developing countries were responsible for achieving goals specifically designed for them, supported by official development assistance (ODA) from the donors of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee. This type of external support will continue to be relevant for the SDGs, particularly in poor and fragile countries. Moreover, development co-operation is already contributing to global public goods by providing financial resources and strengthening capacities at the level of partner countries (e.g. combating communicable diseases and providing climate finance).

Implementing the new goals will require combined efforts and contributions from all areas of international co-operation. This type of comprehensive "global partnership" was relatively weak under MDG8 and must become stronger for the SDGs to succeed. The need for collective action has continued to grow for several, interrelated reasons:

- Global policy interdependence has increased: As a result of globalisation, the impact of most domestic policies no longer remains confined within national borders. Thus domestic policy decisions can potentially have global repercussions (e.g. for financial stability, energy supply, and health). Conversely, global issues penetrate deeper into societies (e.g. social and environmental standards in trade policy). This interdependence is vulnerable to stalemate.
- International cooperation involves a growing number of diverse actors: The international system has become more multipolar due to the rise of emerging powers. Actors from civil society, academia and the private sector as well as national and local public actors (ministries, public authorities, cities, etc.) are also involved. The

foundations of cooperation among these diverse actors, such as trust and a common culture of cooperation, are often not yet fully developed.

- International institutions are in need of reform: Existing institutions tend to reflect the balance of power and the problems at the time of their creation. Progress in reforming the multilateral system is slow or deadlocked (e.g. in trade and climate governance). As a result, co-operation initiatives have formed outside the established multilateral system (e.g. the New Development Bank of the BRICS countries, or negotiations over mega-regional trade agreements).
- International cooperation is fragmented: The proliferation of globally relevant policy areas and cooperation initiatives has increased the density and complexity of international cooperation. Global issues cannot be dealt with in isolation and influence each other. At the same time, coherent and integrated approaches to cooperation across sectors and policies are lacking.

New instruments are needed for the SDGs in order to promote global collective action among all relevant actors and areas of international cooperation under these conditions. In various fields of sustainable development, such as climate, environmental, health and development policy, such approaches already exist under the catchword "orchestration". These should be developed more systematically into an instrument that can support the implementation of the SDGs.

An orchestration instrument for the SDGs

Orchestration is a mode of governance by which an "orchestrator" enables other actors (the "intermediaries") to co-operate and achieve common goals. The orchestrator has no direct control over the intermediaries but exerts influence through facilitative measures. The Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) provides a typical example of orchestration (Box 1).

Box 1: The UN Environment Programme (UNEP) as orchestrator of the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI)

UNEP supported the formation of the GRI in 1997. The initiative functions as a network of actors from civil society, the private sector, public authorities and international organisations. As an intermediary, the network has developed guidelines for sustainability reports to be applied by companies, non-governmental and public organisations. UNEP chaired the GRI's planning committee and strengthened the acceptance of the guidelines in the start-up phase. UNEP also provided financial support.

Table 1 shows what an orchestration instrument for the SDGs could look like. In this model, the governments adopting the SDGs, and their international organisations (e.g. the UN system), are the orchestrators. (Sub-)state and non-state actors as well as their global networks are the intermediaries.

Depending on the actors involved, these networks can be, e.g. multi-stakeholder networks including civil society and the private sector, transnational public-private partnerships, transgovernmental networks among public authorities or city networks. Orchestration does not have to be limited to such networks alone, but this focus is relevant for two reasons:

Firstly, these networks have been one of the most dynamic areas of global governance, standing in stark contrast to the gridlock of the multilateral system. Global networks have made important contributions to global public goods. Examples of well-known networks are the C40 Cities in climate governance, the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative in the setting of standards for resource extraction, and the Global Vaccine Alliance (Gavi) in the field of health policy.

Global networks can emerge without orchestration. Yet problems of collective action often make it difficult to create them or limit their effectiveness. Governments and international organisations can help networks overcome these problems. For instance, they can bear start-up costs and convene the relevant actors. They can reduce transaction costs by setting up/or consolidating administrative structures such as secretariats. They can also provide expertise and finance pilot projects. In this way, orchestration can maximise the contribution of networks to global sustainable development in the form of financing, knowledge or standards.

Secondly, orchestrating global networks can improve the framework conditions of international cooperation as a whole. Networks already accommodate some of the changes in the global context mentioned above. They are open to diverse actors and can lay important foundations to build trust and a common culture of cooperation. Moreover, networks are positioned at the interface between domestic and global processes and improve the linkages between the two levels.

On the other hand, global networks sometimes add to problems such as fragmentation. Governments and international organisations can use orchestration to reduce or coordinate fragmentation, for instance, by strengthening the legitimacy of certain networks (as participants, through political endorsement or legal recognition). In this respect, an orchestration instrument for the SDGs should not consider the effectiveness of individual networks in isolation. Positive repercussions for established international institutions, such as impetus for reform, should also be intended results.

A possible add on: network building with middle-income countries

Orchestration could also be used to support middle-income countries in managing their growing responsibility for global challenges. Networks dealing with the great variety of global issues contained in the SDGs have not necessarily emerged from existing relationships in foreign policy or development cooperation. Therefore, orchestration could foster new networks with a broad range of actors beyond formal bi- and multilateral relations.

Table 1: What might an orchestration instrument for the SDGs look like?

Orchestrators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • governments • international organisations
Intermediaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (sub-)state and non-state actors (ministries, public authorities, civil society, cities, private sector, etc.) • their networks (private multi-stakeholder networks, transnational public-private partnerships, trans-governmental networks, etc.)
Facilitative measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • initiating, supporting and shaping networks by providing financial resources, administrative structures, expertise, recognition, etc.
Intended results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • contributions to global sustainable development (financing, knowledge, standard setting and compliance monitoring, etc.) • improved conditions for international cooperation (building trust and a common culture of cooperation among heterogeneous actors, linking national and global policy processes, providing impetus for the reform of international institutions, reducing and/or coordinating fragmentation)
Source: authors	

Such networks are relevant with regard to all countries independently of their income level. However, middle-income countries deserve particular attention. On the one hand, network structures in various policy areas are more widespread among wealthier countries, such as the OECD member states. On the other hand, the need for new co-operation approaches to deal with global issues is more pressing with regard to middle-income countries than poorer ones. In many cases, development cooperation is being phased out, while other policy areas are not yet systematically integrating middle-income countries into global action.

Some donors are replacing their bilateral programmes in middle-income countries with new cooperation formats. In its Multiannual Financial Framework 2014–2020, the European Union has introduced a partnership instrument to strengthen cooperation with middle-income countries on topics such as climate change, environmental protection and energy security. The British Department for International Development (DFID) is also developing new partnership programmes with middle-income countries that involve the promotion of networks with ministries and other public authorities. These programmes aim, for instance, to increase China's contribution to global health governance and to support actors within the Indonesian government who are

committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Used in this way, orchestration can foster bilateral networks in addition to networks with a global reach.

Similarly, networks with actors from civil society and academia could be supported in middle-income countries. One example of this is the China International Development Research Network (CIDRN), which is financed largely by DFID. This network of Chinese research institutions advises the Chinese government on its cooperation with developing countries.

Orchestration and the transformation of development cooperation

The demand for orchestration will continue to grow in light of the SDGs. The orchestration instrument presented here is not an entirely new approach and can build on previous experiences in various areas of sustainable development. Multilateral organisations such as UNEP, the World Health Organization and the World Bank have been active as orchestrators for some time. The same is true for some governments. The German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), for instance, has been supporting global networks under its budget title "International Cooperation with Regions for Sustainable Development" (IZR), including the UN-initiated Sustainable Development Solutions Network.

Yet current approaches to orchestration are still very piecemeal and not based on a comprehensive strategy. Therefore, governments and international organisations need to develop orchestration more systematically as an integral part of the instruments used to implement the SDGs. The orchestra-

tion instrument proposed here can serve as a basic outline. Moreover, the question arises whether and how an increase in the number of orchestration activities should be coordinated. One possible institution to assume such a role would be the UN's High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

The analysis of previous experiences with orchestration has shown under which conditions governments and international organisations can be successful orchestrators. While much depends on the issue area in question, strengthening an organisational culture that is open to innovative forms of cooperation with a diverse range of actors seems to be crucial.

Making orchestration work for the SDGs is a task for all areas of sustainable development. Development cooperation actors could assume a leading role. They have a number of assets on which they can draw as orchestrators: financial resources, operational capacities, a strong record as focal points for development issues, previous experience with orchestration, and their presence in many countries.

At the same time, such an orchestration instrument might also have to go beyond the current limits of bi- and multilateral development cooperation (e.g. ODA-eligibility, the need to use certain implementation mechanisms). In the long run, the role of development cooperation in the orchestration of global networks depends on the direction in which the policy area is going: towards a specialisation on the poorest and most fragile countries, or towards integration into a broader framework of international cooperation for global sustainable development.

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