

A FOREIGN POLICY PERSPECTIVE ON THE SDGS

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The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are unprecedented in their scope and ambition for human progress. By removing or mitigating many grievances that fuel conflict, progress on the SDGs can be a critical lever to build and sustain peace and stability worldwide. The transformative change they aim to bring about can also affect geopolitical dynamics, balances of power and interdependencies. Thus, progress on the SDGs has significant implications for foreign policy. In brief, core foreign policy priorities depend on SDG progress, and foreign policy makers also have a critical role to play in supporting implementation and managing the challenges associated with transformational change. Despite these critical stakes, the foreign policy dimensions of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda have not been sufficiently broached by foreign ministries to date.

This paper maps out the relevance of the SDGs to foreign policy. Taking the six SDGs under review at the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) in 2018 as entry points, we analyse how progress on specific SDGs may support or undermine progress on foreign policy priorities, especially **SDG 16: peace**.

For each SDG under review, we provide a detailed analysis under the annex section. We conclude with three steps for action through which foreign policy can better anticipate and steer the geopolitical implications of a sustainable transformation to minimise the risks and maximise the positive impacts on sustainable development.



The set of goals to be reviewed at the HLPF 2018: SDG 6 (water), SDG 7 (energy), SDG 15 (life on land), SDG 11 (cities), SDG 12 (consumption and production), and SDG 17 (partnerships).

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1. Introduction: The Foreign Policy Relevance of the SDGs

Agenda 2030 and its 17 SDGs are the first comprehensive, global, and “silo-breaking” agenda for achieving the foundations of resilience and sustainable peace. At a time of increasing nationalism and populism, the SDGs are important symbols of the value of the transformational capabilities of multilateralism. It is a transformative agenda, beyond incremental change, and importantly, it is a *global* agenda – beyond development policy. This agenda resonates with fundamental foreign policy objectives such as improving international security, stability, and prosperity. In other words, because not achieving the SDGs implies severe risks for these priorities, foreign policy makers have high stakes in the SDGs’ outcomes.

The SDGs also have a significant impact on geopolitics. For example, if the world is to transition to decarbonised economies as envisaged under SDG 7 on energy, this will alter the power dynamics between oil producing and oil importing economies. Also, efforts to pursue SDG 6 on sustainable water for all will affect and be affected by highly strained relations between Iraq, Turkey, and Iran over the sharing of waters of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers.

The SDGs play an essential part in achieving foreign policy goals such as stability and peace. For example, achieving stability in countries affected by conflict and extremism requires livelihood security and strengthened governance – which are the core dimensions of sustainable development. However, it is in these very states that progress on the SDGs is the weakest¹. There are many reasons for this: the challenges of operating in fragile contexts, the risk-averse and results-oriented nature of development funding and the concern about poor returns on development investments are but a few. A foreign policy frame that is ready to embrace political risks in the interest of regional stability might help sidestep these negative incentives for development actors.

Foreign policy can and must play an essential role in ensuring that these transitions are managed peacefully. And peace, in turn, is not only an SDG in itself but also an important precondition for the successful implementation of most other SDGs. This interdependence implies a need for greater engagement between the development community – that has taken a leadership role in the SDG process until now – and the foreign policy community – that often has the mandate to ensure *cross-governmental coherence in external relations*.

¹ For example, conflict-affected countries lag their peers in development outcomes: for example, the 10 worst performing countries for maternal mortality globally are all conflict-affected or post-conflict states.
See <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/peace-and-security/facts-and-figures> (accessed 13 November 2015)

THE SDGS ARE VITAL FOR FOREIGN POLICY...

... AS THEY AFFECT PEACE, SECURITY AND GEOPOLITICS WORLD-WIDE AND REQUIRE WORKING BEYOND THE USUAL DEVELOPMENT PARADIGMS.

MINDFUL MANAGEMENT OF SYSTEMIC CHANGES

IMPLEMENTING THE SDGS WILL BRING ABOUT SUBSTANTIAL CHANGES TO GLOBAL DYNAMICS, WHICH NEED CAREFUL AND INFORMED MANAGEMENT

Therefore, the case for foreign policy engagement does not only rest on the relevance of the SDGs relevant foreign policy. The range of diplomatic tools that foreign policy-makers have at their disposal can help circumvent some of the challenges that SDG implementation is facing, especially in fragile states. Harnessing that potential depends on a **deliberate and coherent foreign policy approach to the SDGs** that builds on a systematic assessment of the trade-offs and interdependencies of the achievement or failures of specific SDGs.

This paper will analyse the SDGs under review², one by one, looking at their foreign policy relevance based on a list of six areas we identify as emblematic of contemporary foreign policy priorities, such as forced migration and conflict prevention. It does not attempt to offer a comprehensive review of the foreign policy relevance of the SDGs. Instead, it serves as a starting point in supporting foreign policy makers to address the links between the SDGs and foreign policy. By illustrating the foreign policy relevance of the SDGs, we make a case for foreign policy to contribute, through their diplomatic means, to the effective implementation of Agenda 2030. It will facilitate the usage of SDGs as an integrated framework for foreign policy action.

2. SDGs, Geopolitics, and Peace

The SDGs are inextricably linked to geopolitics. The pursuance of the 2030 Agenda will bring about changes in power and political dynamics which will have geopolitical implications. Dynamics relating to the winners (and losers) of SDG implementation need to be managed with mindfulness and pragmatism to ensure that Agenda 2030 brings about the kind of positive transformation as anticipated.

The adverse risks and potential trade-offs are manifold. For example, increasing agricultural yield, as required to reach zero hunger under SDG 2, cannot be done by sustaining small-scale agriculture. However, shifting from small-holder farming to large-scale industrial agriculture will manifest the divide between the Global North and the South and can harm small-holder farmers and pastoralists. Tensions around such shifts are already visible in the marginalisation of pastoralism and pastoralists in the agricultural development plans in Kenya and Ethiopia. To give another example, efforts to promote sustainable cities under SDG 11 require shifting power to sub-national level. Decentralization does not necessarily contribute to peace and stability. Such a transition needs the right governance structures to be in place and

² SDG 6 (water): Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
SDG 7 (energy): Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
SDG 15 (life on land): Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
SDG 11 (cities): Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
SDG 12 (consumption and production): Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
SDG17 (partnerships): Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

FRAGILE STATES

IMPLEMENTING SDGS
IN FRAGILE CONTEXTS
REQUIRES A FOREIGN
POLICY FRAMING

GEOPOLITICS AND THE SDGS

TO ENSURE THAT
AGENDA 2030 BRINGS
ABOUT THE KIND OF
POSITIVE TRANSFOR-
MATION ANTICIPATED,
OF THE INTERESTS OF
THOSE WHO (INTERMIT-
TENTLY) LOSE FROM
SDG IMPLEMENTATION
NEED TO BE CONSID-
ERED.

calls for much stronger policy coordination between the central government and the decentralised structures. These risks are not just hypotheticals. We can already see the negative transboundary repercussions of global agriculture policy, the purchasing of agricultural land and virtual water by China in Africa³, and the potentially destabilising effects of the decarbonisation agenda.

These examples are but a few of the myriad implications of the SDGs on geopolitics. These geopolitical knock-on consequences of the 2030 Agenda need full and further analysis if we are to avoid doing any inadvertent harm while pursuing the SDGs.

At the same time, geopolitics also affects the landscape within which we pursue the SDGs. Geopolitics can be seen to be undermining the 2030 Agenda, with the re-nationalization of politics in the Global North negatively affecting political leadership and good governance in the Global South. The shifting of power and political influence from Europe towards China and India means shifting away from former leadership to new drivers on sustainable transformation. Furthermore, we are moving away from rule-based policymaking and multilateralism. Here we need foreign policy to promote rule-based policymaking and cooperation, support regional collaboration, and help governments to improve their governance. Governance - at national and global level - is the DNA of the 2030 Agenda (and any other transformative or multilateral agreement).

A better understanding of these geopolitical trends is required such that we can employ the appropriate multilateral or foreign policy tools to address them to ensure they do not undermine SDG progress. It should, in turn, shape the way we implement the 2030 Agenda. Importantly, it means working beyond the usual development paradigms.

Sustainable Development and Sustaining Peace (SDG 16)

The 2030 Agenda links inextricably to peace and stability. Peace and stability are fundamental prerequisites to sustainable development, yet in some cases transformation and change can also bring about conflict and instability. Synergies between peace and sustainable development are increasingly recognised among development and security communities, and stressed in numerous key official documents, the most influential being the two UN resolutions on *Sustaining Peace* by the Security Council and the General Assembly.⁴ But this recognition, along with the reality that the SDGs have significant geopolitical ramifications, is not sufficiently reflected in SDG processes.

³ See for example: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2015/11/05/what-do-we-know-about-the-chinese-land-grab-in-africa/> [accessed on 11.07.18]

⁴ Security Council resolution 2282 (2016); General Assembly resolution 70/262 (2016)

SDG 16 is the goal that relates to peace most explicitly and has been one of the most crucial SDGs for foreign policy. A survey by AidData⁵ that asked 3,500 leaders⁶ in 126 low- and middle-income which of the 17 SDGs they prioritize, found that SDG 16 is the second most important in their perception (a close second to Goal 4, quality education).⁷ An analysis of development funding showed that three goals that deal with climate and environment together received about \$23.8 billion – just seven percent of what SDG 16 received⁸. The numbers say a lot about the *attention* given to peace, but the emphasis is not translated into adequate action – evidenced by decreasing levels of ODA investment and lower rates of SDG attainment in fragile states⁹.

The targets and indicators defined under SDG 16, ranging from “reduce all forms of violence and related death rates” and “develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions” to “promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies” are not sufficient to capture peace as a whole, neither are the indicators to measure progress.

Peaceful, just and inclusive societies have other SDGs as their building blocks. The Pathfinder Initiative found that only one-third of targets that measure aspects of peace, inclusion or access to justice fall under SDG 16.¹⁰ For instance, peaceful societies require reducing violence against women and girls (SDG target 5.2) and addressing child labour and child soldiers (SDG target 8.7). SDGs targets in the social realm that address questions of employment, inequality, social development, etc. are the ones most identified to be the building blocks of peace.

The environmental dimension and the relevance of environmental shocks or the depletion of natural resources for social or political conflict are yet missing in the analysis. There are spaces where their links to peace need to be more explicitly recognised. For example, land and water management needs to be an essential part of SDG 16 activities on peace and governance.

Any external action would thus benefit from systematically assessing the relevance of individual SDGs and identifying entry points to leverage their contribution to foreign policy goals, including peace (for example, a peace dividend achieved through the more equitable provision of basic services). Such an assessment should also examine how foreign policy instruments can (and do) support the SDGs. The outcome of such a process would provide an as yet lacking reference point to ensure that SDG progress does not inadvertently undermine foreign policy goals and that foreign policy can better contribute to the advancement of the SDGs. Such a process, aligning the SDGs with foreign policy,

⁵ Custer et al. 2018

⁶ government officials, civil society leaders, private sector representatives, and development practitioners in 22 sectors of development policy (AidData’s 2017 Listening to Leaders Survey)

⁷ McDonnell 2018

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Sachs et al. 2018

¹⁰ Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies 2017



SDG 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”

SDG 16 AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

PEACE AND STABILITY ARE FUNDAMENTAL PREREQUISITES TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, YET TRANSFORMATION AND CHANGE CAN ALSO BRING ABOUT CONFLICT AND INSTABILITY

would serve as a roadmap towards “Sustainable Foreign Policy.” With this policy brief, we provide a first outline of the foreign policy dimension of the SDGs. It is the authors’ intention to initiate a debate around this topic, in order to further engage foreign policy in the implementation of the 2030 agenda.

Sustainable Foreign Policy

“Sustainable Foreign Policy” implies improving the coherence of foreign policy action under a guiding principle of promoting sustainable development and peace. The 2030 Agenda already points towards an integrated and network-oriented way of doing foreign policy. SDG 17 attests this by highlighting policy coherence and partnerships as key conditions of sustainable development. Promoting integration and partnerships is also a fundamental element of foreign policy.

Foreign policy could and should also contribute to the implementation of the agenda in fragile contexts, where diplomacy can help to improve transboundary cooperation when necessary and provide the kind of foreign policy framing required to circumvent the geopolitical obstacles to implementing the SDGs. More precisely, foreign policy can also offer channels for ensuring a different way of implementing the agenda in fragile contexts, making development assistance and cooperation towards the use of sustainable resources more conflict-sensitive.

“**Sustainable Foreign Policy**” supports holistic SDG implementation and external action, to avoid adverse events such as destabilization, radicalization or forced displacement, and to promote positive developments such as prosperity, a strengthened resource base, or mutually beneficial trade and investments. It is no longer enough to talk about the interlinkages. 2030 Agenda has wide-ranging geopolitical implications and as such, has to be better embedded in foreign policy.

For instance, if water is not sufficiently available to meet basic human needs (SDG 6), that impedes socio-economic development and fuels displacement and conflict, posing significant risks for stability and prosperity. It is clear that transboundary water cooperation - facilitated by bilateral and multilateral development agencies - needs to balance out competing water user interests within countries and across borders. With a few exceptions, transboundary water cooperation is still the domain of development policy. However, all critical issues in larger basins require as much buy-in by diplomats as other geopolitical crises on other subjects.

A foreign policy perspective on transboundary waters would be twofold: a) co-design transboundary water cooperation projects so that they are embedded in larger development perspectives for a given country and particularly at the regional scale and b) to support transboundary water management with their unique diplomatic skills and toolbox. Water management from this perspective is therefore primarily a foreign policy issue and only in second place subject to technical development cooperation.

A NEW OR ADDITIONAL TASK?

IT IS NOT ABOUT ADDING ANYTHING NEW, BUT ABOUT BETTER ALIGNING FOREIGN POLICY AND THE SDGS TO MAXIMISE THE POSITIVE OUTCOMES

SUSTAINABLE FOREIGN POLICY...

...SUPPORTS SDG IMPLEMENTATION AND EXTERNAL ACTION TO AVOID NEGATIVE RESULTS SUCH AS DESTABILIZATION AND FORCED DISPLACEMENT, AND TO PROMOTE POSITIVE OUTCOMES SUCH AS PROSPERITY.

To give another example, deforestation and unsustainable land management (addressed under **SDG 15**) undermine millions of livelihoods and contribute to resource-related disputes and social grievances. Over the last 60 years, 40-60 percent of internal armed conflicts in Africa have been linked to natural resources¹¹, and inefficient land tenure systems compound these pressures. It is well established that development activities which promote sustainable forest management also contribute to conflict prevention – adding to the elusive ‘peace dividend.’ But when it comes to the SDGs, while the links between peace and development are recognised, there is little difference in action on the ground in fragile contexts compared to other more stable settings. At the operational level, there is a widespread failure to recognise that the activities, such as sustainable forest and land management in fragile and conflict contexts, require a different *conflict-sensitive* approach.

When pursuing foreign policy goals, such as building up institutions, capacities, and norms in fragile states, foreign policy instruments such as bilateral trade agreements and special economic zones can help immensely. This can be done by creating incentives or establishing conditions for cooperation regarding SDG implementation, for example, promoting land reforms and participatory management, investing in land restoration, and adherence to voluntary schemes such as the EU’s Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) or the Forest Stewardship Council’s timber certification scheme.

Foreign policy initiatives in areas relevant to Agenda 2030 have been around well before the SDGs, so this is not a question of adding anything new or additional to foreign policy priorities. It is about better aligning foreign policy and the SDGs to maximise the positive outcomes of their convergence and minimise the inadvertent harm they may pose to each other, towards a “Sustainable Foreign Policy.” The first step here is to understand the linkages between the SDGs and foreign policy better. However, until now, there has been no explicit discourse or analysis on the positive and negative impacts of the SDGs on foreign policy and the implications of foreign policy on the SDGs. The examples set out below and in the annex to this paper illustrate how such awareness of these implications is vital if progress on the SDGs is to be genuinely sustainable.

3. SDGs under Review in 2018 and Six Foreign Policy Priorities

We set out six areas of external action which we deem to have broad foreign policy relevance. This is not intended to be a *comprehensive list* of 21st-century foreign policy priorities. Instead, the six areas are illustrative of current areas of key significance for foreign policy. Based on

¹¹ United Nations Environment Programme 2012

MORE THAN

40%

OF INTERNAL ARMED CONFLICTS IN AFRICA HAVE BEEN LINKED TO NATURAL RESOURCES, INCLUDING LAND ISSUES

THE SDGS ARE A PREREQUISITE...

...FOR FOREIGN POLICY WHILE FOREIGN POLICY IS AN IMPORTANT VEHICLE FOR ACHIEVING THE SDGS.

this nominal framework, we look at how each of the SDGs under review affects and are affected by each area.

Our premise is that each of these six areas would greatly benefit from better understanding the implications of the 2030 Agenda, and in turn, could also help support SDG progress.

The six foreign policy priority areas are as follows:

1. **Preventing (forced) migration and displacement**
2. **Conflict prevention and stabilisation**
3. **Reducing humanitarian need**
4. **Countering terrorism and violent extremism**
5. **Promoting foreign trade and investment**
6. **Safeguarding geopolitical stability**

Using these policy areas as a framework, we first look at the various pathways through which the SDGs affect these areas. Secondly, we identify where SDG implementation is most needed and to what extent is a peace dividend likely, and thirdly identify new and existing mechanisms for their application, to move towards more coherent policy-making in these areas.

1. Preventing (forced) migration and displacement

Globally, migration and forced displacement are at historic levels. While many political, social and economic factors influence migration, the primary drivers of *forced* displacement include conflicts, natural disasters as well as human rights violations and abuses.¹² Migration and forced displacement trends are of significant foreign policy relevance for countries of origin, transit, and destination. The socio-economic gains of safe and regular migration can be extensive. Forced displacement and irregular migration on the other hand, often present complex challenges¹³. A growing body of evidence is beginning to show that **human security** offers a more active approach to many of the underlying threats and problems associated with forced and irregular migration than traditional state-security models. Identifying the underlying causes of forced migration can point to solutions which help make migration processes more rational and humane. Addressing threats to human security (underpinned by the SDGs) can reduce forced migration and support conditions for peaceful migration that are driven by choice rather than necessity. This can help contribute to migration and effective integration which positively contributes to development, economic security, trade, and state security.

The analysis of the SDGs under review shows:

- Water insecurity can be a reason for forced displacement and fuel grievances in host communities. Water diplomacy can

MIGRATION

THREATS TO HUMAN SECURITY, LINKED TO ENVIRONMENTAL PRESSURES, SOCIAL INJUSTICES AND ECONOMIC PROSPERITY, AFFECT LIVELIHOODS AND MIGRATION PATTERNS IN MANY REGIONS

¹² McAuliffe 2018

¹³ This formed an important component of the G20 Leader's Declaration under the German Presidency in 2017, see: https://www.g20germany.de/Webs/G20/EN/G20/Summit_documents/summit_documents_node.html

support sustainable and equitable water use and reduce the causes of migration. (see **SDG 6**)

- Universal access to clean energy could vastly improve the situation of millions of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons. Climate change impacts can heighten conflicts over resources, deteriorate living conditions, and thus trigger migratory movements). A shift towards sustainable energy production would help reduce these drivers of migration. (see **SDG 7**)
- Rural-urban movement within countries is likely to increase pressures on cities as more people move to urban environments that already face vulnerability to disaster and fragility risks. In 2015, disasters and violence caused 50 percent of a total of 51 million refugees and internally displaced persons to flee to urban areas. A disproportionate share of slum/shack dwellers is migrants. Inclusive, resilient cities and urban areas can help cope with these challenges and strengthen urban resilience. (see **SDG 11**)
- Decreasing land and soil productivity can be a driver of environmental migration, both voluntary and forced. People may migrate in quest of a more livable environment, or move as a reaction to tensions posed by conflicts resulting from resource scarcities. (see **SDG 15**)

There is a need for comprehensive and concrete responses throughout the migration cycle, including measures to prevent forced migration related to resource scarcity, facilitating planned, safe movement away from degraded lands, and managing adaptation to allow people to stay, or return to, affected areas.

2. Conflict prevention and stabilisation

Over the past 20 years, stabilisation has become a central aspect of foreign – as well as military and development – policy. Stabilisation entails a focus on all sorts of violence, not just conflict, that creates political instability and harm, and a problem-solving approach that draws on various forms of intervention such as state-building, counterinsurgency, peacekeeping – to establish an enabling environment for peace and development. However, despite the current consensus that ‘conflict is development in reverse,’ i.e., insecurity contributes to underdevelopment and that efforts to restore stability in war-affected areas can establish conditions in which social and economic recovery and development can begin or resume, there are few links between stabilisation processes and SDG programming. This is in part because we often see stabilisation as a military-centric response. In reality, stabilisation does not pre-ordain any specific approaches or sectors involved. In fact, stabilisation efforts work as much through security-through-livelihood (development) and diplomacy as through defense. Taking advantage of the full potential of stabilisation requires moving beyond notions that stabilisation can involve ‘buying’ stability with humanitarian or development assistance in the absence of a meaningful diplomatic strategy. Instead,

PREVENTION AND STABILISATION

DEPLETING NATURAL RESOURCES OR UNJUST MANAGEMENT CAN AGGRAVATE CONFLICTS AND UNDERMINE STABILISATION EFFORTS

stabilisation requires a combination of approaches, and we should understand it as the outcome of a combined, **multi-part strategy** rather than a stand-alone activity such as counterinsurgency or humanitarian relief. We have seen for example with the crisis in Mali or the Lake Chad region¹⁴, that military responses alone do not suffice and current wisdom highlights the importance of integrating livelihoods, gender and youth engagement programmes into stabilisation strategies to enhance their efficiency and sustainability. Thus, within the scope of stabilisation and conflict prevention, there is space and need for greater coordination of foreign policy and SDG engagement where they can have the best violence-reducing impact.

Countries affected by conflict and fragility often have the most limited capacities and resources, while facing the biggest political challenges. Processes that build upon existing awareness of context, build national ownership, foster transparency, secure support in the face of difficult choices and build consensus over trade-offs, are crucial. Conversely, tensions and local discontent can arise due to unsustainable practices that are having devastating environmental and social impacts on the local level. For the 2030 Agenda to move forward in fragile states, decision-making needs to address not only the technical, but also the political obstacles to development.

The implications of the SDGs under review on conflict prevention and stabilisation:

- Competing forms of land use (e.g., agriculture and resource extraction), competition over water, environmental pollution and degradation may trigger and aggravate conflicts and undermine stabilisation efforts. (see **SDG 6, 12 and 15**)
- Due recognition of the foreign policy entry points of energy transition can address conflict prevention and resilience building. Stabilisation activities can help introduce renewable energies and showcase how to move away from fossil fuels. Conversely, energy transition processes must support strong and just institutions to avoid any new forms of corruption. (see **SDG 7**)
- Shifting of power and resources from central governments to decentralised systems can alter rural-urban dynamics and can be destabilising without the necessary governance structures in place and enhanced coordination between the centre and the peripheries. (see **SDG 11**)
- Inherently political interactions and diplomatic networks make foreign policy a suitable driver of policy integration needed to enhance sustainable development in fragile states. Diplomats can help mainstream conflict-sensitive sustainability action into peacebuilding, humanitarian aid, and development cooperation. (see **SDG 17**)

¹⁴ Ladbury et al, 2016

3. Reducing humanitarian needs

Global humanitarian aid reached an all-time high of USD 27.3 billion in 2016. This still reflects a 40% shortfall in needs met, while the trend in humanitarian crises and aid requirements is projected to continue rising¹⁵. Since World War Two, humanitarian aid became a vital foreign policy instrument for many governments. But as the aid bills continue to increase beyond what donors can cover, there is more and more of an imperative for aid effectiveness, coherence, and coordination. The 2016 World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) was the most significant acknowledgement of this by the then UNSG, Ban Ki Moon. Despite WHS commitments to better link humanitarian aid and development, we do not see it reflected under the SDG framework or in the measurement of the progress of the SDGs.

The implications of the SDGs under review on reducing humanitarian needs:

- Water insecurity and bad water governance, including lack of transboundary water cooperation, can add to humanitarian pressures and emergencies, possibly developing into security challenges (see **SDG 6**).
- Access to sustainable energy can create empowering opportunities and bridge the humanitarian-development divide by improving livelihoods, food security, health, safety, education and the environment. Humanitarian operations offer entry points to move away from fossil fuel use and use renewables (see **SDG 7**).

4. Countering terrorism and violent extremism

Violent extremism is a global foreign policy concern. More than 40 countries have experienced at least one terrorist attack.¹⁶ Progress on SDGs, particularly in countries that emerge from crisis and conflict, is undermined by such attacks. Governments across the world are spending increasingly large amounts of state revenue to deal with the threats and consequences of violent extremism, taking away resources from other activities. The growth and effects of violent extremism contribute to the hindrance or reversal of progress on the SDGs and may threaten development for decades to come. UNDP estimates that more than 33,300 people in Africa lost their lives in violent extremist attacks between 2011 and 2016¹⁷. Violent extremism continues to threaten to stunt development outcomes for generations to come. However, development activities (as underpinned by the SDGs) uniquely placed within the overall response architecture for tackling violent extremism, have an integral role to play in averting the threats posed by it.

¹⁵ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2017

¹⁶ <http://economicsandpeace.org/reports/>

¹⁷ United Nations Development Programme 2017

HUMANITARIAN NEEDS

LACK OF HOLISTIC APPROACHES TO CRISES CAN ADD TO HUMANITARIAN PRESSURES AND FUEL SECURITY CHALLENGES

TERRORISM

PROGRESS ON SDGS IS UNDERMINED BY VIOLENT EXTREMISM.

AT THE SAME TIME, POLITICAL MARGINALISATION, LIVELIHOOD INSECURITY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION ARE DRIVERS OF TERRORISM.

Development expertise and resourcing can be leveraged to help address structural drivers of terrorism and extremism such as political marginalisation, livelihood insecurity, and social exclusion. To support communities in implementing de-radicalization initiatives, we need to help them ensure that there is a socio-economical reintegration process in place for former members of violent extremist organizations¹⁸.

The implications of the SDGs under review on countering terrorism and violent extremism:

- Resource-related conflicts and social grievances can make parts of the population more receptive to terrorist recruitment. Non-state armed groups are likely to exploit the changing access to and availability of natural resources. For instance, where nomads clash with sedentary farmers, this adds to an already conflicting situation and undermines international efforts to de-radicalize communities and combat terrorism. (see **SDG 6, 12 and 15**)
- Rapid urbanisation in post-conflict societies is often linked to youth criminality and increased vulnerability of youth to illicit activities. Connecting the urban poor and those on the periphery of cities to the urban economy, its institutions, and services, is vital to improve livelihood security and address these risks. (see **SDG 11**)
- Natural resources, e.g., wildlife, wood or minerals, are often illegally sourced and traded by **violent organisations** as a source of income, becoming both a reason for the conflict and an enabling factor to sustain the fighting. (see **SDG 12 and 15**)

5. Promoting foreign trade and investment

External economic promotion is perhaps one of the primary foreign policy priorities of the majority of OECD countries. On the one hand, international trade is a crucial factor in economic output and safeguards many domestic jobs, while on the other, trade and global economic links create trust and help stabilise international relations and enable peace. Each of the SDGs affect the promotion of foreign trade and investment – at all points of the supply chain (e.g., ensuring the sustainable supply of resources such as timber or energy for production, promoting sustainable consumption), as well as in terms of ensuring the stability of markets and investment conditions (e.g. safe cities, effective institutions, partnerships between governments and private sector). Foreign trade and investment are also an integral part of peacebuilding and sustainable peace. Although the SDGs are intrinsically linked to any efforts to promote foreign trade and investment, these links do not reflect in foreign policy or SDG implementation.

TRADE AND INVESTMENT

TRADE AND GLOBAL ECONOMIC LINKS CONSTITUTE A NETWORK OF INTER-DEPENDENCIES. THEY CREATE TRUST, HELP STABILISE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, AND ENABLE PEACE

¹⁸ Ibid.

The implications of the SDGs under review on promoting foreign trade and investment:

- Energy transition processes can help to form mutual interdependencies. Investments in energy transition may support foreign and trade interests of countries able to offer technological solutions and willing to cooperate and promote economic interdependencies. (see **SDG 7**)
- Consumption and production patterns entail a network of co-dependencies – both positive and negative. While global supply chains are very efficient, they also bear significant risks of supply shocks. These shocks need to be planned and accounted for and gradually reduced through trade and investment promotion. (see **SDG 12**)
- Companies will play a pivotal role in increasing the sustainability of consumption and production, e. g. respect human rights and consider the environmental footprint. Efforts from the US, the EU, and the OECD to increase due diligence of companies, for example companies operating in the business of so-called “conflict minerals”, are essential starting points. (see **SDG 12**)
- Foreign policy can play an important facilitating role for partnerships with investment institutions, the private sector, and civil society. (see **SDG 17**).
- Finally, achieving the SDGs requires a transformation of global trade and investment. International trade regulations and regional and bilateral trade relations need to promote the sustainable use of developing countries’ natural assets and provide them with a sound economic basis sustainable development, fostering local development. The coherence of investment and sustainability policies needs strengthening in areas of export promotion, investment protection, development and humanitarian finance. (see **SDG 17**)

6. Safeguarding geopolitical stability

From a geopolitical perspective, power relations and rivalries, often primarily between states but also among other actors of international politics, are shaped by territorial conditions, geography and resource base, and changes thereof¹⁹. Implementing SDGs will transform what natural resources we need, how we procure them and how these questions are governed, redrawing the global map of political influence. Foreign policy should ensure these changes do not create new threats to stability. Both, not implementing SDGs and implementing them without a proactive, foreign-policy driven approach, will have detrimental impacts on stability and peace. Therefore, foreign policy needs to anticipate and help steer the geopolitical implications of a sustainable transformation to minimise risk. Many sustainability issues such as water resource governance have a transboundary dimension. Here too, a strategic, diplomacy-driven approach embedded in the specific context of regional politics is essential rather than viewing

¹⁹ Cohen 2003

GEOPOLITICAL STABILITY

TRANSITIONING TO A MORE SUSTAINABLE WORLD WILL SHIFT INTERNATIONAL POWER RELATIONS AND DEPENDENCIES, AS SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES AND THEIR GOVERNANCE HAVE A TRANSBOUNDARY DIMENSION.

sustainable development topics as a technical issue confined to national borders. Essentially, foreign policy must consider how domestic and international efforts to achieve the SDGs will impact countries' external relations with one another and conditions of geopolitical stability.

The implications of the SDGs under review on safeguarding geopolitical stability:

- Energy transition processes will shift international power relations and dependencies: the decreasing global relevance of oil and gas and a growing resource input requirements the renewable technologies may reduce past conflicts, while also shaping new rivalries and tensions if governance of the transition processes is lacking. (see **SDG 7** and **SDG 12**)
- Different energy mix options may offer less reason for asymmetrical relationships between partners at the global energy map. As a result, geopolitical changes in many regional contexts are likely: with stabilising but potentially also destabilising effects if existing hegemony is usurped. (see **SDG 7**)
- Global supply chains bring significant risks in the form of supply shocks, and interdependent commodity prices transmit shocks across the system. Supply shocks can also increase the competition over resources between countries and lead to tensions over resource access. (see **SDG 12**)
- Transboundary cooperation is often essential for regional stability, and it needs a strategic diplomatic approach. Diplomats can and should try to help shape political thinking over national and regional development perspectives to help shift discourse and policy toward cooperation, drawing on their access, mandate, and skills of diplomacy. (see **SDG 6**)
- Arable land, ecosystem services, and commodity flows have geopolitical relevance in a world that transforming its resource cycles. Making international investment flows compatible with planetary boundaries will likely bring about the devaluation of many national assets and a major shift in economic structures in developing and fragile countries. Strengthening multilateral interaction is essential to be able to cope with this, making sure the international community comes together in the process instead of drifting apart. (see **SDG 17**)
- Foreign policy should contribute resilience and geopolitical perspectives to sustainable development activities to improve the *coherence of external action*. It should also aim to increase the understanding of how priorities of peace and stability interact with the implementation on the 2030 Agenda and identify appropriate responses. (see **SDG 17**)

4. Conclusions

The success of foreign policy activities, be it de-escalation of conflict, transboundary trade, stabilisation or conflict prevention, depends upon human development and resilient societies which can resolve disputes constructively. Many topics of the SDGs such as forest management, sustainable consumption and production and water resource governance have a transboundary dimension. Here, rather than viewing sustainable development topics as national, technical issues, a strategic, diplomacy-driven approach embedded in the specific context of regional politics is essential. As such, the SDGs are a prerequisite for successful foreign policy. Simultaneously, foreign policy is a necessary vehicle for achieving the SDGs.

Implementing the SDGs will alter geopolitical dynamics, and affect peace and stability. The SDG process is already transforming what natural resources we need, how we procure them and how these questions are governed, redrawing the global map of political influence. Shifting from fossil fuels to low-carbon economies, increasing agricultural yields and decentralising power to the sub-national level, overhauling resource supply chains to account for human rights, for example, will all shift power and political balances and alignments. Careful and deliberate diplomacy is required to ensure these changes do not create new threats to stability. Both, *not* implementing the SDGs and implementing them without a proactive, foreign-policy driven approach, will have detrimental impacts on a range of foreign policy areas including stability and peace. Therefore, foreign policy needs to anticipate and help steer the geopolitical implications of a sustainable transformation.

The range of diplomatic tools, such as mediation or initiation of international and multi-stakeholder partnerships, available to the foreign policy community thus play a significant role in ensuring the transformative shifts do not pose any harm – particularly in fragile states. Crucially, foreign policy must consider how domestic and international efforts to achieve the SDGs will impact countries' external relations with one another and conditions of geopolitical stability.

Based on this conclusion, we set out three steps for further action:

1. Analyse the consequences of SDG implementation and integrate SDGs into foreign policy strategies

Policy responses and effective implementation of the SDGs requires cognisance of the politics and geopolitics which they affect and which affect them. All of the ostensibly 2030 Agenda related actions have geopolitical implications. Therefore, there needs to be a better understanding of the foreign policy implications of the SDGs to inform a specific "Sustainable Foreign Policy" approach to the SDGs. Implementing SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions) and SDG 17 (global partnerships) offer the most obvious entry points, but this is relevant to every SDG.

THREE AREAS FOR ACTION

- 1. ANALYSE AND INTEGRATE SDGS INTO FOREIGN POLICY STRATEGIES**
- 2. USE DIPLOMATIC TOOLS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**
- 3. INVEST IN COUNTERING FRAGILITY**

An important first step would be a rigorous and regular analysis of long-term projections on different levels and quality of SDG implementation on geopolitics. It would help identify risks, and potential black swans, as well as identify potential double-dividends of foreign policy and sustainable development goals, to better align strategies to enable greater future synergy.

Such an assessment should also examine how foreign policy instruments can (and do) support the SDGs and how foreign policy can be better structured (in terms of objectives and resources) around the SDGs. In practical terms, external action would benefit from identifying entry points to leverage their contribution to foreign policy goals, including peace (for example, a peace dividend achieved through the more equitable provision of basic services). Importantly, such an exercise should not just be the responsibility of the 'global issues' division of a foreign ministry but involve other technical directorates as well.

The outcome of such a process would provide an as yet lacking reference point to ensure that SDG progress does not inadvertently undermine foreign policy goals and that foreign policy can better contribute to the improvement of the SDGs. Such a process, aligning the SDGs with foreign policy, would give us a roadmap towards **"Sustainable Foreign Policy"**.

2. Employ the diplomatic toolbox for sustainable development

The 2030 Agenda offers a framework for building global resilience to meet some of the significant challenges facing the world today such as forced migration, climate change, poverty, terrorism and violent conflict. These are global challenges for which we need multilateralism. We thus need multilateral tools to achieve these, and here foreign policy capacities are fundamental. All of the diplomatic toolboxes are relevant and should be made available:

- Diplomacy
- Partnerships
- Mediation
- Political Dialogue
- Financing
- Global governance

For example, foreign policy instruments such as bilateral trade agreements and special economic zones can help create incentives or establish conditions for cooperation regarding SDG implementation. Some cases are: promoting land reforms and participatory management, investing in land restoration, and promoting adherence to voluntary schemes such as the EU's Forest Law Enforcement, Governance, and Trade (FLEGT) or the Forest Stewardship Council's timber certification scheme.

Sustainable development is not merely a task for development policy, nor should it be left to specific technical sectors, such as environmental or water Ministries, to pursue discrete, sector-specific activities under siloed goals. There is a distinct role for foreign policy here, and

for leadership from the foreign policy community. We have seen from the success of the Paris Conference on climate change in 2015 that foreign policy engagement in key global processes catalyses action and provides high-level leadership. The SDGs require similar leadership. Examples could include:

- establishing a G7 and G20 initiative to support the 2030 agenda;
- a G7 and G20 statement to highlight the importance of multilateralism for the 2030 agenda;
- identification and support of three flagship initiatives in fragile states on three different continents to support fragile states in the implementation of the SDGs.

The future of sustainable development is one which of course cannot be decided in Europe or amongst G7 states alone. The 2030 Agenda, economic and social opportunities in Africa and free world trade are all issues that are high up on the G20 agenda. And while finding a shared approach amongst G20 countries will not be easy, it is an important step for global governance and effective multilateralism which could bring about policy coherence, provide direction and incentivise action.

3. Invest in countering fragility

Investing in fragile states is where progress is the slowest, yet most needed. Progress on the SDGs, particularly in countries that emerge from crisis and conflict, is required to reinstate livelihoods, and eventually, strengthen resilience. However, this is not merely about piling up development demands on fragile states. There is also a role for foreign policy. Much foreign policy action is already taking place in fragile states, but this action does not sufficiently connect to the SDGs. Besides, much of this action is not adequately sensitive to the fragile context to not harm (i.e., conflict sensitive). Therefore, in addition to the better alignment of foreign policy with the SDGs in fragile states, the modes of action should also be conflict sensitive to ensure that the progress made by the SDGs are not inadvertently undermined.

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Annex

In the annex, we provide a more detailed analysis of the SDGs under review. Please download the annex from www.climate-diplomacy.org/publications.

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