

BOOKS REVIEWS

Governing through Goals: Sustainable Development Goals as Governance Innovation by **Norichika Kanie and Frank Biermann (eds)**. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017. 352pp (paperback), ISBN 9780262533195

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The United Nations Sustainable Development Summit held on 25th September 2015, adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The agenda includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and about 169 targets that aim at ending poverty, fighting inequality and injustice, and combating climate change. The 17 SDGs is an expansion from 8 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) seek to mobilize action from the international community in addressing systemic challenges across economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. The adoption of the goals shows the commitment of the international community in dealing with the impacts of economic development on society and the natural environment. Yet, as detailed in this volume, the United Nations (UN) adoption of SDGs has also sparked academic debate particularly about the importance of goal-setting as a key global governance strategy.

This volume, edited by Kanie and Biermann, is divided into 13 main chapters which are in turn subdivided into three parts. In chapter 1, the volume details debates surrounding governance, especially through goal-setting and how past global governance efforts largely relied upon top-down regulations or market-based approaches. Although there is no single accepted definition of the concept of governance, the authors agree that the concept of governance is not necessarily confined to states and governments as the only actors. They argue that governance also involves participation of public and private non-state actors at all levels of decision-making. The authors first examine how the new approach to global governance through goal-setting is detached from the international legal system. They point out, for example, that although Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are grounded in international law, the goals are technically not legally binding. Likewise, respective governments are not legally compelled to formally adopt the goals into their national legal systems. Therefore, SDGs are different from most of the previous global environmental goals or targets on sustainable development. Previous global environmental goals or targets on sustainable development would often be enshrined in legally binding international treaties.

The volume also critically examines how governance, through goals, functions through relatively weak institutional arrangements especially at ‘intergovernmental level’. It points out that weak global institutional arrangements may not necessarily act as a stumbling block to the successful implementation of the goals. Thus, the volume envisages that successful implementation of these goals would emanate from the bottom-up, non-confrontational, country driven, and stakeholder-oriented aspects of governance. Despite such optimism from the authors, there are still challenges

in implementing the goals. Getting all actors to cooperate during the implementation process is among the likely challenges. One would question, for example, what would be the best mechanisms to foster cooperation among multiple actors during the implementation process? Such actors may have competing and conflicting interests, and that could in a way, undermine the implementation of the goals at various levels. Let us take an example of Goal 7 (of the SDGs); this goal aims at ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all (pg.4, chapter 1 of this volume). However, achieving this goal may require collective action from all actors (i.e. governments, international agencies, private sector, communities etc.). This could prove tricky as some key actors still prefer conventional sources of energy, and have not fully embraced the adoption of more environmentally friendly and sustainable modern energy sources.

On the other hand, in the first part of the volume which covers chapters 2 to 5, the authors discuss 'goal-setting as a governance strategy'. Chapter 2, for example, discusses the conceptualization of goal-setting as a strategy for earth system governance. It explores the nature of goal setting as a governance strategy and analyzes conditions under which goal setting can become effective in achieving Sustainable Development Goals. It firstly explores the basic character of goal-setting by differentiating it from 'rule making', and then examines appropriate conditions in which goal-setting and rule making may be combined to form integrated governance systems.

The chapter highlights that 'goal-setting' seeks to steer behaviour by: establishing priorities to be used in the allocation of scarce resources among multiple and competing objectives, galvanizing the efforts of those assigned to work towards the attainment of the goals, and identifying targets and providing benchmarks to be used in tracking progress towards achieving goals. It contends, therefore, that goal-setting differs from rule making as the latter seeks to 'guide' the behaviour of key actors by articulating rules and devising compliance mechanisms that aim at influencing actors to transform their behaviours.

The chapter also identifies the issues that may deter efforts to effectively employ goal-setting in large-scale international settings. In this chapter, a reader would benefit from a thorough discussion about both the strengths and weaknesses of goal-setting as a governance strategy. Although 'goal-setting' differs from 'rule making' as set out in this chapter, one could also argue that the two strategies would still require some kind of commitment from the actors if either of the strategy was to be effective. While the 'rule making' strategy seeks to 'guide' the behaviour of key actors by articulating rules; there are cases, for example, where some actors have failed to comply with legally binding international agreements. Likewise, 'goal-setting' as a governance strategy may not necessarily serve as a platform for encouraging actors to implement the SDGs as that would also require their full commitment.

In chapter 3, the volume discusses the transition from the Millennium Development Goals to the Sustainable Development Goals. It notes that, whereas the Millennium Development Goals focused more on issues that were directly connected to developing countries, the Sustainable Development Goals include important areas that would require the attention from other actors especially those in developed countries. The chapter reiterates the importance of achieving economic development

while also protecting the earth's life-support systems. The chapter, however, does not discuss about 'sustainable development' as essentially a contested concept. It is worth noting that during the implementation, these goals may be interpreted differently by multiple actors. Such interpretations may emanate from social and cultural contexts of the key actors. There may still be no consensus among actors at different levels over which Sustainable Development Goals would constitute their societal goals. The ambiguity of the concept appears to be one of the challenges in implementing previous Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This chapter does not discuss the extent to which such misconceptions of the concept of sustainable development have been addressed in the current Sustainable Development Goals.

Chapter 4 of this volume focuses on 'global goal-setting for improving national governance and policy'. The chapter defines governance as the purposeful and authoritative steering of societal processes by political actors, which includes traditional activities by governmental actors and certain actions by nongovernmental actors which are legitimately designed to steer behaviour. This chapter therefore argues that governance involves the identification of issues, agenda setting, information gathering and processing, negotiation, setting policy goals and implementation and monitoring. Three core qualities of governance are analyzed in detail: good governance, effective governance, and equitable governance. Accordingly, good governance focuses on qualitative characteristics of governance such as accountability, transparency, participation, and the rule of law. Effective governance, however, deals with how to improve the overall problem-solving capacity of governance, whereas equitable governance focuses on the processes and distributive outcomes of governance, for example the need to protect the disadvantaged groups. The chapter also discusses the emergence of governance on the international development agenda, especially the inclusion of 'governance' in the Sustainable Development Goals.

In chapter 5, the volume critically examines the process of 'measuring progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals'. It notes that measurement is a technical exercise that focuses on gathering and presenting evidence by applying a wide range of monitoring, statistical survey as well as remote sensing methods. However, it also argues that associating measurement with the broader context of sustainability raises questions about its methods and instruments as well as its underlying subject i.e. what is being measured, why and by who. Thus, measurement in the context of the sustainability discourse has resulted into questions about norms, values, and power structures that underpin ideas of what is usually being measured.

Part 2 of this volume covers chapters 6-8 in which the authors have focused on the theme 'learning from the past' whereby lessons from food, water, and energy policies; lessons from the health-related Millennium Development Goals; and lessons from 'corporate water stewardship' are discussed. In Chapter 6, the authors apply an 'issue linkage perspective' to analyze the importance of such an approach in achieving Sustainable Development Goals. They argue that comprehensive linking of issues for a true sustainability agenda would require both technical and normative consensus. It is therefore argued, in this chapter that, the absence of consensus on comprehensive sustainability goals may constrain collective approaches to achieving sustainability through Sustainable Development Goals.

Chapter 7 focuses on the lessons learned from the Millennium Development Goals and how mistakes from the past can be avoided while implementing Sustainable Development Goals. The chapter evaluates the 'health-related goals' as they appear to have been the primary focus of the Millennium Development Goals. It presents examples and the role played by various actors in achieving these goals. Among the successful examples include efforts from the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI) as well as the role played by Norway in achieving health-related Millennium Development Goals.

Chapter 8 discusses how corporations have now become important actors in global environmentalism. It argues that on top of publicizing their eco-friendly business operations and products, corporations are now increasingly agreeing to be held accountable for their own actions and those of their counterparts. At the same time, they are now forming partnerships with international institutions, governments, and civil society organizations to address global sustainability goals. The chapter points out that such partnership has in recent years increased in the area of water. It draws on experience from the Millennium Development Goals especially 'Goal 7: on ensuring environmental sustainability' to provide a typology of global governance.

It is plausible as suggested in this chapter that corporations are now becoming important actors in global environmentalism. However, the reader could have benefited more from the chapter if the role of transnational corporations in the global economy were also discussed. Such corporations have in recent years similarly assumed an increasingly powerful position in international trade. For example, international trade between developed and developing countries is gradually being controlled by such corporations through trade agreements (under the watch of the World Trade Organisation). Due to the nature of their business investments (i.e. mining, oil exploration, etc.); some of these corporations are blamed for environmental degradation in developing countries, i.e. causing irreversible damage to the natural environment, including polluting water sources. They are also accused of adopting poor environmental standards in developing countries. While laws governing environmental standards appear to be very strict in the developed countries; that is not necessarily the case in most of the developing countries. Since the majority of these corporations would always seek to maximize profit, this may call into question their willingness to encourage governments in the developing countries to impose strict environmental standards.

The final part of the book discusses 'operational challenges' and covers chapters 9-13. For example, in chapter 9, the volume focuses on the United Nations' leadership role in the governance of the Sustainable Development Goals. The chapter argues that the UN system serves a central and necessary node in creating, supporting, and enabling the governance environment that may encourage attainment of goals. It outlines coherence, orchestration, and legitimacy as the required core purposes for governance of Sustainable Development Goals and examines the conditions under which the United Nations may be able to fulfil such requirements. Chapter 10 focuses on the Sustainable Development

Goals and Multilateral Agreements. It discusses reformation or rearrangement of existing elements of earth-system governance for an enhanced overall performance in promoting sustainable development. It argues that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is such a comprehensive agenda, thus the

implementation of its goals depends on how multiple agents, who are already engaged in governing human affairs, would respond within their respective domains.

In chapter 11, the volume focuses on ‘financing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The chapter explains why crowding in private finance when designing financing for global development agreements is such an important financing component. It also examines how to address problems that may arise from public-private partnerships. Likewise, chapter 12 focuses on a ‘multi-level action framework for Sustainable Development Goals. It discusses the mechanisms that are required if the global community wants to deliver in the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals. The chapter addresses main principles for action that should be observed for Sustainable Development Goals and how action mechanisms can be structured to enhance coherence in the pursuit of Sustainable Development Goals by different actors. Chapter 13 is a concluding chapter which focuses on ‘key challenges for global governance through goals’. The chapter summarizes some key arguments raised in this volume and discusses the challenges and available opportunities for achieving Sustainable Development Goals.

This volume delivers a well thought account and perspective of global governance, especially the importance of goal-setting as a key global governance strategy. However, chapters of this volume may have varying levels of relevance to the reader. Firstly, since they were written by different authors, they may appeal differently to the reader. Secondly, because some readers may not have a background in social sciences their takes may also vary. Nevertheless, the strength of this volume lies in the level of the detail provided by the authors, especially the ability to separate chapters into three parts, whereby each part of the volume focused on a respective topic. For those interested in sustainability studies, and would prefer gaining more insights about ‘governance through goal-setting’ as a strategy to achieve sustainable development, this volume has a lot to offer. Lastly, the volume has managed to merge theory, policy and research, and has also provided a straight-forward structure that makes it easy to read.