Global Cooperation: A Look at Implementing the SDGs

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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HEBkmpqvtOw
I. Introduction

Imagine a world where natural disasters are ever present in the news; humanity is clawing at itself, as a wolf does in a snare, for the very chance at survival. Wars over food are constant and the potable water that once flowed freely across the globe has been poisoned by the effects of humanity. This world, ripping itself to shreds, trying to survive, may not be so far off. Pollutants are continuously poured into the atmosphere, oceans, and streams, and desertification is slowly turning internationally treasured forest lands to sand. The human effect is tending towards destructive, but there is yet hope. Humanity, in one great fell swoop, has come together to save us from ourselves via the United Nations (UN). Many of these UN efforts have preceded the Post 2015 Development Agenda, but this agenda comes ceremoniously timed with several other UN initiatives. The coinciding of the development agenda with climate talks denotes the potentially stark future that lies in front of the human species.

In this case, the new development agenda will be explored in several facets. Following this introduction, climate change will be explored, in that it provides a catalyst to sustain other development discussions because it infiltrates many aspects of development. Next, the history of intergovernmental agenda will be explored, focusing primarily on the transition from the Millennium Development Goals to the Sustainable Development Goals. Following this, a discussion of the three primary aspects of development will be explored, and an analysis of their interactions shall follow. Then, a discussion of the economic impacts of this agenda will be considered. Finally, the policy impacts, both nationally and internationally, shall be explored. Though, the authors of the work support the new agenda, the readers are encouraged to critically analyze its aspects and use this to inform a rich debate and dialog.

II. Millennium Development to Sustainable Development

To talk about the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) one has to go back and look at the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs covered the years 2000-2015 and encompassed the following eight: 1) eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, 2) achieve universal primary education, 3) promote gender equality and empower women, 4) reduce child mortality, 5) improve maternal health, 6) combat HIV/AIDS Malaria and other diseases, 7) ensure environmental sustainability, and 8) global partnership for development. The MDGs, as Secretary-General of the United Nations Ban Ki-Moon puts it, “were a pledge to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality and equity, and free the world of extreme poverty”.

With the first goal of the MDGs, to eradicate poverty and hunger, how did the MDGs fare? The goal was to at least halve the number of persons living in extreme poverty. In 1990, about half the people living in developing regions earned $1.25 per day which is very little and the main reason this goal was put into place. By 2010, that rate has dropped down to 22%, which means that the world, in regards to the first goal, has met the goal five years before the deadline.
The problem is that some regions like sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia are still behind, and the World Bank believes that they will not reach the goal set forth by 2015; the areas that have met the goal were Eastern Asia and South-Eastern Asia.

There were great strides in the world when it came to the second goal of achieving universal primary education. For a lot of regions it seems as though they worked hard to achieve the goal, but around 2010-2012 the progress just stopped. Some regions, such as Eastern Asia, South-Eastern Asia, the Caucasus and Central Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean, seemed to be close to achieving the goal, but since 2010 there has been very little progress. North Africa, for example, almost achieved the goal by the year 2012. Western Asia and Southern Asia were close to reaching the goal especially since the year 2010. Oceania increased enrollment from 69% to 89% from 1990-2012. The enrollment rates in sub-Saharan Africa increased by 18% from 2000-2012, which is one of the greatest improvements. Although these numbers seem great in sub-Saharan Africa, there have been some challenges facing universal primary education. The challenges are that there is a “rapid population growth” and “armed conflicts and numerous other emergencies which have kept children out of school”.

The third goal of promoting gender equality and empowering women seems to have had more success than the second goal; by 2012, developing regions have met the goal or were close to meeting the goal. The way the United Nations looked at the growth of gender equality was by looking at the Gender Parity Index (GPI) in the three levels of education “primary, secondary and tertiary.” In primary education, the region that really stands out from the rest is Southern
Asia; in 1990 it had the lowest GPI of any other region with 0.74, but by 2012 it rose to 1.00. Sub-Saharan Africa Oceania, Western Asia and Northern Africa have made really good progress in the last two decades, but have more to improve. In secondary and tertiary education levels there are more gaps for women in education. Although there was good progress in those two levels of education, there are still some disparities that need to be addressed.

The fourth goal of reducing child mortality under the age of five requires there be a two-thirds reduction by 2015. The child mortality rate for children under the age of five accelerated from 1.2% in the years 1990-1995 to 3.9% in the years 2005-2012. Some regions, though, will not reach the goal needed by 2015, and do not look like they can until the year 2028; the regions include: Oceania, sub-Saharan Africa, the Caucasus and Central Asia, and Southern Asia.

The Fifth goal of improving maternal health has not been reached. Between the years 1990-2013 the maternal mortality ratio went from 380 deaths to 210 deaths for every 100,000 live births which is about 45%. Although it has improved, it still does not meet the goal determined by the MDGs for the year 2015. Just in the year 2013 about 289,000 women died either during the following circumstances: “pregnancy, childbirth or [within] 42 days of termination of the pregnancy”. And, even though there has been progress in every region of the world, the maternal mortality ratio in the developing regions is fourteen times higher than that of the developed regions in the year 2013; developing regions have about 230 deaths for every 100,000 live births compared to developed regions which have only sixteen deaths for every 100,000 live births.

The sixth goal of combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases has not yet been reached, but there has been good progress on controlling its spread and medical care. HIV infection for every 100 adults declined by 44% between the years 2001-2012. Even in regions such as Southern Africa and Central Africa, which have the highest numbers of incidences of the disease, saw big declines of 48% and 54% respectively. There has been good progress among children in regards to AIDS, in the year 2012 210,000 children died because of AIDS-related causes as opposed to 320,000 deaths in the year 2005.

The seventh goal—to ensure environmental sustainability—outlined that, by 2015, the world needs to “halve the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation”. In regards to having access to safe drinking-water the world has met the goal set by the MDGs. Ninety percent in 2012 compared to 76% in 1990 “of the population used an improved source of drinking-water”. The problem is that the progress has been very uneven between different regions. In regards to basic sanitation, 2.5 billion people did not have access to basic sanitation in the year 2012 which means they are not going to reach that portion of the goal.

For the eighth goal, to develop a global partnership for development, there seems to have been some progress; in the years 2011-2012 out of the “$98.8 billion of sector-allocable aid” allotted, $23.5 billion was used to try and achieve the third goal, which is gender equality and empowerment of women. Although this may seem like it is going towards achieving the goals in 2012, the aid from the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) to least developed
countries (LDCs) was .09% of their combined Gross National Income (GNI) which is the lowest ratio since the year 2008.

There are a few differences between the SDGs and MDGs, and the goals they seek to accomplish. First, the MDGs were aimed towards more of the undeveloped world, with funding from the developed world driving these endeavors. Within the MDGs, the three pillar system of economics, society, and environment was more in a horizontal system where the economy was the first and primary consideration of development, followed by social considerations, and lastly the environment, which was least important and sometimes not cared about at all to achieve the goals.


The SDGs seeks to put these three factors into a more vertical system where everything is equal, and all three are taken into consideration towards a final goal: increasing sustainable development. This new directive comes after the general global realization that without a planet, there will be no economy or social aspects, and moving forward with developing these three encompassing factors under the roof of sustainable development allows for a healthy and natural environment to flourish.
III. Development Analysis

The shortcomings of the Millennium Development Goals are highlighted in the approach to development utilized by them. Instead of approaching the three aspects of human development in a holistic manner, the MDGs approached them as separate phenomena. Social development was taken against economic development, and both of these were privileged over environmental development. The SDGs address the interconnected nature of human and planetary development.


According to the UN System Task Team (UNTT), any agenda that is moving away from the MDGs mode of development needs to be based on “concrete end goals and targets, one of the key strengths of the MDG framework should be retained, but reorganized along four key dimensions of a more holistic approach: (1) inclusive social development; (2) inclusive economic development; (3) environmental sustainability; and (4) peace and security.” This way, instead of forsaking one of the aspects in favor of another, the Post-2015 Development Agenda must take into account the three main pillars (social, economic, environmental) with ample security considerations. Though, under this analysis, we focus on the three main pillars primarily, which are assumed to improve human and planetary security.
A. Social Development

The focus of the social development pillar is primarily within human health, especially as it concerns maternal and infant health. Additionally, there are concerns for human health in general, focusing on disease eradication and prevention (the target being the elimination of HIV/AIDS); social development via education is also targeted through literacy levels and lifelong learning. There are several other aspects to this pillar, but many of the ones not enumerated here belong not just to the new agenda, but are hold overs from the MDGs. Where this new agenda differs very greatly from the past development agenda is that this pillar supports cultural development too. According the UNTT, the cultural aspect of social development is thus:

“It is also critical to promote equitable change that ensures people’s ability to choose their value systems in peace, thereby allowing for full participation and empowerment. Communities and individuals must be able to create and practice their own culture and enjoy that of others free from fear. This will require, inter alia, respect for cultural diversity, safeguarding cultural and natural heritage, fostering cultural institutions, strengthening cultural and creative industries, and promoting cultural tourism.”

By adding cultural development, the SDGs intend to promote a more inclusive society, both within local communities and within the greater world community. The promotion of freedom from fear of cultural persecution is the affirmation of the global community to address societal issues such as religious extremism, bigotry, racism, and xenophobia. Moreover, the promotion of cultural tourism, while it may potentially lead to some cultural commodification, is ultimately beneficial to addressing the aforementioned ailments. The efforts to protect and respect cultural and natural heritage are directed towards protecting indigenous people’s lands and societies. The efforts to protect indigenous lands, promote social inclusion, and protect cultural independence are not endeavors that can be taken exclusively through the scope of social development. Thankfully though, these projects will not be undertaken without the equal support from the other two pillars. Economic development is necessary if social inclusion is to be achieved, and environmental development is quintessential to protecting indigenous lands. Therefore, in order for social development to be achieved, the other pillars have to be equally addressed.

B. Economic Development

The primary focus of the Economic development pillar is not economic growth for the sake of economic growth, but rather “inclusive economic growth based on sustainable patterns of production and consumption.” Initially, it appears that the focus is almost exclusively pro-poor, but the universality of the pillar is such that while it does focus heavily on the poor, it also focuses on those just above poverty. The focus is not just on those living in and around the poverty lines, but also on good governance and financial sector management. According to the UNTT states:
“Better governance of the economic and financial sectors will be key to maintaining regulatory frameworks that respect human rights and protect the environment. The realities of economic and trade interdependence will also require stronger policy consistency and coordination, as well as partnerships and institutional capacity building across countries and regions, not least to build resilience against economic shocks.”

The respect for human rights is the link to the social pillar, and the efforts to protect the environment are the promises to the environmental pillar, but further efforts such as “Growth strategies for the future should give immediate priority to dealing with the global jobs crisis and support productive activities to create full employment and decent work,” challenge the efforts to protect the environment. There are several other areas of the economic pillar that are carry overs from Millennium Development Goals including the aforementioned partnerships building through the regions and across states. Other areas recapitulated in this pillar are the focusses on women and children within the greater economic scheme (point 82) and the efforts to use economic inclusion to further universal education, especially the focus on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) programs (86, 87). Several others, left un-enumerated, belong to both sets of goals, but there is a focus unique to the SDGs. That being the need to focus on good governance practices both within state governments and global governance initiatives, that is to say efforts to fight government corruption, “to ensure legitimacy in their decision-making.”

Fighting global corruption, within institutions and within society as a whole, is an endeavor that will help assuage economic hardships of the disenfranchised. It will also help ensure the proper flow of capital to infrastructure building projects and global financing enterprises, which will further allow for the goal to succeed. Indeed, the efforts to inclusively grow the global economy will be in vain if equal gumption is not shown to tackle corruption.

This paves the way for a multilateral system of financing through both state and private initiatives. Garnering support from the private sector for financing the SDGs, as well as the Green Economy Initiative (GEI), is an important part of making the system function smoothly; while the right corrective taxes, charges, or levies from the state may provide funds at the same time as creating motivation for leaning to more environmentally-friendly practices, the investment of the private sector in environmental protection is of such a magnitude that states could not possibly correct it all alone. At this level, states can finance sustainable development alongside private enterprises, while the global community is encouraged by partnerships between the UN and other fora of state collaboration.

C. Environmental Development

The focuses of the Environmental Development pillar, or properly defined: the Environmental Sustainability pillar, are “a stable climate, stopping ocean acidification, preventing land degradation and unsustainable water use, sustainably managing natural resources and protecting the natural resources base, including biodiversity,”. The International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) under the UN deals with these topics on scientific basis, which is a
detail of paramount importance, considering the great need for conversation between the scientific and political community on the grounds of climate change and sustainable development. Climate stability is the cornerstone of these initiatives, but that should not lead to the other factors being left by the wayside. Nor is the environmental pillar based on an altruistic, save the planet for the planet’s sake, mindset. The majority focus throughout environmental development is the protection of, and sustainable interaction with, the environment for the advancement of the human condition. Arable land and clean water are quintessential in social and economic development, and without proper natural resource management and diversification, many privileges enjoyed through interactions with the natural environment shall be lost.

These objectives are complex and some of them are not completely understood; however, this pillar has as part of its structure the research and development within natural resource management and the best practices for the adaptation and mitigation of climate change:

“Combining the diversification of production with increased resource use efficiency and incentives for the development and use of products with a light carbon, water and biodiversity footprint will be needed. The transition to low-carbon energy sources would need to be coupled with more efficient use of energy, greener consumption and the promotion of energy-efficient technologies. Improved scientific understanding and knowledge-sharing on climate change, natural hazards, the space environment and natural resource limits will be necessary for effective policy-making for sustainable development.”

It is apparent, then, that the energy sector will be primarily affected by the fulfillment of this pillar, in that fossil fuels are the current primary energy source, and the transition to low-carbon energy sources will mitigate, if not eventually eliminate, the use of fossil fuels within the energy sector. Though, it must be noted that fossil fuel utilization is still necessary for the current energy reality, but transitioning away from this reliance is happening. This transition should also include the side-by-side energy harnessing of green energy coupled with cleaner fossil fuels like natural gas. This does, fortunately, create incentives for the exploration, development, and proliferation of green energy technologies should prove to be a boon to the global economy rather than a hindrance to global commerce. But, this shall be explored further in a subsequent section.

Education about environmental sustainability is also fundamental to these successes, but these efforts must be driven at production and consumption patterns, as well as technical and vocational training in order to prepare young people for jobs within the sustainability sector. This obvious interaction with the social pillar is not the instance of this, the need to multilaterally develop the cities of the future to operate within the sustainability system will require both the social pillar and the environmental pillar to be actualized. Furthermore, the need to protect the most vulnerable populations from natural disasters will only help insulate the global economy from the effects of catastrophes such as super storms and earthquakes, but this too cannot be realized without proper social protections for those most vulnerable.

D. Interactions Within the Tri-pillar Structure
The question, then, is can global society maintain the current rate of economic development, and current pace of life, while still striving towards fulfilling planetary commitments to the Post-2015 Development Agenda. It seems obvious that extreme resource extraction is neither socially inclusive nor environmentally friendly, and that a movement away from this must be taken in order to fully secure the sustainable development of the human species. Fortunately though, the SDGs which are the enumerated conceptions of the Post 2015 Development Agenda, are driving towards this endeavor, and the Tri-pillar structure is designed to consider the environment as equally as social and economic development.

Figure 1


The MDGs took the three aspects of development into consideration individually, and so efforts were made to create economic growth without considering the environmental and social impacts of those decisions. Further, when taking each pillar individually the goals of those pillars cannot be reached; but, the SDGs are such that each pillar will be fulfilled individually by fulfilling the goals in concert with each other. Figure 1 details where the pillars interact with each other and it is in these areas that the focuses of the enumerated goals are aimed. The development structure under the SDGs should account for social development via economic inclusion inasmuch as those decision are done to account for environmental pressures including land arability and emissions controls. The economic considerations for the environment are focused more on these areas than the social considerations, but food security, which considers arable land, involves the interactions of the three.
The social considerations of the environment and their economic impacts are interconnected. In order for food security to be achieved, efforts to protect arable lands must be made, and this cannot be accomplished if desertification is allowed to continue. Food security, too, cannot be achieved without efforts to insure that food price volatility is mitigated and the markets are broadened to allow all classes to participate. Social development is not something that can be taken outside of the natural environment, nor can it be achieved without proper economic development.

Economic development and environmental protection are also intertwined. This is most clear when considering growing the global economy through the lens of environmental protection. Growing industry is a successful way to stimulate the economy, but industry requires energy; currently, it is still more cost effective to utilize fossil fuel sources whose cost per megawatt hour ranges from 61 USD (gas) to 151 USD (coal), whereas renewable sources cost per megawatt hour ranges from 37 USD (wind) to 265 USD (residential solar photovoltaic). Some renewable sources are competitive in cost with their nonrenewable counterparts, but as a whole the renewable sector is still not as cheap as the fossil fuel sector; nor is the renewable sector applicable in every geographical region.

It seems, then, that the environment is at a loss when energy needs are concerned, but this ignores the possibility of broadening the scope of renewable energy, which is a key focus of the SDGs. With such a gap in cost, new technologies must be created, and jobs must be as well, in order to adapt current energy grids to utilize renewable sources. The efforts to move away from fossil fuels can be boon to the economy because the renewable sector will provide jobs to the areas that are expanding within this sector. Thus, in order to accomplish the objective of economic development the environment must be protected by transitioning from fossil fuels to more sustainable energy resources. Such sustainable energy and technology should be shared globally to create new industries and opportunities for employment.

Additionally, as fossil fuel extraction becomes more difficult, the prices will rise on these resources, and as the technology to harvest renewable sources is further developed and expanded, the prices will drop; then, eventually the inverse of the current relationship will exist and it will be cost competitive for industries to utilize renewables. However, these technologies will need to be proliferated for the aforementioned job growth to occur in currently underserved areas. But, part of the SDGs is to increase technology sharing and regional partnerships in order to increase access to renewable technologies. This is further evidence of social development requiring economic development, accompanied by the added bonus of environmental protection.

Reinventing the energy sector could also impact climate policy. For example, the cattle industry is one of the largest polluting sectors, as well as one the most unsustainable. The cattle industry is responsible for clear cutting many of the rainforests of Central and South America, with near 40% of rainforests being destroyed in Central America to make way for grazing lands. As of 2006, cattle not only accounts for 9% of CO2, but it is also responsible for 65% of nitric oxide produced by human activity and 37 percent of human activity produced methane. This presents a problem because as of 2006 the cattle industry uses, via grazing land or feed production, near 35% of all arable land on the planet, and employs 1.3 billion people. Though it will be discussed in more detail later, the GEI has much to do with this area of concern; through
its idea of “ecosystem services”, where natural processes and formations are quantified and marketized, industries may no longer produce without including the cost of externalities such as pollution. With the proper subsidies promoting the right types of industries for the environment, alongside these costs of externalities added in to the more environmentally-harmful sectors, there could be beneficial gains in both environmental protection and the energy sector.

To address this issue would involve all three pillars interacting; agriculture, including the meat industry, is necessary for food security employment, but it also involved job growth as the industry tries to feed the growing number of persons on the planet. But, this growth and security comes at steep costs when the environment is degraded and destroyed to make way for more farm land. This destruction weakens the earth’s ability to clean the air and severely increases the likelihood of desertification.\(^{50}\)

Thus, the efforts to create, maintain, and fulfill the three pillar structure of the Post 2015 Development Agenda involve addressing many of the commonly accepted practices of this day and age. These efforts focus on reinvigorating, if not reinventing, several of the more costly (to development) industries, while also promoting and proliferating the industries emerging to tackle these problems. This creates an economic problem, within the capitalist system, that could prove vital, or destructive, to these ends.

### IV. Capitalism in the Green Economy

International trade is a core part of global functions in modern society. This is an easy concept to understand, for some states have resources that others lack, and, in order to compensate for a disproportion of the resources that are necessary—as well as those wanted for material reason—to function properly and support its population, a state that has a surplus of one good would have to trade with another state that has a surplus of a good that the first state is without or has limited pools of. International trade is a superbly delicate system that is constantly shifting in response to signals from each actor within it, not unlike the delicateness of the ecosystem. While trade institutions such as the UN International Monetary Fund (IMF) seek to foster global monetary cooperation, secure financial stability, facilitate international trade, promote high employment and sustainable economic growth, and reduce poverty around the world,\(^{51}\) there still exists a danger to the environment and society without the proper protections from trade; as businesses are typically profit-seeking entities, they lack of concern for the environment and society leads to abusing externalities, or damaging the environment without having to pay the cost of it. The idea of a green economy seeks to force a cost on these externalities, though it harbors its own set of problems in that it still does not keep the economy from being favored over the environment.

The MDGs and SDGs both have their suggestions for changes to international trade. Goal 17 of the SDGs holds several trade-related targets that reflect for the most part the targets under Goal 8 of the MDGs on developing a global partnership for development. The first of these targets promotes a non-discriminatory, equitable multilateral trading system under the WTO.\(^ {52}\) While this is argued to be central to the promotion of sustainable development, it “arguably narrows the scope of the proposed target to just one part of the international trade system, leaving out new trade rules increasingly being developed in bilateral, regional, and plurilateral trade agreements”.\(^ {53}\) Another target of SDG 17 is to increase the exports of developing countries,
including doubling LDCs’ share of exports by 2020.\textsuperscript{54} The third target seeks to implement duty-free quota-free (DFQF) market access for LDC exports, which is a decision that has received support from the World Trade Organization (WTO).\textsuperscript{55} There is also language in the SDGs on fossil fuel subsidy reform that suggests the Group of Twenty (G20) and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) economies “phase out inefficient harmful fossil fuel subsidies”.\textsuperscript{56} A key feature in the furthering of sustainable development is in the suggestion in The Future We Want, the outcome document from the United Nations conference on Sustainable Development, that promotes diffusion of environmental goods and services in order to improve access to technology that can facilitate sustainable development—an example of such being the research into improved water sanitation technologies.\textsuperscript{57} It is not only the UN that promotes this, as mentioned previously, the WTO has supported the change to a more sustainable trade system. The Doha mandate has instructed that services—that is, transport, finance, telecoms, and law—be conducted “with a view to promoting the economic growth of all trading partners and the development of developing countries and LDCs”.\textsuperscript{58} This, among other factors, such as industrial goods, has been a component of the WTO’s effort to continue the conversation on a method of facilitating trade in a cooperative and sustainable manner.

There should be no doubt that capitalism has had an impact on the initial drafting of the Sustainable Development Goals. However, the goals are not clear enough on this issue as they only recommend companies use social, economic, and environmental accounts; there is nothing direct about integrated reporting. To clarify, this integrated sustainability reporting is a crucial step in monitoring the effectiveness of the private sector in putting the Sustainable Development Goals to use, as it would require constant updates from companies on their organizational structure, and thus promote the push for better results. This infuses private sector and markets in the SDG process, something distinct from the MDGs. Additionally, the High-Level Panel’s Goal 12 in its post-2015 development agenda is to “create a global enabling environment and catalyze long-term finance.”\textsuperscript{59} This is indicative of further adoptions of the sustainable agenda in policy promotion.

\textit{The Green Economy}

A large part of the sustainable development process is the introduction of the green economy which is defined by the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) as:

“The business community believes that the term “green economy” is embedded in the broader sustainable development concept. The “green economy” is described as an economy in which economic growth and environmental responsibility work together in a mutually reinforcing fashion while supporting progress on social development. Business and industry have a crucial role in delivering the economically viable products, processes, services, and solutions required for the transition to a green economy.” \textsuperscript{60}

This definition of a green economy is consistent with the United Nations Environment Programme’s (UNEP) definition of it as an economy that results in “improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities.”\textsuperscript{61}
Both these groups seek to promote a ‘spirit’ of efficiency, low carbon, and social inclusiveness. It is a tool for policymakers to seek out more cost-effective methods of improving infrastructure regarding energy policy and reduce the dependency of states on carbon-producing energy sources. However, there are obstacles to this which are inherent to a capitalist society; while it may be seen as a positive that businesses, rather than state governments, would seek to take the lead on the sustainable movement through adapting to incentives—explicit or hidden—and regulations, the problem lies in the tendency for the private sector to search for profits and new markets over operating in the ‘spirit’ of the GEI. Another issue with this policy is that businesses may cut in front of UN efforts to promote sustainability on the claim that UN efforts are ineffective and slow in implementation, which takes away from the locus of influence it holds on sustainability policy. The private sector is able to take advantage of this “green economy” due to a central aspect of it—“ecosystem services”. These “services” include functions of the natural world such as water purification, carbon capture, and plant pollination, which would shortly transition from being free and shared to quantified and marketized. This is supposed to hold industries more accountable to the externalities of damage to the environment they cause. Put simply, the act of giving nature’s processes a market value is intended to act as an incentive for industry not to produce ecologically harmful products. At first glance, such a policy seems like a positive version of the aforementioned exploitation of environmental capital. However, there are issues with the green economy that undermine its possible effectiveness. The ecosystem services are “inherently difficult to price” in that human knowledge of ecosystem operations is limited, and the proposed pricing tools for insect pollination, to use an example, are based on the scenarios of “total pollinator loss,” which develop a price at $190 billion/year without raising the concern that pollination is a natural capital that physical capital simply cannot replace, despite the advancements in human technology. Therefore, UNEP’s green economy automatically operates on a fault of assumption; the impact of a world devoid of pollinators is simply unpredictable, and attempting to assign a price to that scenario would require a sounder scientific method. This point is supported by Anneleen Kenis and Matthias Lievens, who cite others, such as Vandana Shiva, on the subject, stating that monetary valuation of ecosystem services “not only misrecognises other modes of valuation, but also threatens to transform people’s attitudes to nature and its protection.” That is, ecosystem services are a “contestable social construction” that replace the moral and aesthetic “intrinsic” reasons for conservation into financial “extrinsic” reasons, unable to provide motivation to protect nature based on ecological ideals.

V. The New Policy

With these new sustainable directives, which call for substantial changes in the way countries operate at even local levels, the global population will witness see major shifts in policy and action that will be directed towards this new sustainable movement. Policy change across the international system, most of the time, will react more slowly than expected or wanted. Some have tried to explain it by saying that this time allows for the input of democracy within the system. Usually when there is immediate change in in the direction of a nation’s policies, it coincides with a change in government or instability within that nation’s politics. The issue that will be presented, at the development of the SDGs in late 2015, is that this change will need to happen relatively quickly, and this may mean aligning state governmental policy with strict goals not be in their economic favor. The reformation of national policies is essential to improving the stewardship of the earth’s environment, and this need for reformation gives cause to international environmental diplomacy and transnational advocacy campaigns. Understanding
this, what follows should be gearing these goals towards regions that will require the most change in policy with respect to culture, society, and economy. It would be wrong in assuming that just because Africa maintains 35 of the United Nations Lesser Developed Countries you should immediately focus on that one region. While that seemed to be effective with regards to some aspects of the MDG because the continent proved to be the region that presented the most targets under the eight MDGs (poverty, education, and health), providing a major focus on just the impoverished regions will result in failure of the future goals of the SDGs.

With the inclusion of sustainability as a roof over the economic, social and environmental factors, the tables are laid evenly in regards to which states are required to make the most sacrifices and take the most action. As mentioned before, the focus of the SDGs, and in reality any type of guidelines produced at this level, should be directed at the region requiring the most change in policy. With the prevalence of extreme poverty, dispersed social communities and with economic growth constantly being challenged by political corruption and the mismanagement of funds; the African continent and countries in similar economic, social, and environment are more ready to begin the implementation of guidelines that seek to sustain those three factors. Due to the innate belief of “if it is not broke don’t fix it,” problems could arise out of the more industrialized countries. These more industrialized countries will have to make more commitments to not only outside investment, but also change within the inside. They would have to accomplish that while also implementing new policies that share an international agenda and not a more sovereign domestic one. Two of the largest economies in the world: the US is currently experiencing job growth not seen in 15 years while maintaining its spot as the number one spot in global nominal Gross Domestic Product (GDP); and China over the past 30 years has maintained an average of 10% growth rate and almost equaling the economy of the US nominally (Greiner, 2015). These countries are seeing their respective economies steadily grow annually, and after the 2008 recession the citizens within these countries are not going to be eager to get behind policy that might present some detriment to their economy. The same can be said for other more industrialized countries like, Australia, Saudi Arabia, and several countries that comprise the European Union to say just a few.

Source: http://tagbauer.com/
These major economies while maintaining a significant majority of the global wealth, also happens to maintain the majority of the responsibility in carbon emissions into the atmosphere. As illustrated in the image directly below, these leading countries represents enormous amounts of carbon emissions.

The LDCs are only responsible for minimal amounts of carbon emissions, if any, being ejected into the atmosphere. From an environmental standpoint, a needed change in policy regarding harm to the environment within these areas causing the most damage to the environment has to occur to accomplish the SDGs. A change in policy that is meant for the betterment of the environment could also be of detriment to the growth of the economy or the integration of society, there is no sure way to predict these variables, it can only be assumed that given the current system it would happen, at least at first. Countries, corporations, and organizations has already begun the process of informing people not only of the damages of not treating the environment in a sustainable way, but they have also started discussions on what would this change be like: *The Green Economy*.

With regards to the sustainability of economic growth, those LDCs would see waves of cooperation and investment in a push to create new mutual economic growth that would benefit the countries as well as the environment. One must understand that policy may not always drive policy, and that it presents the opportunity for action to the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and corporations to take hold

The same countries that are both low emitters of carbon in the atmosphere and are developing economically, as shown above, present what may be the future supplier of renewable energy to the continent and world. Out of this a new global cartel will form between these countries, similar to what is seen in the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), and that cooperation would yield way to sustaining a renewable energy force that benefits the environment and the region.
Global Mean Wind Speed at 80m

Global Mean Solar Irradiance

As mentioned previously these policies will not be regionally limited in the targets that they set. With the knowledge that political corruption is prevalent along with the mismanagement of governmental funds within some of the developing countries, and that will have to be targeted in order to even begin to set strict goals. The target of the SDGs should not be something that is open to discussion or negotiation. As the world grows closer to the limits of the environment’s elasticity, the earth’s population will continue witnessing unheard of and drastic events as a result of the change in climate. Even in the most urgent of times internationally, countries will, nevertheless, seek to hold on to as much of their sovereignty as possible, and in doing so the progression towards the SDGs will be extremely slow to say the least.

An important aspect of the SDGs is in the implementation of strong accountability and transparency measures. Introducing these two factors, underneath the three pillars, will present the best possible results in targeting the SDGs. All countries must sign on to these measures, and present truthful progress, and agree to continue to work towards the SDGs with transparency and accountability in mind. In this format, the more industrialized countries will be relieved of their position as “policing states” as the global community will replace those select few as the new policing entity in regards to holding countries accountable.

VI. Conclusions

The Post-2015 agenda is proving to be a heated debate among contemporaries across multiple fields—from policy to science to business. This paper discussed the development agenda as the Sustainable Development Goals arose from the Millennium Development Goals, followed by an analysis of the development of the SDGs in the form of the three pillars—economic, societal, and environmental. There was also a discussion on the economic environment in which these SDGs will be implemented, and how a green economy influences the realm of capitalism. Lastly, there was a discussion that took place on the policy surrounding the issue, both presently and in prospects for future policy. The new development agenda presents a necessary, but challenging, attempt by mankind to secure its future on the planet. It is at this point that the reader must take into consideration the ongoing nature of this conversation; as states gather in UN panels to discuss their ideas on sustainable development, the world waits with baited breath to see what resolutions, if any, pass. Nothing about these changes to the global system are final, and so one must ask the question, “are these initiatives feasible in the current system of production and consumption?” Though perhaps it is more important to question if the SDGs encompass all areas of concern and have the best answers for all of them. The reader must take the ideas presented here and go forth to help the cause of sustainable development for the betterment of society.

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2 Ibid. pg. 3
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.


Ibid.
Ibid.
Ibid.
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Ibid.


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UNEP. “What is GEI?” (May 2015).


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Ibid.
