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especially in low-income countries, is a precondition for the SDGs, especially through ‘growth-enhancing and inequality-reducing investments in health, education, infrastructure and agricultural productivity...’ (IMF 2024a). Third, *planet*: The IMF focuses particularly on climate change and promotes carbon pricing and fossil fuel subsidy reform as means of mitigating climate change, as well as helping vulnerable countries with improving their resilience to climate impacts (Skovgaard 2021). Fourth, *peace*: The IMF’s work in this pillar concerns strengthening governance and reducing corruption within countries, which are seen as preconditions for meeting SDGs. Fifth, *partnerships*: The IMF’s arguably most important role concerns the financing necessary for achieving the SDGs. This role concerns how to increase public spending on selected areas and raise finance through strengthening tax capacity and increasing aid and private finance.

While the IMF’s efforts to implement the SDGs are notable, they remain circumscribed by two fundamental characteristics of the organization, which have been the subject of criticism from civil society and the Global South. The first is the emphasis on economic growth, which downplays discussions of limits to growth. The second is the governance structure of the IMF, which grants industrialized countries a majority of the votes and ensures the Managing Director is from Europe and the first Deputy Managing Director from the United States (IMF 2024b). Of these two characteristics, it is arguably easier to change the governance structure. If countries with low income and high vulnerability to environmental change become more influential within the IMF, it can become a stronger force for meeting the SDGs.

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International organizations

Thomas Hickmann

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are the result of intense negotiations between governments and, as such, a product of the United Nations system (Chasek et al. 2016). While the main responsibility for implementing the SDGs lies with national governments, international organizations within and outside the United Nations system seek to advance the various goals and targets by providing platforms for multilateral cooperation and giving impulses for national policymaking.

International organizations adopt a range of roles and functions in the global endeavour to advance the SDGs. They set agendas and frameworks for policy initiatives, engage in coordination efforts across regions and countries, offer technical assistance and expertise to countries with a lack of adequate resources, compile data and monitor progress of goal implementation and raise awareness about sustainable development among the general public, policymakers and other stakeholders. In this context, numerous international organizations have incorporated the SDGs into their portfolios while scholars have criticized the strong ‘siloization’ around the 17 goals in the work of international organizations (Bogers et al. 2022).

Studies have moreover shown that the efforts of international organizations in fostering multilateral cooperation and driving domestic policies for SDG implementation have been seriously hampered by a number of factors. They include, but are not limited to, growing institutional fragmentation and problem shifting, lack of political will among many governments, inadequate funding and resources for sustainable development, the non-binding nature of the goals and targets and the all-encompassing scope of the SDGs (Biermann et al. 2022; van Driel et al. 2022).

At the same time, authors have pointed to some positive developments and institutional changes in the United Nations system, indicating that the SDGs, to an increasing extent, get incorporated into the strategic work of international organizations (Montesano et al. 2023). By this means, international organizations shape national SDG agendas and influence discourses on sustainable development at different governance levels. Yet, there is evidence that the efforts of international organizations have not led to large-scale goal implementation in national public-administrative systems due to lacking national ownership, prioritization and resources for the SDGs (Hickmann et al. 2024).

In this regard, an emerging body of research focuses on the concept of orchestration. In the area of the SDGs, this concept is based on the premise that international organizations adopt coordination and facilitation functions to foster the advancement of the SDGs (Haas and Ivanovskis 2022). As a case in point, international organizations may collaborate and interact with non-state actors to induce governments to take more ambitious steps for implementing goals and targets. Such orchestration strategies require that international organizations have adequate resources and mandates which allow them to reach out to non-state actors and pool their resources to launch initiatives aimed at advancing the SDGs. While researchers have pointed to the potential of international organizations to act as orchestrators, especially those within the United Nations system, we do not have sufficient knowledge about the effectiveness of such orchestration strategies.

Overall, despite the growing number of studies in this area, there is still a great need for further research on international organizations in relation to the SDGs. In particular, studies are warranted on the future of multilateralism and global cooperation in light of the changing geopolitical environment. Key areas of investigation include power struggles, diverging interests and conflicting norms within international organizations operating in the field of sustainable development. This requires deeper exploration of the political dynamics within international organizations and enhanced cross-disciplinary collaboration.

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