

BOOK REVIEWS

Governing through Goals: Sustainable Development Goals as Governance Innovation,
edited by Norichika Kanie & Frank Biermann
The MIT Press, 2017, 352 pp, £74.95 hb, £27.95 pb. ISBN 9780262035620 hb,
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The concept of goal setting is not new in global governance. In 2001, the goal-based approach to development was popularized by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and it now lies at the core of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.¹ This approach, which arguably constitutes the primary reason for the enthusiasm surrounding the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), goes further than most multilateral environmental and development-related regimes of the 20th century. It does so by advancing the idea that a set of limited, time-bound, measurable goals can constitute a normative and policy framework for guiding the public's understanding of complex challenges, mobilizing stakeholders and resources, facilitating the assessment of progress, supporting integrated thinking, and fostering accountability.²

The SDGs are by no means the sole example of a growing trend towards goal-based planning in governance.³ However, they comprise the most ambitious effort yet to place 'governing through goals' at the centre of the United Nations (UN) development agenda. Even more importantly, the goals come at a critical juncture for multilateral cooperation, where not only anthropogenic drivers are affecting earth system functioning at an unprecedented rate, but the institutions and processes of global governance are increasingly seen as gridlocked.⁴ As a consequence, the 17 goals and 169 related targets enshrined in the 2030 Agenda put forth a series of formidable questions for researchers and practitioners. On the one hand, understanding the characteristics and implications of the SDGs as a governance strategy appears essential to foster innovative organizational arrangements that confront the current failures of cooperation on global public goods. On the other

¹ United Nations (UN) General Assembly, 'Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', Resolution 70/1, UN Doc. A/RES/70/1, 21 Oct. 2015, available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>.

² See, e.g., J.D. Sachs, 'Goal-based Development and the SDGs: Implications for Development Finance' (2015) 31(3–4) *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, pp. 268–78; Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), 'An Action Agenda for Sustainable Development: Report for the UN Secretary-General', 5 May 2013, available at: <http://unsdsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/140505-An-Action-Agenda-for-Sustainable-Development.pdf>.

³ At the international level, the global health governance regime has made frequent use of goal-based planning as a governance strategy, most notably in the context of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. In biodiversity governance, the Aichi Biodiversity Targets (available at: <https://www.cbd.int/sp/targets>) constitute another prominent example of goal setting, resulting in the uptake of a common framework across a number of biodiversity-related conventions.

⁴ See, e.g., T. Hale, D. Held & K. Young, *Gridlock: Why Global Cooperation is Failing When We Need It Most* (Polity Press, 2013).

hand, investigating the conditions under which goal-based planning can promote synergies between the different goals is also a pre-condition to achieving progress on the goals themselves, thereby securing sustainable development on a rapidly changing planet.

Governing through Goals: Sustainable Development Goals as Governance Innovation, edited by Norichika Kanie and Frank Biermann, represents a commendable attempt at unpacking these complex governance issues in an exhaustive, yet accessible manner. The book looks at the multifaceted governance dimension of the SDGs through a three-pronged approach. Firstly, it seeks to introduce and describe the central characteristics of goal setting and its main opportunities and pitfalls as a governance strategy (Part I). Secondly, it asks what can be learned from earlier experiences of global goal setting and what governance arrangements can ensure effective implementation of the SDGs (Part II). Finally, it focuses on the key outstanding challenges for the operationalization of the goals (Part III).

Part I of the volume opens with a concise yet compelling conceptualization of goal setting as a governance strategy, highlighting the differences between goal setting, rule making and norm promotion, and summarizing the difficulties and determinants of success associated with goal setting at the international level (Chapter 2, Young). In Chapter 3, Young, Underdal, Kanie and Kim link goal setting with the overarching theme of earth system governance, discussing the implications of the onset of the Anthropocene for the development and implementation of the SDGs. The chapter makes a poignant case for the adoption of a fundamental principle of law, a sustainability *Grundnorm*, to ensure that the protection of ecological integrity becomes the basic purpose against which all sustainable development policies, practices and legal norms are to be interpreted and evaluated. Chapter 4 (Biermann and others) addresses the idea that better governance can itself be subjected to goal setting, and reflects on the opportunities for integrating governance into all of the 17 SDGs compared with the advantages of pursuing it as a stand-alone goal. Finally, Chapter 5 (Pintér, Kok and Almassy) deals with the key aspect of measurement of progress. Here, the authors argue that the technical and scientific challenges linked with the development of an appropriate SDG indicator framework need not obscure the importance of understanding the policy relevance and political aspects of indicators, if these are to make a difference in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Part II of the book discusses the lessons that can be drawn from previous efforts at developing policy linkages across different issues and using goals as a governance strategy. Chapter 6, by Haas and Stevens, analyzes the prospects for sustainable issue linkage by examining three areas (food security, energy security, and water) where such prospects have increased because of a rising technical and normative consensus among countries. By contrast, Chapters 7 (Andresen and Iguchi) and 8 (Yamada) focus specifically on goal setting and discuss the legacy of the health-related MDGs and the role of the corporate sector in water stewardship, respectively. Overall, these chapters provide timely insights into key challenges that are likely to re-emerge in the

implementation of the SDGs. In particular, they touch on the defining issue of political and normative consensus, as well as on the importance of partnerships and the involvement of the private sector. This part of the book, however, would have probably benefited from a wider selection of case studies along the environmental dimension of the SDGs, especially considering that the key aspect of ecosystem integrity is described elsewhere in the book as a cornerstone of the new sustainable development framework.

Part III is probably the most intellectually engaging. It presents a comprehensive discussion of the conceptual and practical issues, challenges and opportunities associated with goal setting as a governance strategy, including the role of the UN system, the relationship of the SDGs with existing multilateral agreements, financing, and the crucial need for improved multilevel governance. In Chapter 9, Bernstein eviscerates the challenges for the governance of the SDGs and identifies the institutional means within the UN system, such as monitoring and review processes, that can mobilize the necessary commitments and resources from all stakeholders. The importance of coordination, orchestration and other institutional linkages in reducing fragmentation and promoting synergies between existing multilateral agreements is addressed by Underdal and Kim in Chapter 10. Chapter 11 (Voituriez and others) examines the unprecedented need for SDG financing and the implications of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development. In Chapter 12, Gupta and Nilsson propose a set of key principles and mechanisms that should guide multilevel action on the SDGs, such as the need to target drivers of change at the appropriate spatial scale and that of ensuring horizontal and vertical coherence between policies, programmes and actions. Finally, Chapter 13 (Biermann and Kanie) concludes the book by brilliantly summarizing the key characteristics of 'governing through goals' and the primary conditions for an effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including stronger arrangements at the global level, an adaptation of universal ambitions to national circumstances and priorities, and governance mechanisms that are flexible enough to respond to tipping points and abrupt earth system change.

Governing through Goals constitutes a compelling contribution to the academic study of the SDGs as a governance strategy and represents a timely reminder that the hard part of the game begins now. Two years after the UN Sustainable Development Summit, the pace of implementation of the SDGs is still insufficient to deliver on the promise of transformative change that surrounded their adoption. More importantly, there are two inherent risks in wrongly assuming that goal setting alone will move the world towards sustainable development. One such risk is arguably the central concern of this book: that enthusiasm towards goal setting does not appear to be matched by a parallel political will to move away from 'governance-as-usual' and devise innovative arrangements to help in managing global public goods in the Anthropocene. The other is the risk of an inadequate level of country ownership of the SDGs, leading to developments at the national level that simply realign existing policies with the SDG framework or fail to effectively integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development.

Although *Governing through Goals* outlines the role that the High-Level Political Forum might play in promoting coordination within the UN system and steering national commitments through its periodic review of progress, it is likely to take a few years before this potential can be evaluated. Moreover, despite the commendable contribution the authors make to the study of the governance dimension of the SDGs, empirical evidence of the implications of goal setting at different scales is still relatively limited, thereby greatly hindering our capacity to assess governance outputs, outcomes and impacts in an era of rapid economic, social and environmental change. In order to fill the vast knowledge gaps currently underlying the SDG framework, the implementation of the future research and policy agenda discussed at the end of the book therefore remains an essential, if prodigious, challenge.

Dario Piselli
*Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies
and Global Health Centre, Geneva (Switzerland)*

Riccardo Pavoni
University of Siena, Siena (Italy)

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Ecological Restoration in International Environmental Law,
by Anastasia Telesetsky, An Cliquet & Afshin Akhtar-Khavari
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The scholarly field of environmental law passed an important milestone with the publication of *Ecological Restoration in International Environmental Law*, the first specialist book devoted to this subject. Restoration of damaged ecosystems has been largely ignored both in the practice of environmental regulation and in scholarly enquiry, with few exceptions.¹ Compared with the abundance of literature on sustainable development and climate change law, eco-restoration law has struggled to garner the attention it deserves. Yet, restoration ecology is a burgeoning field, as evidenced by the growth of many dedicated journals² and international networks,

¹ E.g., B.J. Richardson, *Time and Environmental Law: Telling Nature's Time* (Cambridge University Press, 2017); M.A. Palmer & J.B. Ruhl, 'Aligning Restoration Science and the Law to Sustain Ecological Infrastructure for the Future' (2013) 3(9) *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment*, pp. 512–9; D. Hughes, 'Land Conservation and Restoration: Moving to the Landscape Level' (2002) 21(2) *Vanderbilt Environmental Law Journal*, pp. 115–28.

² E.g., *Restoration Ecology* (Wiley) and *Ecological Management and Restoration* (Wiley).