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UN Specialized Agencies and Governance for Global Risks

For the first time in human history, we have reached a level of scientific knowledge that allows us to develop an enlightened relationship to risks of catastrophic magnitude. Not only can we foresee many of the challenges ahead, but we are in a position to identify what needs to be done in order to mitigate or even eliminate some of those risks. Our enlightened status, however, also requires that we . . . collectively commit to reducing them.

Allan Dafoe and Anders Sandberg[1]

The United Nations has grown far beyond the institutions directly provided for in the UN Charter. This chapter and those immediately following review a number of global issues and risks that have emerged largely since 1945 and the responses through the UN family of specialized agencies, programs and convention secretariats. We consider the efforts of the UN to develop more strategic and integrated approaches to the range of interrelated problems in sustainable development facing the world today. We then consider examples of reform in the economic, environmental and social dimensions, without attempting to be comprehensive. We first look at governance for the global economy, especially to address the major challenges of growing inequality and the need for a level playing field for business. For the risks of instability in the financial system, we propose reinforcing the role of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for enhanced financial governance. We then review global environmental governance, including climate change, as well as population and migration as significant global social issues.

ADDRESSING CRITICAL RISKS

While the first impetus for creating institutions of global governance was to prevent inter-state war as the principal risk to global security, many other issues have

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[1] Dafoe, Allan and Anders Sandberg. 2018. "Why Care Now?" *Global Challenges Foundation Annual Report 2018*. https://globalchallenges.org/en/our-work/annual-report/annual-report-2018/why-care-now.

emerged requiring global collaboration, and the UN system has expanded with a variety of specialized agencies and other entities to address the different issues. Issues in need of focused and coordinated international attention can be expected to evolve in the future, and global governance mechanisms will likewise need to be flexible and adaptable.

Currently some of the most significant and threatening possible global risks are poorly understood and seriously underestimated by both political leaders and the general public. They tend to be complex and diffuse, and somehow are not considered short-term priorities. Global environmental challenges such as climate change and loss of biodiversity fall into this category. Risk assessment is always difficult – relying both on technical data and abstract probabilities – and even more so for problems that seem distant or infrequent, but with catastrophic consequences that we prefer not to think about. Improved scientific research on such risks and their interrelationships will be an important starting point, to assess more clearly their probability, magnitude and consequences. This should feed through assessment processes (see Chapter 6) into the deliberations of the the General Assembly (and associated bodies), or the other relevant UN organ, specialized agency or affiliated international organization. Contingency planning for relevant countermeasures can then follow to reduce the risks. Similar scientific advisory processes are needed at national and local government levels coherent with the global level.

The many risks on the horizon are also increasingly interrelated, as any one crisis is likely to precipitate others in our globalized society.[2] For too long we have hoped that the specter of nuclear war had receded, but recent political changes have perhaps brought us closer than ever. The present generation of leaders has apparently forgotten about the studies of nuclear winter and other horrors for the entire planet that would result from a nuclear exchange, in which there would be only losers, and no winners. Moreover, the increasingly integrated global economic system of production is much more vulnerable than in the past, and the reduced capacity for self-sufficiency with the larger urban populations in most countries would mean that any large-scale war or other politically motivated violence that interrupted world trade would precipitate human catastrophes on a massive scale. The repeated small-scale wars of recent decades have inured the public in many places to the suffering of violence as something that happens only to others far away. The ease with which the world slipped into World War I should serve as a reminder of how easily it could happen again without the safeguards that only global governance can provide (see Chapters 8 and 9). A few countries have started a public debate on civil protection, including Sweden, and a recent referendum on increased self-sufficiency in Switzerland.

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[2]   Laybourn-Langton, Laurie, Leslie Rankin, and Darren Baxter. 2019. *This Is a Crisis: Facing up to the Age of Environmental Breakdown*, London, IPPR: Institute for Public Policy Research. www.ippr.org/research/publications/age-of-environmental-breakdown.

For population growth (see Chapter 17), world overpopulation has been debated since Malthus, but improvements in agriculture, often unsustainable in the long term, have so far extended the limits of planetary carrying capacity, so people have stopped worrying about numbers. The focus is more on poverty, which is in fact partly a consequence of absolute numbers of people, as well as of an economic system that does not address the equitable distribution of wealth. Sooner or later, it is very likely that the global population crisis will emerge, perhaps when the world food supply, impacted by climate change or some other disaster, is no longer sufficient to feed everyone. By then, it will be too late. One immediate consequence of excessive numbers of people in some regions is migration, and this may be the issue through which to hold a broader debate on population growth. One partial solution to the population crisis is redistribution – moving people to where there are adequate resources and economic opportunities – but this needs to be presented as a positive solution to an inadequate workforce and replacements for an aging local population, not as an "invasion" of foreigners.

The globalized economy has brought with it a new scale of global risks, recalling the Great Depression of the 1930s, and more recently the financial system crisis of 2008. No effective mechanism to anticipate, prevent or prepare for an economic collapse has been developed at the global level, and existing institutions such as the IMF lack the resources necessary to face a major crisis (see Chapter 15).

Additionally, there are the new and emerging risks that are not yet on the global agenda. There are already worries about the next global influenza pandemic, comparable to the Spanish Flu of 1918–1919, with experts waiting for a virus to mutate to become easily transmittable between people, and which could in the worst-case scenario kill a third of the world population, particularly young people, through an excessive immune reaction. Beyond that, it would not be difficult to genetically engineer a dangerous virus or microbe in a laboratory, which might then be released accidentally or intentionally. Terrorist groups might be motivated to do this, or a criminal organization holding the world hostage to such a threat. Others worry about artificial intelligence becoming so powerful that it escapes from human control. Geoengineering, already debated as a solution to climate change but with the potential to destabilize the planetary system, has already been mentioned as posing significant risks. Many new chemical compounds are being invented, and are often manufactured in quantity and used without adequate study of their possible damaging effects on the environment or various forms of life, including humans. Chemicals that have been shown to be endocrine disruptors are one recent example. The reformed UN should have a strong Office of Technology Assessment with the capacity to follow all these developments and others that cannot now be anticipated, to research and evaluate the risks involved, and to advise the General Assembly and relevant special-ized agencies as appropriate, so that measures can be taken rapidly to establish guidelines and precautions for research, and regulations and prohibitions as necessary, where the risks are identified as significant (see Chapter 6).

Similarly worrying is the increasing vulnerability of our globalized economy and society, because it has become a highly integrated system and is increasingly dependent on vulnerable information technologies.[3] Any one major disruption affecting global trade and communications would precipitate a series of other crises in a complex catastrophe. We have become so dependent on the digital society and the Internet that a major failure would leave many helpless. Such a disruption could be caused by cyber warfare, or even a giant solar flare.[4] Transportation systems could break down. Cities might be cut off from the flows of energy, food and water, and the removal of wastes, essential for the survival of their dense populations. If security breaks down and social cohesion is inadequate, societies could descend into anarchy. A reformed United Nations able to react rapidly to any emerging catastrophe with global reach or implications might be the last bulwark to maintain civilization on this planet.
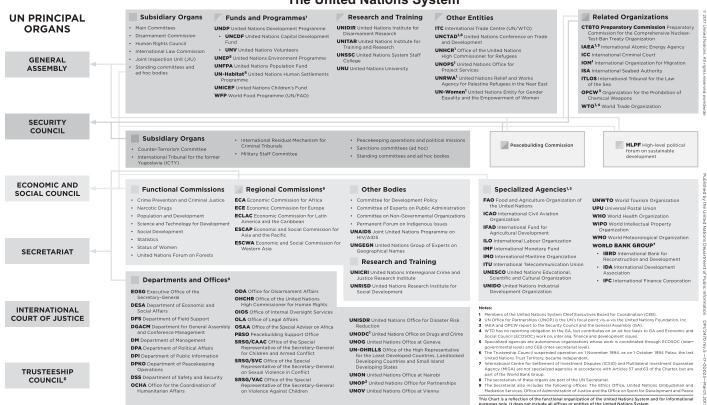
UN SPECIALIZED AGENCIES

Just as a national government has central legislative, judicial and executive functions, with the executive function implemented through a variety of ministries or departments, so the United Nations has specialized agencies, convention secretariats, programs and other entities to address different areas of global concern. Unlike national governments, these often have both legislative and implementation functions in their areas of responsibility. The agencies and conventions have their own legislative charters and governing bodies or conferences of the parties that give them considerable autonomy. They may be financed both from the regular UN budget and/or from their own funding sources. All this is the result of states insisting on retaining complete national sovereignty, down to deciding what international legislation they are willing to accept, and what to ignore. The inefficiency of basing international governance on voluntary legislation is made evident if we imagine the result if each individual could choose what national laws to obey and opt out of others.

The United Nations, alongside its central functions in the Charter to maintain peace and security and control politically motivated violence, has incorporated mechanisms over the years to deal with a wide range of issues requiring a global approach across the economic, social and environmental fields and for collaboration in health, science and education, among others. Today, the United Nations system includes about two dozen specialized agencies that formulate programs and channel resources to a number of important areas that address the Charter's provisions for the promotion of economic and social development (see Figure 13.1, UN System Chart).

[3] MacKenzie, Debora. 2012. "Doomsday Book," *New Scientist*, No. 2846, January 7, 2012, pp. 38–41.
[4] A giant solar flare or coronal mass ejection could break through the protective magnetosphere around the Earth and send a surging electrical pulse through everything electrical and electronic with possibly disastrous consequences.

The United Nations System

UN PRINCIPAL ORGANS

- GENERAL ASSEMBLY
- SECURITY COUNCIL
- ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL
- SECRETARIAT
- INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE
- TRUSTEESHIP COUNCIL[6]

Subsidiary Organs
- Main Committees
- Disarmament Commission
- Human Rights Council
- International Law Commission
- Joint Inspection Unit (JIU)
- Standing committees and ad hoc bodies

Funds and Programmes[1]
- **UNDP** United Nations Development Programme
  - **UNCDF** United Nations Capital Development Fund
  - **UNV** United Nations Volunteers
- **UNEP**[8] United Nations Environment Programme
- **UNFPA** United Nations Population Fund
- **UN-Habitat**[8] United Nations Human Settlements Programme
- **UNICEF** United Nations Children's Fund
- **WFP** World Food Programme (UN/FAO)

Research and Training
- **UNIDIR** United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research
- **UNITAR** United Nations Institute for Training and Research
- **UNSSC** United Nations System Staff College
- **UNU** United Nations University

Other Entities
- **ITC** International Trade Centre (UN/WTO)
- **UNCTAD**[1,8] United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
- **UNHCR**[1] Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
- **UNOPS**[1] United Nations Office for Project Services
- **UNRWA**[1] United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
- **UN-Women**[1] United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

Related Organizations
- **CTBTO Preparatory Commission** Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization
- **IAEA**[1,3] International Atomic Energy Agency
- **ICC** International Criminal Court
- **IOM**[1] International Organization for Migration
- **ISA** International Seabed Authority
- **ITLOS** International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea
- **OPCW**[3] Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons
- **WTO**[1,4] World Trade Organization

Subsidiary Organs
- Counter-Terrorism Committee
- International Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY)
- International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals
- Military Staff Committee
- Peacekeeping operations and political missions
- Sanctions committees (ad hoc)
- Standing committees and ad hoc bodies

Peacebuilding Commission

HLPF High-level political forum on sustainable development

Functional Commissions
- Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice
- Narcotic Drugs
- Population and Development
- Science and Technology for Development
- Social Development
- Statistics
- Status of Women
- United Nations Forum on Forests

Regional Commissions[8]
- **ECA** Economic Commission for Africa
- **ECE** Economic Commission for Europe
- **ECLAC** Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
- **ESCAP** Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
- **ESCWA** Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

Other Bodies
- Committee for Development Policy
- Committee of Experts on Public Administration
- Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations
- Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
- **UNAIDS** Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
- **UNGEGN** United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names

Research and Training
- **UNICRI** United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute
- **UNRISD** United Nations Research Institute for Social Development

Specialized Agencies[1,5]
- **FAO** Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
- **ICAO** International Civil Aviation Organization
- **IFAD** International Fund for Agricultural Development
- **ILO** International Labour Organization
- **IMF** International Monetary Fund
- **IMO** International Maritime Organization
- **ITU** International Telecommunication Union
- **UNESCO** United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
- **UNIDO** United Nations Industrial Development Organization
- **UNWTO** World Tourism Organization
- **UPU** Universal Postal Union
- **WHO** World Health Organization
- **WIPO** World Intellectual Property Organization
- **WMO** World Meteorological Organization
- **WORLD BANK GROUP**[7]
  - **IBRD** International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
  - **IDA** International Development Association
  - **IFC** International Finance Corporation

Departments and Offices[9]
- **EOSG** Executive Office of the Secretary-General
- **DESA** Department of Economic and Social Affairs
- **DFS** Department of Field Support
- **DGACM** Department for General Assembly and Conference Management
- **DM** Department of Management
- **DPA** Department of Political Affairs
- **DPI** Department of Public Information
- **DPKO** Department of Peacekeeping Operations
- **DSS** Department of Safety and Security
- **OCHA** Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
- **ODA** Office for Disarmament Affairs
- **OHCHR** Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
- **OIOS** Office of Internal Oversight Services
- **OLA** Office of Legal Affairs
- **OSAA** Office of the Special Adviser on Africa
- **PBSO** Peacebuilding Support Office
- **SRSG/CAAC** Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict
- **SRSG/SVC** Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict
- **SRSG/VAC** Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children
- **UNISDR** United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction
- **UNODC**[1] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
- **UNOG** United Nations Office at Geneva
- **UN-OHRLLS** Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States
- **UNON** United Nations Office at Nairobi
- **UNOP**[2] United Nations Office for Partnerships
- **UNOV** United Nations Office at Vienna

Notes:
1. Members of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB).
2. UN Office for Partnerships (UNOP) is the UN's focal point vis-a-vis the United Nations Foundation, Inc.
3. IAEA and OPCW report to the Security Council and the General Assembly (GA).
4. WTO has no reporting obligation to the GA, but contributes on an ad hoc basis to GA and Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) work on, inter alia, finance and development issues.
5. Specialized agencies are autonomous organizations whose work is coordinated through ECOSOC (intergovernmental level) and CEB (inter-secretariat level).
6. The Trusteeship Council suspended operation on 1 November 1994, as on 1 October 1994 Palau, the last United Nations Trust Territory, became independent.
7. International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) and Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA) are not specialized agencies in accordance with Articles 57 and 63 of the Charter, but are part of the World Bank Group.
8. The secretariats of these organs are part of the UN Secretariat.
9. The Secretariat also includes the following offices: The Ethics Office, United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services, Office of Administration of Justice and the Office on Sport for Development and Peace

This Chart is a reflection of the functional organization of the United Nations System and for informational purposes only. It does not include all offices or entities of the United Nations System.

FIGURE 13.1 **UN System Chart**

Source: www.un.org/en/pdfs/18-00159e_un_system_chart_17x11_4c_en_web.pdf, ©2019 United Nations. Reprinted with the permission of the United Nations

Once the General Assembly is reformed to become a legislative body empowered to adopt binding legislation on issues of global concern including initially peace and security, and the planetary environment, the UN will have the capacity to reform and consolidate as necessary the many parts of the UN system (see Chapter 4). The General Assembly could legislate, allocate budgets and assign responsibilities for implementation, regulation and enforcement. Specialization is a necessary approach for any complex institution, but collaboration and integration are also increasingly necessary to address complex global problems. In addition, the independent funding mechanism for the renewed UN (see Chapter 12) would help to overcome the chronic funding shortages that have handicapped most UN agencies and programs.

Making a comprehensive assessment of the sorts of reforms that are needed in the UN's system of specialized agencies and other bodies is beyond the scope of this book. But because we feel strongly that these agencies can play a critically important role in promoting and bringing into practice the best ideals of the UN Charter, we do wish to provide the reader, by way of illustration, with a sense of the kinds of issues that emerge in undertaking this work. We provide a brief review of the governance challenges represented by the wide range of issues covered, the multiplicity of mechanisms created to deal with them and the need for better collaboration to address the integrated challenges of sustainable development. As examples, we then expand on a few particularly challenging issues for the risks they represent for the future of humanity: the challenge that increasing inequality represents for social stability and the risks that could be created by unregulated multinational corporations (see Chapter 14); financial issues in the global financial system and the risks of another financial crisis (see Chapter 15); the need for environmental governance to address the dangers of overshooting planetary boundaries, in particular through climate change and biodiversity loss (see Chapter 16); and the social challenges presented by population growth and migration (see Chapter 17).

UN AGENCIES, PROGRAMS AND CONVENTIONS

Many specialized intergovernmental agencies and bodies have been created over the last century, starting with the International Labour Organization (ILO) dating from 1919. Many of the global bodies, with a notable exception in the World Trade Organization (WTO), which was intentionally kept separate, are today part of the United Nations system. They can be grouped into three main categories:

a) **Conventions** and other multilateral agreements under the UN umbrella were negotiated independently by governments and are responsible to their Conferences of the Parties (COP) with their own secretariats, funds and subsidiary mechanisms. Among the international conventions born from UN processes, some, such as the

ILO conventions, have a single organization as secretariat, but many, including the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD), have independent secretariats. The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) and the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) have their own secretariats directed by their COP, but are administratively under UN Environment (formerly UNEP).

b) **Specialized agencies** of the United Nations system have their own legal charters and intergovernmental bodies. In terms of the resources they receive from the UN budget through assessed annual contributions, the most important are the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Health Organization (WHO), the ILO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

c) **United Nations programs** such as the UN Development Program (UNDP), UN Women and UN Environment (UNEP) are under the UN Charter and considered part of the UN Secretariat under the ultimate responsibility of the UN General Assembly and the UN Secretary-General. They may have their own intergovernmental bodies and funds in addition to the regular UN budget.

The IMF and the World Bank were set up in 1944 at the United Nations Monetary and Financial Conference (also referred to as the Bretton Woods Conference), nearly a year before the San Francisco conference that adopted the UN Charter. These two agencies generate their own funding, have their own by-laws and founding charters and have traditionally had a considerable degree of independence from the UN Secretariat. They also have systems of weighted voting, unlike the one country–one vote approach within the UN General Assembly. In many ways, however, because the resources they deploy dwarf those of the entire UN system, they deserve particular attention.

Many other intergovernmental organizations, often regional in coverage or with a narrower focus, are outside the UN system. Since these were all independently negotiated, and may not have exactly the same governmental parties, they are quite independent, potentially making coordination or reform difficult.

Most of these agencies and programs receive direction from their own intergovernmental bodies, such as the World Health Assembly of the WHO representing health ministries, or the UN Environment Assembly of ministers of the environment. This can mean that the same national governments can take different and not always coherent positions in these specialized agencies. The UN itself has a range of subsidiary structures to coordinate across issue-areas and provide framing guidance where governments meet and make decisions, including the Economic and Social

Council, the Human Rights Council, the Statistical Commission, the Commission on the Status of Women and the High Level Political Forum charged with overseeing the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, among many others.

The full range of UN bodies, commissions, programs, specialized agencies and other associated entities perform vital roles in promoting human welfare and prosperity. They represent institutional capital, a source of expertise and depth of experience that are essential for any effective system of international governance. They provide leadership on global issues, set global norms and give operational guidance and assistance to developing countries in particular. Whatever the direction of UN reform, it should preserve these important capacities and plan for their evolution into the new system.

At the same time, due to their diverse origins and heterogeneous arrangements, they are far from a coherent and efficient system at present. Coordination is difficult. There are significant gaps and overlaps, and the inevitable inefficiencies that come from such a multiplication of structures. In addition, their governing bodies have government representatives from different sectors, who may seldom coordinate at the national level, creating the potential for the same governments to give incoherent instructions to different parts of the UN system. Further their main problem is implementation, often because the means made available to them are inadequate to their mission, and sometimes because of government resistance and the general lack of a mandate and means for binding enforcement.

The challenge, then, is how to maintain and strengthen as necessary the existing UN agencies and bodies while making the transition to a more coherent and effective system of global governance. Indeed, in an increasingly interdependent community of nations facing a wide range of unresolved global problems, the need for an effective cluster of specialized agencies is more urgent than ever and is likely to intensify. A strengthened UN with a revised Charter, greater responsibilities in the areas of security, peace and management of the global commons, and a larger and steadier source of funding, will create new opportunities for international cooperation in a number of areas of global concern, including climate change and the environment, the global financial system, human rights, migration, poverty alleviation, income inequality, job creation, nuclear proliferation, corruption, terrorism and drug trafficking, among many others.

CREATING THE BASIS FOR REFORM

The first step to reform this complex but useful assemblage will be to create the necessary structures for binding international legislation in the reformed General Assembly (see Chapter 4), and for executive action in the Executive Council (see Chapter 7), through revisions to the UN Charter. The General Assembly would be mandated to adopt legislation in the different areas of specialized concern requiring international coordination and action as demonstrated by the existing institutional

arrangements and as defined in the Charter. It would not start from scratch, but over time could consider all the existing charters and conventions in a particular field, build on their strengths and acquired experience, correct weaknesses, address new challenges and approve legislative texts that would substitute for and replace the existing international legal instruments. Such legislation would be binding on all countries, just as legislation is binding at the national level, without the need for complex processes of signature, ratification and accession as at present. This would also provide a mechanism for review and improvement in international legislation when required without the cumbersome process of ad hoc convention revision. The secretariats would transition into institutions within the new governance framework.

The legislative mandate of the General Assembly should ultimately include the ability to define and raise limited types of international taxes in its specific areas of responsibility (see Chapter 12). An effective system of governance must have some financial independence, and not be subject to the goodwill (and sometimes political pressure and leverage) associated with contributions from national governments. Taxation can be one of the tools of good management, requiring activities that damage the common interest or threaten its stability to cover the costs of their regulation. For example, this could initially simply involve a harmonization of specific taxes at the national level to reduce the harmful effects of tax competition, without the need to create a global system to collect taxes. Access to a reliable source of finance would also be a strong incentive for the specialized agencies, conventions and other entities to integrate into the new system.[5]

In the meantime, and as part of the evolving system of global governance, the Executive Council, with its management and system coherence mandate, could consider how to enhance the effectiveness of specialized UN agencies and conventions without waiting for legislative revision. The goals should be subsidiarity, coherence and efficacy.

There would still be a need for subject-specific intergovernmental consultations beyond the capacity of the General Assembly, presently carried out by the existing commissions, governing bodies and conferences of the parties. There are also scientific and technical advisory bodies, and mechanisms for the participation of

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[5] In Chapter 12 we presented a range of proposals for strengthening the UN system's capacity to respond to crises and to deliver on the responsibilities given to it in the UN Charter. None of these proposals envisaged the need for the UN to develop a revenue-generating machinery of its own, independent of its members. In this respect, our proposals are aligned with the system currently in operation in the European Union, where members have created an independent source of revenue for EU institutions, while maintaining revenue collection as a responsibility of member states. Potentially giving the UN taxing authority is a long-term objective that would need to be examined in light of the experience with the system(s) we have proposed. In particular, the UN would need to establish a fairly long track record of efficiency in the administration of the considerably larger volume of resources being made available to it under our proposals. In federal systems, all levels of government have some taxing authority and they have generally worked well, within a clearly defined legal framework.

civil society and other stakeholders. These could be attached to the relevant specialized agencies, or, if their function was legislative revision, become subsidiary commissions under the General Assembly (see Chapter 6).

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THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS:
AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

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The United Nations has always had a vital normative role, setting the global agenda and agreed standards, ranging from the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other Declarations and Resolutions,[6] to Agenda 21 adopted at the 1992 Earth Summit.[7]

One of the remarkable recent steps forward in international consensus among states has been the adoption in 2015 at a UN General Assembly Summit of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (see Box).[8] The fact that unanimity could be achieved around such a broad and ambitious agenda covering and integrating so many issues of world concern and developed with such wide participation was already an achievement.[9] Its implications for global governance are also significant, as it maps out the wide range of areas where progress needs to be made globally, insisting that they are all integrated, indivisible, and must be addressed together.

Box: Sustainable Development Goals

Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

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[6] United Nations. 1948. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/index.html www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf.

[7] United Nations. 1992. *Agenda 21: Programme of Action for Sustainable Development*. United Nations Conference on Environment & Development, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, June 3–14. New York, United Nations. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/Agenda21.pdf.

[8] United Nations. 2015. *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Outcome document of the Summit for the adoption of the Post-2015 Development Agenda, New York, September 25–27. A/70/L.1. New York, United Nations. www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/L.1&Lang=E.

[9] United Nations. 2014. *The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet*. Synthesis Report of the Secretary-General on the Post-2015 Agenda. Document A/69/700, December 4, 2014. New York, United Nations. www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/69/700&Lang=E.

Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

Goal 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries

Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts*

Goal 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

Goal 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

* Acknowledging that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is the primary international, intergovernmental forum for negotiating the global response to climate change.

The SDGs can be seen as a global framework for action toward sustainability. There are 17 goals that are action oriented, global in nature and universally applicable to all countries, rich and poor, unlike the previous Millennium Development Goals to 2015. There are goals that place humans at the center of a global development agenda to eliminate poverty, where environmental challenges represent threats to human health and well-being, and where environmental solutions can reinforce human progress. Another cluster of goals for environmental resources, processes and boundaries define the dimensions of planetary health on which human well-being and development depend. There are goals about transitioning to a green and circular economy that builds rather than undermines planetary sustainability. The final two goals are on institutional and governance issues including peace and security, and on the means of implementation. Along with the goals, 169 quantified targets were identified as a focus for action, and initially 241 global indicators have been adopted by the UN Statistical Commission to measure progress toward the targets.

As with any government-negotiated action plan, there are some contradictions and inconsistencies within the SDGs. A goal of sustained economic growth as currently measured, for example, is incompatible with environmental sustainability within planetary boundaries. Some targets need to be balanced or prioritized differently in each country; others are interdependent, with one, perhaps, a prerequisite for progress on another. One challenge in the UN is to coordinate and deal with the interactions in their implementation.[10]

The SDGs can be considered the most recent globally accepted definition of sustainable development, building on the Brundtland Commission definition of 1987, "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs,"[11] and then Agenda 21 adopted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992.[12] As such, they also can be considered an outline of what the responsibilities of governance should cover and the benefits governments should deliver to their populations. While much of the effort must be made at the national level and below, it is at the UN, acting today through the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) set up after the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro in 2012,[13] that progress toward the global goals is assessed.

It is useful in the present context to consider, broadly speaking, the purpose of governance in light of the Secretary-General's summary in his synthesis report to the 2015 Summit which adopted the goals.[14] He called for a fundamental transformation of society and the economy, with the SDGs defining a paradigm shift for people and planet, inclusive and people-centered, leaving no one behind, integrating the economic, social, and environmental dimensions in a spirit of solidarity, cooperation, and mutual accountability, with the participation of governments and all stakeholders. How many governments today really see this remarkable and urgent vision as their core purpose and primary motivation?

At the 2015 Summit, heads of state and government committed:

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[10] Nilsson, Måns, Dave Griggs, and Martin Visbeck. 2016. "Policy: Map the Interactions between Sustainable Development Goals," *Nature*, Vol. 534, pp. 320–322. DOI:10.1038/534320a; Nilsson, Måns, Dave Griggs, Martin Visbeck, and Claudia Ringler. 2016. *A Draft Framework for Understanding SDG Interactions*, ICSU Working Paper, Paris, International Council for Science. www.icsu.org/publications/reports-and-reviews/working-paper-framework-for-understanding-sdg-interactions-2016/SDG-interactions-working-paper.pdf.

[11] World Commission on Environment and Development. 1987. *Our Common Future*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

[12] United Nations, *Agenda 21*.

[13] United Nations. 2012. *Report of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development*, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, June 20–22. A/CONF.216/16. New York, United Nations. www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/CONF.216/16&Lang=E.

[14] United Nations, *The Road to Dignity by 2030*.

- to end poverty and hunger, in all their forms and dimensions, and to ensure that all human beings can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment.
- to protect the planet from degradation, including through sustainable consumption and production, sustainably managing its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change, so that it can support the needs of the present and future generations.
- to ensure that all human beings can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives and that economic, social and technological progress occurs in harmony with nature.
- to foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies which are free from fear and violence. There can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development.
- to mobilize the means required to implement this Agenda through a revitalised Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, based on a spirit of strengthened global solidarity, focussed in particular on the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable and with the participation of all countries, all stakeholders and all people.[15]

It is encouraging that governments can sign up to such high ambitions, but they too often fall down in their implementation. The gap between principles and practice is still wide, as it is too often in intergovernmental processes. It is the responsibility of the UN system to take this agenda to heart and restructure itself as the best instrument to turn these ideals into actions. It should aim to catalyze "an organic change in the structure of society itself so as to reflect fully the interdependence of the entire social body—as well as the interconnectedness with the natural world that sustains it."[16] The 2030 Agenda calls for just such a fundamental transformation.

Indeed, among the transformational aspects of this agenda are its profound implications for approaches to governance. While the SDGs are intended to be met by 2030, they really define the scope of governance generally. Many proposals for sustainable development governance have been made, which are well summarized by Cruickshank, Schneeberger and Smith,[17] as well as in a recent study specifically on governance for the Sustainable Development Goals.[18] Governments

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[15] United Nations, *Transforming Our World*.

[16] Bahá'í International Community. 2010. *Rethinking Prosperity: Forging Alternatives to a Culture of Consumerism*. Bahá'í International Community's Contribution to the 18th Session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development, May 3. www.bic.org/statements/rethinking-prosperity-forging-alternatives-culture-consumerism.

[17] Cruickshank, Emlyn W., Kirsty Schneeberger, and Nadine Smith (eds.). 2012. *A Pocket Guide to Sustainable Development Governance*, 2nd edn., Commonwealth Secretariat/Stakeholder Forum. www.stakeholderforum.org/fileadmin/files/PocketGuidetoSDGEdition2webfinal.pdf.

[18] Monkelbaan, Joachim. 2018. *Governance for the Sustainable Development Goals: Exploring an Integrative Framework of Theories, Tools, and Competencies*, Tokyo, Springer. www.springer.com/us/book/9789811304743.

traditionally consist of ministries and departments responsible for different functions provided to citizens, such as health, education, welfare, finance, commerce, transport, energy, science, justice, security and defense. The United Nations similarly has specialized agencies and subsidiary bodies with a wide range of functions. The 2030 Agenda takes an integrated approach, in which all the goals must be addressed as an interrelated whole. Science is demonstrating how interrelated the physical, chemical and biological systems are at the global level, with biogeochemical cycles operating at a planetary scale, and human economic, technological and social systems now having global impacts. The world is a single integrated system in which every component and process influences, and is affected by, every other. This requires breaking down the traditional silos in which different functions have operated more or less independently, implying a radical restructuring, even for governments at the national level, and even more so for international governance.

It is not clear that anyone knows very well how to do this. Innovative new ways are needed to balance the values of specialization and of integration through new institutional structures and forms of coordination, as well as new skills and systems thinking. Such integrated, holistic governance will have to evolve organically through adaptive learning processes of action/experimentation, consultation and reflection. As a starting point, it will be necessary to agree on a framework of principles and values that would define the purpose of governance (see Chapter 20). Examples include ensuring justice and equity for every human being, defending the greater good and the common interests of all humanity, maintaining the sustainability of the biosphere, building resilience in human society, and encouraging learning, innovation and diversity. The people involved in governance, whether elected or appointed officials, should be conscious of the essential interdependence of humankind and operate with the common good in mind, rather than defending any unduly limited national perspective, ideology, selfish viewpoint or vested interest, as is too often the case in governments today. While much of the experimentation will need to be done at the national and even local levels, there will clearly be a role for the UN at the global level to coordinate these efforts, share best practices and encourage adoption and adaptation to the many different national circumstances.

The 2030 Agenda also specifies that no one should be left behind, so that governance should respond to the needs of all human beings, starting with the most deprived and marginalized. This will also be a challenge requiring new approaches. It is the economically deprived, the marginalized, minorities, those with disabilities, not infrequently migrants, women and girls, etc., that are most often left behind, frequently not captured or disaggregated in statistics, often not even legally recognized if unregistered at birth or without proper documentation, and thus invisible. The concept of statehood includes a state responsibility for its citizens, but not for non-citizens or the rest of humanity. There are also an increasing number of "failed states" and incompetent governments incapable of providing even the most rudimentary facilities and protections to which any citizen

should have a right. Today an increasing number of migrants and displaced persons are escaping from any one state's responsibility and are not even covered in many cases by human rights protections. They are in an international limbo that only global governance can address; the system of a national citizenship for life is breaking down alongside the erosion of the nation-state. A renewed UN will have to consider adopting stronger measures to ensure that every human being has a recognized legal status regardless of where they are in the world. Leaving no one behind includes the poor whose births were never registered and the many undocumented refugees and migrants. Ultimately, the rights and opportunities of a human being should not be conditioned by something as arbitrary as where one is born.

Using the SDGs as a framework would also call for a number of other characteristics in governance, both in the UN and its specialized agencies and in governments at the national and local levels. This includes an important role for science and knowledge to support policy-making, both in describing the reality of the natural and human situation, and in generating indicators of the status and trends in actions to reach the goals. Furthermore, average statistics often give a misleading impression by covering over extreme differences, for example between a rich minority and a vast majority of the poor. The SDGs call for disaggregation of data, for example by gender, age, class, urban and rural, and including often-discriminated minorities, to ensure that all those that are being left behind are measured and monitored, and their needs identified and responded to. The lessons learned from the work coordinated by the United Nations after the 1992 Earth Summit to develop indicators of sustainable development can be a useful guide to the even greater effort needed to implement indicators for the SDGs.[19]

Cooperation and knowledge-sharing would be necessary to integrate all the goals and targets in a systems perspective, since some are dependent on others or are mutually reinforcing, while a few are contradictory and will require trade-offs.[20] Research is still needed on the best way to integrate indicators across all the domains of the SDGs, and to develop indicators of integration itself.[21]

Multilevel governance will be essential, since the global goals have to be translated to the national level for implementation, and many will require action at the

[19] Dahl, Arthur Lyon. 2018. "UNEP and the CSD Process for Sustainable Development Indicators," in Simon Bell and Stephen Morse (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Sustainability Indicators and Indices*, London and New York, Routledge, pp. 347–363.

[20] Nilsson et al., *A Draft Framework*; Nilsson, Griggs, and Visbeck, "Policy: Map the Interactions"; International Council for Science (ICSU). 2017. *A Guide to SDG Interactions: From Science to Implementation*, ed. D.J. Griggs, M. Nilsson, A. Stevance, and D. McCollum, Paris, International Council for Science. www.icsu.org/cms/2017/05/SDGs-Guide-to-Interactions.pdf.

[21] Dahl, Arthur Lyon. 2018. "Contributions to the Evolving Theory and Practice of Indicators of Sustainability," in Simon Bell and Stephen Morse (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Sustainability Indicators and Indices*, London and New York, Routledge, pp. 42–58.

subnational level and by other actors including business and civil society.[22] There will need to be continuing debate about the future of society and the visions and paradigms that will lead in the desired direction. In the modern world we have created, the past is no longer a good guide to the future, and we therefore need to learn from the emerging future. Innovation and experimentation should be encouraged, with both successful results and the lessons learned from failures shared so that society can keep advancing. All levels of governance from the global to the local will need to be involved in this process.

This book cannot review all the global risks requiring UN action. The important principle is to create the mechanisms through which reform can be pursued as and when needed. A few examples are developed in the following chapters, from the economic, environmental and social domains, as illustrations of how the reform process could work and the results that would be possible. These include governance of the global economy and business (Chapter 14), the global financial architecture represented by a reformed IMF (Chapter 15), global environmental governance including responding to the challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss (Chapter 16), and managing migrations and population displacements in an increasingly crowded world (Chapter 17).

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[22] Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen, Sylvia, Arthur Lyon Dahl, and Åsa Persson. 2018. "The Emerging Accountability Regimesfor the Sustainable Development Goals and Policy Integration: Friend or Foe?" *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, special issue on Integrative Governance. DOI: 10.1177/2399654418779995.