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# Global Sustainability policy networks for the Sustainable Development Goals

## Global policy networks

This article focuses on public policy networks, but more particularly on those that are global in scope and intent.<sup>1</sup> It examines how such networks are being deployed to advance the goals of the Sustainable Development Agenda, and how the New Zealand government and non-government actors might be involved. Networks have become an important tool

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in policy making at all levels of government. They have been described as

a set of relatively stable relationships which are of [a] non-hierarchical and interdependent nature linking a variety of actors, who share common interests with regard to a policy and who exchange resources to pursue these shared interests acknowledging that co-operation is the best way to achieve common goals. (Borzel, 1998)

Although networks can exist entirely within an organisation, they are more likely to be a means of expanding well beyond any particular one so as to link up with other actors, whether state, private sector or civil society, to pursue shared objectives, ‘a kind of meta structure integrating different forms of interests, intermediation and governance, forming a symbolic relationship between state and civil society’ (Katzenstein, 1978, cited in Kenis and Schneider, 1991, p.31)

Networks may bear a variety of names, including alliance,<sup>2</sup> partnership,<sup>3</sup> forum, initiative, campaign, coalition, etc., or they may be nameless and informally binding together likemindedness. Networks are most commonly established for knowledge sharing, standard setting, issue advocacy, support mobilisation and compliance monitoring (Streck, 2002). While networks are implicitly or explicitly concerned with 'making a difference', they often are not positioned or given a formal mandate for direct implementation, a responsibility which generally falls to individual governments,<sup>4</sup> although Reinicke and Deng point to their role in encouraging compliance of governments with treaties and conventions (Reinicke and Deng, 2000, p.xiv).

This article doesn't focus on policy networks *per se*, but on policy networks that are global in scope or reach.<sup>5</sup> The themes of the 'global policy agenda', which commenced early in the 20th century with the quest for global stability set out in post-World War One agreements, and which were further articulated in the post-World War Two charter of the United Nations through inclusion of human rights, social and economic development, trade and finance, and international cooperation, have since the 1970s strongly included environmental protection and sustainability (Reinicke, 1999). And the term 'sustainability' is increasingly being used as the bedrock for or 'glue' between human rights, social and economic development for the purpose of developing within the carrying capacity of the global ecosystem.

The global policy agenda is advanced by the member countries of the United Nations, not least in the 560 multilateral treaties<sup>6</sup> that are now establishing collective expectations about delivering what Kaul and others have articulated as 'global public goods' (Kaul et al., 2003). Stone refers to the emergence of 'transnational policy communities' to address common problems:

When a problem is recognized by nations, the policy tools available are international treaties and conventions. Their effectiveness is problematically reliant on

compliance and good international citizenship, and founded upon an implicit assumption that states will act 'rationally' and recognise that collective action is to long-term interests. (Stone, 2008, p.27)

Stone points out that networks 'enable actors to operate beyond their domestic context, and networks are the means by which organizations individually and in coalition can project their ideas into policy thinking across states and within global or regional forums' (Stone, 2004, p.560). Global public policy networks have thus emerged to address all manner of global policy problems in a manner that works with, and supplements,

on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services was modelled and is ongoing (2014–18).

Other issue-specific yet global networks include: Safer Cities, Global Water Quality Data and Statistics (GEMStat), the Global Compact (for corporate social responsibility), Academic Impact (for tertiary institutions), Energy for Sustainable Development (GNESD), Coral Reef Monitoring, Promoting Digital Technologies for Sustainable Urbanization, and Monitoring and Evaluation for Disability-inclusive Development. Networks established by the World Health Organization to enlist multi-sector support for global health objectives include the Global Noncommunicable Disease Network,

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the efforts of national governments. Whereas the number of sovereign states rose during the 20th century to 192, the number of international non-governmental organisations grew from approximately 1,000 in 1915 to 37,000 in the year 2000 (Christensen, 2004, p.50).

A considerable number of global policy networks have emerged through global agency patronage. Significant global policy networks that United Nations organs and agencies have initiated include the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which Weiss has characterised as a powerful recent illustration of 'the role of intellectuals in creating ideas, of technical experts in diffusing them and making them more concrete and scientifically grounded, and of all sorts of people in influencing the positions adopted by a wide range of actors, especially governments', an influence felt because 'the network of world-class volunteer scientists from several disciplines translate scientific findings into the language comprehensible by policymakers' (Weiss, 2010, p.6). In the wake of the success of IPCC, the Intergovernmental Platform

Global Alliance against Chronic Respiratory Diseases,<sup>7</sup> Global Network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities<sup>8</sup> and Global Health Workforce Alliance,<sup>9</sup> amongst many others.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has initiated global policy centres in the fields of public service excellence, resilient ecosystems and desertification, private sector and development, governance, global development partnerships and sustainable development, to 'provide research support and leverage partnerships to support better use of the organization's funding for emerging priorities and innovation', to use multi-stakeholder approaches such as 'public-private dialogues, government-civil society dialogue, and design of civil society initiatives and platforms' and to 'measure results and the development impact of public-private cooperation, risk assessment and management/due diligence of private sector partners' (UNDP, 2016). The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) provides the secretariat for REN21, a global renewable energy policy multi-stakeholder network of governments,

non-governmental organisations, research and academic institutions, international organisations and industry, established to ‘facilitate knowledge exchange, policy development and joint action towards a rapid global transition to renewable energy’.<sup>10</sup> Under the auspices of UN-OHRLLS (the UN Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States), the third SIDS conference, held in Apia, Samoa, resulted in the establishment of the SIDS Action Platform, which convenes 306 ‘SIDS partnerships’ having sustainable development objectives.<sup>11</sup>

## Jurists acknowledge that global public policy networks which establish global norms therefore influence domestic policy, which raises issues of legitimacy and juridification under Westminster notions of national sovereignty.

The World Bank is involved in some 85 global and 35 regional partnership programmes which set international standards, share expertise, promote compliance with codes of conduct or facilitate coordination in other areas of policy:

Almost half the programs in which the Bank is involved are knowledge, advocacy, and standard setting networks that are generating and disseminating knowledge about development in their sector. Of these, about 40 percent have management units (secretariats) located inside the Bank, about 35 percent in other international or partner organizations, and about 25 percent are freestanding independent legal entities. (Stone, 2017, p.9)

However, not all global public policy networks have their origins in the global agencies. There are those such as the

Global Network for Health Equity, which was formed by the convergence of three regional networks.<sup>12</sup> The Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments, a coordination mechanism which brings together major international networks of local governments to undertake joint advocacy relating to international policy processes, was established in 2013 through the initiative of the mayor of Istanbul, Kadir Topba, president of UCLG (United Cities and Local Governments).<sup>13</sup>

Stone notes similar ‘transnational policy community’ networks of judges, legislators and regulators, among others (Stone, 2008, p.27). The World Economic Forum, a Swiss-based non-governmental

hand, significant advantages to the use of networks, such as the ability to enlist expertise from well outside one’s own organisation, and to mobilise support for attainment of shared goals. Although often distinguished from institutions by their fluid and impermanent existence, networks nonetheless require administrative and financial capacity to operate, and vary greatly in their expectations of members. Although they need not have a permanent secretariat, those that have one tend to operate most effectively. Networks can range from low entry-level commitment (such as the Internet Society), to those requiring subscription, or specified levels of participation and commitment, such as the anti-corruption ‘networks’ convened by the International Monetary Fund. The Global Health Council established a Global Health Action Network. The Global Water Partnership and the World Water Council collaborated in the integrated water resources management (IWRM) movement (Kramer and Pahl-Wostl, 2014). The Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) is a coalition established by 44 small island states in 1990 to assist with their advocacy on global climate change, and is coordinated by a bureau comprising three permanent representatives to the United Nations.

Whereas some networks disestablish when their objectives are met, others evolve in new directions, or even transform into more permanent institutions. The World Health Organization’s Global Health Workforce Alliance, for example, created in 2006 with a ten-year mandate to coordinate engagement of multi-sectoral stakeholders to advocate for human resources for health, issued a ‘legacy report’ at its conclusion in 2016 (Insource, 2016).

Whereas the concerns referred to above are more of an administrative nature, there are others that address constitutional theory. Jurists acknowledge that global public policy networks which establish global norms therefore influence domestic policy, which raises issues of legitimacy and juridification under Westminster notions of national sovereignty. If a national government is not desired by constituents, it can be

deposed through elections. But what democratic oversight of global public policy networks exists? Furthermore, if an action by government creates a harm, this can be redressed in a domestic court of law; under what jurisdiction do harms created by the actions of global public policy networks fall? Advocates of societal constitutionalism suggest that global public policy network activities demonstrate the limits to the Westphalian paradigm of state and law, and are, furthermore, contributing to non-state constitutionalisation of world society (Oerges, Sand and Teubner, 2004).

#### **Policy networks and the Sustainable Development Agenda**

Leaving aside constitutional theory for the moment, the fact is that policy networks in support of, in this instance, sustainability have been developing since the Brundtland Report of 1987 and the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Governments responsible for the generation of public goods at national scale did not prioritise the generation of ‘global public goods’ over provincial economic interests. The apparent failure of governments and UN bodies (such as the Commission for Social Development) to make genuine progress with policy reforms envisaged by the Rio conference’s Agenda 21 was acknowledged at the Rio+10 World Conference on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002. The weight of having thousands of civil society representatives gather of their own volition on the edges of the intergovernmental meeting and express grave concern about the state of the world’s environmental stewardship influenced the establishment of ‘type II’ partnerships to assist in prosecuting the sustainable development agenda in the following years.

Whereas type I outcomes referred to the conference’s conventions and declarations negotiated by states, type II outcomes were ‘a series of commitments and action oriented coalitions focused on deliverables made by individual or groups of governments along with other interested parties or “stakeholders”

(Wilson, 2005, p.391).<sup>18</sup> Experience and experimentation with multi-stakeholder partnerships and networks continued through the period of the Millennium Development Goals. Although there is some underlying feeling that the eight goals were once again selected and directed by international agencies without significant input by member countries, civil society or ordinary citizens, who are in fact the intended beneficiaries of the programme (Caliari, 2014), there were innovative new platforms, such as the Leading Group on Innovative Financing for Development, an alliance of 66 states and approximately 25 international organisations, 13

are to be pursued by all countries, not just those of the global south. Secondly, specific targets and mechanisms for each country are to be devised within countries rather than advised by development agencies. Yet another difference is that the Sustainable Development Goals incorporate an expanded approach to stakeholder engagement and include far greater involvement of the private and voluntary sectors. They envisage global cooperation rather than predominantly north–south cooperation, and are driven more by multi-stakeholder ‘platforms’ than by governments alone, thereby creating fertile ground for the emergence of formal and informal networks

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foundations and corporations and 20 non-governmental organisations which collaborated in pursuit of Millennium Development Goal 8, ‘global partnership for development’.<sup>19</sup>

It was in this context that the post-2015 development agenda was formulated and framed. A global awareness campaign, The Future We Want, sought out the views of ordinary people in as many countries as possible. The eventual 17-goal agenda resulted from an insistence by some states that it include their priority goals or lose their cooperation.<sup>20</sup> The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, launched by the world’s leaders at the UN General Assembly in September 2015, is conceptually and operationally different from the Millennium Development Goals in a number of ways. Unlike the Millennium Development Goals, which focused on basic human development goals in the developing world, the Sustainable Development Goals will have universal application, such that the 17 goals with multiple targets and indicators

consistent with Sustainable Development Goal 17.

To enhance knowledge sharing on a global scale, and taking advantage of emerging information technologies, the UN established in 2012 the Sustainable Development Solutions Network, a global knowledge network open to universities, research institutions, foundations, civil society and other organisations with a commitment to Sustainable Development Goal implementation. A regional network for Australia and the Pacific has been established at Monash University in Melbourne.<sup>21</sup>

Increased appreciation of the importance of results monitoring has also led to the creation of statistical partnerships, such as the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data.<sup>22</sup> Thinking has now also turned to how multi-stakeholder platforms and partnerships are best led, and how they can maximise the integration of their contributions and minimise duplication (Freeman et al., 2016).

### Global policy networks for sustainable development: what role for New Zealand?

Given the framework for governance set out in the Sustainable Development Goals, being a ‘good global citizen abroad’ will now require New Zealand to account for its domestic stewardship of sustainable development, and this will be viewed in some quarters as quite a challenge. Viewed positively, domestic engagement with the Sustainable Development Goals

organisations have agreed that Hui E! will coordinate NGO dialogue on Sustainable Development Goals with government, and on 6 September 2016 Hui E! presented to a meeting with Treasury officials civil society’s six priority areas: adequate and affordable housing; vulnerable children; climate change; social and economic inequality; violence against women; and pay equity. Since then, universities have commenced collaboration with Hui E! to

which seek to inspire a discourse across developed and developing countries and engage sectors beyond governments. Civil society, business and academia are engaging to create or recreate informal networks in order to understand the Sustainable Development Goals, and to develop concerted action and measurement capacity to develop an accountability at societal level. Hence, formal global policy networks are both influencing and being influenced by emerging informal networks at multiple levels of scale. New Zealand’s challenge is to cultivate cross-sector networks that give practical effect to each of these aspirations.

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will confirm New Zealand’s reputation as a country which not only coaches others about the path to sustainable development, equity, equality and well-being, but one which also pursues these objectives at home in ways that are inclusive, accountable and transparent. Commitment to progress towards national targets under the Sustainable Development Goals will help advance the view that in the face of global challenges all nations are now ‘developing countries’.

Civil society organisations in New Zealand have been watching Sustainable Development Goal dialogue closely, and pressing the national government for information about how it intends to proceed. Non-governmental

facilitate the first New Zealand Summit on the Sustainable Development Goals in 2018 in Wellington, and subsequent summits in Auckland and the South Island, to support the bringing together of all sectors of society in their various configurated networks. It is envisaged that this ongoing dialogue will contribute towards the delivery of Sustainable Development Goals to the best of New Zealand’s ability toward 2030.

Global policy networks can be recognised and are ever evolving in both formal and informal ways. This article highlights the development of global policy networks culminating in the recent adoption of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals,

- 1 Thanks to Robin Chandler for helpful comments.
- 2 <http://www.who.int/alliance-hps/en/>.
- 3 <http://www.globalpartnership.org/>; <http://www.ngowgsc.org/>.
- 4 Or else it lies with governance networks: see Huppé, Creech and Knoblauch (2012).
- 5 Some networks that include the term global in their title do not have global scope or reach; they may have global aspirations, or they may merely be using an en vogue term which draws attention.
- 6 [https://treaties.un.org/Pages/Overview.aspx?path=overview/overview/page1\\_en.xml](https://treaties.un.org/Pages/Overview.aspx?path=overview/overview/page1_en.xml).
- 7 <http://www.who.int/gard/en/>.
- 8 <http://www.agefriendlyworld.org/>.
- 9 <http://www.who.int/workforcealliance/en/>.
- 10 <http://www.ren21.net/about-ren21/about-us/>.
- 11 <http://www.sids2014.org/partnerships/>.
- 12 <http://funsalud.org.mx/gnhe/>.
- 13 <http://www.gtf2016.org/about-us>
- 14 <https://www.weforum.org/communities/global-agenda-councils>.
- 15 In addition to ‘global networks’, OECD convenes many others, including Economic Regulators, Fiscal Federalism, Parliamentary Budget Officials, etc.
- 16 <http://www.oecd.org/gov/global-network-schools-of-government.htm>.
- 17 <http://www.oecd.org/development/effectiveness/globalpartnership.htm>; see also <http://effectivecooperation.org>.
- 18 Some of these type II links are still viewable online at <http://www.earthsummit2002.org/ic/process/type2.html>. See also the OECD’s type II partnership commitments at <http://www.oecd.org/greengrowth/oecdwsdpartnerinitiatives.htm>.
- 19 <http://www.leadinggroup.org/rubrique173.html>.
- 20 <http://www.copenhagencoensus.com/post-2015-consensus>.
- 21 <http://undsn.org/>; <http://ap-undsn.org/about/secretariat/>.
- 22 <http://www.data4sdgs.org/>.

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