

Collaboration between MEAs and the SDGs: Mainstreaming sustainable development along global environmental conventions

Natalia Escobar-Pemberthy (Assistant Professor)
Department of International Business
Universidad EAFIT
nescoba3@eafit.edu.co
Carrera 49 No. 7Sur-50 / Medellín (Colombia)
Tel. +57 3176433618

Introduction

Goals have been used as instruments of global governance to articulate strategies, mobilize resources, and dissect priorities and actions. Some of them have been achieved and some are still to be implemented. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) established from year 2000 to 2015 evidenced important progress in areas such as poverty eradication, gender equality, and education.¹ Sustainable development, on the other side, has been an overarching international goal for almost three decades. In 2015, with the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a new pathway emerged in this front. The SDGs articulate ambitious and universal expectations and frame policies for the next 15 to 30 years.² But the goals are not entirely new.

The SDGs are founded in previous commitments established in multiple policy areas to promote economic development, to advance social improvement, and to protect the environment. They relate closely to previously articulated global environmental goals, most of which were defined in global environmental conventions and global summits since the early 1970s. Agreements to preserve wetlands, and protect endangered species were signed in the early years of that decade. Later, conventions on ozone-depleting substances, biodiversity, desertification, climate change, and chemicals and waste followed. They all articulated specific goals in each issue area and established governance mechanisms to support and review implementation.

Therefore, as countries embark on the implementation of the SDGs questions emerged about how the SDGs were to interact with existing similar commitments from other governance mechanisms, particularly the extent to which environment-related SDGs reflected the visions already established by global environmental conventions. This paper addresses this issue, reflecting on the relationship between the SDGs and these agreements. Using the case of conventions addressing global environmental problems, the analysis shows how the SDGs connect to existing targets and indicators already established by the conventions, how the agreements can contribute to the monitoring and fulfillment of the SDGs, and how the conventions can build on their achievements to contribute to sustainable development, including their capacity to monitor, assess, and attain the related global goals. The analysis illustrates how any new stage in the process of defining international goals needs strategic definition so as to boost the motivation of the actors involved and their capacity to undertake the necessary measures, minimizing structural constraints, and ensuring implementation.

¹ United Nations, "Millennium Development Goals Report 2015," UN, [http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20rev%20\(July%2015\).pdf](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20rev%20(July%2015).pdf).

² "A/Res/66/288 the Future We Want - Outcome Document from Rio+20," in *United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development* (Rio de Janeiro 2012).

Global Environmental Conventions

Almost five decades ago states began to recognize their inability to address critical environmental problems on a national basis. At the same time, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) started calling for new international initiatives to facilitate cooperative responses on environmental protection and conservation. In 1972, the international community held its first-ever global summit on the environment—the UN Conference on the Human Environment (UNCHE) which main outcome was the creation of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP). Three years earlier, the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) recommended to the UN General Assembly the definition of specific mechanisms to discuss member states' views on problems of the human environment; to evaluate the progress already being made by governments, international organizations, and NGOs; and to identify areas requiring international cooperation.³ The international community recognized that “a growing class of environmental problems, because they are regional or global in extent or because they affect the common international realm, will require extensive cooperation among nations and action by international organizations in the common interest”,⁴ and that managing these problems requires “a cooperative spirit by all countries, big and small, on an equal footing”.⁵

These efforts flourished during the next two decades, and as UNEP evolved into the anchor institution for the global environment,⁶ other governance mechanisms—including several global environmental conventions—were negotiated. Multiple international environmental law mechanisms have been established to promote environmental conservation, including bilateral and multilateral agreements to bring governments and other actors together on specific environmental agendas.⁷

At the same time, sustainable development emerged as an overarching goal of the international community, calling for international cooperation structures.⁸ In 1992, the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED)—also known as the Earth Summit—reaffirmed governments' intention to establish “new levels of cooperation among states, key sectors of societies and people”.⁹ Its implementation plan, known as Agenda 21, defined international legal instruments as mechanisms as crucial to achieving sustainable development. UNCED also acknowledged the essential importance of countries' participation in these mechanisms, the need for implementation strategies, and the importance of assessing the implementation of these instruments to ensure the efficacy and effectiveness of international cooperation.¹⁰ Twenty years later,

³ "Ecosoc Resolution 1346 (Xlv) Question on Convening an International Conference on the Problems of Human Environment," (New York, NY: United Nations, 1968).

⁴ "A/Conf.48/14 Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (Stockholm Declaration)," in *United Nations Conference on the Human Environment* (Stockholm 1972).

⁵ *Ibid.* principle 24

⁶ Maria Ivanova, "Unep as Anchor Organization for the Global Environment," *International organizations in global environmental governance* (2009).

⁷ United Nations, "A/Conf.48/14 Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (Stockholm Declaration)."; Elizabeth R. DeSombre, "The Evolution of International Environmental Cooperation," *Journal of International Law and International Relations* 1, no. 1-2 (2004).

⁸ WCED, "Our Common Future - the Brundtland Report," (1987), <http://www.un-documents.net/wced-ocf.htm>.

⁹ United Nations, "A/Conf.151/26 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development," in *United Nations Conference on Environment and Development* (Rio de Janeiro 1992).

¹⁰ UNCED, "Agenda 21," (New York: United Nations, 1992).

the UN Conference on Sustainable Development—also known as Rio+20—reinforced this message as countries agreed “to promote policy coherence at all relevant levels, improve efficiency, [...] and enhance coordination and cooperation among (the) multilateral environmental agreements”.¹¹

Within the framework of sustainable development, however, global environmental conventions experienced two fundamental changes. First, the creation of UN Environment constituted a new framework for global environmental governance. Second, the number of conventions began to increase having now reached more than 1,250¹² (see Figure 1), addressing transboundary environmental problems such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and chemical pollution. However, only perhaps fifteen of them could be considered truly global in both membership (universal) and scope (global) (see Table 1). Over the same period, these conventions have also experienced a significant increase in membership.

Figure 1 Historical evolution in number of international environmental agreements

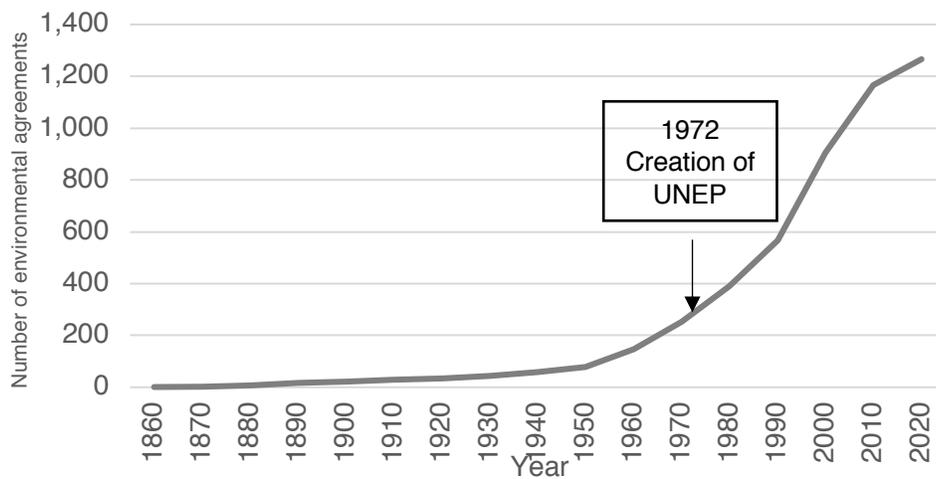


Table 1 Global Environmental Conventions

		Start Year	Parties (No.)
Atmosphere	• UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)	1992	197
Biodiversity	• Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)	1992	196
	• Convention on International Wetlands (Ramsar Convention)	1971	169
	• Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES)	1973	183
	• Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS)	1979	126

¹¹ United Nations, "A/Res/66/288 the Future We Want - Outcome Document from Rio+20." paragraph 89

¹² Edith Brown-Weiss and Harold Karan Jacobson, *Engaging Countries: Strengthening Compliance with International Environmental Accords* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998); DeSombre, "The Evolution of International Environmental Cooperation."; R.B. Mitchell, "International Environmental Agreements (Iea) Database Project," University of Oregon, <http://iea.uoregon.edu>.

		Start Year	Parties (No.)
Chemicals and Waste	• Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants	2001	182
	• Basel Convention on Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes	1989	186
	• Rotterdam Convention on Prior Informed Consent Procedure	1998	158
	• Vienna Convention and Montreal Protocol on the Ozone Layer	1987	197
Land	• UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)	1994	197

Data to July 2018

Environmental conventions thus became key to the system of global environmental governance, with the goal of centralizing commitments and innovations around environmental problems.¹³ They serve as institutional frameworks that deliver various functions: they set agendas, proscribe behaviors, prescribe actions, contribute to the raise awareness about environmental issues, reduce uncertainty around regulation, and generate policy responses.¹⁴ Environmental conventions also contribute to policy specialization, opening spaces for the participation of civil society and for the use of innovative instruments to solve environmental challenges.

The SDGs and Global Environmental Conventions

The Sustainable Development Goals fully incorporate an environmental dimension both collectively and individually.¹⁵ However, their relationship to international environmental law instruments goes beyond addressing the same policy issues. The question is how both agendas relate as governance instruments, and how they can develop synergies that promote implementation, reduce the policy burden on governments and stakeholders, and ultimately contribute to the solution of key environmental challenges.

As universal and comprehensive objectives, the SDGs contribute to the clarity and focus of policy agendas. They also support priority-setting, governance and constitute an instrument for advocacy and action. Furthermore, they advance the creation of a culture for measurement and data collection among governments and stakeholders. All of these characteristics can certainly influence the fulfilment of the goals established by global environmental conventions. Nonetheless, the SDGs also face critical challenges that may be relevant for their linkages with the conventions. Issues such as the availability and quality of the data to measure progress and countries' capacities to manage reporting requirements are some of the concerns. Furthermore, implementation is a key challenge.

¹³ A. Steiner, L.A. Kimball, and J. Scanlon, "Global Governance for the Environment and the Role of Multilateral Environmental Agreements in Conservation," *Oryx* 37, no. 2 (2003).

¹⁴ Peter M. Haas, Robert O. Keohane, and M.A. Levy, *Institutions for the Earth : Sources of Effective International Environmental Protection* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993); R.B. Mitchell, *International Politics and the Environment* (London / Thousand Oaks, CA / New Delhi / Singapore: Sage Publications Limited, 2010); Steiner, Kimball, and Scanlon, "Global Governance for the Environment and the Role of Multilateral Environmental Agreements in Conservation."; Jutta Brunée, "Enforcement Mechanisms in International Law and International Environmental Law," in *Ensuring Compliance with Multilateral Environmental Agreements : A Dialogue between Practitioners and Academia*, ed. Ulrich Beyerlin, Peter-Tobias Stoll, and Rüdiger Wolfrum (Leiden; Boston, MA: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2006).

¹⁵ UN General Assembly, "A/Res/70/1 Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," (New York, NY: United Nations, 2015)..

As the international community has broadened the range of global goals through international agreements and development agendas—such as the MDGs and the SDGs—attention has been focused on the extent to which countries are implementing their purposes of action. The adoption of domestic regulations and conditions that facilitate and enable the fulfilment of the global environmental conventions is critical to countries ability to address these global problems and to the achievement of other global goals as well as the environment-related SDGs goals and targets.¹⁶ However, evidence of the low implementation of global environmental conventions, raises questions about the conditions required for the optimal implementation of the international sustainable development agenda. In this order of ideas, the conventions provide insightful lessons not only in terms of synergies for monitoring and implementation but also as instruments of governance. In this context, the lessons from the conventions as governance instruments are critical.

Synergies: common goals, reporting and implementation

Specifically, the Rio+20 outcome document “The Future We Want” recognized the need to integrate policy issues such as chemicals management, biodiversity conservation, and the adaptation and mitigation to climate change and desertification—all of them at the core of global environmental conventions—into specific SDGs.¹⁷ When comparing the established SDGs goals, targets, and indicators with the scope and goals of the environmental conventions listed in Table 1 it is possible to identify that there are three types of linkages that can be established between two governance instruments.

First, some SDGs include goals that are directly related to environmental conventions. Specific environmental goals such as SDG 13 Climate Action, SDG 12 Sustainable Consumption and Production patterns, and SDG 15 Life on Land include specific references to goals already established by environmental dimensions. For example, SDG 12 calls for member states to achieve, by 2020, the environmentally sound management of chemicals and waste. SDG 15 also covers different areas of biodiversity conservation in order to “protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems” and to combat desertification and biodiversity loss among other threats. Second, issues in the SDGs such as urbanization, water and sanitation, health, and food security include policy dimensions related to global environmental conventions. SDG 2 Zero Hunger, for example, aims at maintaining the genetic diversity of seeds, cultivated plants and farmed and domesticated animals and their related wild species, while SDG 3 Good Health and Well-being calls for a reduction of the number of deaths and illnesses related to hazardous chemicals, pollution, and contamination. SDG 6 Clean Water and Sanitation also addresses the chemical pollution of water resources, calling for improved water quality. Finally, SDG 16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions and SDG 17 Partnership for the goals clearly contribute to create the conditions under which protecting the environment would be a more feasible and attainable task, and to develop

¹⁶ H.K. Jacobson and E.B. Weiss, "Strengthening Compliance with International Environmental Accords: Preliminary Observations from Collaborative Project," *Global Governance* 1 (1995); R.B. Mitchell, "Institutional Aspects of Implementation, Compliance, and Effectiveness," in *International Relations and Global Climate Change*, ed. Urs Luterbacher and Detlef F. Sprinz (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001); Beth A. Simmons, "Compliance with International Agreements," *Annual Review of Political Science* 1, no. 1 (1998); Oran R. Young, *Compliance and Public Authority: A Theory with International Applications* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979).

¹⁷ United Nations, "A/Res/66/288 the Future We Want - Outcome Document from Rio+20."

the means of implementation required to achieve progress in multiple global environmental goals.

Table 2 identifies the specific targets, goals and indicators related to global environmental conventions.¹⁸

In terms of monitoring, the interaction of the SDGs with global environmental conventions and the targets and indicators they establish is critical. The SDGs bring new targets, indicators, and reporting obligations into the system of global governance. Specifically, the SDGs defined the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), supported by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) as the main follow up and review mechanism for progress on the goals. The HLPF conducts thematic reviews in a four-year cycle. For each meeting of the HLPF, countries are invited to prepare Voluntary National Reviews, that are expected to provide useful information, identify best practices and challenges and offer lessons that contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Furthermore, the Environment Live initiative provides useful insights defining the contribution that the environmental conventions can provide to the SDGs, including specific actions and targets that are already part of the conventions and that can be used to measure progress on the implementation of several SDGs.

Synergies are also critical for implementation. States parties to global environmental conventions have consistently discussed the need for better strategic frameworks to achieve the goals defined by each agreement.

Different instruments have been defined with specific targets, indicators, and in some cases metrics to evaluate progress. Under these mechanisms, governments have been encouraged to develop, implement, assess, and report on national outcomes. Recently, the conventions have been working on connecting these instruments to the sustainable development agenda, since their outcomes can provide data and baselines for the implementation of the SDGs and guarantee that all national policy efforts point to the same results. Examples of this include the Convention on Biological Diversity 2011-2020 Strategic Plan for Biodiversity, that frames the efforts for biodiversity management around the 2020 Aichi Biodiversity Targets, CITES Strategic Vision 2008-2022 that characterizes the convention's work to guarantee that international trade in wild fauna and flora is conducted at sustainable levels, SAICM, the strategic framework for the environmentally sound management of chemicals and waste, and the UNCCD Land Degradation Neutrality Goals to achieve a balance between three processes: degradation, rehabilitation/restoration and sustainable land management.

The successful implementation of the SDGs will also require synergies across the environmental conventions, and between each goal and other forms of governance, in order to respond to the complex challenges that environmental conservation faces.

¹⁸ This analysis excludes SDG 16 and SDG 17 since these are considered relevant for the implementation of all the conventions at all policy levels.

Table 2 Relation between chemicals and waste regime and SDGs

Goal	Target	Indicator
SDG 2 Zero Hunger	2.5. By 2020, maintain the genetic diversity of seeds, cultivated plants and farmed and domesticated animals and their related wild species, including through soundly managed and diversified seed and plant banks at the national, regional and international levels, and promote access to and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge, as internationally agreed	2.5.1 Number of plant and animal genetic resources for food and agriculture secured in either medium or long-term conservation facilities 2.5.2 Proportion of local breeds classified as being at risk, not-at-risk or at unknown level of risk of extinction
SDG 3 Good Health and Well-being	3.9. By 2030, substantially reduce the number of deaths and illnesses from hazardous chemicals and air, water and soil pollution and contamination	3.9.1 Mortality rate attributed to household and ambient air pollution 3.9.2 Mortality rate attributed to unsafe water, unsafe sanitation and lack of hygiene (exposure to unsafe Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for All (WASH) services) 3.9.3 Mortality rate attributed to unintentional poisoning
SDG 6 Clean water and sanitation	6.3 By 2030, improve water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating dumping and minimizing release of hazardous chemicals and materials, halving the proportion of untreated wastewater and substantially increasing recycling and safe reuse globally	6.3.1 Proportion of wastewater safely treated 6.3.2 Proportion of bodies of water with good ambient water quality
SDG 11 Sustainable Cities	11.6 By 2030, reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, including by paying special attention to air quality and municipal and other waste management	11.6.1 Proportion of urban solid waste regularly collected and with adequate final discharge out of total urban solid waste generated, by cities 11.6.2 Annual mean levels of fine particulate matter (e.g. PM2.5 and PM10) in cities (population weighted)
SDG 12 Sustainable Consumption and Production patterns	12.3 By 2030, halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses	12.3.1 Global food loss index
	12.4 By 2020, achieve the environmentally sound management of chemicals and all wastes throughout their life cycle, in accordance with agreed international frameworks, and significantly reduce their release to air, water and soil in order to minimize their adverse impacts on human health and the environment	12.4.1 Number of parties to international multilateral environmental agreements on hazardous waste, and other chemicals that meet their commitments and obligations in transmitting information as required by each relevant agreement 12.4.2 Hazardous waste generated per capita and proportion of hazardous waste treated, by type of treatment
	12.5 By 2030, substantially reduce waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse	12.5.1 National recycling rate, tons of material recycled
SDG13 Climate Action	13.3. Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning	13.3.2 Number of countries that have communicated the strengthening of institutional, systemic and individual capacity-building to implement adaptation, mitigation and technology transfer, and development actions
	13.B. Promote mechanisms for raising capacity for effective climate change-related planning and management in least developed countries and small island developing States, including focusing on women, youth and local and marginalized communities	13.B.1 Number of least developed countries and small island developing States that are receiving specialized support, and amount of support, including finance, technology and capacity-building, for mechanisms for raising capacities for effective climate change-related planning and management, including focusing on women, youth and local and marginalized communities
SDG 14 Life below water	14.5. By 2020, conserve at least 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, consistent with national and international law and based on the best available scientific information	14.5.1. Coverage of protected areas in relation to marine areas
SDG 15 Life on Land	15.1. By 2020, ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, in particular forests, wetlands, mountains and drylands, in line with obligations under international agreements	15.1.1. Forest area as a proportion of total land area 15.1.2 Proportion of important sites for terrestrial and freshwater biodiversity that are covered by protected areas, by ecosystem type

Goal	Target	Indicator
SDG 15 Life on Land	15.3. By 2030, combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods, and strive to achieve a land degradation-neutral world	15.3.1. Proportion of land that is degraded over total land area
	15.4. By 2030, ensure the conservation of mountain ecosystems, including their biodiversity, in order to enhance their capacity to provide benefits that are essential for sustainable development	15.4.1 Coverage by protected areas of important sites for mountain biodiversity 15.4.2 Mountain Green Cover Index
	15.5. Take urgent and significant action to reduce the degradation of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity and, by 2020, protect and prevent the extinction of threatened species	15.5.1 Red List Index
	15.6. Promote fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and promote appropriate access to such resources, as internationally agreed	15.6.1 Number of countries that have adopted legislative, administrative and policy frameworks to ensure fair and equitable sharing of benefits
	15.7. Take urgent action to end poaching and trafficking of protected species of flora and fauna and address both demand and supply of illegal wildlife products	15.7.1 Proportion of traded wildlife that was poached or illicitly trafficked
	15.8. By 2020, introduce measures to prevent the introduction and significantly reduce the impact of invasive alien species on land and water ecosystems and control or eradicate the priority species	15.8.1 Proportion of countries adopting relevant national legislation and adequately resourcing the prevention or control of invasive alien species
	15.9. By 2020, integrate ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning, development processes, poverty reduction strategies and accounts	15.9.1 Progress towards national targets established in accordance with Aichi Biodiversity Target 2 of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020

It is important that the SDGs have a clear definition of what is expected from state parties, and what the measurement standards are for assessing countries' progress. Specifically, clear and specific targets are lacking, and gaps exist in the implementation of specific policies that address environmental challenges.¹⁹ Monitoring, measuring and assessing progress then becomes critical as countries seek to implement the new sustainable development agenda and to avoid the crossing of planetary boundaries. As we move through the Anthropocene and realize how interconnected our actions are, implementation of global commitments will be critical. To this end, conceptual and practical lessons from previous sets of global goals are important to ensure that progress will be achieved.

Lessons for better governance from global environmental

Environmental conventions provide insightful lessons for SDGs to articulate and implement a consistent, coherent, and ambitious vision for the protection of environmental resources. As goals, the SDGs are expected to galvanize attention, to motivate political will, and to improve the ability of countries to deliver on core development priorities.²⁰ In addition, conventions specifically set agendas, proscribe behavior, prescribe actions, contribute to the socialization of policy issues, reduce uncertainty around regulation and generate domestic policy responses.²¹ Understanding how they work as governance instruments—individually and jointly—reflects on the importance of policy goals to have a series of characteristics that enhance their power to generate positive outcomes and change policy behaviors at the national and local levels. More solid efforts for the protection of the environment will be conducted, if the process of implementation of the SDGs takes into consideration the following aspects:

- *Integration*
Synergies are required among existing mechanisms within in global environmental conventions and with other policy areas. Furthermore, efforts for implementation have to recognize the socio-economic role of issues such as biodiversity, chemicals management, climate and desertification. In this context, convention secretariats have initiated joint activities on common issues. Conventions and SDGs should be seen as integrated mechanisms.²² In addition, governments and other actors should recognize the contribution of the SDGs in particular to the implementation of the rest of the goals.
- *Differentiation of responsibility*
Conventions and SDGs have universal or close to universal application. Responsibility for action, however, is 'common but differentiated' as enshrined in the 1992 Rio Declaration.²³ The principle of common but differentiated responsibilities recognizes the responsibility of all states for the protection of the environment and acknowledges the differing national ability to prevent, reduce or control the threat as well as the various contributions to the environmental problems. In this context, the implementation of the SDGs needs to emphasize the specific circumstances and needs of developing countries.

¹⁹ UNEP, *Global Environmental Outlook 5*, ed. United Nations Environment Programme (Nairobi: United Nations, 2012).

²⁰ WCED, "Our Common Future - the Brundtland Report".

²¹ Brunée, "Enforcement Mechanisms in International Law and International Environmental Law."; Haas, Keohane, and Levy, *Institutions for the Earth : Sources of Effective International Environmental Protection*; Steiner, Kimball, and Scanlon, "Global Governance for the Environment and the Role of Multilateral Environmental Agreements in Conservation."; Mitchell, *International Politics and the Environment*.

²² UNEP, "Role of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (Meas) in Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals," (Nairobi (Kenya): United Nations, 2016).

²³ United Nations, "A/Conf.151/26 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development."

- *Capacity building*
Environmental conventions have established specific mechanisms to address capacity building, and to provide technical and financial assistance to support developing countries in the process of implementation. Learning from these challenges, the new sustainable development agenda was designed to be applicable for all, considering different national conditions and priorities. The SDGs are expected to assess the requirements of developing countries and provide the mechanisms that address their specific capacity needs.
- *National ownership*
Environmental conventions request, through different mechanisms, that state parties define national implementation plans, strategies and legislation that incorporate international agreements into domestic policies to guarantee ownership and implementation. Progress in national strategies has also required the support of donor countries and international funds. In the case of the SDGs, national ownership is critical for sustainable development and guarantees that implementation, follow-up, monitoring and review.²⁴
- *Engagement*
The environmental agenda has been successful in engaging civil society. Political and social engagement will be critical for the implementation of the SDGs. Governmental actors involved in the implementation of the SDGs should design political processes that also involve international organizations and stakeholders, including civil society, the scientific community, and other agencies from the UN system.

Conclusions

Environmental conventions have not been as comprehensive as the SDGs in the definition of specific targets and indicators to measure progress on implementation, and still need to make progress in a culture of monitoring indicators.²⁵ To translate these into national policies, they had to define strategic instruments to offer governments and stakeholders guidelines and concrete objectives and targets to move forward with the agenda established by each convention to protect environmental resources and to improve their conservation. They also need to establish metrics and assessment mechanisms that evaluate progress.

Nonetheless, synergies with the SDGs for monitoring assessment and implementation would be critical. Furthermore, the main lessons that the conventions provide for the implementation of the SDGs go back to the importance of targets and indicators.²⁶ Concrete measurement strategies and mechanisms provided governments and international organizations with the necessary data and science-based information to evaluate advancement in the development agenda and take corrective measures as required. Despite concerns about the extent to which metrics reflected the real speed of progress, the use of concrete targets and indicators is an effective instrument to focus efforts, to monitor the evolution of strategies, and to prompt global

²⁴ UN General Assembly, "A/Res/70/1 Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development."

²⁵ U.S. General Accounting Office, "Gao/Rced-92-43 International Agreements Are Not Well Monitored," (Washington, DC 1992).

²⁶ Maria Ivanova and Natalia Escobar-Pemberthy, "The Quest for Sustainable Development: The Power and Perils of Global Development Goals," in *Poverty & the Millennium Development Goals (Mdgs): A Critical Assessment and a Look Forward*, ed. Thomas Pogge, Gabriele Köhler, and Alberto D. Cimadamore (London, UK: CROP / Zed Books, 2016); Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals, "Programme of Work 2013-2014," (New York, NY: UN, 2013).

political mobilization around concrete targets for development.²⁷ Targets and indicators also helped to create a culture of monitoring and evaluation, which, despite the need for further improvement, brought to the international community more and better data.²⁸

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ CROP, "Brief No. 13: Mobilizing Critical Research for Preventing and Eradicating Poverty," (Bergen, Norway: International Social Science Council / University of Bergen, 2013); United Nations, "Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform," <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org>.