

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE 2024 UN SUMMIT OF THE FUTURE

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Abstract

In the context of the 2023 UN Summit of the Future held in New York, world leaders discussed and assessed the progress of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As a result, it became necessary for all stakeholders to clearly redefine their commitments to the challenges related to the SDGs, propose new directions, and intensify efforts toward achieving them. In the political declaration, they affirmed that “the achievement of the SDGs is in peril.” In 2024, the SDG Report was published, highlighting several critical warning signs, including: 17% of the SDGs have been fully achieved, 48% have been partially achieved, and 35% have not been achieved or are regressing. Despite increased efforts and commitments, significant gaps remain, with 1.4 billion children at risk, 733 million people facing hunger, and 2.33 billion people experiencing moderate or severe food insecurity. Moreover, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) confirmed that 2023 was the hottest year on record, with global average temperatures rising approximately 1.45°C above pre-industrial levels. These alarming signals were brought to the forefront of discussions at the 2024 Summit of the Future. Member State leaders adopted the Pact for the Future, which includes a Global Digital Compact and a Declaration on Future Generations. This document outlines key areas of action: peace and security, sustainable development, climate change, digital cooperation, human rights, gender equality, youth and future generations, and the transformation of global governance. The role of these annual global events is to provide a unified response to the global challenges we face and to adapt the tools we use to drive positive change in line with current opportunities and technological advancements. Consequently, this paper will analyse the current state of progress toward achieving the SDGs, the challenges identified in 2023-2024, and the new commitments made by world leaders at the 2024 Summit of the Future.

Keywords: *United Nations, Summit of the Future, Agenda 2030, Sustainable Development Goals*

Jel classification: *[K32, K33]*

1. Introduction

In this paper, I aim to explore the intersection of the rule of law, democracy, and sustainable development, focusing on their roles in achieving the 2030 Agenda and addressing global challenges. By examining the interconnectedness of the rule of law and democracy, I will analyse how these two concepts mutually reinforce each other in advancing human rights, accountability, and peace. Additionally, I will investigate the implications of the 2030 Agenda and its specific goals, particularly

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SDG 16, in the context of post-conflict states like Bosnia, and the difficulties in implementing legal reforms in such environments.

Furthermore, I will delve into the concept of soft law and its role in fostering international cooperation and multilateral agreements, particularly within the framework of the United Nations. This analysis will also consider the significance of the Future Summit and the Pact for the Future, evaluating how the international community is tackling urgent issues such as poverty, climate change, and global security. By examining evolving trends in governance, digital cooperation, and financing for sustainable development, I aim to highlight the need for reforms that better align with current political and economic realities.

I will also address the vital role of youth and future generations in decision-making processes, emphasizing the importance of inclusivity in global governance. The paper will explore the ongoing need to enhance the effectiveness of multilateral institutions, ensuring that the voices of developing nations are heard and that solutions are both sustainable and equitable. In the context of global digital cooperation, the establishment of frameworks and funds dedicated to artificial intelligence and emerging technologies will also be examined.

Ultimately, this paper seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how the rule of law, democracy, and sustainable development can work together to create a more just, peaceful, and sustainable global society, as envisioned in the 2030 Agenda.

2. An introduction to the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda

The rule of law and democracy are interdependent, with each reinforcing the other. The rule of law provides the legal and institutional framework necessary for democracy to function, while democracy legitimizes and strengthens the rule of law through citizen participation in the decision-making process. In this regard, Nicolas Tenzer emphasizes that the rule of law can only be identified with the state that protects public freedoms, in other words, with democracy (Tenzer, 1998, pp. 324-329). According to the definition of the UN Secretary-General, the rule of law is a state-centered concept focused on the application of norms, procedures, and regulations through institutions and governance (Khan, 2017, p. 210–218). The definition emphasizes alignment with international human rights standards, with justice playing a complementary role, focusing on accountability, fairness, and the protection of rights, while considering the overall well-being of society (R. S-G, 2004).

As a foundation for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, the rule of law combines legal and political dimensions. However, in post-conflict states such as post-Dayton Bosnia, these initiatives are complex, as they challenge the interests of political-economic elites and organized crime (Edgar, 2021, p. 401–402). Tim Donais emphasizes that the essence of the rule of law lies in how power is constituted, exercised, and controlled (Donais, 2013, p. 189–210). In the Western

Balkans, weaknesses related to the rule of law hinder progress in achieving the 2030 Agenda, particularly SDG 16, and limit aspirations for European Union membership. In other words, a person is truly free and can exercise their rights only in a rule of law, where fundamental rights and political power are in balance (Zlătescu, 2007, p. 24).

In September 2015, 193 United Nations (UN) member states adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a global framework designed to guide national efforts toward achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), developed through an extensive consultative process. This process involved civil society actors, academics, international and national officials, political elites, and both formal and informal community groups, resulting in a framework that reflects diverse yet universal priorities, integrating socio-political, economic, and environmental objectives (Denney, 2015).

Unlike its predecessor, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the 2030 Agenda is considered universal, applicable to all UN member states, regardless of income level or other characteristics (Taylor & Mahon, 2019, pp. 54-70). This universality has been hailed as a significant shift in development discourse, addressing previous criticisms that development frameworks reflected hegemonic Western notions of progress, imposed on disadvantaged countries through the technocratic structures of multilateral agencies and international and national non-governmental organizations (Slater, 1993, p. 419–437; Escobar, 1988, p. 428–443). The 2030 Agenda is a complex framework aimed at preserving the values of nature, humanity, and human rights. Effective communication is essential to engage the public and ensure understanding of the goals, especially since many people are not familiar with the concepts and indicators involved (Firoiu et al, 2019, p. 2).

The 2030 Agenda places national governments and local actors at the heart of implementation, assigning them the responsibility to lead the processes of setting priorities and making decisions to achieve the SDGs (Novovic, 2022). The focus is on local knowledge and solutions as a response to the standardization of global policies, which are often rhetorical and implemented unevenly (Beisheim et al, 2018, p. 105–119). A central point of the Agenda is the "domestication" of the goals, reinterpreting them and adapting national agendas to the commitments made by governments in 2015 (Mthembu et al, 2021, p. 1–28; Nhamo et al, 2018, p. 60–75).

The 2030 Agenda was also followed by the Grand Bargain, an initiative from the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, which highlights international commitments in the humanitarian context. It promotes "localization," a key objective aimed at transferring resources and decision-making responsibilities to the communities that are the beneficiaries of international assistance (Metcalfe-Hough et al, 2020).

The EU's strategic policy documents highlight the Union's commitment to being a leader in implementing the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), both in its internal and external policies.¹ This commitment has been

¹ European Commission, *On the next steps for a sustainable European future*, 2016a, (Communication) COM (2016)739final. *Corob. Council and the representatives of the*

translated into concrete actions, such as the integration of the SDGs into the Commission's policies and the launch of a multi-stakeholder platform for the exchange of best practices.² However, from a legal perspective, the implications of this commitment remain unclear, raising questions about the status of the 2030 Agenda as a non-binding legal document (soft law) or a potential source of customary international law (Rabinovych, 2020, p. 182–199).

The 2030 Agenda is a soft law instrument, non-binding but with indirect legal effects through connections to international treaties and customary international law. It reaffirms states' commitments to international law, referring to areas such as biodiversity protection, labour rights, and the sustainable use of ocean resources.³ In addition, some targets in the Agenda are aligned with specific international treaties, such as the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, without explicitly mentioning them (Biermann, 2017, pp. 26-27).

Although it is not an international treaty, the 2030 Agenda supports adherence to international law by promoting multi-stakeholder actions, involving governments, cities, NGOs, and other actors. It contributes to global coordination and strengthens the implementation of international treaties, utilizing governance structures for sustainable development, such as the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), which, despite being limited in resources, promotes the integration of SDG-related policies (Abbot et al, 2018, p. 188–209).

In summary, although non-binding, the 2030 Agenda is a unique (*sui generis*) tool that is intricately linked to international law. It plays a key role in facilitating the implementation of treaties and global governance to address global challenges such as climate change, migration, and extremism.⁴

The 2023 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Progress Report provides a detailed analysis of global and European progress in implementing the UN 2030 Agenda. The report highlights both significant achievements and persistent challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic, climate crises, and geopolitical conflicts have

governments of the Member States meeting within the Council, the European Parliament and the European Commission, The New European Consensus on Development 'Our World, our Dignity, our Future', 2017 Online: https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/european-consensus-on-development-final-20170626_en.pdf, accessed 20 November 2024

² European Commission, *A Sustainable Europe by 2030 (Reflection Paper)*. 2019, Online: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/publications/reflection-paper-towards-sustainable-europe-2030_en, accessed 20 November 2024

³ Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goals Indicators (IEAG-SDGs), Final List of Proposed Sustainable Development Goal Indicators, 2016. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/11803Official-List-of-Proposed-SDG-Indicators.pdf> accessed 21 November 2024

⁴ United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), Resolution A/RES/70/1. Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 17th Session, 21 October 2015. https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_70_1_E.pdf, accessed 21 November 2024 Corob. Werther-Pietsch, Ursula, *Measuring the Impact of SDGs on International Law – A Nucleus of a Right to Peace*, Austrian Journal of Political Science, 47(1), 2018, pp. 17–28. <https://doi.org/10.15203/ozp.1895.vol47iss1>

slowed progress since 2019. Developing countries face an annual funding gap of \$4 trillion to achieve SDG targets. The report calls for transformative actions to accelerate progress through: strengthening peace and conflict resolution mechanisms, improving financing for developing countries by reforming the global financial system, and doubling efforts in areas such as energy, food systems, digital connectivity, social protection, and education to address the "triple planetary crisis" of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. The 2030 Agenda and SDGs must be complemented by responses to today's societal challenges, including tools that may or may not help, such as the rapid evolution of technology, artificial intelligence, etc. The report highlights that globally, 15% of SDG targets are on track, 48% show minimal or moderate progress, and 37% are stagnating or regressing.⁵

Regarding the results of the 2024 SDG Progress Report, 17% of the SDGs have been fully achieved, 48% have been partially achieved, and 35% have not been achieved or are in regression.⁶

3. Outcomes of the 2024 Summit of the Future

The Future Summit is a high-level event that brings together global leaders to build a new international consensus on how we can create a better present and safeguard the future. Effective global cooperation is becoming increasingly vital for our survival, yet achieving it is challenging in a context defined by distrust and outdated structures that no longer reflect current political and economic realities. Key objectives include accelerating efforts to fulfil existing international commitments and taking concrete actions to address emerging challenges and opportunities.⁷

These goals will be achieved through an action-oriented outcome document: the Pact for the Future, which will be negotiated and approved by states in the lead-up to and during the September 2024 summit. The Future Summit (September 22-23, 2024) presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to enhance cooperation on critical challenges, address gaps in global governance, reaffirm existing commitments, including those to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the United Nations Charter, and advance toward a revitalized multilateral system better equipped to positively impact people's lives.⁸

⁵ United Nations, *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023*, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, ISBN: 978-92-1-101460-0, New York, 2023, ISBN: 978-92-1-101460-0, p. 11.

⁶ United Nations, *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024*, <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2024/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2024.pdf>, accessed 4 December 2024, p. 7

⁷ United Nations, *Pact for the Future: Adopted at the Summit of the Future*, 2024. United Nations. Retrieved from https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/soft-pact_for_the_future_adopted.pdf, pp. 1-2, accessed 26 November 2024

⁸ United Nations, *General Assembly adopts outcome document of the Summit of the Future, including Pact for the Future*, United Nations, 2024, Retrieved from <https://press.un.org/en/2024/ga12641.doc.htm>, accessed 26 November 2024

The outcome will be an international system better equipped to manage current and future challenges for the benefit of all humanity and future generations. The context and trajectory leading to the Future Summit are marked by significant milestones reflecting the global commitment to a sustainable and equitable future. In 2015, UN member states adopted the 2030 Agenda, an action plan with 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aimed at promoting human well-being, protecting the planet, and ensuring prosperity. In 2020, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the UN75 Declaration was issued, emphasizing the need to address global challenges with 12 key commitments. These culminated in a call for the Secretary-General to present solutions to global issues. In 2021, the Secretary-General responded with the "Our Common Agenda" report, which highlighted the importance of accelerating SDG implementation and proposed organizing the Future Summit to find multilateral solutions. In 2022, the General Assembly adopted a resolution to organize this summit, and preparatory consultations began in 2023, culminating in the SDG Summit in September 2023, marking the halfway point in implementing the 2030 Agenda. Ultimately, the 2024 Future Summit will adopt the Pact for the Future, a global commitment to action, reaffirming the values of the UN Charter, revitalizing multilateralism, and strengthening commitments for a more equitable and sustainable future.⁹

At the Future Summit, world leaders adopted the Pact for the Future, an unprecedented initiative that outlines 56 concrete actions in key areas such as sustainable development and its financing, international peace and security, science, technology and innovation, digital cooperation, youth and future generations, as well as transforming global governance.

This Pact marks the culmination of an international cooperation process tailored to current realities and future challenges. It reaffirms that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development remains our primary roadmap for achieving a better and more sustainable future, both for us and for future generations.

3.1. Sustainable Development and Financing

The Pact emphasizes the commitment to combating poverty in all its forms, including extreme poverty, as a key element for sustainable development. It also reaffirms that human rights, gender equality, and sustainability are interconnected and fundamental for the progress of humanity. In this context, priority is given to accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda through more ambitious policies and greater investments. To address the financing gap of the Sustainable Development Goals, global financial incentives, private resources, mobilization of domestic revenues, and international fiscal cooperation will be utilized. Additionally, the introduction of a global minimum tax for high-income individuals will be considered. In response to the climate crisis, the Pact reaffirms the commitment to

⁹ United Nations, *Pact for the Future: Summit of the Future*, United Nations, 2024, Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/softf-pact-for-the-future-deck.pdf>, accessed 28 November 2024

limiting global warming to 1.5°C, transitioning to net-zero emissions by 2050, and protecting biodiversity through strict agreements on plastic pollution.¹⁰

3.2. Peace and security

P The document underscores the commitment to resolving conflicts through peaceful means and protecting civilians, while adhering to the laws of war. It also advocates for increased humanitarian aid and the implementation of innovative financial mechanisms to prevent famine and address gender-based violence. A significant development is the renewed commitment to nuclear disarmament after nearly 15 years, along with specific measures to prevent the militarization of outer space and regulate the use of lethal autonomous weapons. In response to emerging global challenges, the Pact promotes strategies for preventing terrorism, combating transnational crime, and strengthening digital security.¹¹

3.3. Science, Technology and Innovation

This section outlines the importance of reducing global inequalities in access to science, technology, and innovation. Measures are proposed to increase the participation of women and girls in STEM fields and to uphold ethical principles in the development of emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI). Additionally, there is an agreement to establish a Global AI Capacity Fund and a global dialogue platform for digital technology governance, while also promoting public digital goods and open-source standards.¹²

3.4. Youth & Future Generations

The Pact places a strong emphasis on involving young people in the decision-making process, both at the global and national levels. With the support of the UN Youth Fund, we aim to expand access for young people in developing countries to education, healthcare, employment opportunities, and resources for their initiatives. By adopting the Declaration for Future Generations, we have acknowledged the responsibility to make decisions that prevent anticipated harm and protect the interests of future generations.¹³

3.5. Transforming Global Governance

Reforming the multilateral system is crucial to make it more effective, representative, and financially sustainable. The Pact emphasizes the need for greater representation of developing countries, particularly African nations, in international structures such as the UN Security Council. It also underscores the importance of

¹⁰ United Nations, *Pact for the Future: Adopted at the Summit of the Future*, 2024. United Nations. Retrieved from https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/soft-pact_for_the_future_adopted.pdf, pp. 3-11, accessed 28 November 2024

¹¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 11-19

¹² *Ibidem*, pp. 20-23

¹³ *Ibidem*, pp. 23-25

promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, viewing them as fundamental pillars of global progress. In this regard, revitalizing the Commission on the Status of Women and the goal of having a woman serve as UN Secretary-General are key measures. Additionally, the Pact proposes a reform of the global financial architecture to enable countries to access sustainable loans and invest in long-term development.¹⁴

3.6. Global Digital Compact

The Pact proposes the establishment of a global framework for digital cooperation, aimed at promoting public digital goods, data governance, and digital security. Additionally, it suggests initiatives for the creation of a Global Fund dedicated to artificial intelligence and the development of a global governance structure for it.¹⁵

3.7. Implementation and Review Mechanisms

To turn these commitments into reality, their implementation will continue through appropriate intergovernmental processes. In 2028, at the start of the 83rd session of the UN General Assembly, an assessment of progress will be made, with measures expected to be on track by then to secure a better future.¹⁶

Conclusions

Thus, in this paper, I explored the connection between the rule of law, democracy, and sustainable development, focusing on their collective role in achieving the 2030 Agenda and addressing contemporary global challenges. By analysing how these elements are interconnected, I highlighted their complementary nature, demonstrating how the rule of law provides the necessary legal framework for democracy to thrive, while democracy strengthens the rule of law through active citizen participation. I also considered the complexities of implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 16, in post-conflict contexts such as Bosnia, where political and legal reforms often face significant barriers.

Additionally, I examined the concept of "soft law" and its influence on international cooperation, especially through frameworks like the United Nations. The analysis included the evolving importance of multilateral agreements and initiatives, such as the Future Summit and the Pact for the Future, which aim to address global crises such as poverty, climate change, and security threats. Through this, I explored the need for reforms in global governance structures to adapt to the challenges of the 21st century.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 25-35

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 37

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 50

Moreover, I emphasized the role of youth and future generations in shaping decisions that affect their lives and the world, advocating for a more inclusive and representative global decision-making process. I discussed the ongoing need to strengthen multilateral institutions, ensuring that developing nations have a stronger voice and that global solutions are equitable and sustainable.

Ultimately, this paper aimed to shed light on the intricate connections between the rule of law, democracy, and sustainable development, highlighting the need for cooperative action to create a just, peaceful, and sustainable global society. Recognizing the importance of these elements in achieving the 2030 Agenda, this work contributes to a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by the global community in its quest to build a better future for all.

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