THE POLITICS OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

LEGITIMACY, RESPONSIBILITY, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Magdalena Bexell and Kristina Jönsson

The Politics of the Sustainable Development Goals

This book draws attention to political aspects of sustainable development goal-setting, exploring the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the global-national nexus during their first five years.

After broad global deliberation and political negotiations, the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs were adopted in the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in 2015, and by now many countries have political structures in place for working towards their realisation. This book explores three concepts to call attention to the political qualities of processes related to the SDGs: legitimacy, responsibility, and accountability. Legitimacy is required to obtain broad political ownership for policy goals in order for them to become effective in addressing cross-border sustainability challenges. Responsibility needs to be clearly distributed among political institutions if a long-term set of broad goals such as the SDGs are to be realised. Accountability to the public is the retrospective mirror of political responsibility. *The Politics of the Sustainable Development Goals* contributes new knowledge on political processes at the nexus of global and national levels, focussing on three countries at different levels of socio-economic development and democratisation: namely Ghana, Tanzania, and Sweden. These countries illustrate a variety of challenges related to the realisation of the SDGs.

This book will be of great interest to students and scholars of sustainable development, international organisations, and global politics.

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Lund and Copenhagen, 30 November 2020
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1 Introduction

The 2030 Agenda and the study of sustainable development politics

1.1 Rationale and aims of the book

For many decades, environment and development were two separate tracks of intergovernmental negotiations, agreements, and implementation attempts. This changed with the adoption of *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (the 2030 Agenda) in the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in 2015 (UN 2015a). The 2030 Agenda contains grand visions on a world with universal respect for human dignity in which humanity lives in harmony with nature. In its Preamble and Declaration, governments pledge that no one will be left behind. Among its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are "No poverty", "Reduced inequalities", "Responsible Consumption and Production", and "Climate Action" (see Table 1.1). The adoption of the 2030 Agenda was preceded by broad global deliberation and accompanied by political momentum for change during the "super-year of development" that also resulted in the Paris Agreement to combat climate change and the Sendai Framework on disaster risk reduction. The 2030 Agenda contains several paragraphs on follow-up and review, emphasising governments' accountability to their citizens. Questions of whether and how these goals can be realised until 2030, the prescribed end date, has gained even more urgency by the Covid-19 pandemic, which seriously challenges hitherto positive developments. To start answering questions on the role of the 2030 Agenda, we need to know how the politics of goal realisation has developed to date. This study contributes new knowledge on political processes at the nexus of global and national levels during the initial years of the 2030 Agenda, focussing on three countries at different levels of socio-economic development and democratisation.

In light of the above visions, our theoretical interest in this book concerns three central political qualities of sustainable development goal-setting: legitimacy, responsibility, and accountability. We understand the SDGs as political in the sense that they are the result of political negotiations and that the main responsibility for their realisation resides with political institutions. They are also political in the sense that their realisation is far from a technical matter. Rather, goal fulfilment requires political

Table 1.1 Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda

	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
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 industrialisation 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[a]
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 revitalise the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

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

prioritisations and will involve goal conflicts, opening for further political contestation. Moreover, the 2030 Agenda does not enter a void at the national level, but encounters a pre-existing political setting. The concepts of legitimacy, responsibility, and accountability concern normative qualities of the relationship between political decision-makers and their constituencies, and therefore allow us to situate the analysis of the SDGs in a broader political-theoretical context. While these concepts are at times used as buzzwords in policy rhetoric, they are also long-standing concepts of scholarly enquiry in normative political theory. We are thereby able to substantiate our arguments with reference to the theoretical underpinnings of these concepts, independent of the concrete empirical context at hand. The concepts are closely interlinked and serve in complementary ways to highlight

central political qualities of sustainable development goal-setting. Legitimacy is required to obtain broad political ownership for policy goals in order for them to become effective in addressing cross-border sustainability challenges. Responsibility needs to be clearly distributed among political institutions if a long-term set of broad goals such as the SDGs are to be realised. For its part, accountability to the public is the retrospective mirror of political responsibility. Through accountability, political actors need to answer for how they exercise power and make political choices related to the goals.

Our initial studies found that the UN documents on the 2030 Agenda establish a state-centric notion of responsibility with great room for state sovereignty, self-regulation, and national circumstances. In light of this finding, we explored the role of reporting practices for accountability related to progress towards the SDGs. We also assumed at an early stage that legitimacy challenges would be central for the SDGs at the global as well as the national level. By identifying drivers and obstacles of localisation of the 2030 Agenda, we have argued for the importance of involving parliaments in national level policymaking related to the 2030 Agenda (Bexell and Jönsson 2017, 2019, 2020). In this book, we are able to study more in depth how the 2030 Agenda has been taken up at the country level. We have the opportunity to explore implications for legitimacy, responsibility, and accountability across political institutions and processes in three different empirical contexts. Scholarly studies of the SDGs and national level political institutions and processes are thus far scarce. The present book aims to fill parts of this gap by placing the study of how the SDGs are taken on at the national political level at centre stage. More precisely, the book's empirical focus is on the nexus between global and national levels and our key question is: How has the global agreement of the 2030 Agenda been translated into national political settings? The case of the SDGs lends itself particularly well to a study of the interaction between political levels with a joint agenda that requires long-term political decisions, yet faces pre-existing institutional structures and overlapping policy systems at national levels. The present book is driven by the need to study how the SDGs are in fact taken up by political institutions at the national level and we therefore develop a new conceptual framework suitable for this purpose. The framework is elaborated on normative grounds and provides a bridge between conceptual exposition and empirical studies by identifying elements of each concept that can be studied empirically. This leads to sub-questions such as: What legitimacy challenges arise in the transition from global agreement to national policymaking? In what regards do tensions related to responsibility appear and how do they impact goal fulfilment? Which accountability relations are privileged at the global-national SDG nexus?

Guided by the framework, the book contributes new empirical knowledge on how SDG politics plays out across three different countries:

Ghana, Tanzania, and Sweden. The three countries are chosen because they display great variation with regard to political system, degree of socio-economic development, and the country's role in international development cooperation. Clearly, country-specific factors shape how challenges of legitimacy, responsibility, and accountability play out in domestic SDG governance. The three countries face vastly different challenges in terms of realising the SDGs. At the same time, they share a joint global agenda with 17 SDGs that put high demands on political action in all three countries, and they are subject to similar international review processes. The book brings new knowledge on SDG processes in the three countries through our rich empirical material with a large set of interviews. Moreover, there are no in-depth qualitative studies, that include both high-income and lower-income countries with regard to the SDGs. The book thereby fills several theoretical and empirical gaps in the nascent research field of social science scholarship devoted to the study of the 2030 Agenda and its 17 SDGs. It also contributes to broader scholarly debates on legitimacy, political responsibility, and public accountability in goal-setting governance at the global-national nexus.

1.2 Prior research

1.2.1 Prior social science research on the 2030 Agenda

Research on the 2030 Agenda has expanded in many academic disciplines since 2015. Our main contribution is to the evolving body of social science research that concerns governance related to the 2030 Agenda. In prior research, one prominent ambition has been to study the participatory qualities of goal-setting processes during consultations and negotiations before the formal adoption of the 2030 Agenda in 2015. This research has provided rich accounts of global consultations conducted on a post-MDG agenda as well as on interstate negotiations on the final version of the 2030 Agenda (Dodds et al. 2017; Kamau et al. 2018). In this vein, researchers have examined patterns of participation in consultations (Chasek et al. 2016; Desai and Schomerus 2017). In particular, studies on the role of civil society in global consultations on the 2030 Agenda have pointed to strengths and limits of civil society participation for addressing an assumed democratic deficit of intergovernmental organisations (Sénit et al. 2017; Sénit 2020). Others have explored issues of contention between low-income and high-income countries during intergovernmental negotiations (Fukuda-Parr and Muchala 2020). Critical scholars have highlighted power struggles and argued that the 2030 Agenda does not challenge the ways in which inequalities in wealth and power are produced nationally and globally. Last-minute changes in the negotiation texts on the 2030 Agenda weakened the responsibilities of rich countries (Esquivel 2016). One study posits that consultations and negotiations on *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable*

Development privileged knowledge discourses of rich country governments, ignoring local knowledge and pluralist-participatory knowledge discourses (Cummings et al. 2018). Moreover, a special issue of *Global Policy* (Fukuda-Parr and McNeill 2019) usefully unravels the politics of intergovernmental negotiations behind the selection of SDG indicators. This feeds into our understanding of the interplay between consultations and interstate bargaining when we study processes of legitimation pre-2015 in Chapter 3. We contribute to this stream of research by comparing consultations from three country-level perspectives instead of taking the global arena in itself as a starting point.

Another strand of social science research usefully explores governance challenges facing the SDGs as steering instruments at several levels. One study suggests that collective action, trade-offs, and accountability are the three most central governance challenges for SDG implementation (Bowen et al. 2017), while another emphasises the role of democratic institutions and participation (Glass and Newig 2019). Several authors have explored challenges and opportunities of governance by goal-setting, such as an inclusive goal-setting process, detachment from the international legal system, and weak institutional arrangements at the international level (Biermann et al. 2017). A rich account in this vein is provided by the edited volume *Governing through Goals: Sustainable Development Goals as Governance Innovation* (Kanie and Biermann 2017), exploring central challenges for global governance through goal-setting as well as conditions under which such governance can enhance sustainable development. A broad overview is provided in *Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals: Global Governance Challenges* (Dalby et al. 2019) that deals with global governance challenges related to the SDGs in issue areas such as health, food, and gender equality. Research also engages with interlinkages and synergies between goals at the level of their substantive content in a systemic perspective, emphasising policy coherence and policy integration (Weitz et al. 2018), and unpacking governance mechanisms available for political decision-makers to manage trade-offs (Nilsson and Weitz 2019). Monkelbaan (2019) explores different governance theories and tools for the 2030 Agenda with a focus on climate change and sustainable energy.

Human rights scholars have criticised the ambiguous relationship between the SDG and the international human rights regime (Esquivel 2016; Winkler and Williams 2017), and questioned the claim that the 2030 Agenda is universal, arguing that it falls short of what is required to address challenges of sustainability and inequality (Vandemoortele 2018). Others have argued that the SDGs are embedded in a neoliberal politics of development that highlights economic growth as the means to reducing inequality, leading to unjust and exclusionary policies rather than seeking structural change (Esquivel 2016; Weber 2016). We draw theoretical leverage from research by Sakiko Fukuda-Parr and Desmond McNeill (2019) on governance by numbers and the formative role of measurement and quantification for

sustainable development politics. Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen et al. (2018) have analysed possible trade-offs between indicator-based review systems and policy integration across SDGs, while in an earlier publication (Bexell and Jönsson 2019), we have studied countries' self-reporting on the SDGs to the annual UN High-level Political Forum. With regard to global governance, studies have found that a few years after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the High-level Political Forum had become important for mobilising action towards SDG attainment even if this forum constitutes a relatively small node in global sustainable development governance (Abbott and Bernstein 2015; Bernstein 2017). We contribute to the literature on SDG governance through the book's systematic scrutiny of three central normative qualities of governance in empirical light at the global-national nexus.

The present book also makes a contribution to the hitherto limited number of scholarly studies on individual countries' national level processes related to the 2030 Agenda. A set of country studies have drawn on evidence available in governments' Voluntary National Reviews, presented at the High-level Political Forum. One such study (of 26 countries) demonstrated that initial steps at the national level consisted in the establishment of institutional coordination mechanisms, stakeholder consultations, and mapping of SDGs against national policies, with OECD countries being furthest ahead (Allen et al. 2018). Other studies of Voluntary National Reviews have concluded that differences in choices of institutional arrangements could not be explained by different levels of income or degree of political centralisation (Tosun and Leininger 2017) and that Goal 1 and Goal 8 receive the most attention in national policies, suggesting "cherry-picking" and a limited steering capacity of the SDGs (Forestier and Kim 2020). In Voluntary National Reviews of 2017, governments equalled the principle of "leaving no one behind" to measures to end extreme poverty rather than with inequality, human rights, or discrimination (cf. Vandemoortele 2018; Fukuda-Parr and Hegstad 2019). For its part, a case study of Ecuador concluded that policymakers engaged selectively with SDG targets that resonated with national priorities and policymakers' individual views, legitimising policies that had already been decided on (Horn and Grugel 2018). In the case of Finland, SDG mainstreaming had largely been limited to the operations of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and sectoral divisions remained between development policy and sustainability, the latter interpreted in terms of an environmental issue (Ylönen and Salmivaara 2020). One noteworthy study puts SDG politics centre stage, zooming in on domestic politics of agri-food governance in Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay (Siegel and Lima 2020). In brief, while there are recent country studies, we contribute an account of the politics of the SDGs with greater analytical depth than prior studies due to our richer empirical material and new conceptual framework.

There are thus far few academic studies of SDG politics in the three countries in focus of this book, while they are often briefly mentioned among other countries in policy reports. There are two scholarly books on the

SDGs in an African context, feeding into the broader understanding of the cases of Ghana and Tanzania. The edited volume *From Millennium Development Goals to Sustainable Development Goals: Rethinking African Development* (Hanson et al. 2017) examines how the SDGs relate to issue areas of development in Africa's transition from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to the SDGs. Some of its chapters raise issues related to political leadership, but the volume does not look into the role of political institutions or legitimacy, responsibility, and accountability. In a similar vein, *Africa and the Sustainable Development Goals* (Ramutsindela and Mickler eds 2020a) provides a broad overview of issues arising at the intersection of the SDGs and African development agendas, and contains examples from several African countries, including Ghana. With regard to research on the case of Sweden and the SDGs, there are still few academic studies that examine the SDGs as a steering instrument in its own right at the national level. Some of our own prior studies have looked into the Swedish national setting (Bexell and Jönsson 2016, 2019, 2020), while an early study by the Stockholm Environment Institute provided a forward-looking assessment of challenges involved in turning the SDGs into a national Swedish agenda (Weitz et al. 2015). Accordingly, this book also contributes new empirical knowledge on the 2030 Agenda in the three countries in focus (see also Jönsson and Bexell 2021). We also advance research on the politics of the 2030 Agenda in these countries by locating 2030 Agenda processes in their broader political context, as discussed in Section 1.4.

1.2.2 Research on the three concepts

Beyond the field of social science studies focussed specifically on the 2030 Agenda, this book also engages with broader contemporary literatures on legitimacy, responsibility, and accountability in governance settings at national and global levels. This is the case with regard to literature on legitimacy and legitimation, which has thus far usually concerned either global governance (Tallberg et al. 2018; Dingwerth et al. 2019) or the national political level (Barker 2001; von Haldenwang 2017). Our book contributes to enhancing understanding of legitimation at the nexus of global and national levels. As further elaborated in Chapter 2, we align with an empirically oriented approach to the study of legitimacy, asking questions on perceptions of legitimacy, sources of legitimacy beliefs, and processes of (de)legitimation. The process-oriented study of legitimation explores self-legitimation attempts by global governance organisations (Steffek 2003; Gronau and Schmidtke 2016) as well as delegitimation attempts (Gregoratti and Uhlin 2018).

For their part, studies on responsibility in political-theoretical terms have predominantly concerned principles according to which responsibility should be distributed (Barry 2003). Responsibility debates in political theory often explore tensions between political, legal, and moral considerations

in proposals on different substantive principles of assigning obligations. Recent research has concerned questions on what kind of actors can be considered moral subjects capable of being assigned responsibilities and the reach of institutional responsibilities beyond state borders. The latter revolves around notions of institutional cosmopolitanism (Cabrera 2018), in particular with regard to the role of the state as a potential responsible agent in international affairs. Contemporary cosmopolitan theorists argue that individuals and states have moral responsibilities that stretch beyond state borders and seek to enquire into whether the state can be an agent of cosmopolitanism, rather than a hinderance to it, as assumed in earlier cosmopolitan thought (Beardsworth et al. 2019).

Lastly, accountability has been the subject of large literatures in the study of domestic politics and public administration, as evinced by the *Oxford Handbook of Public Accountability* (Boven et al. 2014), as well as in research on global governance (Hirschmann 2020). While the former mainly concerns answerability of national politicians and public servants in rule of law states, the latter explores accountability mechanisms of more informal and unsystematic kinds. A central theme has been the potential of civil society to strengthen accountability relations in a global setting (Scholte 2011). While we do not seek to make contributions to these bodies of literature in their own right, our combination of the three concepts is in itself theoretically innovative. Moreover, the present book brings into focus the global-national nexus, whereas the above literatures usually deal either with the global or with the national domain. This contribution will be further elaborated in Chapters 2 and 6. While accountability has been explored to some extent in the context of the 2030 Agenda, this is less the case for legitimacy and responsibility. Accountability questions have mainly been brought up as part of broader concerns with follow-up and review. Increasingly, academics have provided normative proposals on accountability and the 2030 Agenda (Ocampo and Gómez-Arteaga 2016) or criticised an alleged lack of accountability in its design (Donald and Way 2016). Other publications deal, for instance, with the relationship between policy integration and accountability (Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen et al. 2018) and the need for nationally adapted SDG targets (Persson et al. 2016).

In sum, this book's main contribution is geared towards the evolving body of social science literature on the 2030 Agenda. In particular, our conceptual framework and new empirical material allow us to pinpoint how challenges related to legitimacy, responsibility, and accountability have affected SDG processes at the country level. The book also contributes new empirical knowledge on Agenda 2030 processes in the three countries in focus and locates these in their broader political context at hand. Moreover, we provide a theoretically and empirically substantiated new account of interlinkages between the three concepts in focus. This account allows us to highlight continuing challenges in the broader politics of sustainable development of which the 2030 Agenda is now part and parcel.

1.3 The creation of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs

This section outlines the global setting against which our country cases are explored in Chapters 3–5. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda was the culmination of decades of intergovernmental negotiations on sustainable development. A central new feature of the SDGs is that they merge two global agendas that had for long been the subject of parallel institutional tracks, namely on development and environment. The development track consisted in a number of global development conferences in the 1990s, through the MDGs 2000 to 2015, to the adoption of the 2030 Agenda in 2015 (Jönsson et al. 2012). The environmental track took off with the UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972. A later important milestone was the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro with the adoption Agenda 21, which like the 2030 Agenda puts sustainability demands on all countries. In 2011, the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon established the UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda. In 2012, the Task Team published the report *Realising the Future We Want for All*, which recommended priorities for the post-2015 development agenda and process (UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda 2012). The MDGs had been criticised for being selected in a non-transparent manner (Darrow 2012), and the UN therefore aimed to create a more inclusive process for agreeing on a successor framework. Consultation processes were initiated when governments agreed at the Rio+20 Summit in 2012 to negotiate new SDGs. Legacies of the two earlier global agendas have shaped the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. They merge social and economic development with environment, and focus has shifted from poverty reduction in countries in the global south to the well-being of the whole planet, including of future generations. The SDG process has affected the way the UN multilateral development and sustainable development negotiations are conducted through its broad societal consultations in parallel with discussions among a smaller number of states in working groups prior to the UN General Assembly intergovernmental negotiations (Kamau et al. 2018). This ultimately contributed to the universal adoption of the 2030 Agenda.

According to one estimate, some 1.4 million people were involved at some point during consultations on the post-2015 development agenda (not counting the below MYWorld online survey) (Sénit 2020: 699). Several consultation processes ran in parallel (see Dodds et al. 2017 and Kamau et al. 2018 for detailed descriptions). Below we briefly summarise the main processes leading up to the adoption of the 2030 Agenda (see also Figure 1.1).

First, the UN Task Team initiated national and global thematic consultations conducted from June 2012 to June 2013. The UN country teams supported a number of countries in convening national consultations which included governments, civil society, private sector, media, universities, and think tanks. Nearly 100 countries carried out some form of national
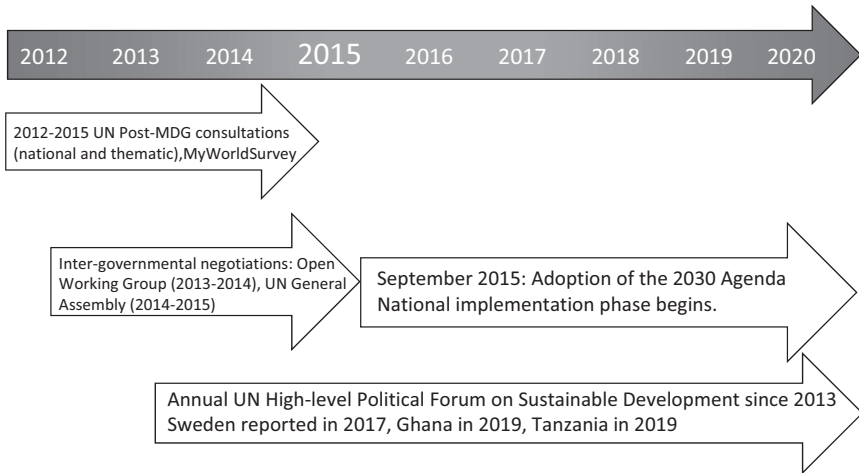
Figure 1.1 Schematic overview of state-based processes related to the 2030 Agenda
and the SDGs.

consultations. Of these, 88 were facilitated by UNDP country teams in low-
and middle-income countries (among which were Tanzania and Ghana).
Six regional and 11 global thematic consultations were conducted, led by
different UN agencies and national governments (including Ghana, Tanza-
nia, and Sweden). The thematic consultations concerned inequality, health,
food security, energy, governance, education, conflict, water, growth, envi-
ronment, and population issues. As a complement, an online consultation
platform was constructed, called the World We Want (UNDP 2013). The
MYWorld online survey was launched in 2012 by the UNDP and the UN
Millennium Campaigning and asked individual citizens to prioritise among
a set range of issues suggested for the new global agenda. This was available
on the MYWorld Analytics website. Over 9 million voices were captured;
95% of respondents came from developing countries (Sénit 2020: 699). One
study shows that the MYWorld survey was inclusive in terms of participa-
tion by nonstate actors, but it had a strong bias towards a small group of
English-speaking developing countries (Sénit et al. 2017). Language skills,
as it turns out, continue to constitute an element of inclusion and exclusion
at the national level also after the adoption of the SDGs (see Chapter 3).

   Second, there were many expert-based constellations that provided pro-
posals on the substance of the new global agenda. For instance, a High-level
Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda in 2013
issued the report *A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Trans-*
form Economies Through Sustainable Development that called for transform-
ative shifts and proposed 12 goals as part of a people-centred agenda for
development. In addition, the Sustainable Development Solutions Network

(SDSN), consisting of well-known representatives from academia, civil society, the private sector, and development practitioners, submitted a report to the UN Secretary General in 2013, identifying ten priority challenges after worldwide consultations. On the basis of these and other reports, the UN Secretary General published his report, *A Life of Dignity for All,* in 2013 (UNGA 2013).

Third, there were negotiations in the UN among governments. In January 2013, the intergovernmental Open Working Group on the SDGs was created. It comprised 30 seats (where countries were represented individually or in clusters) from various regions and it was mandated to provide recommendations to the UN General Assembly on the design of new goals. The African Group had seven seats. Countries that had been most involved in Rio+20 processes volunteered to serve in the Open Working Group on the part of the African Group. This meant that Benin, Congo, Ghana, Kenya, and Tanzania had their own seats (Kamau et al. 2018: 53). In contrast, Sweden did not hold its own seat in the Western European and Others Group. There were many issues of contention during Open Working Group proceedings. For instance, the African Group and the G77 argued for a standalone goal on inclusive and sustainable industrialisation, while high-income countries argued against such a goal (Fukuda-Parr and Muchhala 2020: 7). The Open Working Group also included measures of nonstate actor input into deliberations. Civil society was influential in preventing some issues from being excluded from negotiations but it had only a marginal effect on shifting the positions of governments (Sénit 2020). In Open Working Group hearings, a lack of time and a lack of funding for travel expenses of civil society representatives from low- and middle-income countries undermined inclusiveness and the influence of participatory consultations on formal decisions was limited (Sénit et al. 2017; Sénit 2020).

Proper intergovernmental negotiations were launched at the 69th session of the UN General Assembly in September 2014. Based on Open Working Group recommendations, a list of SDGs was negotiated by governments in the UN General Assembly during 2014–2015 and formally adopted in September 2015. The outcome document *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* contains a preamble identifying five areas of critical importance to humanity until 2030: people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership. In the ensuing declaration, heads of states commit to implement the 2030 Agenda and the 17 SDGs at its core (see Table 1.1 for a list of the SDGs). The document emphasises that the new agenda is grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in international human rights treaties and it reaffirms the outcomes of earlier UN conferences. *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* ends with sections on means of implementation and on follow-up and review at different levels. While this outcome document specifies the SDGs and their targets, it does not include the measurable indicators of these targets, which were yet under

development in 2015. The SDG indicators (247 in total) were approved by the UN General Assembly in 2017.

In parallel, the *Addis Ababa Action Agenda* was negotiated and adopted at the Third International Conference on Financing for Development held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in July 2015 (UN 2015b). This summit gathered heads of state and government, ministers of finance and development, UN system representatives, and non-state development stakeholders. Its purpose was to plan financing of the post-2015 agenda. The UN General Assembly endorsed this agenda in July 2015. During negotiations, a contentious issue was how to allocate financial responsibility for realising the 2030 Agenda. The *Addis Ababa Action Agenda* entails separate commitments for countries who provide official development assistance and countries who engage in South-South cooperation. Compared to earlier agreements, it contains a broadening of the field of financing for development that includes both a stronger emphasis on domestic public resources and private capital. At the same time, it downplays international public resources (Engberg-Pedersen 2016). High-income countries were hesitant to accept low-income countries' demand to make solid financial commitments. In the end, the responsibility of national governments to finance realisation of the SDGs was emphasised (Bexell and Jönsson, 2016; Fejerskov, 2016). Moreover, negotiations on a climate agreement unfolded in Paris during 2014–2015, documented elsewhere, and the *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030* was endorsed by the UN General Assembly in 2015. In sum, 2015 was a super-year of development agreements.

The main institutionalised follow-up procedure at the global level is the High-level Political Forum that takes place at the UN in July each year in order to assess progress towards the SDGs. Every four years the High-level Political Forum is held at the level of Heads of State and Government under the auspices of the UN General Assembly opening in September. While the High-level Political Forum is mainly a forum for exchanging best practices, it also contains a political element which consists of a political declaration in support of the 2030 Agenda issued by world leaders at the end of the Forum's high-level segment. In addition, progress assessment reports and rankings play a key role in follow-up attempts globally and nationally. Assessments of progress showed in 2020 that goal fulfilment continued to be uneven across countries. In global aggregate terms, there was certain progress in some areas, such as a decline in poverty, even if the pace of decline was decelerating. There was also a reduction in maternal and child mortality rates, increased access to electricity, development of national policies to support sustainable development, and increased number of signatures to international environmental protection agreements. Other areas were not progressing in a positive direction. For example, more people were suffering from hunger, climate change occurred faster than anticipated, and inequality continued to increase within and among countries (UN Economic and Social Council 2020). The impact of the global pandemic of Covid-19 on goal fulfilment will

be felt for many years, as demonstrated in the *Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020* (United Nations 2020). Along similar lines, Sachs et al. (2020) estimated that the pandemic's short-term negative impact on SDGs related to poverty, hunger, health, growth, and inequality will be high, considered as a global aggregate. The impact on SDGs related to education, gender equality, energy, infrastructure, and peace would be mixed and moderate, while the impact on SDGs dealing with sustainable consumption and production, climate change, the oceans, and ecosystems was still unclear. Needless to say, this impact will look very different across countries.

In addition to implementation processes initiated by governments and the UN, it should also be highlighted that many sectors of society have voluntarily taken on the ambition to support the SDGs. This is the case for scientists and the educational sector across the world as well as for the business sector and civil society organisations. A key limitation of this book is, however, that we do not seek to portray or do justice to the rich amount of SDG-related activities going on in these sectors since 2015. Our focus is on national governments and we will only go into the role of other actors to the extent that this is mentioned in our empirical material. Moreover, international and national policymaking processes that governments are involved in throughout various issue domains impact the realisation of the SDGs. Our book is limited to those that explicitly place the SDGs or the 2030 Agenda in its entirety at centre stage. Other limitations concern the selection of country cases and empirical material, which we will discuss next.

1.4 Selection of countries: Ghana, Tanzania, and Sweden

In our selection of country cases, we have been guided less by concerns of geographical spread than by including countries that represent three different levels of socio-economic development and democratisation. Accordingly, first, we expect the level of socio-economic development to affect substantive issues related to goal prioritisation and fulfilment and have therefore selected three countries that differ much in this respect. Ghana represents a country belonging to the lower-middle-income country category, and Sweden represents a high-income country. At the start of our research project in 2015, Tanzania belonged to the low-income country category, but it reached lower-middle-income country status in 2020 (World Bank 2020).[1] Even so, there were still in 2020 important differences between Ghana and Tanzania in terms of socio-economic development and capability to achieve the SDGs by 2030. According to the SDG Index where countries' likelihood of reaching the SDGs is estimated, Ghana ranks number 100 and Tanzania 131 out of 166 countries, whereas Sweden ranks number one (Sachs et al. 2020). The broader development context of each country is also part of our empirical scope, as the 2030 Agenda does not enter the country level in a vacuum. Many sustainable development policies and goal frameworks are already in place.

Second, variation in the degree of democracy and quality of government deeply shapes the political space in which SDG politics is played out. This variation has great implications for legitimacy, responsibility, and accountability, and we seek to find out what these implications are. While Sweden, a consolidated democracy, scored 45 out of 50 on the Quality of Government Index of Democratisation in 2018, Ghana, which is a relatively recently democratised country, scored 16, and Tanzania 11 (Vanhanen 2019). During our time of study, Tanzania has faced a trend towards more authoritarianism while having a multi-party system. In terms of Freedom House's Global Freedom Score rating in 2020, Ghana scored 82 out of 100, Tanzania 40, and Sweden scored 100 out of 100 (Freedom House 2020). With regard to corruption, in 2019 Ghana scored 41 on Transparency International's index of perceived levels of public sector corruption that ranges from 0 (Highly corrupt) to 100 (Very clean), while Tanzania scored 37 and Sweden 85 (Transparency International 2020). In brief, there is large variation between the three countries with regard to several structural factors. Table 1.2 summarises their scores and rankings on these and other indices used throughout the book. Rather than further describing the three countries here, Chapters 3–5 provide more detail on their respective political contexts, as warranted by the thematic focus of these chapters.

In addition, national policymaking in Ghana and Tanzania is to a larger extent than in Sweden intertwined with international development cooperation partners, not the least concerning financing of the 2030 Agenda. Also, Sweden is part of the regional politics of the European Union, while Ghana and Tanzania are members of the African Union, a less institutionalised organisation but still important for the topic of this book. Notably, the 2030 Agenda and the Africa Union's own development Agenda 2063 were adopted in the same year. The African Union Assembly welcomed the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, stating that they significantly capture Africa's priority areas and are compatible with Agenda 2063. Even if many goals of these two agendas overlap, their roots are different. While the SDGs seek to advance sustainable development through goal-setting, the Agenda 2063 is rooted in Pan-Africanism and aims for regional socio-economic transformation. Researchers point out that the 2030 Agenda is important in achieving the Agenda 2063, which has a much longer time horizon (Ramutsindela and Mickler 2020b: 3).

Because our focus is on the country level, the degree of socio-economic development and quality of democracy, as well as position in international development cooperation, are the most important structural dimensions of variation for case selection. Moreover, the three countries were also chosen because they were active pre-2015 in global and national consultations and in working groups negotiating the 2030 Agenda in the UN, as described above. This allows us to study the role of consultations and negotiations for how challenges of legitimacy, responsibility, and accountability evolve at the global-national nexus. Clearly, other countries could have been chosen

Table 1.2 Summary of country scores and rankings

	Ghana *31 million inhabitants*	**Tanzania** *60 million inhabitants*	**Sweden** *10 million inhabitants*
World Bank country classification by income level, 2015–2020	Lower-middle-income	Low-income (until 2020) Lower-middle-income (since 2020)	High-income
SDG Index 2020 The country is on average XX% of the way to goal fulfillment.	65%	57%	85%
SDG Index 2020 Ranking out of 166 countries	100	131	1
Index of Democratisation 2018 Quality of Government Scale: 0–50	16	11	45
Global Freedom Score 2020 Freedom House Scale: 0–100	82 "free"	40 "partly free"	100 "free"
Perceived level of public sector corruption 2019, Transparency International Scale: 0 (highly corrupt)-100 (very clean)	41	37	85
CIVICUS Monitor of civic space 2020 Classification: open-narrowed-obstructed-repressed-closed	"narrowed"	"repressed"	"open"
World Press Freedom Index 2020 (Reporters without Borders 2020) Ranking out of 180 countries	30	124	4

to illustrate our key analytical themes and we wish to emphasise that this is not primarily a book about these three countries as such. In other words, the book is about legitimacy, responsibility, and accountability at the global-national nexus of the SDGs and the conceptual framework is applicable to the study of SDG politics in other countries as well.

1.5 Empirical material

Our empirical material consists of a large set of interviews in all three countries and of written policy material collected from the range of actors and institutions who engage with the SDGs. In addition, we use newspaper articles that describe SDG-related political events in the three countries. This implies that we have worked with a large empirical material, trying to keep up to date with on-going developments. The book's conceptual framework has determined what we have selected to report from this material and

what elements we have chosen to compare between the three countries. The framework has also informed the questions we ask in relation to the empirical material and the normative challenges we identify with regard to legitimacy, responsibility, and accountability. Within each chapter, we bring forth empirical examples from the three countries that enrich understanding of the theme at hand, pointing to the variety of ways in which countries have approached the SDGs in political life. We do not seek to make a detailed assessment of the status of goal fulfilment for each SDG in each country.

First, interviews were conducted from late 2015 until late 2019, allowing for a process perspective and capturing change over time during the initial stage of the 2030 Agenda. As our aim was to observe the politics of the SDGs, the choice of interviewees was guided by a wish to find out how actors within the political domain, or frequently interacting with it, perceived attempts at realising the SDGs that far. The selection of interviewees was therefore not primarily guided by considerations of representativeness of certain groups, but rather with including key informants. Hence, we have interviewed government officials, civil servants at ministries and in national and local public administration, statisticians, members of parliament, and representatives from the UN, donor agencies, and civil society organisations. We identified potential interviewees foremost through their institutional position, while additional interviewees were found through recommendations from individuals interviewed at an early stage of research. We were fortunate to get access to central informants as well as to a great variety of interviewees. Many were happy to reflect upon the 2030 Agenda in broader perspective than their daily work allowed. More specifically, in Ghana and Tanzania, we have interviewed the UN staff in the respective country working actively with the 2030 Agenda at the national level, and in Sweden we have interviewed parliamentarians of different political parties.[2] In all, we conducted 41 interviews in Sweden, 32 in Ghana, and 28 in Tanzania.[3] Unfortunate timing or a lack of will to participate required us to give up a few potential interviewees. Interviews were semi-structured with questions somewhat tailored to the position of the interviewee at hand, although in principle questions dealt with the same topics for all. Questions concerned perceptions of the SDGs, the role of consultations and existing policy frameworks, divisions of responsibility among different kinds of actors, reporting processes, and challenges of realising the SDGs at the country level. Interviews were recorded and lasted for the most part around one hour. All interviews were transcribed but for reasons of anonymity we do not refer to the name or position of interviewees, neither do we include a list of interviewees. Because our focus is on political institutions and processes, we have chosen not to include interviewees of the private business sector. This does not mean that we find business unimportant for the 2030 Agenda. There is a separate literature on business and the 2030 Agenda which we do not seek to contribute

to. Lastly, we are well aware that our interviews took place prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, and it will be up to future research to empirically explore the impact of the pandemic on the politics of the SDGs.

Second, there is an abundance of policy material on the 2030 Agenda. Policy documents consist of progress reports, implementation guides, written statements, policy recommendations, and meeting summaries from the UN, governments, and civil society organisations. There are also press releases, speeches, video statements, and commentary in social media. For the global level, we have selected key reports that document the consultations conducted on the 2030 Agenda, particularly those that in some way involved the three countries in focus. We have also selected assessment reports that take stock of how goal fulfilment progresses on the global aggregate level as well as in the three countries in focus, such as the UN's *Global Sustainable Development Report* and the *Sustainable Development Report* from the SDSN and the Bertelsmann Stiftung. For the country case studies, we have been able to collect what we deem to be the most central policy documents and reports for each national level. Nevertheless, the composition of the material is not entirely identical for the three countries, partly mirroring the fact that different actors have been in charge of producing reports, and that political institutions differ in the way they document their proceedings. For instance, material from the three national parliaments differs in scope. While the Swedish parliament has a search engine enabling thematic searches of parliamentary proceedings, the search engines of the Ghanaian and Tanzanian parliaments cover less comprehensive material. Perhaps more importantly, while the material in Ghana is available in English as one of the country's official languages, many documents in Tanzania are only available in Swahili, which clearly restricts our access to the material. It should be pointed out that the material in Sweden is not translated to English either. Consequently, parts of our comparative analysis rest on somewhat different kinds of material. Even so, the policy material assists us in tracing processes as well as substantive debates and decisions among key actors.

In brief, our empirical material generates new empirical knowledge on Agenda 2030 processes in the three countries in focus and advances the understanding of these processes in light of their broader political context. We have analysed interview transcripts and policy documents through thematic analysis where the conceptual framework determined what we selected for inclusion in the empirical accounts provided in Chapters 3–5. The material contained information on many more aspects than the ones included in this book. Moreover, interviews and policy material have proven highly complementary for our analysis. Whereas policy reports document the final outcomes of reporting processes and policy deliberation, our interviews have provided accounts of processes, challenges, tensions, opinions, and perceptions that are not otherwise available.

1.6 Plan and findings of the book

The book is structured thematically in that each of the concepts is the subject of its own chapter. After this introductory chapter, we present our conceptual framework in Chapter 2. The framework sets forth how we employ the concepts of legitimacy, responsibility, and accountability and elaborates conceptual distinctions and terms that provide us with a bridge to empirical studies of SDG politics in Ghana, Sweden, and Tanzania in ensuing chapters. The conceptual framework also specifies linkages between the three concepts and clarifies that the global-national nexus is our focus of attention.

The first thematic chapter (Chapter 3) examines legitimacy, asking how processes of legitimation of the SDGs unfolded globally and nationally. The chapter shows that legitimacy was a key concern before the formal adoption of the 2030 Agenda, but once the SDGs were taken up at the national level, legitimacy became less of an explicit concern and more entangled with domestic policies and priorities. Both domestically and internationally, the dominant way of distinguishing between legitimation audiences was in terms of stakeholders rather than citizens or political constituencies. We find less active legitimation domestically as compared to the global setting before 2015. Substance-based legitimation strategies of adaptation and localisation of the SDGs predominate, while it has taken time to spread knowledge about the goals. Parliaments have only to a limited degree been involved in national level Agenda 2030 processes. Among the general public, knowledge on the SDGs appears not to be widespread, but increasing. In the SDG case, we find that the antithesis of legitimation is thus far neglect or ignorance rather than outright delegitimation.

The second thematic chapter (Chapter 4) looks into responsibility. Our material demonstrates that the allocation of responsibility took centre stage in policy debates after the 2030 Agenda was adopted. Debates concerned both the extent of global responsibilities of high-income countries and how to organise domestic political responsibility for attaining the SDGs, "leaving no one behind". We find a strong political rhetoric on shared responsibility, yet the institutional organisation of SDG responsibility is quite government-centred across all three countries. Our country studies bring to the fore how responsibility for realising the SDGs is far from a straightforward matter but involves formative choices related to political will, institutional mandates, and scarce resources. While we find that there is symbolic value in the creation of new organisational structures as a manifestation of political responsibility for the 2030 Agenda, it is far from obvious how to deal with its holistic demands in practice.

The final thematic chapter (Chapter 5) deals with accountability. Our interviews and policy material make it clear that review processes accompany all stages of SDG policymaking, even early ones. The chapter first looks

into *vertical* political accountability, finding that parliamentary involvement is viewed as key for holding the government accountable in the long run, even if parliamentary involvement was low until 2020. There was also broad agreement among interviewees across all three countries that civil society has a central role in monitoring political institutions' achievements towards the SDGs. Yet vertical accountability differs much between countries, depending on the broader domestic democratic space. The second part of Chapter 5 finds that, thus far, *horizontal* accountability relations have prevailed, in the form of government peer-review during the UN High-level Political Forum. Overall, the SDGs reinforce a societal trend of governance by numbers, implying that "count-ability" steers the selection of problems to be addressed. We note an increasing concern with measuring inequalities that may underpin future accountability attempts.

Following that, the concluding chapter goes beyond the thematic chapters in order to draw out the broader picture of the politics of sustainable development goal-setting at the global-national nexus. The chapter does so in three different ways. We first summarise our findings on SDG politics at the global-national nexus in terms of contextual factors located at the levels of structures, institutions, and individuals. We underline that SDG politics are not predetermined by institutional structures or pre-existing policies, but there is room for political will in order to trigger change. Second, we review the findings at a more general level in terms of interlinkages and tensions between legitimacy, responsibility, and accountability. We argue that these concepts serve in complementary ways to underpin observations on inclusion and exclusion in SDG politics. While legitimacy and accountability capture central normative qualities of the relationship between political decision-makers and their constituencies, responsibility adds a concern with the substantive policy matter at hand and its implementation. We then move on to discuss our results in terms of change and continuity, exploring the transformative potential of the 2030 Agenda through a set of potential future scenarios. This also involves sketching certain policy implications of our study. The chapter ends by highlighting the main messages of the book and suggesting future research on that basis.

Notes

1 Tanzania consists of mainland Tanzania and semi-autonomous Zanzibar. This book's focus is primarily on mainland Tanzania as our interview material does not cover Zanzibar.
2 Quotes from Swedish interviews in Chapters 3–5 are based our own translation into English. This also applies to certain interviews in Tanzania that were conducted in Swahili.
3 A few interviews were conducted over telephone. This is noted in the interview reference in-text.

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2 Conceptual framework

The politics of legitimacy, responsibility, and accountability at the global-national nexus

2.1 Legitimacy

This section delineates key elements of a process perspective on legitimacy in which the empirical study of legitimation and delegitimation takes centre stage. The process-oriented perspective shapes the structure of Chapter 3 where we begin with a section on global legitimation, followed by a section on domestic legitimation. This mirrors the sequence of legitimation attempts in the case of intergovernmental decision-making that is interwoven with domestic attempts at justifying political authority. The terms we introduce below are useful for the empirical analysis of both global and domestic (de)legitimation, while it goes without saying that the political-institutional context differs greatly between these two domains.

2.1.1 A process perspective

Political *legitimacy* means that the exercise of political power conforms to one or several sources of appropriate rule, such as democracy, effective problem-solving, moral authority, or expert-based knowledge. Without legitimacy, governance arrangements are either likely to have less impact or to depend on coercive measures. Legitimacy is, in brief, both a source of power and a constraint on power. Institutional arrangements for the organisation of power embody legitimating principles which establish how power is obtained and the limits within which it can be exercised (Beetham 2012: 123; Zaum 2013). Our approach to the study of legitimacy is empirical rather than normative, while our choice of theoretical concepts has normative underpinnings in the sense that we regard them as desirable objectives in political life. Clearly, the distinction between normative and empirical approaches is a simplification, yet useful for clarifying scholarly purposes of enquiry (cf. Beetham 2013). Many studies on legitimacy contain elements of both approaches (Agné et al. 2015; Kuyper and Bäckstrand 2016). Our primary ambition is not to normatively evaluate whether or not the 2030 Agenda is legitimate. Rather, we study processes of *legitimation* and *delegitimation*. To the extent our material allows, we also study legitimacy

perceptions. In its empirical sense, legitimacy is understood to reside in perceptions about appropriate rule among those who are formally subject to a political institution or otherwise affected by its policies.

Legitimation stands for strategic attempts to strengthen the legitimacy of a political institution, seeking to foster the perception that its rule is exercised appropriately (Tallberg and Zürn 2019). In the political domain, legitimation can be practised both by rulers ("from above") and by the ruled ("from below") (Zaum 2013: 9; Bäckstrand and Söderbaum 2018). *Delegitimation*, in contrast, stands for attempts at contesting the authority of political bodies and impacting legitimacy perceptions in a negative direction (Gregoratti and Uhlin 2018). These two terms do not assume that (de)legitimation strategies in fact have an effect on legitimacy perceptions. Whether or not this is the case remains an empirical question. Perceptions of the appropriateness of a given political entity or policy are always shaped within broader systems of norms, values, and beliefs (Suchman 1995: 574). Prevailing norms of contemporary world politics exert structural power in the sense that they shape legitimacy claims of international organisations (Bernstein 2011; Scholte 2018). Moreover, legitimation and delegitimation often interact to shape each other and need to be studied in tandem (Bäckstrand and Söderbaum 2018). A process-oriented perspective that places (de)legitimation at centre stage fruitfully shows that legitimacy is not static but intersubjectively shaped through claims-making, contestation, and power relations. Power relations shape (de)legitimation processes of international organisations. Powerful states have more resources for influencing legitimacy perceptions related to the organisation. Dominant actors seek legitimacy by claiming that their exercise of power serves the general interest of all, including of those governed (Beetham 2013). Next, we identify key elements of legitimation processes, providing a bridge to the empirical study of such processes in Chapter 3.

2.1.2 Agents and audiences of legitimation

Agents of legitimation are those who initiate legitimation, while an audience of legitimation is a set of actors who hold or withhold legitimacy perceptions vis-à-vis that which is being legitimated. In turn, the concept of *audience* steers attention to processes of communication between agents who seek to shape legitimacy perceptions and those whose perceptions the agent seeks to affect, the addressees of legitimation attempts. The terminology does not in itself presuppose what kind of actor is agent or audience in a legitimation process. Recent studies have mainly revolved around elites as agents of legitimation, showing that elite communication matters for citizens' legitimacy perceptions related to international organisations. In particular, communication by national governments and civil society organisations has stronger effects on such perceptions than communication by international organisations themselves (Dellmuth and Tallberg 2020).

The notion of audience should be understood to include the possibility of interaction, where receivers not only take in legitimation efforts, but also react to them. This can, in turn, influence ensuing attempts at legitimation (Bexell and Jönsson 2018). Ultimately, who is recognised as an audience of legitimation is itself a power-imbued contested question. Selecting which groups to address becomes an important choice because the act of targeting certain groups is constitutive of their status as audiences of legitimation. This selection elevates the status of the norms of certain groups, potentially to the disadvantage of others (Meine 2016; Bexell et al. 2020). In brief, agents who are able to define the conceptual terrain on which legitimation takes place wield power (Dingwerth et al. 2019: 6).

The same actors who form audiences of (de)legitimation can become agents of these processes when they themselves attempt to shape the legitimacy perceptions of others. We also use the concept of *intermediary* legitimation audiences to show that legitimation may be filtered through several layers of audiences. Intergovernmental organisations, for instance, may address one audience with the aim that this audience would, in turn, convince another group of the organisation's legitimacy. Intermediary legitimation audiences are attractive targets because they hold the potential to multiply the number of audiences reached. Any actor can become an intermediary audience of (de)legitimation, by further transmitting claims to legitimacy made by an agent of (de)legitimation. Possible intermediaries that may reach many audiences are the media, civil society, and school teachers. The media is an intermediary that transmits legitimation claims and potentially broadly affects public opinion (Bohman 2007). Intermediaries' own credibility (or lack thereof) may therefore influence the degree to which they impact other audiences' legitimacy perceptions (Bexell et al. 2020).

Due to the political-institutional focus of our study, we further differentiate between two main kinds of audiences: "constituencies" and "observers". Constituencies are audiences with institutionalised political bonds to a governing authority, while observers lack such a connection (Bexell and Jönsson 2018). The concept of constituency thereby puts the spotlight on delegated representative authority as a key aspect of legitimacy and legitimation processes. A constituent is the subject from whom a constitutional order originates (Oates 2017). Domestically, the term constituency refers to the electoral base of a politician or to a geographical district where the electorate resides (Bradbury 2009). The legitimacy of the government lies in a delegation of power by the constituency to its elected representatives. The notion of constituency can reasonably well be transferred from the national to the global level in the case of intergovernmental organisations (Tallberg and Zürn 2019). In this case, the territorial scope of the constituency is the country, the popular base of the constituency is the citizens of that country, and the government represents these citizens at the intergovernmental organisation. In this perspective, an intergovernmental organisation would seek its legitimacy in relation to national governments and their citizens.

For its part, the term observer provides a useful contrast to the term constituency in the key sense that observers of a political institution are not bound by its political authority. The observer category can include both active and passive non-constituent audiences (Bexell and Jönsson 2018).

2.1.3 Objects and sources of legitimation

The *object* of legitimation is that which is being legitimised, ranging from an organisation as a whole to its specific policies, decisions, or individual units. Some researchers reserve the term legitimacy for long-term general support directed at political regimes as such, independent of whether or not specific policies are approved of (most famously Easton 1975; cf. Gronau and Schmidtke 2016). We employ a less restrictive view of the object of legitimation and include the possibility that an object of legitimation may indeed be a policy, particularly when the policy is of a global long-term kind. At the same time, we are fully aware that the legitimacy of a particular policy may be highly dependent on the origin of that policy, such as general approval of the UN or of a national government.

   In this book, we distinguish legitimation strategies in terms of the primary *source* of legitimacy that these strategies draw on. The distinction between input-based procedural sources and output-based (effective problem-solving) sources of legitimacy has been formative for research on sources of political legitimacy (Scharpf 1999). Indeed, in the realm of sustainability there is no lack of scholarly studies demonstrating the acute need for effective global responses to collective action problems. A third potential legitimacy source resides in the substance of a rule or decision. Such substantive legitimacy means that the content of policies or rules is congruent with societally shared broader purposes at a given point in time. In other words, this is what Beetham (2012: 123) calls socially accepted beliefs about "the proper ends and standards of government". In this case, the appropriateness of the substantive content of policies is the key source of political legitimacy. This is regardless of how the decision on that policy was made (input legitimacy), or how effective the policy may eventually become in solving problems (output legitimacy) (cf. Hurrell 2005). A fourth possible source of legitimacy in the realm of sustainable development politics resides in justifying decisions on grounds of expertise knowledge. Taken together, we theoretically differentiate between four main strategies of legitimation and delegitimation: input-based, output-based, substance-oriented, and expert-based strategies. These appear in both global and domestic (de)legitimation attempts. They can co-exist and reinforce each other and our empirical analysis looks into which strategies predominated during global and national legitimation of the 2030 Agenda.

2.2 Responsibility

This section explains that we understand responsibility in a forward-looking sense of obligations and that this book explores who are constituted

as subjects of responsibility in the case of the 2030 Agenda. We focus particularly on institutional responsibility and distinguish between the allocation of responsibility and the realisation of responsibility. This distinction shapes the structure of Chapter 4. There is a range of theoretically possible justifications for assigning forward-looking responsibility to an actor and those are particularly contested as concerns the reach of global obligations, beyond the state. The allocation of responsibilities for sustainable development is, however, also contested in domestic politics, tapping into broader ideological struggles on the appropriate role of the state and the market in societal affairs.

2.2.1 *The subject of responsibility*

The subject of responsibility is the actor that bears responsibility. To say that someone is responsible means that someone is required to undertake specific tasks in a forward-looking meaning. To bear such prospective responsibility is to have a duty or obligation in virtue of a role that one fills to ensure that appropriate actions are taken (Cane 2002: 31). In contrast, accountability refers to retrospective judgements of how an actor has fulfilled (or failed to fulfil) its responsibilities. Accountability is therefore the subject of an individual chapter. In this book, we understand subjects of responsibility as continuously being shaped and remodelled as a result of political and other societal struggles. They are in this sense constituted within social practices and not given a priori. In political theory, the bulk of (non-legal) literature concerns individuals as primary bearers of responsibility. Individuals exercise responsibility in society by carrying out the obligations of many more or less well-defined roles, such as employee, parent, and citizen. The responsibilities ascribed to those roles are shaped by a mixture of legal, moral, and social custom principles. Parenthood, for example, illustrates how conceptions of responsibility change over time and remain subject to debate and differing opinions across contexts. If we understand individuals' responsibilities to be constituted as well as ethically constrained within social practices, it follows that other kinds of actors can be constructed as subjects of responsibilities as well (Frost 2003: 94).

Our main concern is with responsibilities of institutions and of individuals in the capacity of representatives of these institutions. Responsibility means to empower politicians or public officials by assigning obligations to them (Dunn and Legge 2000). We do not seek to clarify legal obligations but rather to study the complex web of legal, moral, and political claims that construct spheres of responsibility. In our case, the politics of responsibility is a struggle to define who should be the subjects of responsibility in sustainability affairs and what spheres of responsibility should look like. Ascribing responsibility to someone is a political act that is embedded in the role and function of power. Needless to say, individuals shape the decisions of institutions. The norms, rules, procedures, and cultures of formal organisations channel the decisions and actions of individuals within them. Yet these

organisations can reach decisions and act in ways not adequately described in terms of the sum of the actions of individual human beings within them. We agree with authors arguing that it is warranted therefore to think of "institutional moral agents" (e.g. states, intergovernmental organisations, companies, and labour unions) that can be assigned duties and be blamed for acts and omissions in a way that is not reducible to individuals (Green 2002; Erskine 2014: 118). Importantly, this model in no way precludes the moral agency of individual human actors or subgroups that constitute the institutional moral agent (Erskine 2014: 119). Moreover, we are concerned with political-institutional responsibility which means that our focus is primarily on political institutions. In the political-institutional setting of sustainable development governance, obligations are primarily realised through the collective action of institutions due to their greater capacities for addressing structural conditions. Institutions have the capacity to alter mass behaviour and spread the costs of regulating a problem (Green 2002: 86). At the same time, the responsibility of one actor is often construed in relation to that of another. This relationship is in itself subject to political contention. In brief, the politics of responsibility is a process in which moral agency and notions of responsibility are constituted, challenged, and changed (Ulbert and Sondermann 2018: 201).

2.2.2 *Assigning responsibility*

We proceed by theoretically identifying different justifications as to why an institutional agent has responsibilities. Chapter 4 empirically enquires into what justifications predominated in the cases in focus. The reach of responsibility can be defined according to different principles. Political theorists often mix political, legal, and/or moral considerations into substantive principles (Miller 2001: 54–55). The *connectedness principle* asserts that responsibilities should be allocated on the basis of closeness, so that people with special ties of different kinds have more obligations towards each other (Green 2002: 81). This principle underpins expectations on governments and the state apparatus to consider obligations to citizens before obligations to non-citizens. Yet there are many layers of connectedness also within states. In practice, connections between marginalised groups and the government may be thin or non-existing, possibly impacting how responsibility is assigned at subnational political levels. In contrast, the *capacity principle* asserts that the ability to bring remedy to deprivations entails the obligation to do so (Barry 2003). In other words, the agent who is assigned obligations need to have "response-ability" (Fukuda-Parr and McNeill 2015). For instance, high-income states have greater global responsibilities to remedy inequalities, this principle claims. Clearly, there are many limits in capacity globally as well as nationally, with regard to resource scarcity, power imbalances, or weak political and administrative institutions, to name a few. Finally, *the contribution principle* means that an actor who caused an outcome should

answer for that outcome. In international political arenas, the question of to what extent past activities causing a particular problem lead to greater present responsibilities is a recurrent theme: for instance with regard to past colonial injustices. Hence, causal claims have far-reaching political implications when current responsibility spheres are debated. According to this principle, those who contribute to structural processes producing injustice share responsibility to address it. The power to influence processes that produce unjust outcomes distinguishes degrees of responsibility of different actors (Young 2006). One illustration of this is the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities" that places more responsibility to respond to climate change on those who have caused it than on those who have not (Green 2002: 83; Chasek et al. 2016).

As debates around all three principles reveal, the reach of responsibilities beyond individual states is a core concern when we explore institutional obligations at the global-national nexus (cf. Ulbert and Sondermann 2018). Recent normative scholarly proposals on cosmopolitan state responsibilities, favouring obligations to humanity, suggest that a responsible cosmopolitan state is one that imposes limits on its capacity to dominate outsiders and requires external acts to be subject to the rule of law (Shapcott 2018). Cosmopolitan state responsibilities would entail that national governments reconfigured their political responsibility towards their own people, working "together for the common global good *out of their own interest* and *in fulfilment of their own people's needs*" (Beardsworth 2018: 72). This would bridge the gap between national government responsibility and global governance structures with task efficiency in focus, promoting a more cosmopolitan world order (Beardsworth 2018). In contrast, limits of institutional responsibility may arise from a perceived need to maintain institutional legitimacy in the sense that institutions are created for specific purposes and stay legitimate as long as they perform their intended roles. The reach of responsibilities in this perspective is limited by what institutions are authorised to do by their members. Along the connectedness principle, institutions have greater formal obligations to serve their members than the rest of humanity. This is particularly the case for governments, unless citizens authorise them to assume additional responsibilities (Green 2002: 91).

2.2.3 Realising responsibility

While the allocation of responsibility is in itself the object of policymaking and contestation, it far from exhausts the notion of responsibility. We therefore make a distinction between the allocation and realisation of responsibility. Even if the present book is by no means a study of implementation per se, this distinction implies that we look in our empirical material for challenges believed to affect implementation of the SDGs by 2030. By then, it will be warranted to undertake studies of implementation of the 2030 Agenda in a proper sense of the term. However, we know from prior

research that choices about policy instruments structure work towards goal attainment (Howlett 2009). Policies convey intentions or goals, a mix of instruments for accomplishing those intentions, a designation of responsibilities for carrying out the intentions, and an allocation of resources for doing so. Moreover, the labelling of the policy, the language used to communicate it, and monitoring instruments feed into its realisation (Smith and Ingram 2002).

The distinction between allocating and realising responsibility highlights that we need to look beyond policy outputs, such as formal decisions and policy plans, in order to get a sense of obstacles and enabling conditions for the actual realisation of responsibility. Research on implementation no longer adopts a top-down view according to which bureaucrats are understood to smoothly implement political decisions. Rather, the interplay between policy and politics during implementation takes centre stage (May 2015). Implementation is shaped by institutional mandates and competences, as well as by financial and human capacities. Prior research submits that implementation prospects are enhanced through three kinds of policy outputs: (1) education, funding, and technical assistance, strengthening the capacities of those who are to carry out the actions needed; (2) provisions that increase commitments of those who are to implement policy, such as publicity about the goals of the policy, sanctions for lack of action, and a sharing of cost; and (3) oversight instruments (such as indicators and review processes) and publicity about successful implementation efforts (Howlett 2000). Decidedly, implementation is a politically charged process rather than one of predominantly administrative or technical character. Politics does not end when formal political decisions are made. The bases of support for implementation among target groups also affect the realisation of responsibility (May 2015). The realisation of responsibility depends both on the relative power of interest groups mobilised to support or hinder policy impact and on the broader political environment at hand. Earlier research emphasises that non-state actors have become increasingly involved in public policy implementation. The mobilisation of non-state stakeholders can facilitate implementation, but there are also challenges if it comes to shared governance (Moynhan et al. 2011).

2.3 Accountability

In this section, we turn to accountability and differentiate between vertical and horizontal political accountability. This distinction gives structure to Chapter 5. Vertical accountability refers to constraints that allow citizens to hold political executives to account for their performance. Horizontal political accountability is a more diverse category that includes oversight that is not based on a formal mandate of approving or disapproving of political institutions. Horizontal political accountability relations can be found both

in the domestic and the international domain, while there is little vertical accountability in the international domain.

2.3.1 Retrospective judgement

The third concept that structures our study is accountability, the retrospective mirror of responsibility. Accountability refers to an actor having to answer for the way in which the actor carries out its obligations. Such retrospective judgement implies bearing responsibility for something in the past, whether this involves having failed to fulfil a duty or being praiseworthy. Concepts such as accountability, answerability, and liability deal with the backward-looking sense of responsibility. Accountability involves a presumption of monitoring and sanctioning instruments (Grant and Keohane 2005; Michels and Meijer 2008). To put it succinctly, if responsibility is enabling, accountability is constraining. Key questions in the study of accountability are: Who is accountable (the subject of accountability), for what is accountability demanded (the object of accountability), how (forms of accountability) and towards whom? Political accountability, which is at the heart of our concern with political institutions, is usefully defined as "de facto constraints on the government's use of political power through requirements for justification of its actions and potential sanctions by both citizens and oversight institutions" (Lührmann et al. 2020: 812). Ideally, elected politicians are supposed to be accountable to their electorates, employees to their employers, chief executive officers to their boards, and boards to shareholders. In practice, accountability chains are more complex and affected by others than those who hold a formal relationship of accountability. Our key distinction is between vertical and horizontal accountability, allowing us to capture different possible chains of political accountability to the extent that they appear in the empirical material. Below we further elaborate on this distinction.

2.3.2 Vertical accountability

Vertical political accountability stands for constraints that allow citizens to hold the executive power to account for its performance (Schillemans 2011). At its core is thus the ability of a state's population to hold its government accountable (Lührmann et al. 2020: 813). With its emphasis on citizens, concepts of "political" and "public" accountability come very close to each other (Steffek 2010: 49). In this book, vertical political accountability refers to institutions and actions that make government accountable to citizens, primarily through elections, political parties, and parliament using their formal mandates to oversee government. Clearly, the kind of political accountability that parliaments are able to demand is the most comprehensible in scope, insofar as the government taken as a whole is accountable

to the representatives of a *demos* for all policy areas and the linkages between policy areas (Tsakatika 2007: 557). While other actors also monitor governments' performance in different issue domains, parliaments have the formal ability to vote governments out of power. In this way, parliament can force the executive power to be accountable between elections (Bergman and Strøm 2004; Barkan 2013: 253). In vertical models, those who delegate political power hold power-wielders accountable through a variety of mechanisms and on the basis of how those power-wielders have exercised their responsibilities (Grant and Keohane 2005).

Effective accountability requires channels for reliable information between decision-makers and citizens as well as mechanisms for imposing sanctions, such as elections, legal redress, and "naming and shaming" practices. The role of assessment practices is increasing in both national and global policymaking that seeks to further governance for sustainable development (Elgert 2015). Evaluations influence perceptions of problems, solutions, and form knowledge that underpins policy decisions, creating an "evaluation society" where evaluation practices impact all stages of the policymaking process (Dahler-Larsen 2012; Davis et al. 2012). Evaluation practices influence the selection of topics that make it on to the policy agenda (by highlighting certain problems), inform decisions about policy design, and identify implementation gaps (Barbehön et al. 2015). Equally, evaluations are of significance throughout "the politics cycle". This cycle is determined by the period of general elections, and involves the sessions of the legislature and meetings of the executive, the continuous formation of government priorities, and the annual state budget process. The politics cycle also involves continuous competition between government and opposition parties (Meadowcroft and Steurer 2018). If responsible government bodies fail to address recommendations of evaluations and reviews adequately, these can be taken up by opposition parties or nonstate actors. In addition, the media can transmit recommendations to larger audiences, linking evaluations to broader debates on government performance. Politicians will eventually face the electorate which means assessments may gain political leverage, influencing, in turn, the policy cycle if revisions are made (Meadowcroft and Steurer 2018). Clearly, this account applies better in consolidated democracies than in unsettled polities where accountability is more ambiguous (Olsen 2014).

Internationally, there is in theory a vertical chain of accountability from voters to governments to intergovernmental organisations, as emphasised by the school of democratic intergovernmentalism. This school points to the crucial role of governments as representatives of their peoples' interests in international affairs. Its proponents argue that intergovernmental negotiations among states should be the primary focus of democratisation attempts, supporting institutional reform through enhanced accountability and transparency (Keohane and Nye 2003). Yet long chains of political accountability where performance is evaluated by citizens who entrust

governments with power are often weak in practice. Because governments are the ones who have delegated powers to international organisations, they, rather than citizens, act as the organisations' key principals (Steffek 2010). Broadening the notion of public accountability to become an umbrella term covering many accountability relationships in the public domain risks losing sight of the citizenry, Jens Steffek cautions (2010: 53). In sum, at the heart of vertical political accountability as we understand it here is the institutionalised relationship of answerability between a citizen constituency and its government.

2.3.3 Horizontal accountability

In contrast to vertical accountability, horizontal political accountability refers to oversight that is not based on the formal mandate to approve or disapprove of a political institution such as government. This is in our understanding a broader and more diverse category than vertical accountability. Horizontal political accountability can be found both in the domestic and in the international domain, while there is little vertical accountability in the international domain. Examples of domestic horizontal accountability forms are judicial review and public oversight agencies such as national audit offices (Michels and Meijer 2008). International examples are intergovernmental review bodies such as the UN Human Rights Council that mainly rely on naming and shaming strategies. Horizontal accountability may underpin vertical accountability measures: for instance if parliamentarians draw on national audits in order to hold a government accountable. It should be emphasised that horizontal accountability mechanisms are not intended to replace vertical ones, but are instead an essential extension of those (Michels and Meijer 2008).

Studies on global politics have identified large gaps when it comes to the public accountability of global governance agencies (Scholte 2011). Global policymaking raises challenges for accountability, as those who are affected often have at best very indirect means of holding decision-makers from government, business, or civil society spheres accountable (Grant and Keohane 2005). This book, however, is not about the (lack of) accountability of the range of actors that participate in global and national sustainable development governance, as the subject of accountability that is in focus is political institutions. In the international setting of sustainable development governance, effective enforcement and vertical accountability are absent and most commitments made by governments are nonbinding (Ocampo and Gómez-Arteaga 2016). Examples of horizontal accountability forms that may impact governments internationally (as well as other actors in world politics) are market-based ones, peer-based ones, and public reputational ones (cf. Grant ad Keohane 2005: 36). Market accountability relies on decisions made by investors and consumers with regard, for instance, to which countries they choose to invest in. Peer accountability comes about through

mutual evaluations of organisations by their counterparts. For its part, public reputational accountability is dependent on a widely known reputation of the power-wielder to be held accountable (Grant and Keohane 2005: 37). These kinds of accountability forms may enable accountability relations beyond those between governments and citizens in the vertical sense, instead, for instance, opening possibilities for individuals to demand accountability of governments other than their own.

Civil society and media have horizontal accountability functions on mandates that lie outside political-institutional ones: for instance through shadow reports that evaluate the performance of government (Schillemans 2011; Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen et al. 2018). Civil society organisations enable public accountability through three functions: by monitoring governments, by turning technical discourses into public language, and by promoting alternatives to the ones launched by political authorities. They communicate directly to their membership base and through mass media, exposing power holders to public scrutiny. Structures of transnational civil society have contributed to the formation of a transnational public sphere, no matter how imperfect, still necessary for accountability relations beyond the state (Steffek 2010).

Finally, in the case of indicator-based goal-setting, accountability is steered in the direction of what can be measured. In brief, "count-ability" often shapes forms of accountability in sustainable development governance (Fukuda-Parr and McNeill 2015). Review practices where goals and indicators are involved can be assumed to steer attention towards measurable societal problems. Clearly, an "indicator culture" has developed, embodying tensions between qualitative, locally informed systems of knowledge production and quantified systems of global reach (Davis et al. 2012). Moreover, a discrepancy between broad goals and their narrower indicators is a key concern in research on the impact of indicators. For instance, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) provided ground for verifying the formative impact of numbers and indicators on development interventions (Fukuda-Parr and Yamin 2015). Earlier research demonstrates that the significance and effects of quantified data may shift away from original intentions when transferred from one context to another. As "raw information" collected by experts moves towards policymakers, it is often edited and interpreted in a way that removes assumptions and ambivalence (Leite and Mutlu 2017). In any case, public information, citizen knowledge, and evaluations are prerequisites for public accountability.

2.4 The politics of legitimacy, responsibility, and accountability at the global-national nexus

Theoretically, our book revolves around three concepts that allow us to call attention to the politics of sustainable development goal-setting: legitimacy, responsibility, and accountability. These concepts are closely interlinked

and taken together they underline the political nature of sustainable development goal-setting. This section elaborates on their linkages. To begin, legitimacy may strengthen compliance with institutions and policies and is therefore closely related to responsibility. The adoption of responsibility is facilitated if the policy to be realised is considered legitimate or if the institution deciding on the policy enjoys legitimacy. The realisation of responsibility, which may require political costs and difficult trade-offs, is more likely if the policy to be implemented is perceived as legitimate by those bearing the costs. Thereby, legitimacy is required for global sustainability governance to be effective in addressing cross-border sustainability challenges. Without legitimacy, governance attempts are either likely to have less impact or to depend on coercive measures. In the absence of enforcement measures in the global domain, legitimacy is central to strengthening compliance with globally agreed rules on sustainability.

For its part, responsibility needs to be clearly distributed among political institutions if a long-term set of goals such as the SDGs are to be realised. At the same time, such a division of responsibility taps into pre-existing political debate on the appropriate role of political steering for obtaining sustainable development. Again, the distribution of responsibility is closely connected to legitimacy. As noted earlier, limits of institutional responsibility may arise from the need to maintain institutional legitimacy in the sense that institutions are created for specific purposes. They stay legitimate in the eyes of their constituencies as long as they perform their intended roles. Power is always delegated for a reason and stays legitimate as long as it serves its purposes (Grant and Keohane 2005). The reach of responsibilities in this perspective is limited by what institutions are authorised to do by their members. The connectedness principle implies that institutions may have greater obligations to serve their members than the rest of humanity. This is particularly the case for governments, unless citizens authorise them to assume additional more cosmopolitan-oriented responsibilities as part of their political mandate.

We use the concept of responsibility in its forward-looking sense of obligations, and it is mirrored by the retrospective concept of accountability. Through accountability, political actors need to answer for how they have exercised their decision-making power and their political choices related to assuming and realising responsibilities. This means that the existence of accountability mechanisms in itself may serve to advance the realisation of responsibility, with decision-makers knowing that they will have to answer for their performance. If responsibilities are not well-defined, politicians and officials have little guidance for their actions, and those to whom they are accountable will not have a sufficient basis on which to evaluate their actions (Dunn and Legge 2000). Finally, accountability, in turn, affects legitimacy, completing a full circle of interlinkages between our three central concepts. Effective channels for holding political decisions-makers accountable towards those who have granted them power are crucial for

the legitimacy of political systems in the eyes of constituencies. This also applies to long-term political goals where public promises are made, even if a lack of accountability for such goals does not necessarily undermine the legitimacy of the political system as such.

In brief, the three concepts serve in complementary ways to underpin a study of political decision-making that ideally should serve the interests of all affected by it. The concepts put the spotlight on different sides of the politics of sustainable development, yet are closely interwoven and taken together provide a richer account of such politics than each concept on its own. As succinctly put by Johan P. Olsen, "[a]ccountability is related to fundamental issues in political life and accountability processes provide occasions for debates and struggles over authority, power, norms, worldviews, and responsibility, crucial for the legitimacy of a political order" (Olsen 2014: 111). For its part, we conceive of the global-national nexus as a site where global intergovernmental political agreements interface with national circumstances. This is where adaptation to domestic contexts occurs and national politics come into play. The political compromises required for reaching global political agreement imply that few such agreements are ideally suited for individual countries. The interpretation of how a global agreement should be translated and adapted to national circumstances is far from a straightforward process but rather highly political, not the least as concerns how seriously global nonbinding agreements should be taken domestically. The global-national nexus is therefore filled with friction and tensions. Yet the term global-national nexus does not extend to the local level. We do not, for instance, seek to contribute to literature on "the local turn" in international relations where encounters between global and local are investigated in cases of broader norms related, for instance, to gender and peace.

The conceptual framework has strengths as well as limitations. While the three concepts are theoretically distinct, it is not always obvious where to present empirical observations whose relevance spans several concepts. This means that certain observations appear in more than one thematic chapter. In the same vein, the framework elevates some elements of the politics of the SDGs while obscuring others. This has been necessary in order to employ three rich concepts as well as three country cases. Needless to say, other approaches to the study of politics will yield different conclusions. Our contribution is to offer a novel approach to studying and understanding attempts at reaching the SDGs, rather than capturing every detail of the story. The three concepts call attention to different sides of the politics of sustainable development goal-setting: legitimacy, responsibility, and accountability. While legitimacy and accountability capture central normative qualities of the relationship between political decision-makers and their constituencies, responsibility adds a concern with the substantive policy matter at hand and its implementation. While prior research has assumed that these qualities play out very differently in the global as compared to the national domain, we seek to capture the interplay between these two domains. At the same

time, our focus on political relationships entails that we put more emphasis on relations between decision-making elites and citizens than on the broad range of stakeholders that engage with the 2030 Agenda. In the end, how the interplay between legitimacy, responsibility, and accountability has evolved at the global-national nexus is an empirical question and the subject of this book. We return to the connections between these three normative qualities of political life in Chapter 6, where we also put our findings in a broader discussion on continuity and change.

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3 Legitimacy
A process perspective

"It could have ended up much worse"

<div align="right">(interview government official)</div>

3.1 Global legitimation

Seeking legitimacy for the 2030 Agenda was an important concern for the UN, as set out in the introductory chapter of this book. This section looks into how legitimation attempts initiated at the global level played out in the cases of Ghana, Tanzania, and Sweden, respectively. What legitimation strategies predominated in different contexts? How did processes of legitimation unfold from the perspective of our interviewees, and how did these processes affect legitimacy perceptions?

3.1.1 Ghana

Two rounds of UN-initiated national consultations on the global post-MDG agenda took place in Ghana. The first consultation concerned priority-setting for the new agenda and the second one concerned how to localise the SDGs. In this context, the UN country team in Ghana was the central agent of legitimation and Ghana's National Development Planning Commission is best conceived of as an intermediary audience that both had to be convinced by the new development agenda and then seek legitimacy for the proposal among citizens of Ghana. The UN country team and the National Development Planning Commission launched a first round of national consultations in November 2012 in order to stimulate debate on "the Ghana we want" (NDPC 2018: 1). These priority-setting consultations were divided into three phases: the first phase included women, youth, traditional authorities, private sector, academia, and persons living with disabilities, from the three northern regions of Ghana (which is the poorer part of the country). The most consistent concerns across these stakeholders were inequality, unemployment, sanitation, environment, and human development (health and education). These findings fed into the UN documents *A Million Voices: The World We Want*

(UN Development Group 2013) and *The Global Conversation Begins* (UNDP 2013; NDPC 2018: 1). The second phase consisted of focus group discussions with 15 communities from all ten regions of Ghana. The third phase targeted professional groups (NDPC 2013).

In June 2014, the second round of consultations took place at national, district, and community levels with the aim to localise the post-2015 Development Agenda and to draw lessons from the MDGs (National Report 2014; UN 2014). Critical factors identified for successful implementation were "effective public administration, wider stakeholder engagement, robust data ecosystem, efficient institutions, timely disbursement of approved budgets, and effective decentralisation" (NDPC 2018: 1). These results fed into the Global High-level Dialogue on Localizing the Post-2015 Agenda held in Turin and co-hosted by the governments of Ghana, Ecuador, and Italy (ibid.). In addition, a National Stakeholder Dialogue was held in Accra in 2015 with representatives from the Office of the President, the National Development Planning Commission, several ministries and agencies, the University of Ghana, Ghana Statistical Service, international agencies, and civil society (SEND-GHANA April 2015).

Besides national consultations, the governments of Denmark and Ghana supported thematic UN-led consultations on inequalities that were co-led by UNICEF and UN Women with an Advisory Group drawn from civil society organisations, UN agencies, and academic institutions. This consultation was held from September 2012 to January 2013, aiming at providing an inclusive process that would embrace a diverse range of voices and perspectives. It consisted of written submissions and a series of moderated e-discussions on key themes through the UN online-based *World We Want 2015* platform. It ended with a high-level expert meeting in Denmark in 2013 (NDPC 2018: 2; Government of Ghana 2019: 18). As a follow-up, Ghana in collaboration with the Danish government, UNICEF, and UNDP hosted a Pan-Africa conference on inequality in April 2014. The thematic consultation on inequalities resulted in a synthesis report intended to feed into ensuing international negotiations on the new global agenda. Among the recommendations in the synthesis report were "[a] self-standing global goal on inequalities should be included in the post-2015 development framework. This should not be limited to economic inequalities but should also address other key dimensions, including gender inequalities and discrimination" (§19, Synthesis Report Addressing Inequalities 2013).

How to formulate a goal related to inequality was one of the most contested issues in intergovernmental negotiations (Fukuda-Parr 2019: 62), but eventually the recommendation on a self-standing goal on inequality made it into the final version of the SDGs in the form of SDG 10, "Reduce inequality within and among countries". This was reinforced by the principle of "leaving no one behind" that permeates the 2030 Agenda. Our interviews show that inequality and "leaving no one behind" have remained

important issues for people working with the SDGs in Ghana. This points to the importance of substance-based legitimation in this context, meaning that the content of the goals is a key source of their legitimacy in the eyes of interviewees.

The UN legitimation templates appear to have identified audiences of legitimation primarily in "stakeholder" terms on the basis of different societal interest groups. There were, however, also a few channels open to the "public" more generally understood and where participatory categories were not further specified. The general public had the opportunity to voice their priorities through the online survey MyWorld2015 at the UN platform "World We Want". In Ghana, about 68,000 individuals voted (predominantly men with higher education, aged between 16 and 30). The top four issues selected through those votes were good education, better job opportunities, better health care, and affordable and nutritious food. As we will see later, this is similar to results in Tanzania but different from Sweden.

Moreover, civil society created its own sphere of legitimation attempts. The multilevel nature of post-MDG legitimation in Ghana transpires clearly in a quote from a Ghanaian civil society representative who was part of the Open Working Group, and took part in consultations and intergovernmental negotiations in 2015. It shows that there were intermediary audiences of legitimation in the sphere of civil society as well. In this case, a national civil society organisation acted as intermediary between its global confederation and the subnational level of local civil society activities.

> At that time, we did not have a formal platform of civil society organisations working on the SDGs, that came later. [Back] then we had different levels of civil society consultations […] These consultations were focused on which issues should be included in the content of the goals […] we tried to see what sort of fundamental principles we wanted to see in the declaration. There was the consultation of civil society at the national level and at the decentralised level. But there were also consultations between governments and civil society organisations [and] some kind of facilitation role of the intergovernmental organisations. For example, the UNDP in Ghana played a critical role in terms of facilitating meetings of civil society organisations and allied intergovernmental organisations.
>
> (interview Accra 2018)

Internationally, Ghana held one of 30 seats in the Open Working Group of the UN General Assembly where a proposal on the SDGs was negotiated by governments. Some Open Working Group seats were shared between several countries, while a few countries had their own seats, among them Ghana (Kamau et al. 2018: 55). A government official in Ghana conveyed the following impression of Open Working Group negotiations, illustrating

a sense of ownership but also pointing to the power structures inherent in these negotiations.

> I found that the developing world would say something and that we had a person sitting in the chair as a co-facilitator, and we brought our issues to the floor. […] There were a lot of writings that were brought in by Ghana and are in the main document.
>
> (interview Accra 2018)

At the same time, our interviewee acknowledged that

> as a country we couldn't do much, as a sub-region we couldn't do much. At the European Union level, and then G77 and China levels we could push and say 'no, this is not benefiting us'. So, it brings about some sort of ownership and the fact that this thing is really for all of us, for our benefit.
>
> (ibid.)

As evident in the subsequent analysis, a sense of ownership is important for interviewees who find the SDGs a legitimate policy tool. In conjunction with the Open Working Group, the Ghanaian Government established a National Technical Committee with representatives from government agencies, ministries and institutions, and civil society organisations with the aim to discuss how Open Working Group focus areas reflected Ghana's socio-economic status and future aspirations. A High-level Inter-Ministerial Coordinating Committee with ministers and directors from government agencies was created to provide strategic guidance and to ensure coordination among state agencies (NDPC 2015). This meant that Ghana could take an active part in intergovernmental negotiations on the post-2015 agenda and make proposals on poverty, gender, climate change, food security, technical education, and partnerships for development (NDPC 2018: 1).

Our interview material indicates that the SDGs are perceived as legitimate in elite policymaking circles in Ghana. In the eyes of interviewees, comprehensive consultations prior to the adoption of the SDGs created a sense of ownership of the goals:

> The consultations played a critical role in building consensus for the SDGs. […] Another important role is that it helped regional groupings, such as the African Union to state their own processes […] and to find space in the SDGs.
>
> (interview Accra 2018)

An interviewee with experience from the UN negotiations and implementation at the national level made the same connection.

> [It] has to do with knowing that some of your inputs were considered, and ended up in the final version. It creates a sense of ownership, we

were part of the process, our voice was heard, our ideas were considered and were reflected upon in the process.

(interview Accra 2017)

Both the inclusiveness of consultations and the substantive content of the SDGs were important factors for shaping interviewees opinions on the SDGs (interview Accra 2017, 2018). One interviewee also pointed to the close interplay between these two sources of legitimacy, the input-based one and the substance-based one:

In my view it begins with inclusiveness in developing the content. Speaking as somebody who has been involved in this whole process […] I can see already how certain aspects of the SDGs, especially the targets, had to be carefully negotiated. […] Inclusiveness in terms of getting the content, that was largely satisfactory for all parties. Of course, that can have implications for implementation.

(interview Accra 2018)

Interviewees from civil society organisations who were overall positive towards the SDGs also pointed out that there were limits to how many people were included in consultations: "I would say that in terms of effectiveness and efficiency, the consultations could be debated, regarding how much people were consulted and engaged. […] For me there were a lot, but some were not consulted adequately" (interview Accra 2017). And another interviewee concluded: "We didn't have all the money to talk to everybody" (interview Accra 2018). This hints at the selection inherent in any stakeholder-based legitimation processes, compared to the constituency-based mode of input through political institutions, such as parliament and political parties. While stakeholder consultations provide direct input from interested groups, the latter is a slower and more indirect form of political participation.

Our interviewees also pointed to the importance of a sense of ownership of the goals for engaging in their implementation. "I think that one thing that the consultations did for us, especially for Ghana, is to bring the whole idea to the doorsteps of the people who are going to implement [the SDGs] and benefit from them" (interview Accra 2018). Another said: "Because it creates a sense of ownership, and knowing that it's not something that is being imposed on the country by some experts somewhere. Therefore, we have the responsibility to see to its implementation" (interview Accra 2017). These views related to the overall position of Ghana.

I think the positive part about this is that it's country-driven. The days of one country super-imposing what they thought was development on another is completely gone. However poor, however small a country is, I think they have to be accountable for their own development, they have to drive it. And that is what the SDGs offer countries, that it is

country-owned and country-driven. No one in New York or Geneva can tell us what to do in Ghana. We know the issues. What I'm saying is that it is because it is country owned and driven, nobody can really tell us what to do, because we develop our own framework.

(interview Accra 2017)

These quotes preview links between legitimacy, responsibility, and accountability that we will return to in later chapters.

In conclusion, in the case of Ghana, UN agencies and the UN country team were key agents of legitimation. The UN consultation template was formative for how legitimation of the post-MDG global sustainable development agenda unfolded. A diverse set of groups were targeted as audiences of legitimation in UN-organised national consultations, even if the actual number of individuals reached was limited. The dominant way of distinguishing between legitimation audiences was in terms of stakeholders rather than citizens, voters, or political constituencies. Elites considered the inclusive process to be a key source of legitimacy of the SDGs. This was reinforced by the substantive content of the SDGs in itself. There was, however, awareness of the limited impact consultations may have in the end. We have not found signs of delegitimation during this phase in our material in the case of Ghana. This may result from the fact that, despite attempts at outreach to citizens, consultations were elite-driven in the sense of including audiences already well acquainted with global (sustainable) development policy.

3.1.2 Tanzania

Like Ghana, Tanzania held UN-initiated national consultations on the post-MDG agenda. In line with the UN call for increasing participation in planning this agenda, Tanzania launched a national consultation in 2012 aiming to identify its priority areas for new global goals. Again, the government and its agencies acted as intermediary audiences of legitimation. The President's Office Planning Commission charged a research and policy think tank, the Economic and Social Research Foundation, with coordinating the consultation process. Consultations involved local government authorities, civil society organisations, vulnerable groups (the elderly, women, young women, youth, and children), the private sector, government officials, and representatives from higher education and research institutions. Key recommendations resulting from consultations were to extend the MDGs beyond 2015 but with a focus on quality rather than quantity. Three main issues were proposed to be included in the new agenda: promotion of human development, promotion of sustainable and employment-generating growth, and promotion of science, technology, innovation, and research (President's Office Planning Commission, 2012, 2013; Economic and Social Research Foundation 2013; Summary Report 2013).

In 2014, consultations were held on localisation of the post-2015 Development Agenda, as part of the UN consultation template. Consultations were arranged by the President's Office Planning Commission and the UN Country Team in Tanzania. Four workshops in addition to online consultations were held with key stakeholders from central and local governments, civil society organisations, academia, and the UN, aiming to draw lessons from the implementation of the MDGs. The intention was to foster a broad sense of ownership of the new development agenda (President's Office Planning Commission 2014). Key recommendations from these consultations were to strengthen decentralisation, monitoring, reporting, and local implementation capacity; to ensure participation and promote transparency and access to data at local levels; to enhance domestic resource mobilisation and build strong partnerships; to minimise political interference and manage foreign development assistance and natural resources in a prudent way (President's Office Planning Commission 2014). A summary report emphasised that Tanzania had benefitted from previous consultation processes in conjunction with national long-term development plans and two poverty reduction strategies, and that the first round of post-2015 consultations informed Tanzania's mid-term development planning (Summary Report 2013). This was confirmed in several of our interviews. The consultations resulted in a number of goals and targets that should be considered for the 2030 Agenda (Tanzania Post 2015 Development Agenda Consultations – Key messages). These suggestions were quite in line with the final version of the agenda, contributing to its legitimacy in the eyes of interviewees. Moreover, like Ghana, Tanzania participated in the organisation of a global thematic consultation. In Tanzania's case, the theme concerned energy, and the consultation was organised jointly with the UN Energy and the governments of Mexico and Norway (Dodds et al. 2017: 49). This included hosting a meeting in Tanzania in 2013.

Like in Ghana, the general public was invited to submit their priorities for the new agenda in the online survey *MyWorld2015* on the UN platform, the "World We Want". Some 38,000 individuals voted, which was quite a bit fewer than in Ghana. Again the majority was male, between 16 and 30 years of age, and with higher education. The top three issues were the same as in Ghana, namely a good education, better job opportunities, and better health care. The fourth priority was protection against crime and violence (while in Ghana it was affordable and nutritious food, which was number five in Tanzania).

Our impression is that the 2030 Agenda is perceived to be legitimate among interviewees, bearing in mind that these were elite individuals. Several interviewees claimed that their sense of country ownership of the 2030 Agenda was increased through UN-driven national consultations prior to the adoption of the SDGs. Representatives of the government at the time claimed that it had had an impact on intergovernmental negotiations at the UN (interview Dodoma 2018). One government official said that "I have to say that one of the good things about the SDGs is the process of initiating

them. The process was 'consultative' – meaning that we were involved in the initiation of the SDGs" (interview Dodoma 2018). Illustratively, one interviewee thought that "[t]he level of ownership is astronomically higher than for the MDGs" (interview Dar es Salaam 2018). A civil society representative underlined the difference from previous global development agreements:

> The MDGs had no consultations, now we feel we have ownership […] even if it did not make a change in practice. Many think there are too many and too ambitious goals. […] Maybe this is because of a lack of understanding.
>
> (interview Dar es Salaam 2018)

The same interviewee pointed to the importance of inclusion, even if it was hard to determine that consultations had an impact on the final outcome of the 2030 Agenda: "Did the voice of Tanzania have an impact? Hard question but I think not that much. But it is more the psychology, we took part in this process" (interview Dar es Salaam 2018). This bears witness of the legitimating effect of input-based strategies, despite this input not necessarily having an impact on the actual outcome.

For their part, government officials had a more positive picture of the impact of consultations on the final outcome.

> Tanzania participated effectively in the process of the preparation of these SDGs, referred to as post-MDGs consultations. These consultations were organised nationally and were facilitated and coordinated by the Economic and Social Research Foundation. It is during this process of consultation that Tanzania's priorities regarding the SDGs emerged. I should say that fortunately 11 out of 17 SDGs were proposed by Tanzania during the consultation process. In this respect the consultation process was important for us.
>
> (interview Dodoma 2018)

This view was shared by a representative of the Economic and Social Research Foundation, the organisation in charge of arranging consultations: "We came up with 11 priorities for Tanzania. The feedback we got from New York was that all came on board, so we were quite happy" (interview Dar es Salaam 2018). Yet the fact that the government of Tanzania had an impact on the outcome was not necessarily perceived to be a positive thing by other interviewees. "There are negative consequences. For example, the government took a strong stance against rights of sexual minorities. But the government felt heard" (interview Dar es Salaam 2018). Another issue identified as problematic by this interviewee was that high levels of participation were less useful when ending up with a broad wish list. "It makes you psychologically good but then disillusioned. The impact is limited as the end product is (inter)governmental. It matters for ownership but the government calls the

shots" (interview Dar es Salaam 2018). Despite the rhetorical emphasis on national ownership, two interviewees stated that some stakeholders view the SDGs as something coming from the outside. This raised challenges with regard to engaging these stakeholders in SDG fulfilment (interview Dodoma 2019). In brief, this bears witness of a tension between broad participation at the agenda-setting stage and interstate bargaining in the decision-making stage, privileging government elites.

In the case of Tanzania, but unlike Ghana, legitimation attempts related to the SDGs coincided with the process of crafting a new national development plan. The relationship between the two therefore became a central concern. Government officials emphasised that the consultation process for the SDGs and the formulation of the Tanzania National Second Five Year Development Plan took place in parallel. "Hence, we decided to incorporate the SDGs in the Development Plan [and use] them as a framework for the formulation of the Second Five Year Development Plan" (interview Dodoma 2018). This was confirmed by other interviewees. Despite their different origin and time frame, the relationship between the two plans is framed as overlapping by policymaking elites, indicating substance-based legitimacy perceptions.

Like Ghana, Tanzania had its own seat in the Open Working Group of the UN General Assembly during 2013–2014, where states deliberated on the future sustainable development agenda with input from stakeholders through the UN Major Groups system. During subsequent intergovernmental negotiations in 2015, a Tanzanian Minister delivered a statement on behalf of the African Group, reacting to the draft outcome document on the 2030 Agenda in July 2015, that is shortly before it was supposed to be finalised. Among the points brought forth in the statement was a paragraph on the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, saying that:

> On common but differentiated responsibilities, the Group is of the view that this principle cannot be overlooked and, consequently, should constitute the overarching principle of the Post-2015 Development Agenda. In this context, we propose to delete the mention of "shared responsibility" in paragraph 31 which dilutes the differences between the developing and the developed countries and contradicts the essence of the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.
>
> (§9, Statement by Minister Songelael Shilla, New York 23 July 2015)

Moreover, a Tanzanian Ambassador delivered a statement on behalf of the African Group on the draft outcome document on follow-up and review. This statement emphasised that any review and follow-up should be owned by governments and conducted on a voluntary basis. As we will return to in Chapter 5, review and follow-up remains a politically sensitive issue potentially based on "naming and shaming" practices. The statement also put

forth that SDG indicators should be adopted by the UN General Assembly in order to strengthen indicator legitimacy:

> The African Group welcomes a provision on the adoption of SDGs indicators by ECOSOC and the General Assembly in paragraph 58. There is no other way to guarantee the legitimacy of a possible global indicators framework and to ensure that the global framework does not upset the political balance of the SDGs. Language on the consideration and adoption of a set of global indicators by ECOSOC and the GA must be an essential piece of the document to be adopted by our Heads of States and Government.
>
> <div align="right">(Statement by Ambassador Celestine Mushy)</div>

These statements attest to the active role of Tanzania during the final stages before the adoption of the SDGs. They also exhibit the politically contentious nature of global development policies and the importance of coalition-building during intergovernmental negotiations. In essence, during concluding negotiations there were still political disagreements among states on central principles of the 2030 Agenda. These were not solved by the outcome document *Transforming Our World*: *The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. The statements above bear witness of the presence of long-standing contention on how to assign responsibility for sustainable development. Low-income countries sought to include more emphasis on the responsibilities of high-income countries, including prior unmet commitments. This was resisted by high-income countries (Dodds et al. 2017: 144; Kamau et al. 2018: 34, 118). This will be further examined in Chapter 4. We note at this point that in the eyes of several interviewees, the global adoption in the UN General Assembly of the 2030 Agenda is perceived as a key source of its legitimacy. The political agreement upon which the 2030 Agenda rests is, however, the result of political compromise that may be vulnerable to changing political circumstances.

In short, our material on Tanzania shows that, alike the case of Ghana, legitimation attempts drawing on input-based legitimacy sources such as participation and inclusion predominated in consultations. These seem to have had a positive impact on elite interviewees' perceptions of SDG legitimacy, expressed in terms of national ownership and high relevance to Tanzania's development challenges. Unlike in Ghana, deliberation on the post-MDG agenda was intertwined in the case of Tanzania with processes related to a new national development plan. We have found tensions around the substantive legitimacy of proposals on the SDGs. Unlike in Ghana, consultations contained issues that in the government's opinion were politically sensitive, such as the rights of sexual minorities. Yet we do not find attempts of outright delegitimation during consultations. Audiences of legitimation were defined in global stakeholder terms rather than in terms of representative political institutions.

3.1.3 Sweden

In contrast to Ghana and Tanzania, UN-supported national consultations were not held in high-income countries such as Sweden. The Swedish government therefore did not play the role of intermediary legitimation audience to the same extent as was the case for the governments of Ghana and Tanzania. While global consultations on the SDGs were the most extensive ones to date in terms of UN outreach beyond governments, they mainly involved Swedish elites active in the realm of international development co-operation and foreign policy. The Swedish government at the time invited representatives of certain stakeholder groups to a dozen shorter consultation sessions in Sweden. Notably, members of parliament imparted that they had been informed by the government on how intergovernmental negotiations proceeded but not involved enough in the consultation process as such, in their opinion (interviews Stockholm 2015, 2016). Yet all members of parliament we spoke to highlighted that there was little disagreement at the time among political parties on the final SDG outcome.

Similar to Ghana and Tanzania, Sweden co-organised one of 11 thematic consultations. Sweden and Botswana cooperated with UNICEF and the WHO to conduct the thematic consultation on health. This consultation consisted in different elements: the UN web platform "The World We Want" that received replies on priorities from across the world; papers submitted by organisations; and face-to-face meetings in different countries involving about 1,600 people. The concluding report was submitted to the UN Secretary-General in 2013 (*Health in the Post-2015 Agenda* 2013: 17–19). Moreover, former Swedish Minister of International Development Cooperation, Gunilla Carlsson, was part of a High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, active during 2012–2013 to advise then UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on the global development agenda beyond the MDGs. One government official explained that the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) assisted Minister Carlsson in this capacity (interview Stockholm 2016). In its final report in 2013, the High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda called for five transformative shifts: fighting extreme poverty and inequalities; placing sustainable development at the core of the post-2015 Development Agenda; transforming economies for jobs and inclusive growth; building peace and effective, open, and accountable institutions for all; and creating a new global partnership. These shifts are present in the final UN General Assembly outcome document on the 2030 Agenda, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.

Like in the other two country cases, the Swedish general public had the opportunity of providing input through the online survey MyWorld2015 on the UN platform "The World We Want" where any individual could vote on issues to be prioritised in the post-2015 Global Development Agenda. Notably, fewer people based in Sweden contributed votes (about 7,800) as

compared to Ghana and Tanzania. The share of female voters was higher than male ones, but alike in Ghana and Tanzania, people who chose to cast a vote were predominantly young and with higher education. Among the options provided, the top four ones chosen by Swedish respondents were "A good education", "Access to clean water and sanitation", "Action taken on climate change", and "Equality between men and women". Hence, in all three countries the top priority was "a good education", probably mirroring the predominance of young people among respondents. As mentioned earlier, the online survey was one piece among many that fed into concluding reports on proposals for the post-2015 agenda provided to the UN Secretary-General and member states. Beyond this, there was not much awareness among the Swedish public that deliberations on a new global sustainable development agenda were on-going. In early 2015, then Minister for International Development Cooperation (Isabella Lövin) wrote a debate article stating that few people were aware of the three major global agreements to be concluded that year: a climate agreement, a new set of global development goals, and a global agreement on financing of these goals. The Minister explained that Sweden had a voice that was listened to internationally and that Sweden would push for strong goals on democratic institutions, transparency, rule of law, gender equality, and access to sexual and reproductive health rights. She argued that citizens' outlook should be lifted beyond domestic political quarrels to seize the opportunities of these new global political agreements (Lövin 2015). This indicates that, among policy elites, there was a perception of a lack of citizen knowledge on and engagement in post-2015 deliberations.

If few citizen constituencies were aware of on-going global consultations, this was not the case for Swedish civil society representatives. A Swedish government official conveyed that there was great pressure from civil society organisations on the Swedish delegation: "It was a challenge. Civil society posed clear demands. There was also an explicit ambition from the political leadership to have a good relationship with civil society" (interview Stockholm 2015). Swedish official delegations to negotiations on the SDGs in New York were among the very few that included civil society representatives as official national delegates. The inclusion of civil society representatives created tensions with other countries' delegations that did not support civil society presence during negotiations (interviews Stockholm 2015, 2016). Even so, the value of collaboration with civil society organisations was highlighted in all our interviews with Swedish elites. It allowed for broader input to and domestic backing of official negotiations. However, it also invited questions on who was selected and how they could be held accountable for their influence on Swedish positions. Moreover, one civil society representative pointed out that their inclusion in the Swedish delegation created a tension between inside participation and outside watchdog roles of civil society. For example, the call for a UN tax agency combatting tax evasion was supported by low-income country partner organisations

to Swedish civil society organisations but not by the Swedish government. Nonetheless, all civil society interviewees agreed that the positive aspects outweighed this dilemma, not least due to the fact that civil society organisations and the government largely agreed on Swedish positions. The latter is likely to be a key explanation for the inclusion of Swedish civil society, in line with research showing that civil society organisations with a moderate reformist agenda are more likely to find state allies than those with radical transformational agendas (Pallas and Uhlin 2014).

Civil society organisations were coordinated by CONCORD Sweden, a platform organisation for about 50 small and large Swedish organisations working with international development-related issues. A CONCORD working group elaborated joint statements and enabled information sharing and one of its members participated in the official Swedish delegation (interview Stockholm 2015). A civil society organisation representative said in early 2016 that "The process has been good. There was first dialogue with Sida and then with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the most inclusive consultation in UN history. It demonstrates commitment" (interview Stockholm 2016). Another civil society organisation representative said that

> in general we have agreed with Swedish official positions, but there have always been contentious issues that we focus on (SRHR, equality, violence against children, peace and security). We tell the government 'do not give up', 'continue what you are doing'. We know what the government tells us but not how the government pursues these issues when meeting with other actors, for instance in the European Union.
>
> (interview Stockholm 2016)

During intergovernmental negotiations in 2015, statements were made by the European Union on behalf of all member states rather than by Sweden itself. One member of parliament spoke about challenges of diverging views within the European Union when issues were negotiated in New York by the European Union jointly rather than by Sweden itself (interview Stockholm 2015). Long-standing north-south contention on responsibility for addressing poverty came to the fore in European Union statements:

> We also have serious issues with the section on "Shared principles" in its current form. […] We reiterate our position on CBDR [Common But Differentiated Responsibilities], which cannot apply as an operational principle for the whole agenda. It should not be singled out among the Rio principles. […] The section on "Implementation" is particularly problematic […] There remains a persisting imbalance, with very little mention of the primary responsibility of countries and thus the central place of domestic action and policies. We suggest reiterating at the outset that each country has primary responsibility for its own economic and social development.[1]

These statements convey a view opposing the one presented by Tanzania and the African Group. It bears witness of the political nature of global agreements on sustainable development ambitions, as we have earlier emphasised.

In 2016, Swedish interviewees expressed overall satisfaction with the final outcome of the 2030 Agenda, considering the politics of global negotiations and the politically sensitive issues of the 2030 Agenda. A Swedish government official explained that:

> Issues like climate are sensitive, as demonstrated in earlier negotiations. It is important not to be too detailed. We also had to fight for human rights, democracy, equality, SRHR [Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights], especially earlier. In New York, the European Union was speaking. Despite everything, the atmosphere was pleasant and we managed to get as much as we could on board. For example, Sweden pushed for SRHR together with France. We were sceptical [during negotiations], convinced that the goals would be split up, especially Goal 16. If that had happened, we would have demanded more on democracy [….] There was African resistance against SRHR, it was tough to listen to the arguments. In general, it turned out the way we had hoped for. It could have ended up much worse. Everybody wanted to reach an end to negotiations.
>
> (interview Stockholm 2015)

Interviewees from all categories stressed that Sweden wants to go further than the 2030 Agenda with regard to many issues, in line with Swedish foreign and development cooperation policy. Most Swedish interviewees would have preferred stronger text on democracy, human rights, equality, and to some extent also on sexual and reproductive health. Government officials as well as civil society representatives pointed out that these issues were difficult for many countries to accept, like Tanzania, and that Sweden had to work hard in intergovernmental negotiations to keep them on the agenda at all. Swedish domestic politics did not appear to affect these substantive issues. One representative of a civil society organisation explained that: "We changed governments during consultations, but that did not really affect Swedish priorities. Possibly a bit more emphasis on environmental issues" (interview Stockholm 2016). A common theme in interviews was that the broad scope of the Agenda is both its strength and its weakness. One government official commented that the Agenda's holistic approach appropriately reflects the real world. Another government official had initially been hesitant that such a comprehensive agenda would stand a chance to be adopted. Yet, as the deadline approached, those involved in the process became reluctant to question separate goals as this risked opening up for the deletion of more important goals. The willingness to compromise was relatively high as many wanted to reach a decision. This official also found there to be too

much current focus on the goals at the expense of the broader political declaration of the outcome document, explaining that "[w]ithout the political declaration, the goals are not worth anything" (interview Stockholm 2015). This testifies to political elites' awareness of the political fragility of global sustainable development agreements.

In brief, unlike in the cases of Ghana and Tanzania, Swedish attempts at seeking inclusion in post-MDG preparations took place mainly in the domain of development cooperation and foreign affairs. Swedish development-oriented civil society organisations appear to have been the most important audience of legitimation in the eyes of policymaking elites. Representatives of civil society organisations active in the domain of international development cooperation were largely happy with consultation processes and their contact with Swedish negotiators. Several mention a resulting sense of ownership of the 2030 Agenda. Members of parliament had more mixed views, having been informed rather than consulted. Strikingly, Swedish interviewees emphasise the political character of the 2030 Agenda and the political compromises required to a much larger extent than interviewees from Ghana and Tanzania. We also discerned more reservations around the substantive legitimacy of the SDGs in the Swedish case, where several interviewees saw the SDGs as a lowest common denominator rather than an ideal set of goals for sustainable development. The adoption of the SDGs in the UN General Assembly is in itself a key source of its legitimacy, several interviewees argued.

3.2 Domestic legitimation

This section examines how domestic legitimation attempts related to the SDGs have unfolded after the UN adoption of the 2030 Agenda in 2015. Theoretically, national political institutions are central in a presumed chain of conferring legitimacy upon decisions made in intergovernmental organisations. Knowing from the previous section that the UN and governments were key agents of legitimation in the global domain, we pay particular attention here to the extent to which national parliaments have been involved in the adaptation of the 2030 Agenda to country settings after 2015. This implies that we are also asking whether citizens, in their capacity of political subjects, are familiar with the SDGs.

3.2.1 Ghana

Ghanaian elites have assumed a high profile internationally with regard to supporting the SDGs, and interviewees expected this to be mirrored domestically. In January 2016, former President Mahama (2012–2016) was appointed Co-chair with Norway's Prime Minister Erna Solberg of the Sustainable Development Goals Advocates, a group of celebrities and politicians selected to campaign globally for the achievement of the SDGs.

This position was inherited by President Akufo-Addo (2016–) and, according to one interviewee, Ghana functions as a role-model for other African countries.

> [T]he fact that the President has been appointed by the Secretary General as the co-chair of the Group of Advocates of SDGs […] This puts a lot of visibility in Ghana: if the President is advocating for implementation elsewhere, he has to say something positive about how Ghana is achieving the goals.
>
> (interview Accra 2017)

According to one interviewee, Ghana aspires "to be best in class" (interview Accra 2017). This ambition is conveyed not only domestically but also in relation to the African Union, where Ghana has sought to take a leading role, as for example reflected in its nomination as African Union Gender Champion (UNSDP 2018: i). In the eyes of one interviewee, this mirrors expectations among other actors, viewing Ghana as a democratic, middle-income country with considerable global and domestic SDG-engagement (interview Accra 2017).

At the same time, active legitimation attempts related to the SDGs appear to have decreased with the adoption of the 2030 Agenda in 2015. Rather, there seems to be a taken for granted assumption among policy elites that these goals are legitimate policy tools for the country. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda in the UN General Assembly coincided with national elections in Ghana, leading to a few statements on the SDGs in election debates in early 2016. The main political parties, such as the New Patriotic Party, the governing National Democratic Congress, and the People's National Convention, ensured that the SDGs would be incorporated into their policies, if their party won the election.[2] In parliamentary debate, it was claimed that Parliament should ensure that government policies comply with the SDGs, and Parliament would scrutinise SDG implementation through new committees.[3] Newspaper reporting shows that ministers of President Mahama's government also referred to the SDGs during 2016: for instance in relation to different projects.[4] Since then, work towards the SDGs has progressed under a different administration, and has involved the creation of a parliamentary committee charged with oversight of Ghana's progress on the SDGs (see Chapters 4 and 5).[5] This may contribute to greater parliamentary ownership of the SDGs and to raising awareness of the need for political priorities as SDG realisation advances. However, the SDGs were not an important topic of political debate in national elections in 2020, as far as we could judge from the website of Parliament and major newspapers.

After 2015, the SDGs were aligned with national policy. SDG targets and indicators were reviewed and adapted to suit Ghana's development context (NDPC 2018; UN 2018). One interviewee in Ghana underscored the importance of the fact that countries could localise the SDGs according to

country circumstances. He argued that it would be pointless to engage in consultative processes if the result would be a poor document not giving developing countries leeway to localise the goals (interview Accra 2017). At the time, Ghana was already implementing its own national development framework (Government of Ghana 2014). According to several interviewees and policy documents (interviews Accra 2017, 2018; NDPC 2018), the majority of SDGs were aligned with existing domestic policies, conveying a perception of substance-based legitimacy and possibly explaining a lack of critical debate around them.

For their part, UN bodies in Ghana continued to be proactive agents of legitimation after the adoption of the SDGs, assuming a central role in promoting the 2030 Agenda through the United Nations Sustainable Development Partnership. This is a partnership between the UN in Ghana and the government, intended to reflect Ghana's national goals and the country's commitment to global development initiatives (UNSDP 2018). Moreover, the UNDP Ghana office has assisted by training journalists in SDG-reporting and by translating SDG-messages into local languages (UN 2016; interviews Accra 2017, 2018), aiming to increase awareness of the SDGs.

In addition, civil society organisations have sought to engage the public on the 2030 Agenda through awareness-raising campaigns. They have been invited to take part in national committees working with the SDGs (see Chapter 4). Moreover, civil society organisations self-organise in the Ghana Civil Society Organisations Platform on Sustainable Development Goals, established in 2015 with the aim to coordinate civil society advocacy (UNDESA 2020: 49; http://ghanacsoplatformsdg.org), seeking to raise awareness and promote community engagement with the SDGs at district level. One interviewee suggested that due to the consultations before 2015, civil society organisations had become more engaged than otherwise would have been the case: "you can see the follow-up and review processes constantly engaging the civil society organisations" (interview Accra 2018). "What I find positive is that, for Ghana, the SDGs present an opportunity to use a comprehensive and integrated approach to providing development solutions [for] the development challenges of the country" (interview Accra 2018). At the same time, civil society organisations' attempts at legitimising the SDGs should be understood in light of these organisations' struggle to secure their space in Ghanaian development affairs. In a letter to President Akufo-Addo in September 2020, the Ghana Civil Society Organizations Platform on SDGs stated that

> The pandemic has proven to have the propensity to worsen the sustainability of civil society which has been threatened by diverse factors over the years including dwindled external donor funding, shrinking civic space and disenabling legislative environment for smooth civil operations and engagement.
>
> (SDGs Civil Society Platform 2020)

In essence, while civil society organisations act as domestic agents of legitimation as regards the SDGs, they struggle to secure their own place in Ghanaian politics where civic space was classified as narrowed in 2020 (CIVICUS Monitor 2020). We develop this further in Chapter 5.

Despite attempts by the UN agencies and civil society organisations to spread awareness on the SDGs, one interviewee thought that there had not been any conscious efforts to spread knowledge among the population, indicating a persistent gap between the urban-based elite and the general public (interview Accra 2018). In Ghana, awareness of the SDGs remains low among the general public (interviews Accra 2018; Government of Ghana 2019: 118). This is partly because of the country's multitude of languages (interviews Accra 2017) and due to delays in spreading knowledge because of a wish to coordinate messages about different policy plans in order to "avoid confusion" (interview Accra 2017). Our interviewees expressed worries that the SDGs may not "come down" to the general public – not only because of a lack of language skills but also because of a lack of understanding. However, there have been more recent multi-stakeholder consultations focussing on children and youth, on the principle of leaving no one behind, and on synergies among the goals in conjunction with the government's Voluntary National Review presented at the UN High-level Political Forum in New York in July 2019 (DESA 2019a: 15). The intention was to kick-start a nationwide dissemination campaign to increase national ownership, as knowledge on the SDGs was still considered low among the public at the time (interviews Accra 2018; Government of Ghana 2019). It was also reported that face-to-face meetings have been conducted in partnership with non-state actors. For example, the president has hosted breakfast meetings with representatives from business, civil society, academia, the media, and think tanks in order to define collective action to accelerate SDG implementation (DESA 2019b: 34).

One researcher among our interviewees was a bit more optimistic but nevertheless identified the "informed middle class" and university students as audiences of legitimation who were the most likely to be somewhat familiar with the SDGs. This transpires from the following quote, indicating that as of 2020, knowledge on the SDGs does not follow the "leave no one behind" principle of the 2030 Agenda:

> I would say there is a certain degree of awareness and I know that there are efforts among different groups to interact with schools and things and at the university level and among the informed middle class there is a great deal of awareness of the SDGs. I don't think many people go beyond the goals themselves to the targets and the indicators, which are completely different sets of information needs. So, I would say there is general awareness of what the letters SDG means, there is far less awareness of what the targets are and even less awareness of what the indicators are. […] I would challenge you to find any advert on TV or any

program on TV, a regular program, which is dealing with the SDGs. And if we are serious about them, we should have some sort of programs running. In terms of University of Ghana, I would say that all the students are aware because Balm Library has been having displays of SDGs materials every month for a long time.

(interview Accra 2019)

Our material also indicates that some were sceptical of the SDGs. On the question of whether an official had come across any criticism of the SDGs, the answer was:

Of course. I wouldn't want to mention names, but I have even come across people at high levels who don't believe in the SDGs. I have come across a minister who says SDGs is a waste of time. And that tells you just about where they are standing.

(interview Accra 2019)

Other interviewees had heard of people thinking that the SDGs came "from the outside". But according to these interviewees, this was a misconception due to lack of knowledge (interviews Accra 2019). Again, we believe that legitimacy perceptions related to the SDGs are closely connected to legitimacy perceptions related to the UN more generally. While there is not much data for Ghana to be found on this matter, surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2007 showed that 85% of citizens in Ghana had a favourable view of the UN (Pew Research Center 2007).

In a domestic political context, we regard the media as potentially an important intermediary legitimation audience, transmitting knowledge and legitimacy claims to a broader audience beyond itself. The 2030 Agenda and the SDGs are mentioned from time to time in national newspapers but do not seem to have received any closer scrutiny in media as of 2020. While our material does not in itself allow for a media content analysis, we have asked interviewees about the role of media for the SDGs. On this note, a journalist among our interviewees observed that there are media reports on specific events related to the SDGs, but "those reports are on the event and is not about how you and I can work to assist in achieving SDGs" (interview Accra 2019). The same interviewee could not recognise the description in the Voluntary National Review of media networks working at making SDGs known to the public either. His experience was that the authorities used media primarily for press calls on activities related to the SDGs.

To conclude, after 2015, the main agents seeking to legitimate the SDGs towards audiences within Ghana have been civil society organisations and UN country level agencies, at times in cooperation with the government. The UN agencies and civil society organisations have sought to spread knowledge on the SDGs and their relevance for the country. While the main audience of such attempts has been the general public, the SDGs appear not

to have been an object of legitimation through the procedures of political institutions. The President has been the central political actor visible in advocating the SDGs, albeit mainly in the international setting of the Sustainable Development Goals Advocates. Parliament has not been an agent of legitimation or an intermediary in its own capacity. Interviews indicate that knowledge on the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs remained low among citizens, including in their capacity as voters. Without knowledge, citizens cannot form perceptions related to the legitimacy of the SDGs. This may explain why our material does not contain attempts that qualify as delegitimation of the SDGs, even if there are critical comments.

3.2.2 Tanzania

Contrary to Ghana, and as already noted in Section 3.1, the adoption of the SDGs in 2015 took place in parallel with the construction of a new national development plan in Tanzania. Overall, government elites interviewed for this book frame the relationship between the SDGs and the new national plan as one of mutual reinforcement (interviews Dodoma 2018). A government official explained that national policies were modified in order not to conflict with global policies:

> Global policies cannot be in conflict with our policies. When we adopt global policies, we first look at our domestic policies to identify the differences. In doing this we seek to iron out the differences and to modify domestic policies in order to harmonise the policies. […] As I have indicated the national policies are in some instances revised or modified so that the national policies and global policies do not conflict with each other. Hence, our policies have to conform to the SDGs we have adopted.
>
> (interview Dodoma 2018)

References to national adaptation and policy alignment feed into legitimation of the SDGs in the domestic political context, underpinned by the broader imperative to localise global development policy. This is also true for UN approaches. In the United Nations Development Assistance Plan 2016–2021 for Tanzania, it was emphasised that national concerns should inform the lens through which the SDGs were understood (United Nations Tanzania 2016: 3, 8). The UN has also organised workshops for Ministerial Permanent Secretaries who presented the status of SDG implementation in their respective ministry domains (interview Dar es Salaam 2019). The UN country team has in general been very active in promoting the SDGs giving talks "everywhere, at universities etc." (interview UN Dar es Salaam 2018; see also https://tanzania.un.org/en/sdgs).

Like in Ghana, parliament appears not to have been much involved in adapting the SDGs to national circumstances during the early years of the

2030 Agenda. However, a parliamentary group has been inaugurated by the Speaker with the aim to monitor implementation of the SDGs (interview Dodoma 2019). We return to this in Chapter 4. This is similar to the arrangement made in Ghana and may augment parliamentary involvement with the SDGs in the future. One interviewee was an organiser of SDG training for parliamentarians. This interviewee told us when asked about views on the SDGs among members of parliaments:

> One of the major feedbacks was that they did not know the process so they thought [the SDGs] were an imposition from the UN. First reaction. So we had to explain about the consultation and I think we achieved that.
>
> (interview Dar es Salaam 2018)

A member of parliament shared the same impression in 2019:

> Knowledge about SDGs at both national and local levels is low. We need to educate the citizens about the SDGs. Some people think implementation of the SDGs is the responsibility of the government and UN. Even members of parliament do not know that they are responsible for the SDGs. When you introduce SDG-issues they would ask you to tell them what these are all about.
>
> (interview Dodoma 2019)

The same impression was expressed by a representative of the parliamentary group on the SDGs:

> A cardinal issue we have observed is that the SDGs are seen as coming from outside of Tanzania. What we need then is a lot of engagement. We need to engage and sensitise various stakeholders including government, nongovernmental organisations, civil society organisations, individuals and Parliament so that people can have a thorough understanding of the SDGs. But this has cost implications. The cost involved in engaging these stakeholders is what I see as a major challenge.
>
> (interview Dodoma 2019)

A few civil society organisations have arranged awareness campaigns and workshops for local civil society, civil servants, and members of parliament, acting as agents of legitimation (Policy Forum 2017). Similar to Ghana, there is a civil society organisation platform called Tanzania Sustainable Development Platform (DESA 2019a: 74; UNDESA 2020: 132). The opportunities for civil society engagement are however restricted. The state of civil space in Tanzania was deemed "repressed" by the CIVICUS Monitor (2020), on a scale ranging from open to narrowed to obstructed to repressed to closed. This makes open political conflicts unlikely (interview Dodoma 2019). Not

surprisingly then, so far the SDGs have not been politically controversial or exposed to delegitimation attempts. Many interviewees claim that there are no tensions related to the SDGs and that there will be no future conflicts, echoing our interviews in Ghana.

> Conflicts may arise. But in our context, this is unlikely as Parliament is dominated by one political party. However, if Parliament plays its role as it should, the occurrence of conflicts in Parliament will be minimised to ensure that focus is on monitoring and supervision of policy implementation and holding the government accountable for the decisions and actions it takes.
>
> (interview official 2018)

Interviews also point to the rupture caused by regime change because knowledge was lost during regime transition:

> Consultations were very important, they gave us more understanding of the goals and possibility to align ourselves to the global structure. Timing was important. It was the last year for the outgoing regime. The new regime brought a lot of changes, change of people. Loss of knowledge. The transition has made us less good than we could have been.
>
> (interview Dar es Salaam 2018)

In 2015, the President of Tanzania was invited by the Prime Minister of Sweden to an informal High-level Group consisting of nine countries aiming to provide leadership on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The idea was to promote realisation of the SDGs by driving commitments and sharing best practices across countries and societal sectors (*Svenska regeringen startar högnivågrupp*, 2015). Contrary to the advocacy-group engagement by the President in Ghana, however, the President's involvement in this group has not led to any significant exposure in Tanzania. It is therefore unlikely to have impacted legitimacy perceptions. Seemingly, President John Magufuli has taken an inward-looking approach to economic development through industrialisation and fight against corruption rather than being engaged in global sustainable development work (interview Dodoma 2018; also see Arthur, 2018: 26; Jacob and Pedersen 2018). President Magufuli strongly opposes foreign influence on Tanzania's socio-economic development. His reluctance to engage with foreign actors was not only reflected with regard to the SDGs, but also in the fact that Tanzania is no longer an active member in the African Union or other regional organisations (Schlimmer 2018; Amnesty International 2020: 11). On the part of citizens, it is hard to find material on perceptions of the SDGs or the UN more generally. One exception is a Pew Research Center report from 2007, showing strong support of the UN in sub-Saharan Africa. In the case of Tanzania, 75% of respondents had a favourable view of the UN (PEW 2007).

In 2019, a consultation was held in conjunction with the government's Voluntary National Review before its submission to the UN High-level Political Forum. The Ministry of Finance and Planning coordinated preparations that involved a wide range of stakeholders from all over the country, focussing on different SDGs. As a way to engage the private sector, the business-oriented UN Global Compact Tanzania was responsible for a substantial part of the consultations (Global Compact Network Tanzania 2019; United Republic of Tanzania 2019; interview Dar es Salaam 2019). Yet, despite several consultations, the National Audit Office of Tanzania reported that awareness campaigns have been inadequately conducted at the national and subnational levels. Allegedly, there had been a lack of involvement of actors such as non-state organisations and the private sector (National Audit Office of Tanzania 2018). This can to a large extent be explained by limited resources, but according to one civil society interviewee participation in Voluntary National Review meetings was not representative as only few participated (interview Dar es Salaam 2019). Further, "multi-stakeholder partnerships have not been institutionalised properly and their practices have not been consistent. For example, the government has chosen to work independently on several occasions, only involving other stakeholders at the final stage of the policy process" (interview Dar es Salaam 2019). A civil society representative stated in 2019 that "I don't think that stakeholder participation in the consultation process was inclusive. This is because until recently many actors still think these are UN goals, which in my opinion is wrong" (interview Dar es Salaam 2019).

Our interviews also convey that knowledge of the SDGs is low and uneven among public administration officials at the district level. The Poverty Eradication Department has conducted awareness training workshops for government officials, including local government authorities (Policy Forum 2017: 12; DESA 2019a: 79). The recurrent change of people working in public administration was perceived as a challenge in terms of knowledge and engagement with the SDGs (interview Dar es Salaam 2018). Furthermore, even if local government is perceived as key for implementation, one of the interviewees asked "but how to get them involved?". One interviewee at the district level said "I have been hearing about the SDGs in the radio and other mass media. But with regard to their practice at the district I have never been trained or being informed about the goals" (interview Dodoma 2018). In this context, one interviewee argued that the SDGs did not change much in practice: "nothing is new; it is the emphasis on issues and sharing of best approaches which is new" (interview Dodoma 2018). While a government official (interview Dodoma 2018) stated that district officials "thoroughly understand the goals" – and some of our interviewees had heard about the SDGs – this claim is not supported by our interviewees at the district levels. One community development officer, who was not familiar with consultations on the SDGs, said that "The first challenge is awareness of the SDGs; in my opinion the level of awareness is very low among the majority" (interview Dodoma 2018). Other community officials still in 2018

had not at all heard about the SDGs and mentioned a lack of broad training for district officials and frequent changes of personnel. However, a few interviewees also questioned the importance of knowing the SDGs as such: "We as a District Council implement guidelines from above; the national level including the SDGs. We do not ask whether these are SDGs or not" (interview Dodoma 2018).

With regard to the media as a potential intermediary audience of legitimation, the SDGs are mainly mentioned in English-speaking newspapers, such as *The Citizens* and *The Guardian*. In the Kiswahili versions (Nipashe, Raia Mwema, and Mwananchi), we have found very little information about the SDGs. Most of the reporting in English-speaking media follows the same pattern as in Ghana, that is, the SDGs are mentioned in conjunction with a special project or appearance. Another similarity with Ghana is that language is an issue as well.

> [D]issemination of SDG knowledge is complicated by the language we use. The SDGs are in English and very few people speak and understand English. Only a quarter of our population can read and write English. We therefore have to translate and put it in the local language.
> (interview Dodoma 2019)

This contributes to the low level of knowledge on the SDGs among citizens as it privileges a relatively narrow audience, government officials, and representatives from the (urban) development policy elite.

In conclusion, references are often made to the UN origin of the SDGs when issues related to legitimacy are reflected upon among our interviewees. Compared to interviews in Ghana, there is more concern with legitimacy-related issues among interviewees in Tanzania. Multiple interviewees observed that people think of the SDGs as coming from the outside, being imposed on Tanzania. We do not find criticism of the substantive legitimacy of the SDGs as such, however. Like in Ghana, awareness of the SDGs is as of 2020 low beyond elites from government, the UN, and civil society. Even among members of parliament, knowledge on the SDGs remained low. This is also true for elites at the district level, showing that a sense of political ownership of the SDGs resides at best at the national level. While the present book only concerns legitimacy issues related to the SDGs, these must be understood against the background of state authoritarianism in the case of Tanzania. The president has a large impact on development policy priorities, implying that the domestic political status of the SDGs depends on the individual holding that position rather than on the preferences of political constituencies or on inclusive policymaking processes.

3.2.3 Sweden

In the Swedish domestic political domain, attempts at legitimation of the SDGs have mainly been shaped by pre-existing institutionalised

policymaking procedures. The long-standing system of government committees of enquiry has been used to plan how to realise the SDGs in Sweden. In March 2016, the Swedish government appointed such a committee for planning the realisation of the 2030 Agenda in Sweden and abroad. The committee was called "the Swedish Delegation for the 2030 Agenda". Its mandate lasted between 2016 and 2019 and resulted in a set of influential reports, including a final report with suggestions for routes ahead (Swedish Delegation for the 2030 Agenda, 2019). The committee comprised Swedish individuals representing different societal sectors. The initial selection of members had a bias towards environmental expertise and research/think tanks. Half-way, the committee was expanded to include representatives of municipal politics, business, and expertise from other domains as well. After a referral procedure where stakeholders were invited to provide responses to the committee's final report, the Swedish Government submitted a government bill on the 2030 Agenda to the Swedish parliament in June 2020 (Swedish Government 2019/2020). This process relied on the implicit legitimating effect of the referral system, emphasising preparatory stages of policymaking where support is sought before proposals are formally launched (Petersson 2016). In parallel, the government agency Statistics Sweden provided a first proposal on the interpretation of SDG indicators in a Swedish context in 2017 (Statistics Sweden 2017). This process was rushed because of the decision to present a Voluntary National Review at the UN High-level Political Forum in 2017 (Bexell and Jönsson 2019; see also Section 5.2). In essence, legitimation relying on expert-based policymaking initially prevailed through the committee system and the proposals from Statistics Sweden on how to translate the SDGs to a Swedish context. At the same time, policy documents (Swedish Delegation for the 2030 Agenda, 2018) as well as our interviews bring forth that the substance of the 2030 Agenda overlaps with several parliamentary-adopted Swedish goal systems.

Increasingly, calls have been made for more parliamentary involvement in policymaking related to the SDGs in order to strengthen their domestic political legitimacy (Arkelsten 2017/2018; telephone interviews 2017, 2018; Swedish Delegation for the 2030 Agenda, 2017; Hjerling et al. 2018; interviews Stockholm 2018, 2019). Our interviews with opposition party members of parliament show that they awaited policy proposals from the government and would react to those once provided (interviews Stockholm 2018, 2019). For them, the rationale for rapid parliamentary involvement was the long-term nature of the 2030 Agenda, warranting parliamentary decisions on budgets, priorities, action plans, laws, and review mechanisms. It should be noted that one member of parliament was self-critical with regard to being reactive rather than proactive (interview Stockholm 2015). Tellingly, a national action plan on the 2030 Agenda that the Government presented in 2018 faced criticism for largely being a compilation of things that the government already was underway doing (Halkjaer 2018, 4). Parliamentarians claimed that it would be a challenge to integrate SDG ambitions into parliament's issue-bound committee structure. Climate and development were

among the issues mentioned as particularly challenging in this respect. In their opinion, cross-sectorial work was easier for the government. There appears from our interviews to be agreement among Swedish political parties on the legitimacy of the 2030 Agenda even if one party (the Liberals) has voiced criticism against the lack of goals related to democracy. One member of parliament suggested that the adoption of the SDGs was among the rare positive things about the UN recently. Another member of parliament thought that the lack of political conflict might depend on the high level of abstraction of the SDGs thus far, as it takes time before they become "hands-on" Swedish policy. It was decisive to demonstrate concrete effects at an early stage, creating a positive spiral, or the SDGs might run out of steam, one member of parliament argued. Overall, members of parliament agreed that there was little discussion about the SDGs in parliament in 2018 and that most parliamentarians had limited knowledge about the goals at that point (Halkjaer 2018: 6).

The involvement of parliament increased during 2020 due to the government bill submitted in June 2020. Sweden thereby became the first of the three countries examined in this book where a government bill devoted only to implementation of the SDGs has been submitted to parliament. Counter-proposals (motions) were submitted by four political opposition parties in response to the government bill. These motions evinced that the 2030 Agenda can indeed bring political contestation when taken to national political institutions. To exemplify, the motion by the Sweden Democrats emphasised that priority should be given to realising the SDGs in the domestic context rather than internationally. The party also argued for a need for growth policies that benefit business and welfare, as well as for an expansion of nuclear power plants in the interest of climate (Sjöstedt et al. 2020/2021). Among its broad range of motion proposals, the Left Party demanded a feminist analysis of how the realisation of the 2030 Agenda can contribute to structural change. It also asked the government to propose laws requiring companies to undertake human rights assessments, and to launch proposals on how to combat tax evasion in low-income countries (Andersson et al. 2020/2021). For its part, the Conservative Party asked for more attention to the role of the business community and economic growth for realising the SDGs, and it emphasised that reduced emissions within Sweden must not come at the expense of increased emissions abroad. Moreover, the Conservative Party stated that despite the lack of democracy goals in the SDGs, Sweden needs to be a strong voice for democracy across the world and that when the 2030 Agenda is realised, traditional development aid should be dismantled (Svantesson et al. 2020/2021). In December 2020, the parliament formally approved of the government's proposition on a formal goal that specifies how the realisation of the 2030 Agenda is to be realised in Sweden. We return to the government bill in Chapter 5 as it also concerned follow-up procedures.

There is no doubt that Swedish foreign policy and civil society elites are well acquainted with the 2030 Agenda and several interviewees view it as a positive injection for global sustainable development work:

> The added value is that this is so positive now when we almost have a doomsday feeling in society. It gives a lot of positive energy, a boost. But also a long-time horizon to work with indicators in a systematic way. Inspiring, like Agenda 21. It plays an important role at home but also in Europe.
>
> (telephone interview 2016)

As mentioned earlier, the Prime Minister of Sweden, Stefan Löfven, took the initiative to create an informal High-level Group in 2015 consisting of heads of states in nine countries, aiming to provide leadership on implementing the 2030 Agenda (the other members are Brazil, Colombia, Germany, Liberia, South Africa, Timor-Leste, Tanzania, and Tunisia). The group was supposed to promote realisation of the SDGs by driving commitments and sharing best practices across countries and societal sectors (*Svenska regeringen startar högnivågrupp* 2015). However, while it gave exposure and goodwill in 2015 and 2016 when the SDGs were new, the group did not seek to target domestic audiences of legitimation.

Representatives from civil society organisations have repeatedly argued for the need for a national public campaign to increase knowledge among the general public on the 2030 Agenda, not unlike the situation in Ghana and Tanzania. In 2017, the Swedish Delegation for the 2030 Agenda recommended that the government grant money to communication initiatives aiming to increase knowledge on the SDGs (Swedish Delegation for the 2030 Agenda 2017). Civil society organisations criticised the Minister of Public Administration, in charge of national implementation of the Agenda, for not wanting to contribute such funds. Civil society organisation representatives emphasised that broader knowledge of the 2030 Agenda was conducive for sustainable development (Rogeman 2017). One civil society representative noted that, even among Swedish civil society organisations, there was low awareness of the 2030 Agenda (telephone interview 2017). One member of parliament suggested educational campaigns at schools. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs launched a campaign called #FirstGeneration, aiming to spread knowledge about the SDGs among young people and educators.[6] A 2019 report of the Swedish Agency for Public Management showed that representatives of government agencies, municipalities, and regions found the 2030 Agenda a useful framework for communication around sustainable development, internally within their organisations as well as externally. Particularly SDG logos were useful in communication (Swedish Agency for Public Management 2019: 37). Several municipalities have been active in promoting the SDGs and sought to

integrate the goals in their work. Furthermore, universities increasingly engage with the SDGs in research and education as well as in attempts at reducing their impact on climate change. They thereby contribute to greater knowledge of the SDGs among students and the international research community.

There was agreement among members of parliament that voters rarely or never brought up issues in terms of the 2030 Agenda or SDGs with them (interview Stockholm 2016, 2018; Halkjaer 2018: 4). This does not mean that sustainable development is not important to Swedish voters, but it shows that the 2030 Agenda as such is not well-known. In contrast to the cases of Ghana and Tanzania, there have been surveys assessing to what extent the general Swedish public is familiar with the SDGs. In 2016, 41% of Swedish citizens had heard about the SDGs while in 2017 the number was 42% and in 2018 50%. The percentage who could mention one or several of the goals was 24% in 2018 (Gullers grupp 2018). Another survey confirmed that in 2019, every other Swede had heard about the SDGs while 28% had never heard about them (We Effect/Sifo 2019). In 2020, 52% of Swedish respondents stated they had low or no knowledge on the content of the SDGs (Novus/AFRY/Gapminder 2020). Media has only sparsely reported on the SDGs, while there is ample media reporting on sustainable development affairs generally in Swedish newspapers and television. Accordingly, knowledge about the SDGs is rising among the Swedish general public. It is not possible, however, to draw conclusions on legitimacy perceptions on the basis of these surveys. With regard to legitimacy perceptions related to the UN, surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2020 showed that 77% of Swedes had a favourable view of the UN, while 51% believed that the UN deals effectively with international problems (Pew Research Center 2020). A favourable view of the UN is likely to influence perceptions of the SDGs in a positive direction.

To conclude, Sweden differs from Ghana and Tanzania due to its institutionalised referral system during policymaking and a resulting comparably slow pace of integrating the SDGs in public policy. Domestic political legitimation of the SDGs has been strongly shaped by institutionalised policymaking routines, allowing for input from a range of societal interests. A protracted referral system in combination with strong government ownership of the 2030 Agenda meant little parliamentary involvement until 2020. Swedish elites emphasise that they want Sweden to be a role-model for the 2030 Agenda, based on beliefs in the legitimacy of the SDGs and the UN more generally. In Sweden, unlike Ghana and Tanzania, interviewees have mentioned experiences from the UN Agenda 21 of 1992 as a point of reference for how to approach the 2030 Agenda. Citizens have become increasingly familiar with the SDGs through awareness-raising attempts. Yet, in Sweden as in Ghana and Tanzania, reaching a broader audience beyond elites has been a challenge, not least due to competing issues on the domestic political agenda.

3.3 Conclusions

This chapter has examined processes of legitimation related to the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs in the global setting as well as in domestic political contexts of Ghana, Tanzania, and Sweden after 2015 (see summary in Table 3.1). While seeking to leave no one behind, the 2030 Agenda was negotiated by government elites in a UN setting which means that representative

Table 3.1 Chapter summary

	Ghana	*Tanzania*	*Sweden*	*Overall conclusion*
Global legitimation	Input legitimacy strategies, formative UN template with diverse stakeholder groups. Role-model ambitions. Sense of ownership key.	Input legitimacy strategies, formative UN template with diverse stakeholder groups. Sense of ownership key.	Foreign policy elites and civil society elites in domain of international development cooperation. Role-model ambitions.	Unprecedented reach of globally organised consultations, broad stakeholder participation, yet limited number of individuals. The object of legitimation was a moving target.
Domestic legitimation	Less active than global. Strong presidential political ownership. Emphasis on substantive overlaps domestic policies-SDGs. Lack of citizen awareness but increasing.	Less active than global. Lack of awareness among officials and citizens. Lack of high-level political leadership.	Reliance on traditional referral system. Parliamentary decision in 2020. Increasing citizen awareness.	Primarily among elites, targeting public officials throughout state agencies. Difficulties to reach out to wider audiences. Active civil society but its outreach depends on degree of democratic space.
Resulting outcome	SDGs are largely perceived as legitimate among elite interviewees. A sense of political ownership among elites through participation and perceived influence.	SDGs are perceived as legitimate but with some reservations. Ownership through participation and perceived influence.	Sense of ownership. Acknowledgement of political compromise. Legitimacy conferred through UN approval and parliamentary approval.	Creation of global political momentum on the 2030 Agenda in 2015–2016. Consultations and UN agreement form basis of this. Persistent gap between elites and citizens.

chains towards voters were long and indirect, at best. We have found that legitimation strategies based on input-related legitimacy sources prevailed in the global setting, reinforced by substance-based sources. Our interviews indicate that the SDGs are generally perceived as legitimate policy tools among political and civil society elites in all three countries, due to extensive consultations and the universal UN General Assembly agreement, as well as to the substantive content of the goals. Among elites, there is great awareness that the 2030 Agenda is the result of political compromise and that the SDGs amount to a lowest common denominator. Among the general public, knowledge on the SDGs is not widespread, but increasing. We have not found sustained delegitimation attempts related to the 2030 Agenda in our material, which does not mean criticism is lacking. We may have encountered more critical views if we had selected countries where a majority of the population believes that the UN suffers from weak legitimacy.

Even if processes of legitimation simultaneously spanned global and national levels, we are able to identify differences between the levels. The main legitimation agent at the global level was the UN. Its consultation templates were highly formative for how governments acted in the capacity of legitimation intermediaries. Governments were supposed to advocate their own views on the new agenda while attempting to reach out to a broad range of stakeholders for the purpose of legitimating the post-2015 agenda. Consultations prior to the adoption of the SDGs looked different in the three countries, insofar as the process in Tanzania and Ghana was UN-sponsored with a nationwide scope targeting a wide range of actors. In Sweden, consultations were centred on stakeholders working with international development cooperation and foreign affairs in the capital. Eventually, actors who were first targeted audiences of legitimation became intermediaries and even agents of legitimation in their respective societal spheres (civil society organisations, academia, think tanks, business actors, etc.). Prior to 2015, during globally initiated consultations, the object of legitimation was a moving target, evolving through parallel processes as two global agendas merged (the MDGs and Rio+20). Its content was still open for input, making process-related legitimacy sources of participation and deliberation meaningful.

Moving to the domestic level, the object of legitimation had become fixed after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and its 17 SDGs. The political leadership in Ghana and Sweden early on proclaimed an ambition to act as role-models at home and abroad. Yet, at national levels after 2015, we have found less active legitimation of the 2030 Agenda as compared to the global setting before 2015. Our material shows that substance-based legitimation strategies of adaptation and localisation have become imperative in domestic political contexts. Procedurally, the 2030 Agenda has been integrated into ordinary processes of political decision-making, with the exception of the case of Ghana where new institutional arrangements have been created (see Chapter 4 for details). In all three countries, civil society has been a driving force for spreading awareness among citizens, while in Ghana and Tanzania, international development organisations continue

to be active agents of SDG legitimation. Legitimation attempts have been infrequent but included awareness campaigns, media appearances, and training of civil servants and members of parliaments. Despite such efforts, awareness of the SDGs among citizens remains relatively low, particularly in Tanzania and Ghana, even if this has started to change. Put in broader perspective, most countries in their Voluntary National Reviews report examples of awareness-raising attempts to inform the public on the SDGs, albeit not Tanzania (DESA 2019b: 27). Only a limited number of countries have thus far reported having had parliamentary involvement, among them Ghana and Sweden (DESA 2019b: 47–48). Moreover, interviewees in Ghana and Tanzania mention difficulties caused by the predominance of English in communication on the SDGs. Yet neither the Ghanaian nor the Tanzanian government reports having translated the SDGs to local languages – contrary to several other countries (DESA 2019b: 28). As knowledge is a precondition for forming legitimacy perceptions, this reinforces strong ownership of the SDGs by the government and government agencies rather than by citizens or members of parliament. Due to the lack of knowledge, we cannot assume that citizens in general hold perceptions on the legitimacy of the 2030 Agenda. In conclusion, in the SDG case, the antithesis to legitimation is lack of knowledge and neglect rather than outright delegitimation.

The political nature of the 2030 Agenda agreement is emphasised mainly by elite interviewees who participated in its intergovernmental negotiations. Others mention the politics behind the agreement to a lesser extent. Rather, their concern is with obtaining national and local ownership and to localise the 2030 Agenda. The SDGs epitomise the imperative to localise globally decided goals, illustrating a trend in which "the local" has been normatively upgraded in development affairs (Anderl 2016: 198). In the case of the SDGs, such localisation has become a central policy imperative that is ascribed great value, becoming a substance-based legitimation strategy of its own. Even so, looking to political institutions, parliaments have only to a limited degree been involved in national-level Agenda 2030 processes. This makes links between decision-makers and political constituencies weaker. In countries with limited political freedoms, chains conferring legitimacy from citizens to governments to decisions made in international organisations are already thin. Rather, the basis for identifying audiences of legitimation attempts has been stakeholder terms that straddle the domestic-international divide. Given our focus on political institutions, we have labelled such stakeholders "observer audiences" rather than "constituent audiences", for the purpose of emphasising that the former are not necessarily bound by the authority of national political institutions. Yet, for countries lacking democratic decision-making procedures, international demands on arranging stakeholder consultations may nevertheless increase political participation.

In the next chapter, we turn to exploring responsibility, bearing in mind that the allocation and realisation of responsibility is facilitated if the policy to be realised is considered legitimate or if the institution deciding on

the policy is perceived to be legitimate. Limits of institutional responsibility may arise from the need to maintain institutional legitimacy in the sense that institutions are created for specific purposes. They stay legitimate in the eyes of their constituencies as long as they perform their intended roles.

Notes

1 https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/15748eu2.pdf
2 http://citifmonline.com/2016/07/22/well-prioritise-devt-goals-in-our-manifestoes-parties/
3 https://new-ndpc-static1.s3.amazonaws.com/CACHES/PUBLICATIONS/2016/02/13/Minority+Leader%27s+Speech.pdf, accessed 20 January 2020.
4 Newspaper articles from The Ghanaian Chronicle can be found at http://thechronicle.com.gh/
5 https://www.parliament.gh/news?CO=66, accessed 7 October 2020
6 See http://www.swemfa.se/campaigns/first-generation/

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4 Responsibility

From promise to action

> "The SDGs were negotiated by governments. It is their responsibility to deliver".
>
> (interview civil society representative)

4.1 Allocating responsibility

This section looks into how the three countries in focus have formally allocated responsibility for the SDGs at the national level. We build on interviews, policy plans, directives to government agencies, and written reports from actors involved. While this book's focus is on responsibility assigned to national-level institutions, our material contains many statements pointing to a need to share responsibility across societal sectors and levels, if the SDGs are to be attained by 2030. An examination of how the responsibility of these sectors and levels is constructed is, however, outside of the scope of the book.

4.1.1 Ghana

UN reports show that national institutional mechanisms for advancing the SDGs in most countries fall into one or more of the following three tiers: (1) provision of high-level strategic policy direction, (2) coordination among ministries and government agencies, and (3) technical working groups and advisory committees (DESA 2019: 18). By 2020, Ghana had established entities along all three tiers. Interviewees emphasised that the government holds the main overall responsibility for realising the SDGs, as established in *Transforming Our World*: *The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. For instance, one interviewee stated:

> [Responsibility] rests with the government. First, the SDGs were negotiated by governments. It is their responsibility to deliver. Second, it is the role of government to work for the wellbeing of their citizens. That is the path that the SDGs have defined, so clearly, there is a responsibility

of government. Now, how it is done in terms of cooperation and part-
nership depends on the means [to achieve the SDGs]. Third, if it is the
government that has the primary responsibility of managing resources
through taxation, through management […] all of that has to be deliv-
ered for the wellbeing of people. They must bear the primary responsi-
bility of delivering on the SDGs.

(interview Accra 2018)

Interviewees also agreed that the government should be supported by other
actors in this endeavour, such as civil society and local communities. This
mirrors the political and administrative structures set up to cater for the 2030
Agenda in Ghana. Several new institutions have been assigned responsibil-
ities for the realisation of the SDGs. As described in the previous chapter,
already in February 2014 the Ghanaian government created a National Tech-
nical Committee, representing the third tier. This committee has represent-
atives from government agencies, ministries, and civil society organisations,
and provided input to Ghana's negotiators at Open Working Group sessions
and intergovernmental UN negotiations. A High-level Inter-Ministerial
Committee with 15 ministers and directors from government agencies was
also created to provide strategic guidance and oversight of implementation
of the SDGs with a "whole-of-government" approach. The committee is
chaired by the Minister of Planning with the President's Special Advisor on
the SDGs serving as secretary (NDPC 2015; interview Accra 2018; UNDESA
2020: 47). An SDG Advisory Unit was also created within the President's
Office to support the President in his role as co-chair of the UN SDG Advo-
cates, held until the end of 2020[1]. The appointment of President Akufo-Addo
as co-chair of the UN SDG Advocates (see Chapter 3) puts Ghana's SDG
domestic arrangements more into the international spotlight.

There is also a High-level SDG Implementation Coordination Commit-
tee, created by the National Development Planning Commission and in-
augurated by the President in September 2017 (UNSDP 2018: 3). It aims
to provide strategic guidance to the National Technical Committee and to
ensure greater coordination among state agencies. It consists of Ministers
and Directors from several ministries and agencies. One interviewee hoped
for this committee to overcome existing silos that could hamper implemen-
tation of the SDGs (interview Accra 2017). The High-level SDG Implemen-
tation Coordination Committee also contains representatives with observer
status from civil society, the private sector, philanthropy, national disaster
management organisations, and others. In the same vein, the UN Country
Team and development cooperation partners have observer status in order
to facilitate coordination (interview Accra 2017; DESA 2019: 20; Govern-
ment of Ghana 2019: 23). The National Development Planning Commission
is in charge of coordination and oversees integration of the SDGs with na-
tional development strategies, collaborating with representatives from civil

society and the private sector. Moreover, the Ghana National Civil Society Platform on the SDGs is a member of the earlier mentioned committees. In 2019, the platform had more than 300 local and international civil society members and was divided into 17 sub-platforms – one for each SDG. A youth group deals with cross-cutting issues (UNDESA 2020: 49). In addition, the Ghana Audit Service is included in the coordination structure (DESA 2019: 23). As for implementation of the SDGs, existing administrative structures are supposed to be used (Government of Ghana 2019). In brief, the allocation of SDG responsibilities in Ghana has been thoroughly institutionalised along the three tiers that the UN identifies.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, UN agencies in Ghana have played an important role in supporting the government in its work with the 2030 Agenda from the beginning. One interviewee conveys that the UN Resident Coordinator is part of everything that is going on but that the UN understands that the SDGs are country-owned (interview Accra 2017). In June 2018, the Government of Ghana and the UN in Ghana jointly signed a UN Sustainable Development Partnership for 2018–2022. This includes 24 UN agencies working with the SDGs in Ghana (see list UNSDP 2018: 9). According to its framing document, the UN Sustainable Development Partnership sets out the UN system's collective contributions to help the government and other stakeholders achieve these goals. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has created the SDG Philanthropy Platform mentioned above, advocating localisation of the SDGs and promoting awareness of the goals. Policy agreements between the UN and the government of Ghana go to great length to emphasise the co-operative nature of their relationship. Yet one interviewee pointed out that the government has been late in announcing their priorities, making it difficult for UN agencies to plan their activities. Some see the UN as too remote and disconnected to what is really happening in Ghana, arguing for a need to localise and to involve the private sector (interview Accra 2017).

Compared to Tanzania and Sweden, more new institutional responsibility structures have been created for the SDGs in Ghana. The creation of these structures led some interviewees from civil society to comment on uncertainty and tensions stemming from overlapping mandates, revealing that challenges remain related to conflicts on rules and responsibilities among government institutions:

> 'That is my responsibility, my rule', they say. There is an SDG unit at the office of the President. Then, why do we have the National Development Planning Commission to lead the SDGs? But of course, [the President] is the co-chair of the international platform, and this unit was formed to support him in that role. Usually this is a bit of a challenge as there are conflicts regarding rules and responsibilities between state institutions.
> (interview Accra 2017)

Another difference, compared to Tanzania, is in the sequence of policy alignment. At the time of adoption of the 2030 Agenda, development policy in Ghana was guided by its national development framework, the *Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda 2014–2017* (Government of Ghana 2014). This meant that the SDGs could not be integrated into the national policy framework until a couple of years later.

> We run a four-year plan in cycle. Every four years we have a new agenda. The current one ends in December this year [2017]. In 2015, when the SDGs were launched, we were in the middle of the planning cycle. So, the decision was to continue with the planning cycle, not to change it because of the SDGs. We did a review and realised that 70% of the SDGs target are reflected in our current plan. This was good because it told us that many of those we are already doing in sync with the SDGs. So, developing the next national agenda, in January 2018, it was easy to fully bring on board many of the SDG issues into our own plans.
>
> (interview Accra 2017)

Public administration officers charged with planning and budgeting aligned the SDGs through a mapping process where targets and indicators were reviewed and adapted to suit Ghana's development context (NDPC 2018; UN 2018). Subsequent policies, such as the President's *Coordinated Programme of Economic and Social Development Policies: Agenda for Jobs, Creating Prosperity and Equal Opportunities for all 2017–2024*, reflect the SDGs and form the basis for the Medium-term National Development Policy Framework, according to our interviewees. Ministries, departments, and agencies as well as local authorities are required to align their medium-term development plans with the SDGs (UNDESA 2020: 47). The Coordinated Programme was presented by President Akufo-Addo to Parliament in October 2017. However, in the 150-page document that constitutes the programme, the SDGs only appear briefly in a section on Ghana and international development frameworks (Coordinated Programme 2017: 101–102). This indicates that at the time, the SDGs were not localised to any significant extent in terms of their relevance for national development plans.

With regard to policy implementation, several interviewees underlined the importance of considering the 2030 Agenda as a whole rather than separate goals. In all, policymaking was perceived to be facilitated by overlaps between the SDGs and prevailing policies, while delayed by the timing of policy cycles. In the opinion of our interviewees, the timing of national elections every four years is both a strength and a weakness with regard to responsibility. Policy plans can change every time a new government comes into office (interview Accra 2017).

The SDGs are also related to the African Union's 2063 Agenda, as described in Chapter 1. Even if the SDGs and the Agenda 2063 are of different

origin, they were adopted the same year and could therefore be aligned through parallel processes (Ramutsindela and Mickler 2020).

> Africa was the only continent that went into the negotiation table on the SDGs already having a regional framework. We already had the African Union Agenda 2063 when we were going into SDGs negotiations. And so, by virtue of that, it was easy for us as a continent to ensure that we are aligning the SDGs with our own aspirations. So, the SDGs and Agenda 2063 are 90% aligned. So, when the SDGs were adopted, we decided in Ghana that we do not want to be implementing separate things, SDGs here, Agenda 2063 there, and our own development framework. So, we did what we called an alignment of the three.
>
> (interview Accra 2019)

In total, there are many overlapping policy plans that assign responsibilities related to the SDGs to different institutions in Ghana. However, even if Ghana has a strong ownership of its development plans, this ownership is hampered by the existence of multiple plans lacking clear hierarchy among them or prioritisation within plans (Lofchie 2014: 117; Brown 2017). As we will return to in the next section, the design and adoption of new policies is not necessarily followed up by their implementation, partly because of an unclear division of labour across ministries or levels of government (UN-SDP 2018: 8). Two civil society representatives noted that there was political interest in the SDGs but at the same time "too many hands" on the part of government, which may be hindering effective implementation (interviews Accra 2018, 2019). Besides introducing new institutional arrangements, Ghana is also among the countries that use the national budget as a steering instrument for assigning SDG responsibility. Early on, Ghana integrated the SDGs in its budget planning. Since 2017, the national budget has located expenditures in relation to different SDGs and the government intends to use the budget as an instrument to push the SDG process forward (Government of Ghana 2017, 2018). This was the first budget in Africa placing financial performance in relation to the SDGs (NDPC 2018: 5; Ofori-Atta 2018). In July 2018, the Ministry of Finance presented a Sustainable Development Report to show that financing for the SDGs could be tracked in the budget. The Minister of Finance called it a "proactive SDG budget report" (Ghana Ministry of Finance 2018: 4). Since then, the Ministry of Finance has issued separate SDG Budget Reports. The 2019 report suggests that Ghana should consider a legislative framework for the SDGs in order to ensure that goal attainment is anchored in Parliament's oversight of the budget (Ghana Ministry of Finance 2019: 82).

In 2018, one member of parliament explained that there was no specific role assigned to parliament as a whole regarding implementation of the SDGs. The parliamentary Poverty Reduction Committee did get some SDG

reports and issued recommendations. This parliamentarian thought that it would help if parliament was mandated to monitor progress of the goals, including at the district level. They would report to parliamentary plenary and debate the status of the goals (interview Accra 2018). Later, a new institutional arrangement was created. In November 2019, the Speaker of Parliament directed Parliament to establish a seven-member Ad Hoc Committee with the responsibility to monitor Ghana's progress on the implementation of the SDGs. It will also consider progress reports from implementing ministries and agencies, and advice Parliament on budgetary allocation and other interventions to ensure that the government is on track in SDG implementation. The committee will work closely with the Minister for Planning, the National Development Planning Commission, UNDP, civil society organisations, and other relevant stakeholders.[2]

In sum, the government of Ghana has actively allocated SDG responsibilities related to coordination, implementation, and monitoring by creating new institutional arrangements. As we will see, this makes Ghana different from Tanzania and Sweden, and it should be understood in light of the President's proclaimed ambition for Ghana to be a role model for the attainment of the SDGs. Yet interviews show that despite intentions to pursue a holistic policy approach, existing political and administrative structures set limits for the integration of the SDGs into everyday politics and policymaking.

4.1.2 Tanzania

Like Ghana, the Tanzanian government has formally integrated political responsibility for the SDGs into policy plans. Unlike Ghana but similar to Sweden, Tanzania has not created new institutional arrangements for coordinating efforts to realise the SDGs. Instead, work has largely remained within existing administrative structures, even if a coordination framework is underway (United Republic of Tanzania 2019a). The Prime Minister's Office provides overall oversight, while the responsibility of coordinating implementation and monitoring of SDG activities is bestowed upon the Ministry of Finance and Planning and its National Planning Department (interview Dodoma 2018). A Coordination Steering Committee comprised of Permanent Secretaries of relevant ministers, supported by a secretariat, is responsible for the implementation of the five-year plan and by extension for SDG coordination (UNDESA 2020: 131–132). The President's Office Regional Administration and Local Government also has political responsibility due to the decentralised administrative system in Tanzania with regions, districts, and local government authorities. With decentralisation by devolution, these authorities have responsibility to provide plans and budgets as well as deliver public service, monitoring, and implementation. One interviewee considered it a step forward that local government authorities used national guidelines in order to ensure that the SDGs are integrated in budgets and implementation plans (interview Dodoma 2019).

A Planning Commission was initially assigned overall SDG responsibility but eventually merged with the Ministry of Finance and ceased to exist in Spring 2018. Its task had been to coordinate a national framework of SDG implementation and evaluation. Since 2019, the Poverty Eradication Department at the Ministry of Finance and Planning is responsible for poverty issues, including the SDGs. This department has produced an SDG-baseline report (Ministry of Finance and Planning 2017), an SDG-progress report, and a Voluntary National Review for the 2019 UN High-level Political Forum in New York (see Chapter 5). One government official explained that these procedures operate within the normal government system and that the government has its way of involving other stakeholders (interview Dodoma 2018). Another interviewee stated that through development plans, SDG responsibilities are assigned to different ministries, the National Bureau of Statistics, and the President's office. Moreover, regional administrations and local governments are assigned to come up with strategic plans as to where integration and prioritisation could take place (interview Dar es Salaam 2018).

A lack of institutional arrangements for coordination between ministries and between administrative levels has been acknowledged as a major challenge for holistic implementation of the SDGs (*Champions to be?* 2016). More than one interviewee said that it was not clear to them who was responsible for the implementation of the SDGs (interview Dodoma 2019). A representative from civil society also commented on the difficulties of realising the SDGs due to unclear allocations of responsibility.

> The poverty reduction unit has the overall responsibility. The Ministry of Development, and regional and local government are responsible for the five-year plan but the Ministry of Finance is responsible for the SDGs. The Planning Commission is working on the bigger picture. Who really owns the mandate of responsibility? In the plan they speak about who should be responsible but on the practical side it is a bit confusing.
>
> (interview Dar es Salaam 2018)

Several interviewees said that by tradition institutions in Tanzania work in silos and that policy alignment is lacking at ministry levels. Ministries had not been prepared to undertake customisation of the SDGs and people working in ministries showed a lack of understanding of the holistic 2030 Agenda approach (interview Dar es Salaam, 2018; interview Dodoma, 2019). A civil servant at the district level noted that there were fragmented implementation attempts related to the SDGs because each goal was taken care of by a specific sector with little coordination (interview Dodoma 2018).

> Every ministry is taking care of their respective goals and indicators. For example, the Ministry of Health is dealing with all issues relating to the goal focusing on health, the Ministry of Education is taking care of

SDG education issues. These issues are mainstreamed in their strategic plans. The ministries give us information about implementation of their plans. Therefore they report with SDGs indicators in mind. The ministries work with various stakeholders such as nongovernmental organisations, development partners, civil society organisations, as well. And, we have a tracking mechanism in terms of how resources from donors are channelled to the different programmes of the ministries.

(interview Dodoma 2018)

Governmental officials that we interviewed for this book were well aware of the problems and had tried to find a solution. One interviewee summarised the problems succinctly and is worth quoting at length:

There is weak coordination. We have tried to create institutional mechanism for coordination but in practice it does not work. In our government setting, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) is the overall coordinator of activities. The PMO has been trying to address the institutional fragmentation problem in the implementation of government activities. Nevertheless, with SDG work the PMO has started working on the establishment of the coordination mechanism. [...] Those who are coordinating the Five-Year Development Plan are responsible for coordination of the SDGs as well. However, coordination has been difficult because our country has two systems: there is the central government system consisting of ministries and the local government system. The local government system looks like an independent government because of the decentralisation structure supported by legislation. The local government system comprises a large number of local government authorities with uneven levels of resources and a multitude of activities. Therefore, achieving vertical and horizontal coordination in these two systems of government is a bit of a challenge.

(interview Dodoma 2018)

Another challenge brought up in interviews concerned the level of individuals and related to change of governments. One interviewee said that people change work often in the bureaucracy because the President is quick to move people around. This impedes understanding of the SDGs even if people were willing to learn about them (interview Dar es Salaam 2018). Departments were not clear about who should do what and therefore work was duplicated (interview Dar es Salaam 2018). Another interviewee had experienced fear among civil servants to get extra work. This meant that the interviewee sought to spread awareness about the SDGs without making people feel that it implied a lot of extra work, which was a real challenge (interview Dar es Salaam 2018).

Meanwhile, Tanzania's Sustainable Development Platform has been the preferred platform for the government, other development partners, and

civil society to engage in implementation of the SDGs (DESA 2019: 74; UN-DESA 2020: 132). This platform is led by the Africa Philanthropic Foundation, which has also worked with the National Bureau of Statistics, with Parliament, and local government authorities. The Africa Philanthropic Foundation has played a key role in promoting the SDGs together with the UN Association of Tanzania. They have, for example, worked with parliamentarians in order to push for an SDG-committee in the National Assembly, and conducted several workshops in order to increase awareness of the SDGs (interview Dar es Salaam, 2018; see e.g. Policy Forum, 2017). The Tanzania National Civil Society Platform for Sustainable Development was founded in April 2015, following a multi-stakeholder workshop on the transition from the MDGs to the SDGs held by the UN Association in Tanzania and Africa Philanthropic Foundation. One interviewee conveyed a sense of shared responsibility:

> Everyone should be responsible with leaving no one behind, in all countries. Otherwise the meaning of leaving no one behind is not there. But we all have different responsibilities. Our organisation focuses on advocacy, so we have to make sure that everyone is aware, for example by training the youth. Create awareness but also give them a job description of the SDGs.
>
> (interview Dar es Salaam 2018)

The SDGs are integrated into policies and strategic plans through Annual Development Plans and budgeting processes. Our interviewees underlined that the timing of the adoption of the SDGs was favourable.

> Fortunately, our national planning coincided with the initiation of the SDGs. Our national planning activity incorporated the SDGs and we are lucky that the goals are part and parcel of the Second National Five-Year Development Plan launched recently. Although the overarching national policy is industrialisation, national planning is aligned to the SDGs agenda.
>
> (interview Dodoma 2018)

The government has encouraged local and regional authorities to mainstream the SDGs into their plans and budgets, besides the national Five Year Development Plan II 2016–2021 also a poverty reduction strategy for Zanzibar (2016–2020). The Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty 2016–2020 integrates the SDGs in five areas: economic growth, human capital, services, environment, and governance (UNDESA 2020: 131). However, Tanzania's long-term objectives are stated in two National Visions, the Tanzania Development Vision 2025 and the Zanzibar Vision 2020, which were adopted prior to the SDGs. But according to our sources, institutional arrangements to support these visions have been adapted to cater for the

SDGs. Others were more hesitant. One interviewee saw tensions when integrating the SDGs with national policy as the SDGs were adopted when national plans were already in place (interview Dar es Salaam 2018). Another interviewee argued that even if the government had embedded the SDGs in the five-year plan, this was made in a very general way, possibly making integration superficial (interview Dar es Salaam 2018). It did not mean that all policies were adjusted yet, as one interviewee emphasised (interview Dodoma 2019).

Like in Ghana, the UN, in particular the UNDP, has been very active in supporting the government's work on the SDGs from the start. UN agencies do so by bringing together UN agencies, national governments, academia, civil society, and business to address challenges of poverty, building on experiences from the MDGs in the transition to the SDGs. According to one interviewee, the UNDP had close relations to the Tanzanian planning commission and supported the government (interview Dar es Salaam 2018). The 2016–2021 United Nations Development Assistance Plan (UNDAP) II for Tanzania, where the SDGs are a fundamental element, supplements governmental plans. UNDAP II was launched together with the government and development partners, and focusses on national development priorities and contextualisation of the SDGs.[3]

While we found overall emphasis on the responsibility of government, interviewees also acknowledged that parliament should play an important role and that it needed to increase its engagement with the SDGs. Even if government was considered the driver of SDG processes, parliament approves policies, laws, and the budget, and could say no to everything, a civil society organisation representative claimed (interview Dar es Salaam 2018). The Office of the Clerk of the National Assembly submitted a proposal for the establishment of a parliamentary group for the SDGs already in 2016 and in 2018 the Speaker of Parliament inaugurated such a group (Policy Forum 2017: 13; interview Dodoma 2019). According to one interviewee, the delay was caused by protocol issues and changes of people in relevant administrative positions (interview Dar es Salaam 2018). One member of parliament shared a broader view on responsibility, arguing that achievement of the SDGs is the responsibility of all people – the community, government, parliament, and so on. This parliamentarian acknowledged that the government has more responsibility in this regard and that parliament's responsibility was to exert pressure on the government to implement the SDGs. Additionally, citizens and civil society organisations have the responsibility to ensure parliamentarians play their oversight role with respect to SDG implementation, the interviewee underlined (interview Dodoma 2019).

In short, our material displays much emphasis on the Tanzanian government's responsibility for the SDGs, but the allocation of such responsibility throughout the state administration remains unclear. Several interviewees bring up coordination challenges resulting from the reliance on existing

administrative structures for SDG implementation. Compared to Ghana, there is less presidential leadership. Instead, the UN and civil society organisations have been key in promoting the SDGs – without having formal responsibility for attaining the goals. Alike Ghana, a committee dedicated to the SDGs has been created in Parliament.

4.1.3 Sweden

Like in Ghana, the Swedish government early on proclaimed that Sweden sought to be a role model with regard to domestic and international SDG responsibilities. Since 2015, the Swedish Social Democrat/Green Party government has declared this ambition on many occasions, such as in its annual formal declaration of government. Prime Minister Stefan Löfven said in his opening speech at a national SDG kick-off event in January 2016 that Sweden should to be a forerunner in working towards the SDGs: "We have a responsibility for more than ourselves here and now. We have a responsibility for people all over the world, but also for future generations" (Löfven 2016). This, Löfven claimed, was both morally right and economically smart. Rhetorically, the word "leadership" has been frequently used to describe Swedish ambitions (*Sverige tar ansvar* 2015; Rosén 2016). As mentioned earlier, in 2015 Prime Minister Löfven created an informal High-level Group of nine countries aiming to provide leadership on implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The group was supposed to promote realisation of the SDGs by driving commitments and sharing best practices across countries and societal sectors (*Svenska regeringen startar högnivågrupp* 2015). In December 2016, the Government presented a new policy framework for Swedish development cooperation and humanitarian aid, based on the 2030 Agenda. Overall, the SDGs are frequently referenced in Swedish international development cooperation policies and in international initiatives in several issue domains, such as women's rights, climate change, social protection, the ocean and marine resources, and in support for strengthened statistical capacity to low-income countries (Swedish Government 2020).

Like Tanzania, Sweden has not created new structures for realising the SDGs but uses pre-existing institutional arrangements and goal systems for allocating responsibility. The government early on decided to work with existing structures rather than to create a permanent SDG secretariat. A government official explained that:

> We discussed this as it concerns all departments. How do we do this? We quickly arrived at the conclusion that we should use the existing organisation to accomplish this. We considered the creation of an Agenda 2030 secretariat but it would risk becoming an island of its own. It would be difficult to get included in on-going processes.
>
> (telephone interview 2016)

Within a whole-of-government approach, each minister was assigned responsibility for the agenda's implementation within his or her domain. In addition, special responsibilities for the SDGs were initially assigned to three ministers. The Minister for Strategic Development and Nordic Cooperation was assigned responsibility for long-term visionary strategic thinking on SDG implementation nationally and internationally, including safeguarding cross-sectorial approaches and the need for special initiatives. The Minister for Public Administration at the Ministry of Finance was assigned responsibility for guiding regional and municipal level SDG work. The Minister for International Development Cooperation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was allocated responsibility for the SDGs in Swedish development cooperation. Since 2016, the Swedish Government's budget bills have to an increasing extent mentioned the 2030 Agenda among the key long-term policy goals to be implemented under several different areas of state expenditures.

This organisational structure created expectations of a holistic approach to SDG responsibility, yet raised new demands on coordination. In May 2016, an overall reorganisation of ministerial positions made Isabella Lövin Minister for International Development Cooperation and Climate as well as Deputy Prime Minister. As a result, the SDGs, policies for international development cooperation, and climate change issues became organisationally more intertwined. While the Prime Minister removed the position of Minister of Strategic Development and Nordic Cooperation from government, the Minister for Public Administration kept responsibility for domestic SDG implementation. The sudden change of ministerial portfolios shows how the organisation of responsibility is vulnerable to political considerations arising in other realms. Even though certain ministers have extra responsibilities, politically appointed government officials emphasise in our interviews that the SDGs are the responsibility of the entire government. Coordination on 2030 Agenda matters is sought through the creation of a consultative group with state secretaries from a select set of ministries and an inter-ministerial working group for the 2030 Agenda where all ministries are represented. Feeding SDG responsibility into existing structures is argued to be the best way for spreading responsibility throughout Government Offices (telephone interview 2016). In 2019, ministerial responsibilities for the 2030 Agenda changed again after a reorganisation of ministerial portfolios following government formation after the 2018 general elections. The Minister for International Development Cooperation kept responsibility for international SDG support, whereas the Deputy Prime Minister (equally the Minister for Environment and Climate) was assigned responsibility for goal attainment in Sweden.

In line with our observations in Ghana and Tanzania, our material points to a key tension between the creation of new institutional structures for allocating SDG responsibilities and working within existing structures. While

responsibility for the MDGs 2000–2015 belonged to the realm of foreign policy and development cooperation, the SDGs entail broader demands on both international and domestic action. This means greater challenges for the organisation of responsibility. At an early stage in 2016, one government official said that

> The dream scenario is that all public servants and politicians automatically bring the 2030 Agenda into their analyses and that there is a clear connection to the mandates of government agencies. This is about a new and different way of approaching things.
>
> (interview Stockholm 2016)

At the same time, governmental attempts at organising SDG responsibilities were not made in a vacuum but faced on-going Swedish policymaking processes in several issue domains. Interviews revealed that pre-existing organisational interests, mandates, and resources contributed to delimiting what obligations were established. Without aiming to detail these processes as such, we notice that the SDGs add yet another challenging layer to Swedish domestic and international policies on sustainable development. During 2015–2016, several policy processes were handled in the domain of foreign policy in addition to the 2030 Agenda: a relaunch of the Policy for Global Development, a new written communication on the government's aid policy platform to parliament and a new written communication on human rights from the government to parliament. A rights-based and poverty-focussed perspective on development is supposed to guide how Sida engages in development cooperation and a feminist perspective is to inform foreign policy-making (Statement of Government Policy on Foreign Affairs 2016).

In June 2018 the government launched a national action plan for 2018–2020 for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda (Swedish Government 2018). The action plan detailed for each SDG how on-going work at different political and administrative levels aligned with ambitions at reaching the SDGs and what further measures were needed. It also suggested how cooperation with civil society, academia, and business could be strengthened. The action plan listed six focus areas for government-driven work towards realising the 2030 Agenda: equality; sustainable societies; a circular economy; sustainable business; sustainable food production and consumption; and, finally, knowledge and innovation. These are areas where the government considered Sweden to face the greatest societal challenges but also where the government saw opportunities for action. Moreover, the action plan emphasised the need to increase parliamentary involvement and follow-up and review procedures.

We observe that a set of reports has been central for sparking some debate on how SDG responsibilities should be best allocated throughout Swedish public administration and political institutions. The final report

of the Swedish Delegation for the 2030 Agenda (see Chapter 3) went far in terms of suggestions on how to organise responsibility for implementation of the Agenda: changes in laws of public administration, clear alignment with the state budget, and a parliamentary-adopted decision on implementation, demands on sustainable development concerns in all public procurement, and a more pronounced role for the municipal and regional levels (Swedish Delegation for the 2030 Agenda 2019). Moreover, reports on the 2030 Agenda in Sweden have been issued by the Swedish Agency for Public Management, a government agency mandated to support the government in making the public sector more efficient. These reports have concluded that there is much commitment to the 2030 Agenda in Swedish government agencies, municipalities, and regional authorities, but this commitment has not resulted in changed working modes or altered priorities (Swedish Agency for Public Management 2019: 33). The final report of the Swedish Agency for Public Management strongly argued that the government had not until then had a clear direction for its work towards the 2030 Agenda. This meant that the 2030 Agenda had only to a limited extent affected sustainable development ambitions of government agencies, municipalities, and regional authorities. It even implied that the preconditions for government offices to work towards the SDGs had become worse. The report argued that the government should raise the level of ambition, five years after the 2030 Agenda was adopted. It suggested that the government identifies priority areas for its continued work in order to provide more coordinated directives to government agencies. This would enable public agencies to better understand how they ought to work with the 2030 Agenda (Swedish Agency for Public Management 2020).

Partly in response to the above reports, the Swedish government in early 2020 appointed a national coordinator for the realisation of the 2030 Agenda. The national coordinator is mandated to strengthen cooperation between the broad set of actors working on the SDGs and to increase knowledge on the goals with a special focus on children, youth, and vulnerable groups. The mandate stretches until 2024 when a final report of activities is to be submitted. As detailed in Chapter 3, the government also submitted a bill on the 2030 Agenda to Swedish parliament in June 2020. The government bill states that "Due to its favourable national preconditions, Sweden has a great responsibility to contribute also to the realisation of the 2030 Agenda globally" (Swedish Government 2020). The bill proposed the following overarching aim, which was adopted by parliament: "Sweden shall realise the 2030 Agenda for economic, social, and environmental sustainable development through coherent national and international policies. Implementation shall be carried out in the spirit of the 2030 Agenda's principle of leaving no one behind" (Swedish Government 2020). The bill also emphasised that pre-existing goal systems earlier adopted by parliament align with the 2030 Agenda and that its realisation is a joint responsibility of all societal actors. This view appears frequently in interviews across societal sectors, and we

find high expectations in this regard. For instance, a government official expressed in early 2016 that

> Civil society is very important. There is enormous pressure from all actors who wish to provide input and work with the 2030 Agenda. It is about giving everyone space, important that civil society, municipalities, and business can contribute in a good way. This raises a challenge in practical terms. But there is great commitment from all.
>
> <div align="right">(telephone interview 2016)</div>

In conclusion, like in Ghana and Tanzania, the allocation of responsibility for the realisation of the 2030 Agenda is centred around the executive branch of government, identified as the key subject of institutional political responsibility. Sweden is different from the other two countries by not having a parliamentary SDG-committee and by having a national SDG-coordinator and, as of late 2020, a parliamentary-adopted bill on the realisation of the 2030 Agenda. Similar to Tanzania, responsibility for the SDGs has been allocated within existing political and administrative structures, privileging issue-specific organisational modes rather than holistic or coordinating ones. This has caused impatience and criticism, not only from the political opposition and civil society, but also from government agencies scrutinising the quality of public administration. This shows that there is great symbolic value in the creation of new organisational structures as a manifestation of political responsibility, as has been done in Ghana. It is premature to tell which mode of organisation will be the most effective for attaining the 2030 Agenda by 2030.

4.2 Realising responsibility

This section looks into factors affecting the realisation of responsibility beyond policy plans and organisational matters, which were in focus of the previous section. Country studies lend themselves well to investigating how responsibility becomes politicised due to resource shortage and organisational needs of making priorities. We find the capacity principle ("response-ability") central for justifying limits of responsibility nationally and globally. Capacities (in various forms) are referenced when justifying why certain actors should realise their assigned responsibilities, and a lack of capacity is alluded to when responsibilities are not fulfilled.

4.2.1 Ghana

Despite high political ambitions for the SDGs, Ghana struggles with a lack of resources, corruption, and competing political agendas, as will be described below. To recapitulate, Ghana's score in the SDG Index of 2020 demonstrated that the country had come on average 65% of the way to fulfilling

the 17 SDGs. Two SDGs had been achieved: Goal 12 on responsible consumption and production and Goal 13 on climate action. The other SDGs faced major or significant challenges in order to be achieved by 2030 (Sachs et al. 2020: 27). According to Ghana's Voluntary National Review (2019: xv), there had been progress on indicators on goals like poverty, malnutrition, maternal and child mortality, but not at the rate required to achieve SDG targets by 2030. Economic indicators pointed in the right direction but overall performance has been mixed. Ghana's Voluntary National Review also acknowledged the need to take advantage of synergy effects among the goals and reduce the risks of trade-offs (DESA 2019: 16). In 2016, an assessment was made to identify underlying challenges for sustainable development in Ghana. Four were identified: persisting inequalities, low productivity, demographic dividend, and environmental degradation. Persisting inequalities could be found in terms of income, representation, and participating in decision-making, access to quality health, education, and justice services, which has resulted in polarisation between regions, rural and urban areas, and social groups. Low productivity related to dependence on exports of raw natural resources and unprocessed crops and the lack of transformation to higher-value activities. Demographic dividend is caused by the large number of young people entering the workforce. Environmental degradation and poor sanitation threaten public health and sustainable development in forestry, mining, fisheries, and agriculture (UNSDP 2018: 8).

While the President's statements emphasise ambitions to accelerate implementation of the SDGs (NDPC 2018/Intro Baseline Report 2018), our interviewees had mixed views as to whether the SDGs are realistic in the case of Ghana. One civil society representative found some of the goals to be quite achievable and pointed to progress made on the MDGs (interview Accra 2017). Another interviewee provided a contrasting opinion: "In terms of being realistic, honestly, I doubt it. Because they're quite ambitious. Again, there has to be evidence of financial resources to implement the goals. For these reasons, I think they're not realistic. They're good plans, but no" (interview Accra 2017). In general, there was agreement among our interviewees that it was necessary to make prioritisations of certain SDGs during implementation due to the lack of resources and that the SDGs are too ambitious for a country like Ghana.

> One of the common criticisms is that [the SDGs] are too many. The other criticism is about Goal 1 [eradication of poverty], they say that it is overly ambitious to say that we're going to eradicate poverty. Some of the targets are unrealistic or overly ambitious. This criticism comes from across different actors, civil society and even the private sector.
>
> (interview Accra 2017)

Another government official highlighted that prioritisation was essential to make efficient use of resources but that prioritisation should concern SDG

targets rather than the goals as such (interview Accra 2017). The need for greater efficiency in the budget process was also pointed out as key for the implementation of the SDGs (interview Accra 2018).

Several interviewees could not envisage any future conflicts concerning the SDGs, while others could already discern tensions among different actors.

> [T]here is great enthusiasm around it. It seems like it is quite easy to get people on board. But the criticism, or perhaps a misconception, is that you can choose some SDGs, but not all. Even at the Philanthropy Platform, they said 'our businesses will choose SDG 5, so let's divide the SDGs among ourselves', and that is not how it works. There is a conceptual need to work on the understanding of the SDGs. This is not a criticism per se, but a misunderstanding of them.
>
> (interview Accra 2017)

Clearly, there are many factors beyond plans and institutional structures that affect "response-ability" for realising the SDGs. One interviewee argued that there was a lot of "drawer work" on-going in the shape of paperwork and production of reports that never reached the level of actual implementation and action (interview Accra 2017). A civil society organisation representative pointed to a lack of interlinkages between what government institutions and civil society were doing in terms of implementation. While interlinkages were present at the level of policy framing, at the level of implementation they did not happen (interview Accra 2018). Others drew attention to a need to change attitudes and increase knowledge on the SDGs among bureaucrats at the local level who were still in "MDG mode" (interview Accra 2017, 2018). In the Voluntary National Review, the government also noted the need for capacity building among local government administrations and members of parliament (DESA 2019: 88).

Major impediments to realising responsibility, mentioned by several interviewees, were a lack of funding, persistent corruption, and global political developments. For instance, a civil society representative stated that development interventions relating to the SDGs were not well financed, even if policy alignment had taken place (interview Accra 2018). This was the main challenge in a short-term perspective. In a long-term perspective, political commitment by the government was a challenge, this interviewee believed. Moreover, the quality of government in Ghana was not conducive to SDG realisation, as mirrored in the following quote:

> Another challenge is corruption. That will result in diversion of resources, political capture, poor implementation of development interventions, wrong targeting, not reaching the people that are supposed to be reached – specially in terms of providing SDG-related social intervention programmes. In the long term, the global financial climate and global political development can sweep us off our feet, so we can lose

focus, because our economy is so dependent on others. The lack of own-ership of the economy, macroeconomic instability, a weak currency, all of these can throw us off the targets. Weak or no enforcement of our laws could be contributing factors to these challenges.

(interview Accra 2018)

Along similar lines, other interviewees argued that the interests of politi-cians and citizens did not go hand in hand.

There will always be conflicts of interest. These arise from the interest of duty-bearers against the interest of ordinary citizens. If you look at the challenges of leakages and corruption in this country, political par-ties want to cement and stay in power. So, the actors that are supposed to be at the service of the citizens are rather interested in how can they make money, and use part of that money to finance their political par-ties, so that they can remain in power. Clearly, if you want to empower citizens to be able to make their own decisions, to ask critical questions you're going to stand in the way of political actors, or 'duty-bearers', who have other interests (safe-guarding).

(interview Accra 2018)

Earlier reports confirm this view. In 2013, the majority of Ghanaians per-ceived key institutions as extremely corrupt or corrupt, including the police, the judiciary, public officials or civil servants, and Parliament. Further, they had little or no trust in the tax department, local government, and political parties (UNSDP 2018: 5). In 2019, Transparency International noted that 33% of citizens thought that corruption had increased the previous year (https://www.transparency.org/en/). The same year, as mentioned in Chap-ter 1, Ghana scored 41 on Transparency International's index of perceived levels of public sector corruption that ranges from 0 (Highly corrupt) to 100 (Very clean) (Transparency International 2020). Indifference was put forth as a factor that could influence implementation of the SDGs, as citizens were losing faith in politicians (interview Accra 2018). And even if the cur-rent government was perceived to be committed to the SDGs, worries about the next election and change of governments came up as well as how to get political parties in sync with the SDGs (interview Accra 2017).

Views on cooperation with the business sector for the advancement of the SDGs in Ghana also differed. The government collaborates with the business sector, for example, by engaging with the Private Enterprise Fed-eration and the President has hosted meetings with Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) to discuss investments and collaboration. A CEOs Advisory Group on the SDGs has been set up to provide recommendations on implemen-tation (DESA 2019: 82; UNDESA 2020: 49). One interviewee argued that the government called on the private sector to participate in financing but

said that there was a lack of a framework for public-private partnerships. Corruption and inefficiency made it hard for the private sector to engage in financing the SDGs (interview Accra 2018). A government official argued that the government was trying hard to get the private sector to support the SDGs, but that the private sector looked at things from the perspective of profitability. There was a need to find a way to integrate the business sector if it was to step in and to reduce risks for business when engaging in development programmes (interview Accra 2018).

Our material shows that realisation of the SDGs must be understood in terms of the broader development context of Ghana. The "lower-middle income country" tag is shifting Ghana's position in the international aid system and changing the country's relationship with bilateral and multilateral development partners in notable ways (Arhin 2016). An agreement signed in 2010 by development partners, the Government of Ghana, and civil society organisations expected Ghana to be an aid-free country by 2020, placing full financial responsibility on the Ghanaian government to reduce poverty and inequality. The idea of "Ghana beyond aid" is to move towards self-reliant growth and to break out of a "mind-set of dependency" (UNSDP 2018: 2). The discussion about Ghana beyond aid started when the government of Ghana and development cooperation partners agreed that Ghana had reached a level of political and economic development that made it possible to replace aid with trade within a ten-year period. However, this also means that the country receives less external funding for SDG implementation. In other words, the agreement paved the way for development partners to put exit strategies in place. Reaching middle-income country status, Ghana has reported declining official development assistance and other resources (DESA 2019: 81). It has also led to changing donor relationships with reprioritisations and withdrawal of funds by several of Ghana's traditional donors. New actors partake in development cooperation with Ghana, including South Korea, China, Brazil, and India (Arhin 2016; Broich et al. 2020: 39). This shift raised concerns about "Ghana beyond aid" becoming a parallel structure to the SDGs – and the African Union agenda (interview Accra 2019).

> Even though we have incorporated the SDGs into our system, and it is working very well, there is this 'thinking' that many people have regarding seeking any form of aid from donors. If you take the budget and read it, the target is that Ghana should be seen as 'Ghana beyond aid'. Now, the SDGs more or less [require] some kind of aid that we're getting. So if we're taking a stand that 'we don't want ANY kind of aid', I don't think that things will look good in 2030. Before 2030, we should be able to achieve these visions of Ghana Beyond Aid. Whether that happens before or after the completion of these goals, could lead to a serious conflict of interest. Ghana will want to say 'we don't want any

aid, we want to be on our own'. At one point you might say that you don't want any more aid in the framework of development.

(interview Accra 2018)

In sum, in terms of "response-ability", political commitment to cater for the realisation of the 2030 Agenda has not been fully backed up by funding or overall quality of government. A lack of resources, corruption, and competing political agendas have affected progress towards the SDGs during early stages of implementation. A political ambition to become an aid-free country contributes to dwindling resources for the realisation of the SDGs.

4.2.2 Tanzania

Tanzania faces similar challenges as Ghana with regard to realising the responsibilities outlined in policy plans and mandates, such as a lack of resources – financial as well as human. One interviewee put forth that Tanzania had been effective in policy formulation but weak in terms of policy implementation, coordination, follow-up, and reporting (interview Dodoma 2019). To repeat, Tanzania's estimated SDG Index score suggested that in 2020 the country had come on average 56% of the way to fulfilling the 17 SDGs (Sachs et al. 2020). This demonstrates that there are vast challenges in achieving the SDGs by 2030. The key message in Tanzania's own Voluntary National Review of 2019 was slightly more positive, stating that Tanzania is "doing reasonably well" in the case of eight SDGs and that four SDGs could be achieved with greater effort. In addition, five of the SDGs would need significant local efforts and international support to be achieved. Like in Ghana, only SDG number 12 on responsible consumption and production appeared less of a challenge and SDG number 13 on climate action was reported to be achieved already (United Republic of Tanzania 2019b). The Voluntary National Review also claimed that "substantial improvements" had been made in road infrastructure and transportation systems, aligning with top priorities of the President (United Republic of Tanzania 2019a: 14). A number of implementation challenges concern the absence of baseline data for tracking certain SDG indicators and insufficient technical resources (e.g. low monitoring capacity) as well as financial resources (United Republic of Tanzania 2019a). In some instances, data from different ministries and agencies seemed to contradict each other, according to one interviewee (interview Dar es Salaam 2018).

Like Ghana, many interviewees were of the opinion that there are too many and too ambitious goals: "This can be stressful for the government" (interviews Dar es Salaam 2018). One interviewee believed that time had been wasted on policy alignment and now action was needed instead (interview Dar es Salaam 2018). A civil society representative thought that policies were not robust enough to implement the SDGs – especially not the legal framework (Skype interview 2018). It was also recognised that goal

conflicts may arise if all SDGs were addressed at the same time. Therefore, the government decided to focus on SDGs relevant for the current five-year development plan (interviews 2018, 2019). A member of parliament said:

> We MPs have to ensure that the government implements the goals. Implementation cannot be achieved 100 percent, but I am confident that we will push it to a satisfactory level. Of course there are challenges ahead such as the budget constraints, laziness, funds embezzlement, etc. that will surface and are likely to affect the level of implementation we would like to achieve.
>
> (interview Dodoma 2019)

A government official pointed out that development has an impact on the environment and that it is difficult to strike a balance between the two: "Currently we want to achieve development, hence compromising environmental concerns" (interview Dodoma 2018). Several interviewees conveyed similar sentiments about factors affecting implementation beyond policy plans. These concerned shortage of financial and human resources as well as a lack of political commitment to goal achievement, policy coherence, and access to appropriate data. A district official drew attention to political tensions around resource allocation for development projects because district councillors wanted to be seen as serving their political constituents effectively (interview Dodoma 2018). Overall, changing "business as usual" was deemed hard (interview Dar es Salaam 2018). In addition, interviewees wanted the private sector to fill resource gaps while believing that it was only likely to invest where it could make profits (interview Dodoma 2018). In Tanzania's Voluntary National Review, it was noted that the private sector was expected to play an instrumental role in leveraging efforts for SDG implementation (DESA 2019: 15). The private business sector was viewed as important but difficult to get on board due to perceptions of conflicting interests (interview Dar es Salaam, 2018). In this regard, a civil society organisation representative said that:

> Private sector interests might be in conflict, it is very challenging. They think that the goals are not for them, they are hindering them, for example mining or big companies operating with natural resources. They do not think you can work together to achieve the goals. They are voicing their concern. We need to show them that we can work together.
>
> (interview Dar es Salaam 2018)

As allude to above, coordination activities have been hampered by the decentralised structure with relatively independent local government authorities in combination with cumbersome bureaucratic structures at the central level (Ewald and Mhamba 2019; United Republic of Tanzania, 2019a). This is evident from interviews, saying that there was still unclarity around the

responsibility of departments and authorities and who should do what. "If you go, they send you to someone else. At the end of the day, nobody wants to take full responsibility" (interview Dar es Salaam 2018). The belief was that different actors did things in parallel instead of working in partnership, allegedly because interests could not be aligned (interview Dar es Salaam 2018). Also, there has been a discrepancy between high-level and lower-level ownership due to the lack of implementation capacity (cf. McGillivray et al. 2016: 19–20). One civil society interviewee described a visit to a local district where she saw SDG posters expressing the principle of leaving no one behind: "So people are aware of the goals and leave no one behind but this is just awareness and does not have implications for their activities" (Skype interview 2018). Another challenge mentioned by our interviewees was political tension around resource allocation for development projects, particularly for district councillors (interview Dodoma 2018). Despite the decentralised system, there are signs of recentralisation and top-down distribution of power, according to Ewald and Mhamba (2019). For example, the dual level of authority allows the central government to overrule the local in terms of staff allocation and management (Ewald and Mhamba 2019: 32), a tension noted also in the case of Ghana.

The government has trained more than 800 officials from various ministries, departments, and agencies (Policy Forum 2017: 12; DESA 2019: 86). But at the same time one interviewee argued that the SDGs did not change much in practice (interview Dodoma, 2018), partly because of the recurrent change of people working in the bureaucracy, as mentioned earlier (interview Dar es Salaam 2018). Compared to Ghana, corruption was not frequently brought up as a challenge in our interviews. Possibly, this can be explained by President Magufuli's anti-corruption politics, conveying a sense that corruption is being dealt with. Even so, reiterating from Chapter 1, in 2019 Tanzania scored only 37 on Transparency International's index of perceived levels of public sector corruption that ranges from zero to 100.

Tanzania's position in international development cooperation affects responsibility matters even more than in the case of Ghana. A think tank representative highlighted the need for commitment from the international community as well as a need to develop a dynamic industrial service sector and not only agrarian sector in the country (interview Dar es Salaam 2018). A government ministry official underlined the constraints imposed by debts:

> The other huge challenge relates to finance. You know that development requires money. For us poor nations the source of revenue is taxation and loans. People's ability to pay is low and the loans come with conditions. On top of that, the global economy has declined, influencing change in foreign policy, which is unfavourable to poor countries like Tanzania. This relates to indebtedness problem poor countries are facing – resources tend to be scarce in poor countries because they are

spending a large proportion of their revenue to repay debts. Hence, the financial constraint is a challenge affecting realisation of the development goals.

(interview Dodoma 2018)

In 2020, the World Bank changed its classification of Tanzania from a low-income country to a lower-middle-income country (World Bank 2020). Yet, in spite of high rates of economic growth since 1996, Tanzania has continuously struggled with poverty (McGillivray et al., 2016: 13; Widmark, 2016). Poverty is primarily a rural phenomenon where the vast majority of inhabitants derive their livelihood from agriculture (United Republic of Tanzania, 2019a; also see Wineman et al. 2020). Moreover, Tanzania was the seventh largest recipient of official development assistance in the world during 1960–2013 (McGillivray et al. 2016: 18; also see Lofchie 2014: 105; Furukawa 2018). The influence of donors on political priorities has been significant, and a fragmentation of aid efforts has consequently been serious in Tanzania (Green 2014: 3). For example, in 2014, donors funded 3,308 activities in Tanzania, more than twice the number in 2000. This puts pressure on the government's capacity to deliver (McGillivray et al. 2016: 19).

The government has stated that it wants to diminish aid dependency as donor payments have been unpredictable. Another change is that the development focus has moved from social issues, as in the MDGs, to a commitment to private sector-driven structural transformation (Green 2015; cf. United Republic of Tanzania, 2019a). An interviewee with international outlook said that during the past 10–15 years, Tanzania had become more confident and less interested in conditionalities. When donors wanted to cut their funding, the government said that it did not care (interview Dar es Salaam 2018). Several donors, such as the Work Bank and the European Union, including Sweden, have in fact ceased or frozen their development aid to Tanzania in recent years due to repressive policies in the country (Backlund, 2019; Daily Nation 30 Dec 2018; also see Chapter 5). Tellingly, a government official said that Tanzania had signed many agreements with development partners, and developing countries have certain obligations to donors who know which areas they can finance. The government asks donors to consider identified priority areas, while in some instances donors were reluctant to provide financial support for certain programmes (interview Dodoma 2018). One interviewee complained about the lack of constructive inputs from stakeholders to move the SDG agenda forward when sharing implementation plans. Instead, government authorities received criticism (interview Dodoma 2018). In contrast, one interviewee in a central position voiced his appreciation of the support from "foreign organisations" stating that "foreign organisations" have a network for knowledge and best practices mobilisation (interview Dodoma 2018).

Instead, there has been a rapid increase in Chinese trade and aid to Tanzania in recent years (Furukawa 2018: 271). China offers loans with less strict

conditions than Western donors and does not hesitate to support costly and long-term infrastructure projects (Lofchie 2014: 224). Even so, China's Maritime Silk Road ambitions suffered a setback as Tanzanian officials did not find that a Chinese-funded port project would benefit the country (Hursh, 2 December 2019). In addition, one interviewee claimed that the aid system had created an environment not working in favour of SDG implementation. "We do not have the development-minded people. The culture of expecting money or allowances after performing some activity, embedded in our lifestyles, kills the development-oriented spirit and undermines efforts made to develop our country" (interview Dar es Salaam 2018; cf. Green 2014: 67).

To conclude, the key factors affecting the realisation of SDG responsibilities are a lack of resources, decentralisation and cumbersome bureaucratic structures, and waning political will. These factors impact interviewees' perceptions of what is achievable beyond policy plans and organisational matters. Compared to Ghana, interviewees portray donor-recipient relationships as more politically intricate and the involvement of the business sector as more strained. Compared to Ghana and Sweden, the lack of data on SDG targets is perceived as a bigger problem for realising the SDGs in Tanzania. This will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

4.2.3   Sweden

Compared to Ghana and Tanzania, Sweden's "response-ability" is considerably higher with regard to realising the SDGs. But even if Sweden has for several years been ranked the highest in the SDG Index with regard to its likelihood of reaching the SDGs in 2030 (Sachs et al. 2020), there is no doubt that the country faces great challenges in realising the goals. These challenges have been identified in a few key reports by different public agencies, referring to assessments made by the government agency Statistics Sweden. After having mapped how Sweden fares on the SDG indicators in different reports, Statistics Sweden in 2019 summarised three main substantive challenges with regard to goal fulfilment: inequalities related to the economy, health, living standards, and exposure to violence do not decrease within Sweden; several of the national environmental goals seem not to be reached; and violence and harassment as well as bullying among youth do not decrease (Statistics Sweden 2019: 11). In 2020, a new Statistics Sweden report focussed on the principle of leaving no one behind and detailed inequalities in Swedish society relating to health, violence, sexual harassment, socioeconomic segregation, employment opportunities, and political participation. The report also pointed to a need to further develop statistical capacity in order to make inequalities visible (Statistics Sweden 2020). The Swedish government's Voluntary National Review to the UN High-level Political Forum (see Chapter 5) put forth challenges related to greenhouse gas emissions, sustainable oceans, sustainable production and consumption as well as various societal inequalities (Swedish Government 2017). Similarly, the

2017 report by the Swedish Delegation for the 2030 Agenda pointed to rapidly growing societal and economic cleavages between groups, and large income gaps and that Sweden needed to pay particular attention to SDG 12 on production and consumption. In brief, there is no doubt that Sweden faces great challenges in realising policy plans and political ambitions presented in Section 4.1.

The main instrument available for government when seeking to realise its responsibility is providing resources and instructions to government agencies who are in charge of implementing government policies. In 2016, 86 government agencies were tasked with mapping how their mandates aligned with the SDGs and how they could contribute to realising the goals. Moreover, certain government agencies (Statistics Sweden, Swedish Agency for Public Management, and The Swedish National Financial Management Authority) were given overarching assignments of analysing how the 2030 Agenda affects sustainable development work of public administration at all political levels and how implementation of the agenda could be bolstered. These agencies have in several influential reports examined the status of goal fulfilment in Sweden and proposed ways in which work towards the goals could be improved. In 2019, about 100 government agencies had been given instructions where the 2030 Agenda was mentioned. Most of those were tasked with accounting for how their operations contribute to reaching the SDGs and how they sought to ingrate economic, social, and environmental sustainability into their core activities. A third had recurrent instructions with more explicit assignments related to the SDGs (Swedish Agency for Public Management 2019: 24). The government state budget bill for 2021 contains frequent references to the 2030 Agenda under most areas of expenditure as well as under special headings devoted to its realisation (Swedish Government Proposition 2020/2021:1).

Along this assignment, a report by the Swedish Agency for Public Management concluded in 2019 that there is much activity and commitment related to the 2030 Agenda in Swedish government agencies, municipalities, and regional authorities. This activity, however, had not resulted in changed working modes or altered priorities (Swedish Agency for Public Management 2019: 33). The majority of activities had aimed to increase knowledge on the 2030 Agenda within the organisation and led to mapping of how organisational mandates and on-going work aligned with the SDGs. There were many diverging views on what kind of steering instrument the 2030 Agenda was supposed to be and to what extent it should lead to comprehensive organisational change. Several regional authorities have argued that, due to their independent responsibility for regional development, they should be in charge of regional coordination of Agenda 2030 matters rather than the state branch (Region Skåne 2019). Unclarities concerning divisions of responsibility between state authorities and politically appointed regional authorities appear to have delayed action at the subnational regional level in Sweden. The report by the Swedish Agency for Public Management

concludes that Sweden has not yet integrated SDG attainment in existing governance or steering processes (Swedish Agency for Public Management 2019: 44).

While the previous chapter concluded that we have not found much evidence of active delegitimation of the (content of) the SDGs in a Swedish domestic context, our material shows that criticism has been launched with regard to how the government approaches the 2030 Agenda. Similar to Ghana and Tanzania, criticism has concerned an alleged lack of coordination, leadership, and action by the government. In our early interviews in 2015–2016, government officials hinted at unclear organisational mandates, a lack of manpower, and frequently changing job descriptions, which, in turn, affected coordination within government offices and long-term planning. This is similar to criticism mounted in Tanzania. At the same time, it should be mentioned that in comparison with Ghana and Tanzania, Sweden scores high (85) on Transparency International's index of perceived levels of public sector corruption where 100 means "Very clean" (Transparency International 2020). Government officials and civil society representatives alike drew attention to the boundaries of their capacity to work with such a broad agenda, their "response-ability". One government official argued that Swedish SDG ambitions look great, but when government agencies are not provided with additional resources to perform the ground work for reporting, such ambitions appeared symbolic (interview Stockholm 2017). Another government official mentioned the need to identify synergy effects between goals that contribute the most to the whole 2030 Agenda. At the same time, two government officials emphasised that the organisational structure of Government Offices does not work well in relation to the cross-cutting nature of the 2030 Agenda (interviews Stockholm 2017). One civil society representative pointed out that in order to have an impact, one must pick certain issues on which to focus work efforts and resources. Challenges of working holistically were also brought up by members of parliament. An interviewee from parliament conveyed that environmental and development policy work was pursued along two separate parliamentary tracks (interviews Stockholm 2017).

Tellingly, the former Swedish minister for strategy and Nordic cooperation (see Section 4.1) claimed that the Swedish government that she had recently left was too slow in deciding on strong action for the realisation of the SDGs. She hinted at a lack of government capability to drive broad processes of societal change and argued that there was a gap between words and deeds. Moreover, she claimed that policy processes operated in isolation from one another, impeding holistic politics (Persson 2016). She later emphasised the decisive role of politics for catalysing the capacities of government agencies, municipalities, business, and civil society to ignite change in line with the 2030 Agenda. Yet she claimed, "[It] is apparent that strict boundaries between ministries and the lack of strategic cooperation

and leadership are not in line with the intentions of the 2030 Agenda" (Persson 2017).

Similar concerns were raised by civil society leaders on several occasions. Civil society organisations argued that Sweden was not "best in class" (*Agenda 2030: "Sverige är inte bäst i klassen"* 2017), prompting answer from responsible ministers who emphasised progress and Swedish leadership (*Sverige ska vara ledande i arbetet med Agenda 2030* 2017). The long-term nature of the 2030 Agenda led several interviewees to comment on the political vulnerability of Swedish SDG ambitions. In 2017, representatives of 19 large civil society organisations issued criticism of the ministers with main responsibility for the 2030 Agenda, the Minister for International Development Cooperation and Climate (Isabella Lövin) and the Minister for Public Administration (Ardalan Shekarabi). Their criticism concerned the lack of a national action plan on the SGDs and they demanded higher ambitions, parliamentary involvement, and a rights-based perspective on the SDGs (Lindfors et al. 2017). After Swedish national elections in 2018, two civil society organisation representatives argued that the incoming government had to step up efforts at demonstrating that Sweden was still aiming to be a role model for the realisation of the 2030 Agenda. They also pointed to a lack of faith among the Swedish general public in the capacity of politics to reach a world free from poverty in 2030. They claimed that the political agenda was dominated by short-term political solutions and party-political disagreement, as well as election cycle concerns, hindering work towards sustainable development (Tibblin and Ohlström 2018). This criticism was in line with proposals made by the Swedish Delegation for the 2030 Agenda in 2017 relating to a national action plan, clearer leadership by the Swedish government, parliamentary involvement, and the need for holistic governance (Swedish Delegation for the 2030 Agenda 2017).

Sweden's position as a donor country within international development cooperation means that international dimensions of support for the 2030 Agenda are more pronounced in Swedish policymaking as compared to in Ghana and Tanzania. We have seen increasing references to the SDGs in Sweden's international development cooperation and foreign policy since 2015 (Swedish Government 2019/2020). This is also true for development policies proposed by the Conservative Party (Moderaterna), a major political opposition party (Wallmark et al. 2018/2019). In earlier referenced political party motions related to the Swedish government's 2020 bill on the 2030 Agenda, the extent of international responsibility was one point of contention (see Section 3.2). Most Swedish monetary contributions to the UN system tap into attempts at realising the SDGs. For instance, in conjunction with the adoption of the 2030 Agenda in 2015, Sweden contributed 2 billion USD to health programmes and made other contributions in the area of sanitary measures in low-income countries (Torén Björling 2015). In 2017, Swedish Sida announced that it would devote 4.1 billion SEK over

a period of five years to strengthen the capacity of Sweden's bilateral development partner countries to reach the SDGs. The money was intended to support public institutions of countries receiving development assistance from Sweden as well as SDG partnerships between public and private actors (Halkjaer 2017). At the same time, it can be noted that Swedish development support to Tanzania has been reduced due to the trend towards more authoritarianism in Tanzania (Swedish Government 2020-02-01).

Beyond international resource contributions, we find another element of political responsibility in statements of continued support for the 2030 Agenda in intergovernmental political settings. During 2019, Sweden and Bahamas led intergovernmental negotiations in the UN on the political declaration to be issued at the end of the High-level Political Forum session in July that year. The political declaration is a statement issued by heads of government at the end of each High-level Political Forum and carries political weight in creating momentum for continued political attention to the 2030 Agenda. The wording of the political declaration is at the same time highly politically contentious and requires intergovernmental negotiations for several months before the High-level Political Forum takes place. For instance, in 2018, the US and Israel voted against the political declaration because of its language on foreign occupation and trade and what they considered an inappropriate development model (ECOSOC/6943, 18 July 2018). The political declaration of 2019 called for "a decade of action and delivery with regard to realising the 2030 Agenda". In early 2020, the Swedish government claimed to step up its efforts to realise the 2030 Agenda through on-going initiatives, such as the Global Deal made by Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Löfven in 2016 on decent labour conditions, the Swedish feminist foreign policy and democratisation strategies, as well as domestic attempts to become a fossil-free welfare state (Swedish Government 2020–02–20). A clear demonstration of the increased emphasis on local levels for SDG implementation is the UN-initiated Sweden Local2030 Hub, aiming to bring together the broad range of actors involved in local implementation of the SDGs, hosted by the Swedish think tank Global Challenges. This is highly relevant in a Swedish context, given the broad societal responsibilities and high degree of self-government at the municipal level. This is however beyond the scope of the present book.

To conclude, the realisation of the SDGs is challenging in all countries, albeit less so in Sweden if compared to Ghana and Tanzania. Yet the Swedish government has faced criticism from several actors for not making rapid enough progress in advancing the SDGs at the national level. Key factors affecting the realisation of the SDGs in Sweden are the mandates and allocation of resources to public agencies as well as coordination and political will. Increasingly, public agencies, civil society, and the political opposition have requested political prioritisations by the government. Other factors affecting implementation are tensions between short-term

and long-term political decisions and interests, between holistic and issue-based governance, and the broader political context of competing issues on the political agenda.

4.3 Conclusions

This chapter has examined responsibility in its forward-looking sense of obligations and duties. Overall, the allocation of responsibility is in itself the object of policymaking and contestation, but it far from exhausts the notion of responsibility. We have therefore differentiated between the allocation of responsibility and the realisation of responsibility. This means that we have also looked for factors perceived to affect implementation of the SDGs by 2030. How has responsibility for realising the SDGs been allocated in Ghana, Tanzania, and Sweden? Which factors have affected the realisation of responsibility in the three countries? What are the causes of differences between the countries?

There are both similarities and differences between Ghana, Tanzania, and Sweden (see also a chapter summary in Table 4.1). With regard to who is the subject of political responsibility, we find as expected a strong emphasis on government responsibility in all three countries. By adopting the 2030 Agenda in the UN General Assembly, governments have assumed main responsibility for realising the SDGs. Beyond that, it has been far from clear-cut in any country how to align responsibility for the SDGs with the mandates of government agencies and ministries. Holistic approaches encounter constraints inherent in silo-based mandates of government agencies and state budgets. Coordination challenges have been reported in all three countries as governments have sought to integrate the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in policies and political processes. While Ghana has created several new institutional arrangements for the 2030 Agenda, Tanzania and Sweden have allocated SDG responsibilities along existing institutional structures. In their Voluntary National Reviews, both Ghana and Tanzania have highlighted partnerships involving the UN system and other partners (DESA 2019: 83). The President of Ghana and the Prime Minister of Sweden aspire to be role-models with regard to realising the SDGs home and abroad, while the President of Tanzania has chosen a more inward-looking strategy not emphasising global, or even regional, collaboration in the spirit of the 2030 Agenda. Ghana and Tanzania have parliamentary SDG-committees, while Sweden has not. Rather, Sweden has used its traditional referral system to plan how to undertake realisation of the 2030 Agenda, resulting in a bill adopted in parliament.

While Tanzania, Ghana, and Sweden are surprisingly similar with regard to tensions faced when allocating responsibility throughout their political systems, they clearly face different kinds of constraints for realising these responsibilities. In Tanzania and Ghana, a lack of resources has triggered demands on prioritisation among the SDGs, while in Sweden criticism

has concerned a prolonged preparatory phase of policymaking, leading to a perceived lack of action related to implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Overall, we have found that the 15-year span of the 2030 Agenda's policy cycle does not easily align with national policy cycles. Competing policy issues also affect the political status of the SDGs. The reactions of Swedish political parties to a government bill on the 2030 Agenda show that while the substance of the SDGs is not politically controversial, their realisation taps into pre-existing political contention on the appropriate means to obtain sustainable development. It is also clear that the politics cycle matters for realisation of the 2030 Agenda in Ghana and Tanzania. Change of heads of government as a result of national elections matters more for the SDGs in countries with strong executive power and weaker democratic qualities, than in Sweden where the Prime Minister needs to find support in parliamentary majorities for new policies.

Finally, a country's position in international development cooperation matters for "response-ability" both in terms of access to resources and the power to decide how to use resources – at home or abroad. The global-national nexus of SDG responsibility looks different for donor countries as compared to recipient countries. The UN system and long-standing donor countries connect their contributions explicitly to the aim of advancing the 2030 Agenda. This is not the case for emerging development cooperation donors such as China. Recalling tensions pre-2015 concerning the reach of responsibilities on the part of high-income countries, the global political status of the 2030 Agenda remains a central factor for keeping the political will of governments to realise their responsibilities. Annual intergovernmental negotiations on the political declaration to be issued at the end of the annual UN High-level Political Forum bear witness of remaining contestation around the responsibilities of high-income countries towards other countries. In global politics, it is hard to find signs indicating that cosmopolitan responsibilities have increased as a result of the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. Rather, the reach of responsibilities appears limited by the connectedness principle, by what governments are authorised to do by their citizens in the case of democratic states, or by other political interests in the case of authoritarian governments. In sum, allocating and realising responsibility for the SDGs is not an administrative expert-based matter but involves formative choices related to political will, institutional mandates, and scarce resources.

In the next chapter, we shift attention to how accountability relations evolve in the SDG domain. Our theoretical framework establishes that the allocation and realisation of responsibility constitute the basis for accountability. Through accountability, political actors need to answer for how they have exercised their decision-making power and made political choices related to realising responsibilities. In essence, the distance between allocated responsibilities and their fulfilment is at the heart of accountability. If responsibilities are not clearly allocated, the basis for demanding accountability and evaluating actions of decision-makers will be weak.

Table 4.1 Chapter summary

	Ghana	*Tanzania*	*Sweden*	*Overall conclusion*
Allocating responsibility	New institutional arrangements and policy alignment. Parliamentary committee but strong executive emphasis.	Existing institutions and policy alignment. Parliamentary committee but strong executive emphasis.	Streamlining through existing state institutions. Government bill to parliament. Parliamentary-adopted bill affirms allocation of responsibilities.	Institutional choices do not align with socio-economic or political differences between countries.
Realising responsibility	Lack of capabilities and resources for implementation. Interference of corruption.	Lack of capabilities and resources for implementation. Aid dependency. Shrinking democratic space.	Slow start but increasing role of government agencies and state budget. Additional focus on international development cooperation.	Capacity principle central, steers political prioritisation and extent of international obligations.
Resulting outcome	Many organisational initiatives but implementation difficult.	Lack of political leadership for the SDGs. More business as usual than in Sweden and Ghana.	Long preparatory phase. Increasing attention to holistic thinking but silos remain.	First five years dominated by policy planning and organisational concerns.

Notes

1 https://www.ghanamissionun.org/president-akufo-addo-reappointed-co-chair-of-eminent-group-of-advocates-for-un-sdgs/
2 https://www.parliament.gh/news?CO=66, accessed 7 October 2020
3 http://tz.one.un.org/media-centre/press-releases/272-september-marks-first-year-anniversary-of-the-global-goals, accessed 8 February 2017

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5   Accountability
Vertical and horizontal relations

"We have all the fine-print policies and laws. Whether we are actively involved in promoting accountability is another thing altogether."

(interview member of parliament)

5.1 Vertical political accountability

This section focusses on political accountability at the domestic level, that is, how politicians are held to account for the way in which they exercise rule-making power in the case of the SDGs. We look into formal domestic accountability processes, such as elections, parliamentary oversight of government, and referral systems, and discuss the role of civil society and media in monitoring and reviewing the SDGs at the national level. Our material makes it clear that review processes accompany all stages of SDG policymaking but that SDG accountability is subordinate to the broader qualities of the political context in which it takes place.

5.1.1 Ghana

Ghana is among the most consolidated democracies in Africa, yet political accountability remains a challenge as we will show in this section. In 2020, Freedom House considered Ghana "free" with an aggregate score of 82 out of 100 (Freedom House 2020). The country has a diverse and vibrant media landscape, and civil society organisations are in general able to operate freely. However, corruption and weakness of the legal framework are pulling down the score. Ghana lost its status as the best ranked African country by Reporters Without Borders in 2019 due to an increase in attacks on journalists. In the latest World Press Freedom Index, Ghana ranked 30 out of 180 countries, compared to 124 for Tanzania and 4 for Sweden (Reporters Without Borders 2020). Since 1992 presidential and parliamentary elections have been held every four years. Even so, the 2016 election was the first time since the reintroduction of the multi-party system that the incumbent president (in this case John Dramani Mahama) lost to an opponent

(Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo-Addo) when standing for re-election. In the 2020 election, President Akuffo-Addo got re-elected for a second term but his rival, former President Mahama, questioned the election result. The ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) lost its majority in parliament, making its number of parliamentary seats equal to that of the National Democratic Congress (NDC). One independent parliamentary candidate was elected, who is likely to be able to hold the balance of power during the new parliamentary term of office.[1]

As described in Chapter 3, the SDGs were not considered politically controversial during the 2016 elections. The goals were seen to be "inherited" from the previous president. It was pointed out that attaining the SDGs is not a commitment specific to the current president or part of any political manifesto. As such, the SDGs are not the object of political conflict and it was therefore considered unlikely that the SDGs would be central in future election campaigns, one interviewee believed (interview Accra 2019). From what we have seen in our material, the SDGs have neither been a major issue in media in general (see Chapter 3), nor in coverage of the 2020 election process. Instead, the topic of "Ghana beyond aid" in relation to the SDGs was believed by our interviewees to become part of political debate during 2020 election campaigns (interview Accra 2019) (see Chapter 4), even if the president had made a political commitment according to which Ghana beyond aid would be part of the SDGs (interview Accra 2019).

Nonetheless, all interviewees highlighted the essential role of the Ghanaian parliament in ensuring governmental accountability for SDG implementation. Prior to the High-level Political Forum in 2019, we were told that there was not yet much to oversee in this regard. Knowledge among Members of Parliament about the SDGs was not considered sufficient to hold the government accountable or to track the budget, according to several interviewees (interviews Accra 2018). However, one interviewee who participated at the High-level Political Forum in 2019 said that: "in terms of accountability the government has documented a baseline for the implementation of the SDGs […] without the baseline it becomes difficult to have a reference for accountability [….] now the indicators have been documented" (interview Accra 2019). In other words, there was a feeling that prior to the baseline report, it was not possible to document progress on the SDGs and consequently not possible to hold the government accountable. As mentioned earlier, in late 2019 the Parliament decided to establish an Ad Hoc Committee charged with oversight of Ghana's progress on the SDGs, perceived as a central mechanism for holding the government accountable. The committee is tasked to scrutinise progress reports from ministries and to advise parliament on budget matters to ensure the government seeks to fulfil the SDGs.[2] In addition, Ghana developed an SDG budget tracking system in 2018 and is now able to prepare cost analysis reports, track budget allocation in terms of SDG targets at national and sub-national levels, and monitor different sources of funding (DESA 2019a: 17).

At the same time as the oversight function of parliament was highlighted, we observed a fear of politicisation of the SDGs in parliament. Politicisation relates closely to accountability as it implies increased political debate around a particular societal concern. One interviewee argued that:

> you don't want to politicise the SDGs and you don't want to politicise the accomplishment and what you need to do to get them accomplished […] the SDGs should be non-partisan […] So, I mean parliament definitely plays a role and it should. There is just a real risk if the role is played in particular way.

<div align="right">(interview Accra 2019)</div>

This could also explain why we have not found many mentions of the SDGs, beyond issues related to the budget, when scrutinising material issued by the Ghanaian Parliament (Bexell and Jönsson 2020). Previous research shows that many Ghanaian citizens want their members of parliament to provide their communities with development projects more than anything else. This suggests that, for voters, elections are primarily about local development (Lindberg 2013: 246). It also suggests that from a citizen perspective, the central government is less important than the members of parliament for demanding accountability. Yet research shows that the quality of representation in Ghana is weak, as the majority of members of parliament do not frequently interact with their local constituencies and therefore do not have a clear picture of the interests of these constituents (Gyampo 2017: 79). According to Gyampo (2016), a political party that loses the election also loses party funds, reinforcing the winner-takes-it-all system. This could contribute to the low level of politicisation around issues brought up in parliament. Moreover, the constitution stipulates a party-free local government system, and the 1993 Local Government Act seeks to achieve autonomy of district assemblies by requiring candidates to appear before the electorate as individuals, not associated with a party (Adams and Kinglsey 2020: 352). Even so, a recent study finds that a majority of respondents believed that the process is political anyway. They wanted leaders to be elected rather than appointed by the President, as is presently the case (Adams and Kingsey 2020: 362). Similar sentiments can be found in Tanzania, which has also a decentralised political system (Ewald and Mhamba 2019).

Moreover, the clientelist nature of Ghanaian politics is widely acknowledged. This is a system of competitive clientelism with elite-based political coalitions and winner-takes-it-all electoral system in which two leading parties compete in pursuit of short-term interests of power retention (Mohan et al. 2018: 276). A recent study shows that especially in relation to election campaigns, which are very costly in Ghana, some politicians act corruptly by threatening to transfer noncompliant officials (Brierly 2020: 211). Rotations occur after elections because some mayors wish to work with public officials whom they consider as co-partisans and thus more likely to assist

them in securing campaign funds for their party (Brierly 2020: 215). Further, research demonstrates that mayors and bureaucrats bribe auditors not to report corruption, giving local bureaucrats little incentive to report illegal behaviour (Brierly 2020: 216). One interviewee argued that there is a lack of independence of parliament, which, in turn, weakens its supervisory role. "It is a joke when it comes to issues of accountability in this country. We have all the fine-print policies and laws. As to whether we are actively involved in promoting accountability is another thing altogether" (interview Accra 2018). In direct reference to the SDGs, another interviewee noted that:

> I see a lot more outward accountability than inward. So, then even with the UN General Assembly, for example, we hear more information when we are presenting outside than here. For whatever reasons, I think it keeps happening, it is not just this administration. So, I think that in terms of that kind of inward accountability, I haven't seen much of it. I am not to preview what happens at the district assembly or in local governance, so am not able to speak on that, but talking about it at the national level, that's my opinion.
>
> (interview Accra 2019)

Like in Tanzania and Sweden, our interviewees underlined that civil society organisations play an important role for seeking government accountability and transparency (interviews Accra 2018). For instance, civil society organisations critically commented on the government's Budget Statement, asking for more government concern with inclusion in line with the principle of leaving no one behind (Ghana Civil Society Organizations Platform on the SDGs 2018). However, our material shows that the civil society watchdog role faces many challenges. The changing development landscape in Ghana, with diminishing donor support to civil society organisations, has affected the role that civil society can play (Arhin 2016: 559; interview Accra 2018). One interviewee drew attention to the fact that the production and use of statistical data was left only to the government. This interviewee argued that there was a need to find a way for civil society to report on how it contributes towards attainment of the SDGs. This would promote accountability and show how civil society could independently monitor implementation of the SDGs (interview Accra 2018). In addition, the domestic space for civil society has "narrowed" in recent times (CIVICUS Monitor 2020), as mentioned in Chapter 3. One interviewee claimed that the government resents comments from civil society and raised questions about whether civil society organisations could trust the government not to punish them if they contributed information to monitoring reports on the SDGs. The interviewee underlined that there needs to be a high level of trust to allow different actors to play their roles effectively (interview Accra 2017). Again, this points to the difficulties for civil society organisations to hold politicians to account for the way in which their rule-making power is exercised in the case of the SDGs.

Moreover, we should not assume automatic links between civil society organisations and the broader citizenry. One interviewee reminded us that:

> A lot of what has happened in Ghana around the SDGs is kind of like within the government and from civil society organisations to government and government to civil society organisations, but in terms of involving the everyday citizenry I don't think that much has happened.
>
> (interview Accra 2019)

Another interviewee reinforced the role of citizens more generally:

> In the long term, accountability is key. Citizens need to be able to make critical demands and ask the right questions to political actors, that's the duty. They need to be accounted for the SDGs. Also, the issue of civic consciousness and awareness – if this is not given, you cannot expect any proper accountability from citizens.
>
> (interview Accra 2018)

Finally, in our interview material, connections between corruption, accountability, and SDG implementation are frequently made, underlining the linkage to responsibility discussed in the previous chapter. A UN representative in Ghana observed that the Ghanaian government was committed to deliver the SDGs. The UN representative argued that accountability and corruption were highly linked, and that the government was doing its best to tackle this issue, which remained a challenge for Ghana. Because the government was keen on finding domestic sources of funding, it would need to tackle issues of tax evasion, invoicing problems, and contract sums being inflated. All of these issues were considered to affect implementation of the SDGs (interview Accra 2017). Equally, another interviewee said that in order to reduce corruption, public resources needed to be used in a more accountable and transparent manner (interview Accra 2018). Since this interview was conducted, a Right to Information Law has been passed by Parliament. This new law allows citizens to access information from all public institutions and some private institutions in Ghana. This is expected to increase government transparency and accountability and to help combat corruption, in the view of Amnesty International (Amnesty International 2020a).

In sum, we have found elements of vertical political accountability with regular elections, a free press, and active civil society as corner stones. The Ghanaian parliament's role in monitoring the government with regard to SDG implementation is reflected in budget matters as well as in the creation of an SDG committee. However, accountability relations with citizens are weakened through persistent corruption and clientelist politics. Also, dwindling support from foreign donors jeopardise the independence necessary for civil society organisations to hold the government accountable for its work with the SDGs. Lacking broad connections to ordinary citizens, we

cannot conclude that effective vertical political accountability relations exist in the specific case of the SDGs.

5.1.2 Tanzania

Tanzania has had a multi-party system since the 1990s and is labelled "partly free" by Freedom House. However, since the election of President John Magufuli in 2015, which was deemed credible by international election observers, the political climate has deteriorated. As late as 2017, Tanzania scored 58 out of 100 on the Global Freedom Score of Freedom House while in 2020 the score had dropped to 40 (Freedom House 2020). When President Magufuli came to power in 2015, many thought he was the person to fight corruption, improve service delivery to citizens and enhance democratic space (Yussuf, 20 August 2020). Without doubt, President Magufuli has gained popular support for his fight against corruption. Yet corruption remains a problem, and the President has been accused of focussing on low-level corruption instead of corruption committed by senior officials. While failing to enhance democratic space, new roads, railways, and power plants were built under his first term, benefitting many people and therefore increasing his popularity (Kombe, 7 August 2020). There is a rich body of literature on the complex relationship between state and society in post-colonial Tanzania, which has been characterised by state authoritarianism and stability through one-party dominance (The Revolutionary Party of Tanzania, Chama Cha Mapinduzi, CCM) (Dodworth 2014; Lofchie 2014). This legacy marks the political culture even if the country has introduced a multi-party system (Backlund 2019).

Since the election in 2015, the Tanzanian Parliament has passed amendments restricting political parties to engage in activism (Amnesty International 2020b). As a result, opposition groups have been barred from political gatherings, and several opposition politicians have been arrested for their political engagement or have been exposed to other violations (Bolme 2020; *Daily Independent* 25 August 2020; Kombe 2020). At the by-elections in 2018 (for parliament and local government), violence and other irregularities were reported. In October 2020, general elections were held, presidential and parliamentary. The incumbent President Magufuli won a landslide victory with 84.4% of the votes according to official election results. This was the largest share of votes since the first multi-party system election in the mid-1990s. In the parliamentary election, the political opposition lost all but two of their seats, compared to 119 seats before the election. In Zanzibar, the ruling party CCM took all seats. Election results were immediately questioned not only by the opposition, but also by international observers (Ewald 2020). Already during the election campaign, several opposition parties reported that "hundreds of their candidates have been dubiously disqualified from participating" in the election (Uwesu, 27 August 2020). Repression affected not only politicians but also media, nongovernmental organisations, and foreign actors who have faced increased pressure by the state (Amnesty

International 2020b). This is confirmed by the 2020 World Press Freedom Index where Tanzania ranked number 124 out of 180 countries, dropping from number 70 in 2013 (Reporters Without Borders 2020). The Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority published rules in August 2020 that banned local media from broadcasting foreign made content without permission, and foreign journalists working with local journalists were obliged to be accompanied by a government appointed officer. Social media has faced rising pressure as well (Yussuf, 20 August 2020). Then again, the democratic backlash may in part be a result of strengthened political opposition since 2015, and by the government becoming afraid of losing power (Sköld 2020). Needless to say, vertical political SDG accountability is severely restricted in such a context.

The SDGs have until now only received modest media attention (see also Chapter 3). Our interviewees did not foresee any politicisation of the SDGs in parliament, similar to the case of Ghana. One interviewee described issues related to development and the SDGs as apolitical:

> We observe conflicts in the politics arena and not in issues relating to development. SDGs issues are development issues; the government cannot oppose and ignore development thoughts enshrined in the SDGs. The only thing I can imagine is that other stakeholders for the SDGs can push the government to speed up implementation of the goals and that is what the government is required to do. I therefore don't see any conflict in this.
>
> (interview Dodoma 2018)

Like in Ghana, our interviewees put strong emphasis on parliament being the main accountability channel for the SDGs, as the parliament approves the budget and holds the government accountable on behalf of the people. Also similar to Ghana and as discussed in Chapter 4, Tanzania has a parliamentary group aiming to monitor implementation of the SDGs.

> As for how Parliament is involved in SDGs issues, the Parliament is mandated to supervise and monitor government activities. We are empowered by the constitution to review and scrutinise any policies proposed by government as well. In addition we look into how the government is implementing international agreements such as the SDGs. This is why we created a special group for the SDGs.
>
> (interview Dodoma 2019)

One interviewee argued that the main role of the Tanzanian parliament was the creation of legal instruments for speeding up implementation of the SDGs (interview Dar es Salaam 2018). Another interviewee held high expectations on the new parliamentary SDG group and pointed out that members of parliament have the mandate to raise questions in relation to progress of

SDGs implementation in Tanzania, also through the standard parliamentary committees. Parliamentarians should scrutinise national budgets and the financing of the SDGs, possibly by demanding annual SDGs implementation reports from the government. This interviewee also drew attention to parliament's representative role in relation to citizens:

> In addition, the Parliament is the voice of citizens. If citizens complain about weak implementation of certain policies (for example complaints about high maternal mortality), members of parliament may take forward these complaints in parliamentary sessions without realising that they are demanding improvement in the implementation of the health aspects of the SDGs.
>
> (interview Dodoma 2018)

However, even if the view was that parliament ought to be more active, the chances of this actually happening were perceived to be limited by one interviewee: "I do not think they can. I do not see that happening" (interview Dar es Salaam 2018). Recent research shows that contrary to popular belief, the power of law-making in Tanzania, is in practice almost entirely vested in the executive and not in parliament (Majamba 2018). This makes it possible for the political leadership to more easily pursue its own agenda. For example, "sweeping new legislation" has passed through parliament placing new punitive restrictions on civil society organisations and tourism, to the dismay of the opposition and international observers (Mulindwa 2019; Amnesty International 2020b). In general, civil society organisations in Tanzania are more involved in SDG awareness raising and service delivery than being critical watchdogs holding the government to account (interview Dar es Salaam 2018). Still, civil society organisations have worked for improved transparency and accountability at the local level by providing recommendations for improving budgets and developing user-friendly accountability reports from Tanzania's main oversight institutions: the National Audit Office and parliament (United Republic of Tanzania, 2019: 115). Tellingly, a report by the National Audit Office of Tanzania concluded that the government had not adequately prepared for implementation of the SDGs. The audit report noted a lack of SDG policy coherence and of mechanisms related to monitoring, review and reporting on SDG implementation (National Audit Office 2018). This audit was carried out between 2015 and 2017 and concerned the Ministry of Finance and Planning and the President's Office Regional Administration and Local Government, the two key agencies for implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Even if the report is to some extent dated, the lack of adaptation to cater for the SDGs at ministries and administrative agencies was confirmed in interviews in 2019 (interview Dodoma 2019). Allegedly the government has created coordination mechanisms needed for monitoring (interview Dodoma 2018), but as noted in Chapter 4 it has been difficult to make them work in practise.

Compared to Ghana and Sweden, accountability did not come up as often in our interviews. Perhaps this can be explained by the early stage of SDG implementation, or it may not have been clear whom to hold accountable. Interviewees described a lack of capacity for developing indicators for tracking and reporting progress of SDG implementation. Plans were made for the mapping and development of SDG indicators with external assistance. The National Bureau of Statistics intended to create a Swedish supported SDG tracker portal to make it easier to access information about the SDGS in Tanzania (Mbashiro 2019, see also Section 5.2). However, one interviewee revealed that during such mapping, the National Bureau of Statistics found that some of the planned indicators did not match with indicators for the SDGs. In addition, certain SDGs indicators were difficult to understand and there was no sound system for the collection of data for monitoring progress. A lack of statistical data will complicate SDG reporting requirements (interview Dodoma 2018). Adequate data would enable planning, monitoring, and tracking failures and success, a district level official said (interview Dodoma 2018). There were also very concrete effects on monitoring of the lack of material resources. A district planning official conveyed that the lack of reliable means of transportation in the district hindered them to effectively monitor implementation (interview Dodoma 2018).

As described in Chapter 3, knowledge of the SDGs is still limited beyond those directly involved with policymaking and implementation of the goals (interviews 2018, 2019), making broad accountability demands less likely. At the same time, one interviewee rhetorically asked: is it important that people know about the SDGs as such, or that people work in the spirit of the SDGs (interview Dar es Salaam 2018)? Another argued that policymakers may already be working with the SDGs without knowing that they are implementing them (interview Dodoma 2019). One interviewee pointed out that the SDGs provides a new "package" and an opportunity to talk about things that were previously difficult to raise, for example human rights issues. This was confirmed by a civil society representative who argued that the SDGs had put human rights back on the development agenda (interview Dar es Salaam 2018), while couched in a language of "leaving no one behind".

To conclude, compared to Ghana and Sweden, Tanzania stands out with its shrinking democratic space. Since the SDGs were adopted, there has been a notable shift towards more authoritarianism in the country, which limits vertical accountability relationships. Increasing authoritarian measures prohibit freedom of speech and critical reviews of government performance, including of SDG implementation. Parliament is viewed as key for holding the government accountable, and, like Ghana, Tanzania has created a parliamentary SDG committee. Yet, in practice, presidential power is very strong and the role of parliament has not been pronounced. A persistent lack of knowledge of the SDGs in combination with a lack of resources for data for reporting on SDG implementation, are additional challenges of

vertical accountability. In brief, the case of Tanzania confirms the need to study SDG accountability as part of the broader domestic political context.

5.1.3 Sweden

Sweden is a consolidated parliamentary democracy with a proportional representative electoral system which means that several political parties are represented in parliament. The government depends on majority support in parliament. A new government has to be tolerated by a parliamentary majority, in line with what is called "negative" parliamentarianism, rather than necessarily having the active support of an absolute majority. In brief, voters elect members of parliament and parliament appoints a prime minister who then forms a government. The formation of government often relies on support parties that remain outside of government. Sweden has one of the most fragmented party systems in Western Europe due to its eight parliamentary represented political parties (Lindvall et al. 2020). While Swedish Prime Ministers have more power than other government ministers, their influence is often circumscribed in coalition governments. Overall, Swedish Prime Ministers hold a medium level of power in comparison with other Western European countries (Bäck and Bergman 2016). In 2020, Sweden scored 100 out of 100 in the Global Freedom Scores index (Freedom House 2020) and it ranks number 4 out of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index (Reporters Without Borders 2020). In addition, Sweden has a far-reaching information act allowing practically everybody to scrutinise governmental affairs. The CIVICUS monitor of civic space classifies Sweden as "open", meaning that citizens are free to form associations; demonstrate in public spaces; and receive information without restrictions, including from government (CIVICUS Monitor 2020).

During our period of study, there has been one Swedish national election, namely in 2018. Despite increasing attention among policy elites to potential goal conflicts, there was limited public debate on the 2030 Agenda in conjunction with the 2018 elections. This was similar to election campaigns in Ghana and Tanzania. Political opposition parties demanded more focus on certain goals, rather than aiming to do everything for everyone (*OmVärlden* 2018). One member of parliament of the Swedish Liberal Party argued for abandoning the SDGs as key goals for international development cooperation and wanted instead to put more focus on democracy and human rights. In response, the Minister for Climate and International Development argued for the need for a holistic approach to the 2030 Agenda. Opposition party representatives called for broader agreement between political parties on priorities for the 2030 Agenda in light of the short time horizon until 2030 (*OmVärlden* 2018). Due to a political compromise enabling the formation of a new Social Democrat/Green Party government in January 2019, Swedish development cooperation policy has increased attention to democracy promotion (*OmVärlden* 2019). The compromise was made with

the Liberal and Centre parties and entailed an agreement on an increased focus on democracy promotion in Swedish development cooperation, rather than on the 2030 Agenda. This was mirrored, for instance, in the government's new five-year strategy for Swedish development support to Tanzania (2020–2024) where the amount provided was reduced due to authoritarian trends in Tanzania. The new strategy for development cooperation with Tanzania focussed on human rights, democracy, gender equality, and the environment (Swedish Government 2020-02-01). This shows how domestic political concerns related to government formation shape the role of the 2030 Agenda in Swedish development cooperation.

Just like in Ghana and Tanzania, Swedish interviewees emphasised parliament's central role with regard to monitoring SDG implementation by present and future governments. The long-term nature of the 2030 Agenda led several interviewees to comment on the political vulnerability of Swedish SDG ambitions due to a low degree of involvement of the Swedish Parliament. Members of parliament considered parliament's supervisory role to be increasingly central as the 2030 deadline approaches (Interviews Stockholm 2015, 2016, 2018, 2019). No special committee responsible for monitoring the 2030 Agenda has been established in parliament as of 2020, as has been done in Ghana and Tanzania. Interviewees mentioned several means through which parliament could exercise monitoring: formal questions to responsible ministers in parliamentary plenary, individual member of parliament motions, interpellation debates, seminars with public hearings, and opinions in committee reports (interviews Stockholm 2018, 2019). Until 2020, only a few attempts at using parliamentary procedures for monitoring of government ambitions on the 2030 Agenda had been made (Bexell and Jönsson 2020). One opposition party member of parliament (from the Conservative Party) has stood out by criticising the lack of parliamentary involvement through putting a formal question on this matter in parliament to the minister in charge of national implementation. Initially engagement with the 2030 Agenda primarily occurred in the parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs (interview Stockholm 2018). The low degree of parliamentary ownership of SDG processes until 2020 has been a challenge for securing vertical political accountability between voters, parliament, and government. At the same time, policy decisions as well as our interviews highlight that the substance of the 2030 Agenda overlaps with several parliamentary-adopted long-term Swedish goal systems.

A number of interviewees claimed it was a challenge to integrate SDG ambitions into parliament's issue-specific committee structure (e.g. interviews Stockholm 2015, 2017, 2019). The term "2030 Agenda" appears at least once in 119 proposals submitted by parliamentary committees to the full parliament for decision between 2015 and 2018. However, it is mainly mentioned in passing. The term was most frequently used in proposals issued by the Committee on Foreign Affairs, followed by the Committee on Environment and Agriculture and the Committee on Industry and Trade. This indicates

that at least until 2018, the 2030 Agenda was mainly dealt with in terms of an international (development cooperation) issue belonging to the domain of parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs (cf. UNDESA 2018: 8).

The government bill issued in 2020 on the 2030 Agenda suggested that review of the 2030 Agenda should primarily build on existing structures. Counter-proposals (motions) submitted by four political opposition parties demanded more frequent follow-up requirements than those suggested in the government bill. For instance, the Left Party asked the government to report to the UN High-level Political Forum every other year rather than once per government term, as suggested by the government. The Left Party also demanded the creation of a parliamentary committee devoted to evaluation and follow-up and that government should report results every other year to parliament (Andersson et al. 2020/2021). For its part, the Conservative Party emphasised the importance of follow-up and review and argued that the government should account for progress on SDG implementation to parliament every other year. This is in contrast to the government proposition that suggested such account should be given once every four years. The Christian Democrats wanted the government to clarify the relationship between follow-up of the Swedish Policy for Global Development and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda, fearing that there would be fewer occasions for review (Forssmed et al. 2020/2021). In the end, Parliament went against the government bill on the frequency of follow-up, deciding that the government will need to account to parliament every second year for its work towards realisation of the 2030 Agenda.

There was broad agreement among civil society interviewees that monitoring is a key future task for them, in Sweden and in other countries. They suggested that civil society organisations could provide evaluation reports alternative to official ones ("shadow reports"), inspired by how this is done in fields such as human rights. At the same time, some civil society representatives acknowledged a tension between, on the one hand, wanting to cooperate with government representatives and, on the other hand, holding them accountable (interviews Stockholm 2015, 2016). Hence, how civil society organisations are held accountable for their influence on policy outcomes are also relevant at the Swedish level, where a set of civil society organisations has been repeatedly invited to dialogues with policymakers. Similar to Ghana, the question of whether civil society organisations can maintain their independent monitoring role after providing direct input to official policies was raised by interviewees. Political accountability cannot be considered automatically augmented by civil society monitoring of government even if in most cases it generates information that is of relevance for the public in their capacity of voters.

Similar to Ghana and Tanzania, the role of indicator review for accountability is prominent both in the domestic and in the international realm in the case of Sweden. Our material clearly demonstrates that the role of SDG indicators and number-based review has grown in importance since 2016.

Statisticians argued that statistics enable SDG review without political considerations, illustrated in the following quote: "in the world of statistics, we measure things without considering what image this might provide of individual countries, we do not advocate certain policies, but are supposed to provide an account of how a country is doing" (interview Stockholm 2017). High expectations on indicator-based review were held by government officials and civil society representatives alike (interviews Stockholm 2017). Representatives of Swedish civil society organisations among our interviewees agreed on the central role of reliable statistics for follow-up of the 2030 Agenda. They increasingly engage in quantitative review practices themselves. One telling example is the Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Rights, that called attention to a gap in data on such rights globally. The organisation therefore together with UNDP and the World Bank initiated the development of an inclusion index that would be part of CSO monitoring of states' SDG commitments (telephone interview 2018). Indicators for a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex Inclusion Index were launched by the UNDP and World Bank in 2018 after consultations among civil society and experts.

In Sweden one civil society interviewee pointed out that the development of indicators should be thought of not only as a technical process but as a political one, adding that "[i]f future work on SDGs become reduced to work on indicators only, we have come nowhere" (interview Stockholm 2016). Measurement involves trade-offs between, on the one hand, weak statistical data availability in many low-income countries and, on the other hand, pinpointing urgent needs. Sweden will contribute to statistical capacity building in its development cooperation partner countries (Rosander 2016) and is also a member of the UN Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs), together with Ghana and Tanzania. Clearly, data collection will be challenging for all countries. Neglected groups and issues might disappear in national averages if data is not disaggregated, raising an accountability challenge in terms of "leaving no one behind".

Seemingly, there was at an early stage more concern among Swedish interviewees with review and statistical capacity at the global level or in low-income countries, while increasingly, statistical challenges for Sweden itself have been identified. Official reports have mentioned that statistical evaluation capacity had to be improved, particularly with regard to identifying inequalities within Sweden (UNDESA 2018: 10; Statistics Sweden 2020b). Moreover, Statistics Sweden has pointed to a discrepancy between estimates on SDG indicators for Sweden in the UN-organised database in comparison with Swedish statistical material. Statistics Sweden claimed that estimates available in the UN's global database could be misleading with regard to the situation in Sweden (Statistics Sweden 2020a: 7, 14). Statistics Sweden also pointed out in one of its reports that the participation of Statistics Sweden staff in international working groups on SDG indicators has been beneficial for the construction of Swedish domestic review

systems. Even though statistical review on the indicators was still challenging in the eyes of Statistics Sweden in 2020, the agency argued that the situation had significantly improved since 2016 (Statistics Sweden 2020a: 10). It also explained that it views statistical review of SDG indicators in Sweden as complementary to issue-specific review under pre-existing Swedish goal systems. SDG-based review should be a means to put the spotlight on issues that require cooperation between issue-specific policy domains (Statistics Sweden 2020a: 21). Moreover, follow-up indicators specifically geared towards municipalities have been developed by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions.[3] These indicators are not identical to those developed by the UN. Instead, they are intended to enable review of progress of SDGs that directly tap into municipal domains of responsibility. SDG progress is directly linked to decisions at the sub-national level because municipal councils have a high degree of self-rule and are responsible for providing social services like care, healthcare, education, and public transport.

In conclusion, compared to Ghana and Tanzania, Sweden faces less challenges in terms of vertical political accountability even if statistical review of SDG indicators entails difficulties for Sweden too. There has been some party-political debate on the 2030 Agenda and the government has received criticism for a lack of action. Parliamentary involvement increased in 2020 as a result of a government bill and ensuing party political motions. While interviewees in both Ghana and Tanzania seemed to prefer avoiding politicisation of the SDGs, Swedish interviewees portray parliamentary contention as a way of igniting interest in the 2030 Agenda, thereby enabling political accountability for its realisation.

5.2 Horizontal accountability

The second part of the chapter investigates horizontal peer-review related to the 2030 Agenda and finds that governance by numbers and reporting practices hold a prominent role. Reporting procedures have come to occupy a central role in SDG policymaking both internationally and domestically. This puts statistical capacity, compilation of data, indicators, targets, and rankings centre stage. In this section we discuss how continuous SDG review and the "count-ability" of SDG indicators affect accountability relations.

5.2.1 Ghana

The international arena quickly became central for shaping governments' SDG review procedures, particularly through the annual UN High-level Political Forum where countries are invited to present Voluntary National Reviews. As a self-proclaimed role model, this has been the case for the government of Ghana. One interviewee put this succinctly: "Ghana likes being the best student in class. So I think the SDGs will make the government

work harder on reporting" (interview Accra 2018). Most interviewees portrayed the High-level Political Forum as a soft accountability forum.

> It's becoming kind of an accountability instrument. Countries are not compelled but doing this voluntary. And now it's becoming a competition even though it's voluntary. I think it's becoming an accountability mechanism. Every country – especially developing countries – wants to demonstrate what they've done. Ghana is also preparing to do a report. NDPC [National Development Planning Commission] says that countries in Africa are presenting reports and that we should do the same to show our achievements.
>
> (interview Accra 2017)

Yet it took until 2019 before the Government of Ghana presented a Voluntary National Review at the High-level Political Forum (Government of Ghana 2019). Similar to Sweden and Tanzania, the review was partially based on an SDG indicator baseline report. In the Ghanaian case, the baseline report was published a year ahead of the Voluntary National Review, while in the Swedish case a baseline report was produced in a short time span right before the High-level Political Forum. This meant that the Ghanaian time frame allowed for the involvement of various stakeholders during the production of the review. There was a roadmap for promoting awareness and involving sub-national authorities in the review and consultants were engaged to develop background reports (interview Accra 2018). A civil society representative with insight into the preparations said that the government-driven process was going pretty well and that civil society was underway preparing a shadow report, complementing the government report. This interviewee said that "[the shadow report] also serves as a major accountability basis for demanding improvement on the delivery of SDG targets and SDG interventions" (interview Accra 2018).

At the same time, the production of the baseline report made it clear that Ghana's statistical system faced enormous challenges with regard to tracking and reporting progress. In the opinion of the National Development Planning Commission, Ghana needed to move away from heavy reliance on survey data generated at five-year intervals (NDPC 2018: v). As a result, a standardised data template was developed for SDG monitoring. The template was used when compiling and validating 80 indicators, which served as a basis for the preparation of the Voluntary National Review (Government of Ghana 2019). The baseline report built on the final MDG report in 2015 and drew on data from ministries, government agencies, Ghana Statistical Service and consultations with SDG committees and platforms. The UNDP country office assisted the consultation process and publication of the report (NDPC 2018). In 2017, a meeting was held with national and international participants to discuss the data system. Subsequently an SDG data roadmap was developed by the Ghana Statistical Service and the National

Development Planning Commission to facilitate monitoring. It focusses on filling data gaps, encouraging data use, and strengthening the overall data system (UN 2018: 6; Government of Ghana 2019). Statistical planning was facilitated through Ghana's participation in the UN Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators (IAEG-SDGs). "[R]ight from the onset we have been part of the process, we started working internally to ensure we have a sense of the capacity of the country to monitor progress" (interview Accra 2019). Notably, several interviewees highlighted accountability challenges related to the quality of statistics, quantitative indicators, and data collection. For example, one interviewee used the principle of "leaving no one behind" to illustrate difficulties of data disaggregation serving to identify the most vulnerable groups (interview Accra 2018). Two other interviewees tellingly summarised the role of statistical data accordingly:

> if you do not have the data to say this and this is a problem, then you are going to have challenges in not just accomplishing the SDGs, but even knowing where to start, where to continue, and where to move forward.
> (interview Accra 2019)

"All of this depends on data, data, and data – and therefore, we must address capacity [building] that will help us address all of these needs" (interview Accra 2018).

According to the Voluntary National Review, the process of producing it focussed on three areas: an assessment of institutions and policies for implementing the SDGs; progress made on the goals thus far; and three cross-cutting themes (children and youth, leave no one behind, and goal synergies) (Government of Ghana 2019: xv). The Voluntary National Review contains baseline values of 69 indicators covering the 17 SDGs. The indicators will be used for monitoring the achievements of the SDGs as well as the corresponding African Union's Agenda 2063 targets (the latter are only included in the indicator baseline report). While 56 of the indicators required no amendments, ten had to be adapted to the Ghanaian context and three were added as they were already being used in Ghana. Data for the review was produced by governmental ministries and agencies as well as from the Ghana Statistical Service. To a lesser extent, data compiled by UN agencies and the World Bank was used (NDPC 2018: 97). A team of local experts supported data collection, analysis, and the drafting of background papers under the direction of the Implementing Coordinating Committee, responsible for strengthening cross-sectoral coordination and multi-stakeholder partnerships (see Chapter 4) (Government of Ghana 2019: 23–24). The Voluntary National Review process was also used to create knowledge on the SDGs by addressing media and holding consultations with marginalised groups and others (Government of Ghana 2019: xv; interviews Accra 2019). For instance, one governmental official stated that in preparation for the

Voluntary National Review, they had tried to go to the regions and to educate people in schools, in the market place and on the streets (interview Accra 2019).

Ghana's delegation to the High-level Political Forum included the Minister of Planning (Professor George Gyan-Baffour) and several other ministers (Graphic Online, 22 July 2019). Civil society was also well represented in the delegation. This was viewed in very positive terms by civil society interviewees:

> [T]his year we were able to get twelve delegate status for our members and that was so helpful because then we could spread out our members to attend virtually all meetings, follow the activities, report on them, and look at the way forward.
>
> (interview Accra 2019)

The previous year, civil society was only allocated two accreditations. Ghana's Voluntary National Review presentation was held by President Akufo-Addo. He described institutional and coordination arrangements, SDG relations to the national development agenda, synergies between SGDs, progress so far in select areas, and key lessons. Moreover, for the first time a civil society representative could use two minutes out of the 15 minutes available to each country. These two minutes were used to present the civil society shadow report and civil society collaboration with government (Power point, Ghana VNR 2019). The civil society presentation was made by visually impaired Mr Alexander Bankole Williams in the spirit of "leaving no one behind".[4] It is worth mentioning that instructions for reporting at the High-level Political Forum have changed over the years (Sénit 2020: 705). In the Ghanaian case, this meant that the civil society platform not only shared the official presentation with the government, it also held an exhibition and produced a shadow report, as mentioned earlier. The shadow report aimed to promote "mutual accountability" related to implementation of the SDGs. It was intended for advocacy, public awareness campaigns and the strengthening of multi-stakeholder partnerships at the sub-national level. The shadow report also highlights challenges of civil society coordination, monitoring and reporting on the SDGs (Ghana Civil Society 2019). The exhibition was organised by the Ghana SDG Civil Society Platform and the Government of Ghana together with other networks and concerned the theme "Building Inclusive National Voluntary Reviews – Promoting multi-stakeholder participation on the SDGs". A well-attended so-called side event was also arranged:

> [I]t was so amazing, we organised a side event on partnerships for achieving the SDGs. [...] It was in the evening after 6 pm and the room was full. I have been to several SDGs events at the UN and other places,

and you hardly get that kind of subscription. And that was a model we showcased and it is actually working.

<div align="right">(interview Accra 2019)</div>

In other words, the High-level Political Forum was an opportunity to showcase Ghana's ambition to be a role model for inclusive SDG implementation. The fact that the President of Ghana is co-chair of the UN group of SDG Advocates reinforces the importance of the country's international image. A plausible explanation for the inclusion of civil society is that it does not raise much criticism of the government. Rather, relations between the government and civil society were portrayed from both sides as mutually supportive with regard to SDG ambitions. This transpires clearly in a quote from one civil society interviewee:

> I think [the High-level Political Forum] went very well. It was an opportunity for us to showcase to the world what we have done as a country. Ghana has set a standard in terms of how we are bringing all partners on board and we have a multi-stakeholder approach to implement the SDGs in which we have civil society, private sector, donor partners and even traditional authorities all being engaged on SDGs and even sitting on the same platform to discuss and agree on what we need to do as a country. So, for the High-level Political Forum, it was the same multi-stakeholder delegates that went so we had traditional rulers there, we have private sector and then we have civil society for the first time.

<div align="right">(interview Accra 2019)</div>

In subsequent UN reports, Ghana has been noted among countries that had opened up for civil society organisations to participate in the official delegation as well as having the opportunity to be involved in the process of producing the Voluntary National Review (Mangenot, 27 August 2019). A government official confirmed the inclusive approach, stating that a lot of people were excited about the government's partnership with the private sector and the CEO advisory group that had been created, and that there were private sector representatives in Ghana's delegation to the High-level Political Forum (interview Accra 2019). "So, it was an interesting outing and people commended the fact that Ghana has really done well in terms of building strong institutions, multi-stakeholder institutions for implementing the SDGs" (interview Accra 2019). However, civil society inclusion in official presentations eventually raised questions about fulfilling its monitoring function.

> One key lesson, or what actually came up strongly in New York, has to do with other civil society organisations perception that when you work and collaborate with government, then you are in bed with government. People don't get it, they didn't understand how civil society

organisations could collaborate on a joint exhibition with government you know, and then we say that we are civil society organisations. So those were issues that we have to draw attention to. When we were there, we didn't see it as a problem until people started raising issues because other countries don't have it that way […] We all have a common interest and a common agenda. We can't always be antagonistic […] So it is better to work together.

(interview Accra 2019)

In response, another civil society interviewee stated that

the kind of relationship we have with government is such that it doesn't compromise our neutrality. For example, we were part of the government delegation, but they did not give us any money to go. We found our own money.

(interview Accra 2019)

In conclusion, Ghana's preparation of a Voluntary National Review was intertwined with other policy processes at the national level, triggering efforts at strengthening statistical capacity and cross-sectoral collaboration related to SDG implementation. This was similar to Tanzania. The process of producing a Voluntary National Review contained attempts at broader outreach to citizens and appears to have been an important lever for integrating the SDGs into domestic policymaking. In contrast to the Swedish case, UN country agencies facilitated preparations for the Voluntary National Review and experiences from MDG-reporting fed into the process. The Voluntary National Review presentation at the High-level Political Forum was a showcase for the government for an international audience and responses reinforced Ghana's positive image. In comparison with Sweden, participants in Ghana's delegation to the High-level Political Forum appear to have had longer prior involvement with domestic SDG processes. In essence, the High-level Political Forum supported soft horizontal accountability between governments. Supportive relations between government and civil society raised questions about the latter's independent monitoring role, which may ultimately have consequences for vertical accountability.

5.2.2 Tanzania

The government of Tanzania intended to submit a Voluntary National Review to the High-level Political Forum already in 2018, like Ghana, but this was postponed to 2019 due to a reorganisation at the Ministry of Finance (email conversation Dar es Salaam 2018). Overall, our material shows that the SDGs are viewed as a useful accountability mechanism by many actors in Tanzania. However, interviewees were painfully aware of Tanzania's low statistical capacity. "You cannot say anything without data",

one interviewee believed (interview Dar es Salaam 2018). The Bureau of Statistics holds primary responsibility for developing indicators and providing statistics but according to several interviewees it could only cater for less than half of the statistics needed (as of 2018).

> Data is there but it is still not fully working – the Bureau of Statistics is only responsible for 39% of the data and the other data comes from government, private sectors, civil society organisations. Governments at different levels are the main responsible actors.
>
> (interview Dar es Salaam 2018)

Consequently, much effort has been devoted to finding out how to make use of data from governmental departments, civil society, and international agencies. Clearly, the lack of a centralised statistical system was a main challenge, as evinced from the following quote:

> Data? They need to be localised. The National Bureau of Statistics has built up some indicators. It is the custodian for statistics. We expect that everything will come from there. We are struggling with measurement. We do not have a centralised system. We have to collect and come up with the big thing. It is difficult to get a contribution from the private sector […] how do we get this information?
>
> (interview Dar es Salaam 2018)

The challenges of collecting data in Tanzania have also been described elsewhere (Sullivan, 2017). Our material shows that for SDG accountability, there is a heavy emphasis on what can be counted and measured: the so-called "count-ability" (Fukuda-Parr and McNeill 2015). Measuring performance has been central in aid interventions and development cooperation for a long time, but the SDGs have certainly accentuated this trend. Reporting to the High-level Political Forum in 2019 was an important driver for advancing national level development of indicators. However, work towards a "Data revolution for Sustainable Development" started already in 2016 and lasted for two years, as collaboration between The National Bureau of Statistics, the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data, the World Bank, MCC-PEPFAR collaborative,[5] United Nations Development Program, and other national stakeholders. This resulted in a "data roadmap" similar to the one in Ghana, aiming for effective tracking of the SDGs and the establishment of a national coordination mechanism for implementation, monitoring, and reporting. The roadmap showed that out of 244 global SDG indicators, 240 were considered potentially relevant for Tanzania (The United Republic of Tanzania 2018: 11).

In 2017, the Ministry of Finance produced an SDG-baseline report. The report provides information on indicators that can be used for tracking progress. The baseline data was benchmarked on 2016 scores and at the time data existed for indicators of 12 out of the 17 SDGs (ca 70%), largely correlating

with the MDGs. It was acknowledged that, in international comparative perspective, Tanzania did not perform well as concerned SDG implementation. The government was keen to learn best practices from countries that ranked high in terms of capacity to fulfil the SDGs. A range of actions were identified in order to achieve the SDGs, including strengthening data collection and evaluation frameworks (Ministry of Finance and Planning 2017: xiii). One of our interviewees also pointed out that policies needed to be mapped and that one attempt at mapping appeared in the SDG-baseline report, where three enabling conditions for SDG implementation were identified: institutions, policies, and legal frameworks (interview Dodoma 2018).

According to the Voluntary National Review, the process of preparing the review involved government ministries, departments and agencies, UN agencies, civil society organisations, the private sector, Union Parliament and House of Representatives (Zanzibar), local government authorities, and media. The Ministry of Finance and Planning and Zanzibar Planning Commission were responsible for coordination. The Global Compact Network Tanzania, a multi-stakeholder platform for the private sector, civil society organisations, UN agencies, development partners, and the government also conducted consultations (United Republic of Tanzania 2019: 22). The Voluntary National Review contains chapters on the national policy environment related to SDG implementation in mainland Tanzania and Zanzibar, brief outlooks on SDG achievements in Tanzania, and assessments of the six selected SDGs to be emphasised that year, and the means of implementation. The chapter on policy and enabling environment quite interestingly provides long lists of supporting policies relevant to the selected SDGs on the theme "empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality", in line with the above-mentioned policy mapping. As in the case of Ghana, the preparation of the Voluntary National Review was viewed as an opportunity to raise SDG awareness and to mobilise partnerships among stakeholders (United Republic of Tanzania 2019: 127).

Because our interviews were conducted prior to the High-level Political Forum in 2019, we do not have any first-hand information about experiences of the meeting. However, we talked to a civil society representative who participated in consultations leading up to the review, which took place between March and April 2019 in Dar es Salaam through the Sustainable Development Platform (interview Dar es Salaam 2019). The interviewee was critical of the quality of participation.

> [E]ven in Voluntary National Review (VNR) meetings participation was not representative as only few participated. However, the government claimed that civil society organisations participated. […] Actually, we participated in that platform only during VNR-civil society organisations perspective report writing and it was not fairly inclusive, as I said earlier. […] I think this is the first time in Tanzania with civil society

organisations perspective on the VNR. What the Sustainable Development Platform did was actually to identify stakeholders in each goal for consultation and during report writing […] we don't know who and have never seen the report. […] It was submitted to the government which then compiled the whole report for submission to the UN. […] Yes, the invitation was for the specific goal one deals with. But, at the end of the day, in compiling the whole report for 17 goals we also participated. Actually, what they did is locating actors for each goal and after finishing consultative meetings they summoned the national committee which we participated in.

(interview Dar es Salaam 2019)

The quote illustrates the difficulty for nonstate actors to get an overview of SDG processes when information is not readily available. As a result, we have less material to describe preparations for the Voluntary National Review in the case of Tanzania. Another interviewee told us that his organisation did not succeed in participating in the Voluntary National Review process. The organisation wrote to the Global Compact Tanzania asking for more information after learning about the review process in social media (interview Dar es Salaam 2019). In 2017, the Tanzanian Policy Forum provided a report on how different stakeholders could potentially play a role in the implementation, follow-up and review of the SDGs in Tanzania, especially at the sub-national level. The UN Association Tanzania and the Africa Philanthropic Foundation supported this initiative (Policy Forum 2017). Yet, unlike in the case of Ghana, no shadow report was provided by Tanzanian civil society for the High-level Political Forum.

In the Voluntary National Review, challenges of data collection and the low level of technological capabilities were mentioned. The need for global support to fund capacity development was also underlined, and the needs of other developing countries were alluded to.

Concerning the domestication and localisation of the Sustainable Development Goal indicators, which are considered to be potentially relevant in terms of context, about 167 Sustainable Development Goals indicators out of 240 were mapped as either primary or secondary indicators for Mainland Tanzania and 198 for Zanzibar (although only 49 indicators had baseline data). These indicators will be used to track and report on the process and progress of the implementation and are the basis of this review. The time frame for the baseline data for most of the indicators lies between 2015 and 2018, depending much on the frequency of data collection. Inadequate baseline data on some of the indicators has proved a challenge in assessing progress on the monitoring and implementation of the Goals.

(United Republic of Tanzania 2019: 13)

Several interviewees stated that while most SDGs were "implementable", developing realistic indicators had been a difficult exercise at both national and sub-national levels. Consequently, indicators have to be adjusted to the national context.

> I must start by saying that the SDGs are implementable and are being implemented. However, countries could have differences in implementation. There is a requirement for each country to report implementation status. This is known as Voluntary National Reporting. We are aware of this and we have to provide such reports. We as a country are implementing the SDGs although not exactly as per the UN guidelines. Implementation challenges are there because implementation is touching various aspects of the SDGs. We have also to understand that as we implement our plans, we also implement the SDGs. Hence, as a country our view is that the SDGs are implementable.
>
> (interview Dodoma 2018)

The National Bureau of Statistics in Tanzania has a seat in the UN Inter-Agency Expert Group on SDG indicators, as have Ghana and Sweden. The head of the Bureau of Statistics represents Tanzania in the UN Inter-agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goals Indicators (IAEG-SDGs), which was perceived as extremely helpful for the work with indicators in Tanzania (interview Dar es Salaam 2018). This means that the National Bureau of Statistics is involved in driving the process of developing and localising SDG indicators. Despite the lack of capacity and resources, a lot of faith is put in the development of indicators and collection of statistical data. At the same time statistics is a politically sensitive issue. As one interviewee put it, "statistics worries me because data is not everything, it can be abused, not value free" (interview Dar es Salaam 2018). In 2015, the government introduced a Statistic Act, which made it a crime for people to publish "false official statistics". In 2018, the Parliament hastily approved an amendment of the law to make it criminal to publish statistics without the approval of the National Bureau of Statistics. The law was heavily criticised in Tanzania and elsewhere, and in June 2019 some of the restrictions were lifted by the Tanzanian Parliament (Nyeko 2019). While one could interpret the amendment as an attempt to strengthen the quality of statistics (Domasa 2017; interview Dar es Salaam 2018), some argue it was a way for government authorities to control civil society organisations, in line with increasingly authoritarian measures from the government. Indeed, civic space was classified as "repressed" in 2020 (CIVICUS Monitor 2020).

In brief, we do not have first-hand information on experiences from Tanzania's participation at the High-level Political Forum to the same extent as for Ghana and Sweden. We do, however, observe a tension between the lack of national statistical capacity and the urge to file a comprehensive report at the UN High-level Political Forum in New York. The Voluntary National

Review makes clear that Tanzania wants to signal high SDG ambitions. Unlike in Ghana, we have not found systematic civil society engagement or consultative elements in review practices. In combination with increasing authoritarianism, it is unlikely that the Voluntary National Review and High-level Political Forum participation had significant consequences for either horizontal or vertical accountability in the case of Tanzania.

5.2.3 Sweden

While progress towards SDG attainment has not been the subject of vertical political accountability in Sweden, there has been more activity during 2016–2020 in realms of horizontal political accountability, particularly in the international domain. The Swedish government decided to report for the first time to the High-level Political Forum in 2017. This required the compilation of a Voluntary National Review. In early 2017, Statistics Sweden was therefore tasked with writing a preparatory report and a group of statisticians was created for this purpose. They were instructed to map the availability of data and suggest alternative SDG indicators suitable for the Swedish context. Our interviews with employees of Statistics Sweden showed that the procedural prerequisites for compiling the first Statistics Sweden report were tight, and that the short time frame limited their work (interviews Stockholm 2017). The group had about six weeks at its disposal and interviewees conveyed they had to find time in between their ordinary tasks to squeeze in work on the SDG indicators. "The reason for writing our report was that Ardalan Shekarabi [Minster for Public Administration] was to present at the High-level Political Forum in the summer. I don't think they realised how much work this would imply" (interview Stockholm 2017).

Statistics Sweden interviewees felt they could not work through the first attempt at mapping SDG indicators with regard to Sweden as thoroughly as needed. They tried to capture what was most important and saved more in-depth work for a second Statistics Sweden report due in the Autumn of 2017. It was an unusual experience for Statistics Sweden employees to be provided first with indicators, then trying to decide what these indicators could shed light on in the Swedish case. Normally, statisticians would first identify a societal phenomenon in need of scrutiny, then they would consider indicators and data that might apply (interview Stockholm 2017). This points to the influence of global indicators on domestic accountability processes, even if the SDGs are but one set of goals in Swedish sustainable development policy. High expectations on indicator-based review were held by government officials and civil society representatives alike (interviews Stockholm 2016, 2017). Tellingly, it was first hard for statisticians to make their voice heard at all, then suddenly everyone asked them "where are the indicators?". Before that, the attitude of politicians towards statistics was rather one of "do not disturb us now, we are negotiating!" (interviews Stockholm 2017). In addition to the Statistics Sweden report, the Swedish Voluntary National Review

also built on reports from the Swedish Delegation for the 2030 Agenda (see Chapter 3) and on memos from Swedish government agencies and Swedish embassies across the world.

The Swedish Voluntary National Review was drafted through an unusual attempt of joint ownership by two government ministries. The review was written by a government official of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs supported by a steering group of representatives from the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation and the Swedish Agenda 2030 Ambassador at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. There was also a small reference group with whom the author consulted, consisting of representatives from civil society organisations, local communities, and the private sector. During this process, civil society organisations argued that the government should not hesitate to put domestic challenges upfront in the review. They encouraged the author to highlight that, despite being highly ranked, Sweden also needed to perform better (interview Stockholm 2017). A broader group of stakeholders of about 120 people was invited for discussion twice by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Nonstate actors were able to provide best practice examples for *Sweden and the 2030 Agenda–Collection of Examples*, attached to the Voluntary National Review. In a unique process, the draft report was then handed over to the Ministry of Finance for ministry deliberations. Two representatives of different civil society organisations concluded that the process of report preparation was inclusive but that the Voluntary National Review is of course in the end a government product (interviews Stockholm 2017, 2018).

The bulk of the final version of the Voluntary National Review is devoted to a preliminary assessment of the 17 SDGs in Sweden (based on the Statistics Sweden report) and to an overview of on-going and future work in all sectors of society of benefit to the 2030 Agenda. The Voluntary National Review lists implementation challenges (see Chapter 4) and mentions tensions arising when Swedish companies do business in countries where environmental concerns or human rights are not respected. It also promises that Sweden will remain active in the international follow-up system for the 2030 Agenda (Swedish Government 2017: 86). The report states that existing domestic follow-up systems will keep their relevance. Unlike in Ghana, Swedish civil society did not produce a "shadow report" mirroring the Voluntary National Review but instead issued statements seeking to influence the content of the review. These statements in particular emphasised that the review should include perspectives related to human rights and that goal conflicts should be acknowledged. Commenting on the resulting review, the civil society organisation Concord Sweden wrote that "[i]ssues that are not described thoroughly or analysed in the review are several challenges at the international level, for example the above-mentioned arms trade and migration concerns" (*Champions to be?* 2017: 19). And another civil society interviewee said that "[the Voluntary National Review] could have been stronger when it comes to a state like Sweden that is usually seen as leader in

human rights, development work, marginalised groups rights, and LGBTI [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex]" (interview Stockholm 2018).

Participants in the official Swedish delegation to the High-level Political Forum in 2017 were selected by the Ministry of Finance and the delegation was headed by the Minister for Public Administration and the Swedish Ambassador for the 2030 Agenda at the time. The delegation consisted of representatives from government agencies, municipalities, trade unions, civil society organisations, parliamentarians, private business, and academia. Our interviews show that the selection of participants had strong symbolic dimensions. The government frequently referred to its inclusive approach to SDG fulfilment, involving cooperation with all sectors of society (Swedish Government 2017). The Ministry of Finance demanded that all organisations invited to be part of the official delegation should be represented at the highest level by its chair or secretary-general (interview Stockholm 2018). Government officials pointed to the value of having a broad delegation, not least because it would send a message to other countries that realisation of the SDGs requires the involvement of all sectors of society (interviews Stockholm 2017).

Interviewees testified that Sweden, alike Ghana, received a lot of positive feedback on the broad composition of its delegation to the High-level Political Forum (interviews Stockholm 2017, 2018). Yet some interviewees also raised critical points. Some delegation members were not clear on what they were supposed to do during the High-level Political Forum and they did not fully understand the expectations on their participation. The broad composition of the delegation was generally considered a strength but also involved tensions:

> Things can become a little messy when nonstate actors on the one hand are included in an official governmental delegation to represent Sweden in a UN SDG setting, on the other hand they are supposed to hold that same government accountable for its SDG work.
>
> (interview Stockholm 2017)

This is precisely the same concern as found among certain civil society representatives in Ghana after having participated in the High-level Political Forum. Beyond the official delegation, a couple of Swedish civil society organisations participated at the High-level Political Forum through the UN Major Groups system of nonstate actor representation. One civil society interviewee argued that "[w]e were all in New York because we came in our own capacity as organisations working at the UN level, but it sends a different message if organisations come in official capacity as part of a state delegation" (telephone interview 2018). Certain civil society organisations outside of the official delegation were disappointed that several planned meetings with Swedish government officials were cancelled on short notice.

In their view, the Ministry of Finance did not prioritise civil society contacts during the High-level Political Forum.

The 15-minute presentation of the Swedish Voluntary National Review was shared between the Minister for Public Administration, the chair-person of Malmö municipality, the chair of the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise, and a representative from a youth civil society organisation. A few other country presentations in plenary also included nongovernmental speakers (UNDESA 2018: 52), as did Ghana's presentation in 2019. Civil society representatives were pleased that the Swedish presentation raised Swedish challenges, because "[t]he High-level Political Forum is not only supposed to be a PR event" (interview Stockholm 2018). This encouraged some other countries to mention their challenges as well. Civil society organisations from other countries were impressed that Swedish organisations dared to address questions to government officials related to Swedish weapons export in the High-level Political Forum plenary (interview Stockholm 2018). The Minister for Public Administration answered in plenary by emphasising that civil society is extremely important for SDG implementation and that the government would continue its dialogue with civil society. The Minister emphasised that sexual and reproductive health rights are an important part of Swedish feminist foreign policy but did not respond specifically to the question on Swedish weapons export. Swedish government officials also were asked to participate in side-event panels on Goal 17 (means of implementation) at the High-level Political Forum in 2016 and 2017. This was interpreted as a confirmation of the Swedish "champion role" (interview Stockholm 2017). One interviewee pointed out that such events had more room for discussion than the Voluntary National Review plenary where time management was strict.

Some government officials and civil society organisations saw the High-level Political Forum as a constructive learning-forum that did not suffer from the usual UN conflicts. One civil society representative made a comparison with review of states' human rights reports: "It is much easier to have a discussion about our issues at the High-level Political Forum and states do not react in a hostile way, which happens in the regular human rights mechanisms framework" (interview Stockholm 2017). Other civil society representatives considered the lack of effective accountability to be a weakness of High-level Political Forum. Illustratively, one government official said:

> [The High-level Political Forum] is not politically sensitive. It is not a problem to put a company representative on the Swedish chair in the High-level Political Forum plenary, because nothing politically sensitive will happen there. To me as a supporter of the 2030 Agenda, this is sad. It conveys that the High-level Political Forum is a nice forum where

people meet to talk but it is not about accountability. You do not put a nonstate actor on the Swedish chair in a Security Council negotiation or in human rights compliance mechanisms.

(interview Stockholm 2017)

Sweden has signed up for presenting a second Voluntary National Review at the High-level Political Forum in 2021. This experience is likely to be different from 2017 as instructions on the preparation and substance of a Voluntary National Review have been developed by the UN in order to streamline country reporting.

In contrast to peer-learning, political contention on sustainable development played out strongly in a parallel intergovernmental setting of negotiations on the Ministerial Declaration that is issued at the end of the High-level Political Forum each year. In these negotiations, conducted by states' permanent representatives to the UN, the global politics of intergovernmental agreements came to the fore. More specifically, negotiations concerned the wording on politically contentious matters among states, such as foreign occupation, equality, sexual and reproductive health rights, and human rights.[6] Among our interviewees, government officials as well as civil society representatives found these negotiations highly worrying, risking to weaken the political status of the 2030 Agenda. One government official felt that certain states' attempts at renegotiating the 2030 Agenda "exploded in our faces" (interview Stockholm 2017). We did not find similar worries among interviewees in Ghana and Tanzania. As mentioned in Chapter 4, Sweden and Bahamas led intergovernmental negotiations in 2019 on the wording of the political declaration to be issued at the end of the High-level Political Forum that year. In the 2019 political declaration, heads of states and government called for a decade of action and delivery and pledged to carry out ambitious review on the 2030 Agenda (UN General Assembly 2019).

In conclusion, preparation of the Swedish Voluntary National Review did not feed into vertical accountability chains as it did not provoke party-political debate, parliamentary involvement, or broader voter engagement. Yet it triggered the production of statistical reports on progress towards the SDGs that can nurture such accountability in the future. The Swedish "champion state" role was enacted during the UN High-level Political Forum and in side events, reinforced by positive peer-review of horizontal accountability relations between governments. The inclusion of civil society representatives was still unusual in 2017. While this may promote horizontal accountability, it also invites questions concerning the independence and representativeness of civil society. UN proceedings show that the political status of the 2030 Agenda is vulnerable during each year's negotiations on the High-level Political Forum's ministerial declaration, weakening horizontal accountability relations between states.

5.3 Conclusion

This chapter testifies to the rapidly increasing role of follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda, nationally as well as internationally. Even during the very first years of implementation of this 15-year policy, monitoring and evaluation took centre stage in order to identify gaps in goal fulfilment at the country level and at the global aggregate level. In this chapter we have investigated nascent vertical and horizontal accountability elements related to the SDGs in the cases of Ghana, Tanzania and Sweden. There are similarities as well as differences between the three countries (see chapter summary in Table 5.1). Above all, their respective parliament is viewed as key for holding the government accountable in the long run, even if parliamentary involvement was low until 2020. It took about four years for Ghana and Tanzania to establish parliamentary committees tasked with SDG oversight and monitoring government progress and five years for the Swedish government to submit a bill to the Swedish parliament. In Ghana, parliament has become involved through its approval of a budget that tracks expenses in SDG terms as well. There was also broad agreement among interviewees across all three countries that civil society has a central role in monitoring political institutions' achievements towards the SDGs.

In actual fact, possibilities to demand accountability differ much between countries, depending on the broader domestic democratic and civic space. Evidently, the accountability of the SDGs is subdued to the political climate in which it takes place. We find similar review practices in the three countries but their role and impact vary depending on the political regime. As a result, accountability mechanisms are weaker in Tanzania than in Ghana, and strongest in Sweden. Ghana and Tanzania suffer from corruption which severely affects vertical accountability relations between politicians and their electorate. We have looked for politicisation of the SDGs but, perhaps surprisingly, do not find many traces of political contention. A lack of politicisation probably contributes to explaining why there have not been demands for political accountability despite the concern with follow-up among policy elites. It remains to be seen whether in Sweden, where there is party-political contention on sustainable development, implementation of the 2030 Agenda will spark politicisation.

Government reporting to the High-level Political Forum has spurred consultations with a wide range of stakeholders, above all in Ghana, as well as the compilation of statistical baseline reports and national adaptation of indicators, which, in turn, facilitates accountability measures. Still, a lack of statistical capacity in Ghana and Tanzania and a lack of citizen knowledge of the SDGs in all three countries are significant obstacles for vertical accountability. All three countries are members of the UN Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators. Both Ghana and Tanzania stress the importance of

data disaggregation in order to leave no one behind, drawing attention to the difficulties of disaggregating statistical data in a meaningful way (DESA 2019b: 70). For its part, in 2020 Statistics Sweden published the first ever country report on the SDGs with a focus on societal inequalities and "leaving no one behind" throughout. Our material also shows that on-going statistical work with SDG targets and indicators is a politically sensitive matter, especially in Tanzania (cf. Lofchie 2014: 204). In Ghana and Sweden, civil society organisations take upon themselves to monitor government but they have also been included in official delegations to the UN, opening up questions about their independence and functions as watchdogs. In the case of Tanzania, shrinking democratic space for civil society, media, and the political opposition is a serious obstacle to vertical accountability.

Overall, our material demonstrates that the SDGs reinforce the societal trend of governance by numbers and that SDG reporting may trigger measures at strengthening national statistical capacity more generally. The question is who is privileged by SDG accountability measures and who is neglected. What are the consequences for global and national level accountability? The voluntary-based nature of the SDGs ignites primarily horizontal accountability as hard enforcement measures are lacking. Even if the UN-based review can promote peer pressure among governments, the national and local levels remain the primary location of vertical accountability relationships between citizens and governments. A challenge remains to make governments' SDG responsibilities, which still seem remote to many citizens, part of these accountability relationships. A lack of independence from politics of monitoring systems at national and subnational levels appears to be a worldwide problem (Saner et al. 2020). One risk of an over-reliance on quantitative data collection is that the broader ambitions within which indicators are embedded become secondary, as they are more difficult to measure (e.g. human rights). This implies that "count-ability" steers the selection of problems to be addressed. We note an increasing concern with measuring inequalities, particularly in Sweden, but also in Ghana and Tanzania. If statistics is used to identify those left furthest behind, it may draw more political attention to vulnerable groups, particularly if such an ambition is promoted by governments jointly during international review.

In sum, this chapter has shown that SDG accountability relationships are emerging but that they are exclusive insofar as the broader citizenry is not actively involved or informed. Yet there is no doubt among our interviewees that accountability is key for attaining the SDGs. In the next chapter we put the findings from Chapters 3 to 5 in light of our conceptual framework, before looking at future scenarios and suggestions for further research.

Table 5.1 Chapter summary

	Ghana	Tanzania	Sweden	Overall conclusion
Vertical accountability	Elements of vertical accountability: elections, free press, active civil society, budget tracking, parliamentary committee. Corruption and clientelism. Weak connection to citizens.	Parliamentary SDG committee but increasingly authoritarian state. Repressed civil society. Weak statistical capacity.	Democratic vertical accountability, but lack of voter engagement. Criticism from political opposition. Decision in 2020 on government accounting to parliament.	Political system and democratic space key, civil society freedom also central. The 2030 Agenda has not been object of party politics or election debates.
Horizontal accountability	High-level Political Forum and Voluntary National Review, showcase role model ambitions. Civil society engagement, spur national processes.	High-level Political Forum and Voluntary National Review ambitions but less showcase, spur data collection.	Role-modelling at High-level Political Forum 2017, did not feed into domestic processes.	High-level Political Forum reporting triggers governments' domestic SDG work, including review of progress. SDGs reinforce governance by numbers and evaluation.
Resulting outcome	Nascent accountability	Weak accountability	Prepared for accountability	Until 2020, horizontal accountability relations predominated.

Notes

1 https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/ghanaelection2020/elections. parliamentary.results.php, accessed 25 January 2021.
2 https://www.parliament.gh/news?CO=66, accessed 19 December 2019.
3 http://rka.nu/agenda2030.2868.html.
4 24 July 2019, www.ghananewsagency.org.
5 https://www.mcc.gov/initiatives/initiative/mcc-pepfar-partnership.
6 Statements made at these negotiations can be found at https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/ecosoc6864.doc.htm, accessed 15 November 2020.

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6 Conclusions

Interlinkages, continuity, and change in sustainable development politics

6.1 Structural, institutional, and individual contextual factors

This section revisits the three structural factors that guided our selection of countries and we consider how these factors interact with institutional and individual factors. We include references to studies on other countries' national approaches to the SDGs in order to broaden the empirical outlook. On a brief methodological note, we regard structures, institutions, and individuals as co-constituting each other, and make no a priori assumption of one level being causally more important than another in determining outcomes. The countries selected for this book represent three different levels of socio-economic development, democratisation, and position in international development cooperation. It is clear from previous chapters that these three structural factors constitute the baseline for policymaking towards realisation of the 2030 Agenda. Structural socio-economic factors determine the actual distance to SDG fulfilment that individual countries face, such as the degree of poverty and hunger, conflict, pollution, and societal cleavages. We have found that national adaptation of the SDGs takes its point of departure in an assessment of gaps related to goal fulfilment, and that countries struggle with the tension between addressing all SDGs and making priorities. In Sweden, structural inequalities related to income, health, housing, and consumption-based emissions are main challenges in regard to SDG fulfilment. In the case of Ghana and Tanzania, poverty and a lack of resources, in combination with weaknesses in quality of government and democratic virtues, are main structural challenges in relation to SDG advancement. While Ghana has had both economic growth and reduced poverty, Tanzania has failed to reduce poverty to the same extent in spite of high rates of economic growth since the mid-1990s. Yet Tanzania is one of the fastest growing economies in Africa and the categorisation of Tanzania changed in 2020 from a low-income country to a lower-middle-income country (World Bank 2020). Clearly, countries' distance to goal fulfilment varies drastically. Yet we have not found that the size of this distance per se impacts the extent to which the SDGs have been taken up in domestic policymaking.

As expected, a country's position in international development cooperation strongly impacts national policymaking on the SDGs. For Ghana and Tanzania, international organisations have been much involved in domestic approaches to the 2030 Agenda, while this has not been the case for Sweden. Issues pertaining to financing of the SDGs differ substantially as Sweden provides rather than receives international development assistance, in contrast to Ghana and Tanzania. This means that normative structural tensions at the global-national nexus play out differently for the three countries. Global standards of sustainable development gain increasing normative power in international development cooperation, yet the localisation of such standards is far from straightforward. In contexts of high pre-existing structural inequalities, localisation of the SDGs is a strained political process, especially where norms of inclusion are not strong among political elites (Siegel and Lima 2020). At the same time, as concluded in Chapter 3, the SDGs evince the presence of a trend in which "the local" has been normatively upgraded in development cooperation (Anderl 2016). Whereas localisation has turned into a legitimation strategy, global extension has become a normative imperative for responsibility, albeit a contested one. Political contention around the responsibility of high-income countries for addressing global structural inequalities resurfaces in annual negotiations on the intergovernmental political declaration for the UN High-level Political Forum. Moreover, we have found that sovereignty remains a firmly embedded norm in international sustainability affairs. References to national circumstances feature strongly at the global-national nexus and have contradictory effects for the 2030 Agenda. On the one hand, such references seek to legitimise adaptation of the SDGs in the sense that they should address central problems of individual countries. On the other hand, they reinforce state sovereignty in the domain of SDG follow-up and review.

Institutional factors, for their part, concern the mandates and resources of national political institutions and choices made with regard to the allocation of responsibilities for implementation and review of the 2030 Agenda. Reports from the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) identify a variety of national institutional arrangements for SDG-implementation (UNDESA 2019: 4). Looking into Voluntary National Reviews of 2019, a majority of in total 46 countries reporting that year had set up new high-level institutional arrangements to lead and coordinate SDG-implementation. In 17 countries, alignment with pre-existing arrangements was chosen instead. Among those that had set up new arrangements, 12 countries had placed it directly under the head of state or government, while 15 had placed it under a specific ministry. In the case of Ghana, this was the Ministry of Planning in 2019. Tanzania and two other countries chose to use pre-existing arrangements which placed responsibility with an inter-ministerial entity led by the head of state or the government (UNDESA 2020: 5). Sweden has also chosen to use pre-existing institutions. This was not unusual among countries presenting Voluntary National

Reviews in 2017 (UNDESA 2018: 3, 5). Ghana has created a new institution specifically devoted to overseeing realisation of the SDGs, in contrast to Sweden and Tanzania where there has been more emphasis on integration into ordinary institutional procedures. We have found a low degree of parliamentary involvement during the first five years of the 2030 Agenda and strong political ownership of the 2030 Agenda by the executive branch of government. This is changing in Sweden as of 2020 with a government bill submitted to parliament. Parliamentary SDG committees in Ghana and Tanzania are potentially important steps for broadening political ownership of the 2030 Agenda. However, presidential forms of government with "winner takes it all" systems in Ghana and Tanzania make their respective parliaments less influential compared to Sweden, where the prime minister depends on political support in parliament. More generally, even though parliaments are acknowledged to be the primary institution for accountability related to the realisation of the SDGs, their involvement varies much across countries (UNDESA 2020: 6). For instance, only 13 of 46 countries presenting a Voluntary National Review in 2018 had engaged parliament in preparing it (UNDESA 2018: 7). In this respect, socio-economic and democratic differences between countries turn out not to make a difference for the degree of parliamentary involvement during the first five years of the 2030 Agenda. Internationally, we have also found the tension between mainstreaming the SDGs throughout UN agency mandates and creating new institutional arrangements. Among political elites interviewed for the present book great importance is attached to the annual UN High-level Political Forum, while public servants working with statistical follow-up emphasise the UN Statistical Commission's Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (where Ghana, Tanzania, and Sweden are members). Our material shows that the creation of new institutions does not necessarily make the allocation of responsibilities clearer. Rather, it often creates yet an overlapping layer in an issue domain with high institutional complexity. That said, our investigation took place at the beginning of a 15-year period and new structures may become consolidated over time.

Finally, individuals feature in our empirical material in three main capacities: as political leaders, voters, and citizen audiences of legitimation attempts. In terms of political leadership, we find differences as concerns the 2030 Agenda between the three countries. In both Ghana and Sweden, political leaders have issued statements declaring ambitions to become role-models that are best in class. In Ghana, there has been strong presidential political ownership of the 2030 Agenda. A new president can change political priorities quite substantially once in power without involving parliament. This is even more so in Tanzania. In comparison with political elites, we have found individuals in their capacity as citizen audiences of legitimation, and as voters, to be less central during the first five years of the 2030 Agenda. At an early stage in 2015–2016, citizens did feature as audiences of legitimation attempts related to the 2030 Agenda, but a stakeholder

focus rather than voter accountability shaped how citizens were approached by political elites. After that, there have been continued efforts at spreading knowledge on the SDGs on the part of public authorities and of civil society organisations. Most interviewees pointed to the importance of voters and parliaments for future accountability processes. A lack of politicisation in all three countries is likely to have contributed to low parliamentary involvement in combination with low knowledge of the 2030 Agenda among the general public in its capacity as voters. National elections held thus far have not ignited greater interest in the 2030 Agenda among voters. Neither has there been much party politics related to the 2030 Agenda.

In conclusion, factors at the levels of structures, institutions, and individuals interact to shape how the politics of the SDGs plays out in different countries. In brief, Chapters 3–5 evince that contextual structural factors provide the baseline against which countries' translation of the 2030 Agenda to domestic politics unfolds. The structural setting shapes the kinds of political choices that can be made by institutions and individuals with regard to the 2030 Agenda. Formal institutional features related to the national political system clearly and unsurprisingly contribute most to shaping how countries engage with the 2030 Agenda. Differences between the three countries with regard to their distance to SDG fulfilment turn out not to correlate with the institutional choices made. We have also found that the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs are not the most important policy tools domestically to address structural inequalities and unsustainable development. At best, the SDGs have led to increased political pressure for holistic policy approaches to sustainable development. Indeed, interlinkages and synergies between SDGs have been a prominent concern in our material. In the end, change with regard to structural factors that the SDGs seek to address is slow. If it happens, it cannot easily be ascribed to the SDGs as such, particularly not before 2030. Even if structures are slow at changing, our material demonstrates that there is room for political choice in shaping how institutions act in relation to goal realisation. In the absence of broad voter concern for the 2030 Agenda, the room for political choice appears greatest for the individual acting through an institutional position with institutional resources, pointing to the central role of the choices made by political elites.

6.2 Conceptual interlinkages and tensions

This book has revolved around three concepts that call attention to the politics of sustainable development goal-setting: legitimacy, responsibility, and accountability. In particular, they capture central normative qualities of the relationship between, on the one hand, political decision-makers and institutions, and, on the other hand, their constituencies, people affected by their decisions, or other actors having a stake in the 2030 Agenda. We have shown throughout the book that the SDGs are political in several senses of the term. They are the result of political negotiations and the main

responsibility for their realisation resides with political institutions. Moreover, their realisation is far from a technical matter but requires political prioritisations and will involve goal conflicts, possibly opening for political contestation. Our case studies have made clear that the 2030 Agenda does not enter a void at the national level, but encounters a pre-existing political setting. While the three prior chapters separately offer important insights into how the global agreement of the 2030 Agenda is translated to national circumstances, they do not connect the three concepts. Therefore, this section revisits our conceptual framework and elaborates on interlinkages based on our empirical findings in order to provide a more encompassing view of the global-national SDG nexus.

Our theoretical assumption, as spelled out in Chapter 2, was that legitimacy may strengthen compliance with institutions and policies and is therefore closely related to responsibility. We assumed that the adoption of responsibility is facilitated if the policy to be realised is considered legitimate or if the institution deciding on the policy holds legitimacy. We also suggested that the realisation of responsibility, which may require political costs and difficult trade-offs, is more likely if the policy to be implemented is perceived as legitimate by those bearing the costs. Thereby, legitimacy is required for global sustainability governance to be effective in addressing cross-border sustainability challenges. Without legitimacy, governance attempts are either likely to have less impact or to depend on coercive measures. This is acutely so as concerns compliance with globally agreed sustainability policies.

In all three country cases, broad consultations before and after the adoption of the SDGs have facilitated integration of the goals into the domestic policymaking setting. We have also found that notable overlap with existing national policies was an important factor for domestic uptake during the early years of the 2030 Agenda (see also Horn and Grugel 2018; Mbanda and Fourie 2019; Forestier and Kim 2020). Our elite interviewees confirm that the majority of policymakers view the 2030 Agenda as a legitimate political agreement warranted to be implemented, if adapted to national contexts. Its legitimacy stems from both procedural and substantive legitimacy sources. Yet we find a significant tension between the global agreement of *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* and the leeway available for national adaption due to national circumstances. While the room for national adaption facilitates legitimation of the 2030 Agenda in the eyes of policymakers, it may in the aggregate also weaken implementation of the original global agreement. Overall, a key finding in this book is that legitimation attempts were much more actively initiated pre-2015, driven by the UN but in cooperation with governments, than what has been the case after 2015 at the domestic level once the 2030 Agenda was formally adopted, but still largely unknown nationally. Actors at the global-national nexus are primarily policymaking elites who interacted with civil society elites and to a more limited extent with elites from academia and the business sector.

Clearly, the SDGs in themselves are not sufficient to promote greater political inclusion domestically, as shown in the case of Tanzania as well as in a recent study of Paraguay (Siegel and Lima 2020).

Our case studies show that implementation of the SDGs as of 2020 is not yet at a stage where trade-offs with regard to resource allocation or goal conflicts have been a major political issue. This probably explains why there have not been major delegitimation attempts in any of the three countries. Rather, the SDGs have been used to legitimise and reinforce policies that countries already have in place. This has been noted in studies of other countries as well. For instance, a study on Ecuador concludes that the SDGs do not influence what Ecuadorian development means. Rather, the government considered the SDGs a way to validate its own priorities. The SDGs legitimised development goals and policies that had already been decided upon (Horn and Grugel 2018: 74). Another study reports similar findings in the case of South Africa where interviewees stated that the national development plan and the SDGs could be reconciled relatively easily. They critiqued the SDGs for being "too broad" and "too big" with "too many goals and targets" (Mbanda and Fourie 2019). This is similar to views we have found in Ghana and Tanzania. Another explanation for a lack of debate around the SDGs as such is that there are many political frameworks that overlap with the 2030 Agenda and some of these are more politically debated. In the Swedish case, the legally binding national *Climate Act* (of 2018) is one example. These may be more well-known and thereby ignite more debate. Even if overlapping policies reinforce the 2030 Agenda, there is a risk that its holistic ambitions are lost sight of. There are constant agenda-setting contests on national and international political arenas. As alluded to in Chapter 1, during 2020 the Covid-19 pandemic predominated in political debates and decision-making at all levels.

Our conceptual framework also put forth that responsibility needs to be clearly distributed among political institutions if a long-term set of goals such as the SDGs are to be realised. A division of responsibility taps into pre-existing political debate on the appropriate role of political steering for obtaining sustainable development. We also suggested that limits of institutional responsibility may arise from the need to maintain institutional legitimacy in the sense that institutions are created for specific purposes. They stay legitimate in the eyes of their constituencies as long as they perform their intended roles. This means, we argued, that the reach of responsibilities in this perspective is limited by what institutions are authorised to do by their members. Taking the connectedness principle into account, institutions most likely prioritise obligations to serve their members. This is particularly the case for governments, unless citizens authorise them to assume additional more cosmopolitan-oriented responsibilities as part of their political mandate.

Our cases show that, in general, responsibility is distributed according to the mandates and procedures of pre-existing political institutions. Among

our three cases, Ghana is the exception with a cross-cutting new institutional arrangement created especially for the realisation of the SDGs. The Swedish government has made a point out of integrating SDG responsibility into ordinary institutions and processes, in order to avoid competing structures. Tanzania too has opted for using existing structures. Our interviews as well as policy documents recognise the need for a holistic approach if the vision of the 2030 Agenda is to be realised, even if they also acknowledge that prioritisations will be necessary. Perhaps not surprisingly, the engagement of parliaments in all three countries has been slowly evolving. International agreements are negotiated and signed by governments and do not formally require parliamentary approval when being nonbinding, such as the 2030 Agenda. Such agreements reinforce that governments take on the primary responsibility for their realisation. Our interviewees confirmed that they expect the government to take the lead in realising the 2030 Agenda, and in the Swedish case parliamentarians waited for government proposals. The allocation of responsibilities throughout government agencies and public administration at large has taken time to configure. A lack of coordination was a common concern among interviewees, especially in Ghana and Tanzania. For Ghana, this may be unexpected in light of the new institutional arrangement created for the purpose of SDG coordination. Overall, we find a tension between allocating responsibilities in line with pre-existing institutional mandates and creating new arrangements, seeking to secure a holistic steering approach. It is premature to assess if one approach is better than the other for goal realisation. By analysing 19 Voluntary National Reviews, one recent study finds that SDG 1 on poverty reduction and SDG 8 on economic growth are by far the most prioritised goals (Forestier and Kim 2020). This comes as no surprise as for many countries this is in line with existing development policies. In Tanzania, for instance, economic growth and industrialisation are viewed as the country's way out of poverty. An early study of holistic policy integration could not confirm that such integration was based on interlinkages between SDGs, nor on countries' level of income or degree of political centralisation. Instead, the characteristics of domestic policymaking processes were likely to determine implementation strategies of individual states. For example, path dependency seems to have been critical in Turkey, while in Colombia new policy measures and institutional arrangements had been used (Tosun and Leininger 2017). Our case studies show that different levels of socio-economic development do not determine how responsibility is organised. Rather, domestic politics, power relations, and institutions shape domestic uptake of the SDGs. This is confirmed in a recent study of Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay, which also calls attention to the role of resources, capacities, and prior experiences of civil society and subnational governments (Siegel and Lima 2020).

When it comes to responsibility beyond national citizen constituencies, the Swedish government places more emphasis on international obligations, compared to Tanzania and Ghana, This more cosmopolitan outlook,

reflected in traditional support for multilateralism and international development cooperation, is not surprising, given that Sweden ranks in the top in terms of chances of realising the SDGs domestically. We have observed a tendency in high-ranking countries to put more emphasis on integrating the SDGs into policies on international development cooperation and foreign affairs. While this was the case in Sweden at the outset, this had changed a few years into our period of study. A recent study shows that in Finland, mainstreaming of the SDGs has largely been limited to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and its development policy departments. Despite a national institutional framework seemingly conducive to policy integration, traditional sectoral divisions remained between development policy and sustainability as an environmental issue (Ylönen and Salmivaara 2020). At the same time, the Swedish government – and other democratic governments for that matter – considers domestic public opinion when deciding on spending tax money on international development cooperation. In this sense, the legitimacy of the 2030 Agenda is closely connected to its realisation. In particular, the Swedish case shows that there is not as of 2020 political agreement on how to balance national and international obligations in the 2030 Agenda case. Reactions by political opposition parties to the government bill on the 2030 Agenda align with prior political cleavages on the appropriate extent of Swedish international commitments.

Finally, the conceptual framework conveyed that through accountability, political actors need to answer for how they have exercised their decision-making power and their political choices related to assuming and realising responsibilities. This means that the existence of accountability mechanisms in itself may serve to nurture the realisation of responsibility, with decision-makers knowing that they will have to answer for their performance. If responsibilities are not well defined, politicians and officials have little guidance for their actions and those to whom they are accountable will not have a sufficient basis against which to evaluate their actions. Therefore, effective channels for holding political decisions-makers accountable towards those who have granted them power are crucial for the legitimacy of political systems in the eyes of constituencies. This also applies to long-term political goals where public promises are made, even if a lack of accountability for such goals does not necessarily undermine the legitimacy of the political system as such. In short, accountability affects perceptions of political legitimacy, completing a full circle of interlinkages between our three central concepts.

Already during intergovernmental negotiations before 2015, accountability in the form of follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda was a politically sensitive topic for the large majority of governments. Any form of binding accountability mechanism was interpreted as interference with national sovereignty (Global Policy Watch 2016). Our case studies have shown that the annual UN High-level Political Forum has accelerated the creation of national baseline reports and the development of indicators against which to

measure progress at the national level. Lyytimäki et al. (2020) find that the risk of nonuse of indicators is larger than overuse or misuse in the cases of Finland and Germany. Voluntary National Reviews submitted to the High-level Political Forum set forth the official version of how governments take on the 2030 Agenda. These reviews may hold the potential to enable learning from national experiences and to promote accountability to citizens (Fukuda-Parr et al. 2019). Our interviewees agreed that the High-level Political Forum did enable peer learning but, overall, they put more emphasis on parliaments as the main channel for demanding accountability of governments with regard to SDGs attainment. Considering the slow pace of policy adoption and the unclear status of the SDGs as steering instruments, interviewees convey the impression that accountability is foremost a future concern. Despite different political systems and different levels of socio-economic development, the SDGs have not featured prominently in political debate or among voter priorities in any of the three countries during elections.

For their part, civil society organisations are expected to facilitate accountability relations between governments and citizens in all three countries but so far, they have primarily influenced awareness creation and agenda setting. A shrinking space for civil society in Tanzania impedes its ability to scrutinise government performance, not only with regard to the SDGs. In addition, media and members of parliament are reported to be subject to increasingly authoritarian measures. Moreover, there are nascent regional follow-up attempts. In the case of Ghana and Tanzania, the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, convened by the UN Economic Commission for Africa, undertakes an annual review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and African Union Agenda 2063.[1] In the case of Sweden, European Union institutions have created an additional set of SDG indicators to underpin nascent EU statistical review procedures. In brief, international peer-review reporting has triggered governments to advance efforts towards SDG attainment, evincing a mutually supportive relationship between accountability and responsibility. International exposure and an explicit political will to act as role-models have created standards against which to hold governments accountable in the cases of Ghana and Sweden, while less so in Tanzania. In sum, accountability concerns tap into broader struggles over authority and the exercise of power, crucial also for the legitimacy of a political order (Olsen 2014).

To conclude, our cases make clear that legitimacy, responsibility, and accountability may reinforce each other, and that a lack of one of these qualities undermines the others (see Table 6.1 for a summary). In the case of the 2030 Agenda, their interlinkages are strengthened by persistent international expectations on governments to arrange stakeholder consultations, to create SDG institutions, and to undertake review of progress and account for domestic efforts to work towards the SDGs. Yet the degree to which these qualities are in effect in place domestically is determined by the broader domestic political system and degree of democracy. This book

Table 6.1 Summary of empirical findings and their theoretical implications

	Empirical findings	*Theoretical implications*
Legitimacy	More active global legitimation than national, stakeholder focus (much trust in civil society). Perceptions of input legitimacy based on UN origin and consultations. Still elite project, lack of citizen awareness. Substantive legitimacy but with question marks on feasibility (Ghana, Tanzania) and on lack of human rights, democracy, wanting higher bar (Sweden). Importance of future output legitimacy. Annual negotiations on ministerial declaration at High-level Political Forum may undermine global political status of 2030 Agenda.	Rather than delegitimation, neglect or lack of knowledge is an antithesis of legitimation. Concern with relationship between citizens and political institutions should remain central despite stakeholder focus in global consultations. A plausible temporal sequence of legitimation strategies: expert-, input-, substantive, output-based. Need to theorise a spectrum of global/national nexuses due to domestic political differences.
Responsibility	Choice of new institutional arrangements (Ghana) or existing ones (Tanzania, Sweden) does not depend on political system. Lack of resources (Tanzania, Ghana), struggles with holistic approaches in public administration (all). More emphasis on international obligations for Sweden, but subject to domestic politics.	Capacity (material and institutional) is a central enabling and limiting principle of responsibility. Contested reach of international obligations, cosmopolitan visions not empirically supported.
Accountability	Thus far more horizontal global accountability relations around SDGs (Voluntary National Reviews). High expectations on civil society but risk of political co-optation. Vertical domestic political accountability depends on integration in ordinary processes, broader democratic qualities and civil society space. High-level Political Forum has not (yet) strengthened accountability towards citizens.	Indicator review moulds accountability relations. International review and politicisation may trigger vertical accountability. The global-national nexus contains long but diluted chains of accountability.
Interlinkages	Strong legitimacy beliefs attached to the 2030 Agenda among elites have enabled allocation of 2030 Agenda responsibilities into domestic institutions (all three countries), preparing for realisation of responsibility, with high expectations on accountability to advance implementation efforts.	Accountability is crucial for legitimacy and responsibility in the case of long-term policy cycles of global origin. The global-national nexus is shaped by friction between long-term global policy cycle and short-term domestic politics cycle.

demonstrates that the interplay between legitimacy, responsibility, and accountability continues to evolve at the global-national nexus. Having its origin in a global intergovernmental agreement, the 2030 Agenda brings legitimacy challenges additional to those faced by national political institutions in terms of whose legitimacy perceptions count. In individual countries, the SDGs do not encounter a blank sheet but rather a multi-layered web of sustainable development politics, ranging from the global to the local. The legitimacy of the 2030 Agenda therefore may affect what role it comes to play at national and local levels and the extent to which political institutions and individuals at those levels consider it their responsibility to realise the SDGs. As the year 2030 approaches, output legitimacy will grow in importance, meaning that the extent to which actual goal fulfilment contributes to solving global problems eventually becomes decisive for the 2030 Agenda's legitimacy. Moreover, the division of responsibility becomes more intriguing when there is a global dimension to it, triggering tensions around the responsibilities of rich countries in relation to national responsibility, not least for financing implementation of the SGDs. Again, the relationship between responsibility and accountability is close. At the global-national nexus, horizontal peer review among governments intersects with hierarchical accountability of domestic politics. Chains of accountability become long at this nexus, ranging in theory from the UN to national governments to parliaments to voters. At the same time, many kinds of actors beyond political spheres have engaged in attempts to fulfil the SDGs, including pressuring political actors to take responsibility for its realisation. These actors are not part of political accountability chains and often operate cross-borders through advocacy or in the market.

6.3 Continuity and change: a political agenda with transformative potential?

We continue by discussing in what regards the 2030 Agenda is, after five years, about continuity and change and what transformative potential it may hold for the future. Even if over the years there have been several parallel global policy processes related to sustainable development, we have chosen three of these for putting the 2030 Agenda in perspective. We first compare over time, relating the 2030 Agenda to the UN Agenda 21, which was adopted in 1992, and to the Millennium Development Goals, adopted in 2000 (see Section 1.3). These are central historical predecessors of the 2030 Agenda and therefore obvious points of comparison. Next, we compare across issue realms by discussing the transformative potential of the 2030 Agenda in relation to the contemporary international human rights framework. The latter covers similar substantive ground as the SDGs but is built around international law rather than political goals. We then sketch three scenarios for the future potential of the 2030 Agenda. Because this book has not aimed to assess how goal fulfilment advances, the change we

are concerned with is mainly of an institutional and policymaking kind. Moreover, as already stated, it is premature to assess goal fulfilment only a third into the SDG era.

Starting with a comparison between the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 21, there is striking continuity. The main similarities are an emphasis on local participation, a holistic approach to sustainability, initial political momentum, and the development of indicators. Agenda 21 was globally agreed, adopted at the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, and contained sustainability demands on all countries. In addition to substantive goals, Agenda 21 also called for greater local ownership of and participation in decision-making on sustainability affairs. In fact, the UN "major groups" system, which enabled a range of societal actors to be represented in Open Working Group negotiations during 2013–2014, emerged out of Agenda 21 (Kamau et al. 2018). In contrast to the 2030 Agenda, Agenda 21 was quickly engaged with at local levels in Sweden. Research demonstrates that Sweden showed the earliest start among European countries and the highest part of local governments having Agenda 21 activity. Yet, when conflicts arose between environmental concerns and economic growth projects, the latter tended to be prioritised. This was particularly the case for transportation and traffic issues (Forsberg, 2002). Another study finds that experts and substance goals predominated over procedural goals related to public participation (Feichtinger and Pregernig, 2005). During the 1990s, work with Agenda 21 was channelled into ordinary procedures of public authorities, during a phase of consolidation. This was followed by an integration of Agenda 21 objectives into more general sustainable development policies, where it could in the end no longer be discerned in its own right. Our interviews showed that officials at the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs looked at experiences from Agenda 21 when planning SDG work (interviews Stockholm 2015, 2019; Persson et al. 2016). Even if we have only been able to find limited research on Agenda 21 with regard to Ghana and Tanzania (Kassim and Ali 2006; Vordzorgbe 2006) and we did not ask interviewees about Agenda 21, this trajectory inspires one of our scenarios below. Like the 2030 Agenda, its predecessor called for follow-up and review and the UN Commission on Sustainable Development was created for that purpose. Agenda 21 also called for the development of indicators to enable review of progress. Such indicators were developed in several editions by experts and a third revision was agreed on in 2006, containing 96 indicators of sustainable development.[2]

We find overall less continuity when comparing the SDGs to the MDGs, even though the latter are of more recent origin than Agenda 21. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the MDGs were created on the basis of the Millennium Declaration, adopted by the UN General Assembly for the period of 2000 to 2015. Yet the MDGs as such were created through a top-down bureaucratic procedure, while the SDGs were based on broad consultations among

stakeholders. Many scholars have applauded the fact that, in contrast to the MDGs, the SDGs raise challenges for all kinds of countries and are in this sense a more universal agenda. Moreover, the 17 SDGs encompass a more holistic understanding of sustainable development than the eight MDGs. As emphasised by Fukuda-Parr and Muchala when exploring the transition from MDGs to SDGs, "the adoption of the SDGs is a game changer in thinking about development. Its redefinition transitions development from a post-colonial to a global project" (Fukuda-Parr and Muchhala 2020: 9). The way indicators are constructed also differs between the two sets of goals. MDG targets were constructed to halve poverty based on proportional goals, while the SDGs seek to eliminate poverty entirely. There was more emphasis on international development cooperation as a source of funding of the MDGs than what has been the case for the SDGs. Interestingly, the SDGs are more in line with the spirit of the Millennium Declaration as such than what was the case for the MDGs themselves. At the time of the creation of the MDGs, there was little inclination to include politically sensitive issues of the Millennium Declaration among its measurable goals. Nevertheless, the MDGs paved the way for the SDGs even if goal fulfilment was uneven across the world and did not accelerate until close to the deadline in 2015. This indicates that even if our country cases attest to a slow start for the SDGs, the process of goal fulfilment may escalate the closer we get to the end year of 2030.

In sum, we find more continuity between the Agenda 21 of 1992 and the 2030 Agenda than between the SDGs and MDGs, particularly in terms of initial political momentum, a holistic approach, and applicability to all countries (see Section 1.1). During 2015, the "super-year of development", a sequence of high-level meetings pushed the global sustainable development agenda forward. Arguably, in a world divided along several lines of contention, common goals and targets may function as a uniting element of international cooperation (Saith 2006; Jönsson et al. 2012: 114). While most recent publications make comparisons between the SDGs and MDGs, rather than with Agenda 21, such comparisons do not necessarily do justice to the transformative potential of the SDGs due to differences in terms of level of ambition of the two goal sets. Moreover, this book has demonstrated that the global-national nexus is shaped by friction between policy and politics. This nexus is where 15-year-long policy cycles of globally adopted agendas (Agenda 21, the MDGs, and the 2030 Agenda) interact with domestic four- or five-year long politics cycles. The shorter time horizon of domestic politics is rarely conducive to the realisation of global agendas. For instance, our case studies have demonstrated that domestic uptake of the 2030 Agenda may be affected by the timing of elections, regime change, and voter preferences.

Our third point of comparison for the 2030 Agenda is the contemporary international human rights framework. The preamble of *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* asserts that this

agreement "is grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, international human rights treaties, the Millennium Declaration and the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document. It is informed by other instruments such as the Declaration on the Right to Development" (§10). In fact, the substance of most SDGs is already covered by international human rights law. Yet, in the part where the SDGs are presented, references to "rights" are made only in a few of the 169 targets (e.g. Target 1.4, 5.6, 8.8) and to "human rights" only once, in Target 4.7. Human rights scholars have critically interrogated the potential of the SDGs to reduce inequalities in order to leave no one behind (Winkler and Williams 2017). Several interviewees had observed that the SDGs were less politically contentious than human rights. This feeds into the third scenario below. One interviewee in Tanzania saw the SDGs and the principle of "leaving no one behind" as a way to work with sensitive issues in effect related to rights. Along similar lines, a Swedish interviewee noted that the rights of sexual minorities were easier to discuss at the High-level Political Forum than in human rights accountability mechanisms. There were fewer hostile reactions by states in the former (interview Stockholm 2018). At the same time, other Swedish interviewees believed that the 2030 Agenda risked placing human rights issues in the background (interview Stockholm 2018) and that a main challenge was to secure a rights-based perspective when implementing the SDGs (interview Stockholm 2016). Two civil society representatives noted the absence of human rights references during the national kick-off event for the 2030 Agenda in Sweden: "I found it sad that not a single speaker talked about human rights during yesterday's kick-off" (interview Stockholm 2016). One interviewee recalled that when developing SDG indicators in the UN, it was much harder to reach agreement on issues related to women's rights than for many other matters (interview Stockholm 2017). And another interviewee revealed that sexual and reproductive health rights were among the politically contentious issues during intergovernmental negotiations on the Ministerial Declaration of the High-level Political Forum of 2017 (interview Stockholm 2018). Accountability procedures for international legally binding human rights instruments are highly institutionalised, yet suffer from politicisation and a lack of enforcement powers. In brief, the SDGs overlap in a substantive sense with international human rights agreements, while our material points to several tensions between these two frameworks. The 2030 Agenda is not constructed around a rights-bearing legal subject but rather around politically agreed goals belonging mainly to the duty holder. Nevertheless, progress towards the SDGs implies improvement of certain human rights.

Bringing the pieces together, we wrap up by outlining three scenarios for the future of SDG politics at the global-national nexus (cf. Bexell and Jönsson 2016). These scenarios take their point of departure in the different senses in which we understand the SDGs to be political: they are the result of political negotiations; the main responsibility for their realisation

resides with political institutions; their realisation is far from a technical matter; goal fulfilment requires political prioritisations and will involve goal conflicts; the pre-existing political setting has a large impact; and political agency and choice matter. The role of scenarios is to suggest possible consequences of political decisions and how external circumstances impact challenges related to political responsibility, legitimacy, and accountability. The scenarios aim to illustrate that the continued destiny of the 2030 Agenda is dependent both on active political choices made along the way and on broader economic and political structures.

A first scenario is one of political neglect and diminishing resources geared towards realisation of the 2030 Agenda. High ambitions stated in *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* are not translated into domestic practice. Instead, path dependency leads to business as usual politics after initial political momentum has passed. National political self-interests take over and there is little inclination to find compromises when goal conflicts arise. Competing issues, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, financial downturns, or unregulated migration flows, dominate the political agenda and ensuing political prioritisations. Increasing populism encourages short-term political horizons and contributes to voter neglect. The legitimacy of the SDGs becomes weakened because of such neglect, and may even lead to delegitimation due to vested interests. The lack of prioritisation of the SDGs also leads to diffuse allocations of responsibility, which, in turn, weakens accountability measures. In countries with increasing authoritarianism, active participation of societal actors in SDG work is difficult. The impact of the SDGs will be marginal.

A second scenario is muddling through, where the 2030 Agenda remains one of many policy frameworks around which sustainable development politics revolve. Formal responsibilities are in most cases clearly distributed within political institutions and processes. However, its political status is somewhat unclear, and the formal distribution of responsibility does not change much in practice. The choice of aligning the SDGs with existing structures and agencies initially facilitates broad responsibility, but eventually the SDGs become subsumed under pre-existing obligations and goal conflicts. Follow-up processes are centred around quantitative measures and rankings, neglecting the holistic approach of the 2030 Agenda. The SDGs become a concern for global elites but not for citizens in general. As a result, the SDGs hold high legitimacy among elites but only moderate knowledge about the SDGs develops among citizens. Even if the SDGs are part of everyday politics, they are not an explicit concern in elections, and consequently accountability will be exercised mainly through a strengthened High-level Political Forum and other horizontal accountability measures. Uptake of the 2030 Agenda ultimately depends on the domestic political context.

A third scenario envisions a strong political status for the 2030 Agenda, even if it is not fulfilled in all countries and across all goals. The agenda strengthens holistic approaches to sustainable development at all

policymaking levels. All sectors of society join forces to realise responsibility, underpinned by strong legitimacy perceptions with regard to the SDGs, and clear and active accountability channels. Substantial resources are devoted to spreading knowledge on the 2030 Agenda, leading to more SDG engagement on the part of individual voters, who, in turn, push politicians to prioritise the SDGs. This provides a basis for holding politicians and policymakers at all levels accountable for their SDG obligations until 2030. The impact of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs will be substantial and reaching beyond the 2030 deadline. The SDGs have forced policymakers to make long-term decisions in the interest of sustainability. Pressing issues such as climate change, migration flows, and recurrent pandemics are not perceived to be competing with the 2030 Agenda. Rather, addressing these issues is considered to contribute to attaining the SDGs. At the same time, strong political emphasis on the 2030 Agenda comes at the expense of strengthening the international human rights framework, particularly human rights that are not covered by the 2030 Agenda such as certain political and civil rights. This is due to the less politically sensitive nature of the 2030 Agenda as compared to international human rights agreements.

On balance, a third into the period of the SDGs, we submit that there is overall continuity in the politics of sustainable development but also indications of change. The evidence available five years after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda implies that we find the second scenario most plausible. Global norms related to sustainable development have been strengthened through the political momentum generated by the universal adoption of the 2030 Agenda in 2015. Holistic approaches have gained ground, even if they are difficult to live up to in practice, and the North-South divide has become less pronounced in development discourse. Review and reporting practices have been institutionalised through the SDG indicators and the annual UN High-level Political Forum. Increased statistical capacity has facilitated monitoring of SDG progress and thereby strengthened prospects of holding those who are allocated responsibilities for SDG realisation to account. Sustainability projects that engage with individual SDGs can legitimise their objectives with reference to a globally adopted goal, benefitting from embedding their work in a broader normative setting. Furthermore, global institutional discourses on sustainable development have increasingly streamlined around the SDG vocabulary and logos, providing a common reference frame on sustainable development across geographical borders and political institutions.

6.4 Future research and policy implications

This very last section highlights the main messages of the book and relates these to suggestions for future studies on the politics of goal-setting on sustainable development. The section also points to the ways in which the book is relevant for policy practice, sketching policy implications at a general level.

   In this book, we have investigated sustainable development goal-setting at the global-national nexus on the basis of a conceptual framework that puts three normative qualities of political decision-making centre stage: legitimacy, responsibility, and accountability. Our main message, put in terms that can also be translated into policy recommendations, is that legitimacy is required to obtain broad political ownership for the SDGs in order for them to become effective in addressing cross-border sustainability challenges. Responsibility needs to be clearly distributed among political institutions if the SDGs are to be realised. Through accountability, political actors need to answer for how they exercise power and make political choices related to the goals, which, in turn, is crucial for the legitimacy of the SDGs. To put this differently, legitimacy cannot be taken for granted in the transition from global agreement to national policymaking and practice. The legitimacy of the SDGs is something that needs to be nurtured through constant attention. This can be done through raised awareness or concrete actions such as mainstreaming the SDGs into policymaking or creating appropriate institutions. Tensions related to responsibility do arise when high ambitions such as the ones embedded in the 2030 Agenda are to be converted into action, in particular in resource-scarce settings and when political will or leadership is not present. This means that goal fulfilment is impacted negatively if responsibility is not clearly allocated. In contrast, if responsibility is clearly allocated, chances of SDG realisation increase considerably. At the global-national SDG nexus, horizontal accountability relations are privileged thus far. For vertical accountability to become stronger, the SDGs must probably become more politicised and well-known to citizens across the world. On balance, a third into the period of the SDGs, we have demonstrated that there is overall continuity in the politics of sustainable development but also indications of change.

   As alluded to in Chapter 2, there are strengths as well as limitations of the book's conceptual framework. While the three concepts are analytically distinct, there are empirical overlaps. The framework elevates some aspects while obscuring others. Employing three concepts means that we have not been able to do justice to the theoretical and empirical richness of each concept. Moreover, looking both to global and to national processes has also put limitations with regard to the empirical depth of the study of each country. Yet our contribution is to offer a novel way of studying the realisation of the SDGs, not intended to capture every detail. A strength of our conceptual framework is that it has allowed us to focus on more general characteristics of the global-national nexus without losing sight of the SDG context. Evidently, the framework does not draw attention to all ways in which the SDGs are potentially political. This remains for future studies to consider through the use of alternative theoretical perspectives and conceptual lenses. The same is true for the normatively based selection of key concepts in the book. Needless to say, there are other candidates for central qualities of political decision-making that warrant scholarly attention. In particular,

different democratic qualities ought to be investigated next, such as political equality, participation, representation, and inclusion. We believe that our conceptual framework works well in diverse political settings but there are of course limits to its domain of applicability. We are also well aware that our access to different kinds of empirical material affects our analysis and the reach of empirical conclusions. That said, the comparison of quite different countries has hopefully yielded new and interesting results. For the continued study of legitimacy in global governance, our book has demonstrated that the antithesis of legitimation is often neglect and indifference rather than active delegitimation. This means that pre-existing perceptions of international organisations policymaking do not change quickly among citizens. Moreover, recent survey experiments have demonstrated that negative messages issued by elites concerning international organisations have stronger effects on citizens' legitimacy perceptions than positive messages (Dellmuth and Tallberg 2020). This means that if delegitimation attempts are directed towards the 2030 Agenda, particularly if undertaken by elites, they are likely to have more impact on citizens' legitimacy perceptions than the legitimation attempts we have studied in this book.

Our conceptual framework moreover provides a foundation for studies on other countries than the ones selected in this book. Continued research on the role of domestic political institutions for the realisation of the 2030 Agenda is needed in light of the encompassing responsibilities assumed by governments when adopting *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* in 2015. Overall, our observations in this book underpin the continued need for the social sciences not to shy away from studying political conflict and the role of politics for implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Indeed, the Independent Group of Scientist pointed out in the first *Global Sustainability Report* that "[s]ustainable development, while identifying a bridge to the future, is inevitably dependent on the making of choices through the political process" (Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the Secretary-General 2019: 5). The report moreover asserted that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development defines "a political space" within which the UN member states have committed themselves to managing relationships among human beings as well as between human beings and the planet. Importantly, the report stated that both socio-economic and political equalities are fundamental for the principle of leaving no one behind in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and that attaining such equality requires deep structural transformation of social, political, and economic relations (Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the Secretary-General 2019: 24, 31). These arguments align with the present book's observations on a gap between elites and citizens with regard to processes related to the 2030 Agenda, even if there is increasing engagement with the agenda on local levels, as the case of Sweden demonstrated. Most centrally, the *Global Sustainability Report 2019* reinforces our message on the importance of studying the politics of sustainable development in light of research addressing

quality of government and democratic values at the domestic level, vital for political equality. Our country cases show that the domestic politics cycle (of four to five years) should at this point become a more prominent research concern in social science research on the 2030 Agenda than the global policy cycle (of 15 years).

In general, the 2030 Agenda has not only contributed to more holistic views on sustainable development among politicians but also among researchers who pay increasing attention to policy integration and goal interlinkages. Moreover, studies are needed on how the 2030 Agenda is taken from the national level to the local municipal policymaking level. There, representative political institutions will continue to face legitimacy challenges related to the 2030 Agenda in light of diverging views on the best route to a more sustainable world. Further comparative studies of countries' follow-up and review practices are also warranted. Such comparisons can underpin more comprehensive theorising of the politics of numbers in the domain on sustainable development than we have sought to provide in the present book. Our conclusions indicate that governance by numbers will only grow in prominence until 2030. Research questions should be asked as to whose voice matters for policymakers when review and follow-up schemes are constructed on the basis of SDG indicators. The relationship between what is measurable through SDG indicators and the broader goals of *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* is also central to scrutinise in the long run.

Our conclusions lead to a number of policy implications and several of these have been alluded to earlier in this chapter. A clear allocation of responsibility facilitates both implementation and ensuing accountability measures. Inclusive processes may strengthen the legitimacy of the SDGs which, in turn, increases the chances of the SDGs to be realised. A stronger role of national parliaments is warranted to obtain a more systematic political foundation and allowing for long-term funding decisions as well as holding government accountable. Hence, there is reason to take proactive measures to strengthen the role of national parliaments in the case of the 2030 Agenda. Governments should seek broad political agreement in parliament on policy plans for the implementation of the SDGs until 2030, aiming to avoid reconsideration of SDG policy priorities after each national election. Parliamentarians should on their own initiative make use of their monitoring powers to put the spotlight on how the government fares with regard to realising the SDGs: for example through political debate on the state budget, by creating a parliamentary committee dedicated to the 2030 Agenda, or by assigning the task to monitor implementation of the SDGs to an existing parliamentary committee. Reaching out to voters, parliamentarians can more explicitly refer to the 2030 Agenda when debating sustainable development politics in order to spread knowledge about its existence. Knowledge on the SDGs must reach beyond a limited circle of people. Consultations at an early stage of policymaking will not suffice to secure

legitimacy of the SDGs if the majority of the population is excluded. Rather, in order to realise the SDGs, political institutions at all levels need to adopt the 2030 Agenda and align it with their mandates. If domestic representative political institutions do not engage with the 2030 Agenda there is a risk that a gap is created between what governments do in intergovernmental bodies and what kind of policies citizen constituencies support. Finally, it is important to acknowledge that sustainable development remains a politically charged field replete with goal conflicts that need to be addressed through national political processes. Representative democratic political institutions should therefore become central arenas for debating the 2030 Agenda as part of the broader politics of sustainable development. Opinions will continue to differ on what sustainable development should entail and how to reach it.

Notes

1 https://sdg.iisd.org/events/africa-regional-forum-on-sustainable-development-2019
2 https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/topics/indicators.

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