



# **The Role of the United Nations**

## **in a complex and global world**

**A study of the Sustainable  
Development Goals and the  
challenges of the United Nations**

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## ABSTRACT

The world's current international systems, including, among others, the United Nations, was established and built in the era following the Second World War. But the world has changed a lot since then making it relevant to question whether our international systems are fit to address the 21<sup>st</sup> century and its challenges.

This project explores and explains the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and whether they can be used to improve and redefine the United Nations, researching the effect and influence of the Sustainable Development Goals on the challenges of the United Nations. At first, the project presents relevant literature regarding the challenges of the United Nations taking point of departure in the book "What is wrong with the United Nations and how to fix it" by Thomas G. Weiss (2016), which is used as the theoretical framework. The project also briefly describes how the United Nations is structured, including a presentation of the 2030 agenda.

Through an analysis of the Sustainable Development Goals and how they relate to the challenges of the United Nations, I discover the goals most relevant for solving the challenges of the United Nations and how these goals are making progress in regard to national sovereignty, artificial grouping, lack of coordination, and excessive bureaucracy and limited leadership.

Conclusively I consider and discuss how the Sustainable Development Goals co-align with the purpose of the United Nations. Moreover, the increasing power of the third United Nations, global players such as international corporations and nongovernmental organizations, is discussed by including Sustainable Development Goal 17 about partnerships. Lastly, I discuss and reflect on the theoretical and methodological consequences.

The result of this project is that the Sustainable Development Goals are relevant in responding to the challenges of the UN, especially goals 5, 10, 13, 16, and 17. SDG 5 brings attention and progress to the United Nations' gender imbalance. SDG 10 shifts the attention of the United Nations from states to individuals. SDG 13 requires for the member states to disregard national interests and agree on needed climate reforms. SDG 16 calls for changes to the United Nations' organizational structure, improving its coordination.

Furthermore, the Sustainable Development Goals presents a more universal framework compared to the former Millennium Development Goals, by including goals relevant to all member states of the United Nations. The 2030 agenda marks a shift from the traditional model of development, providing a more transformative vision that goes beyond the narrow vision of the Millennium Development Goals.

The thesis discovers that partnerships are important for the United Nations and that the third United Nations, including multinational corporations and nongovernmental organizations, must be more involved and better integrated in the United Nations' system for the United Nations to maintain its legitimacy as an international institution.

Finally, it concludes that the Sustainable Development Goals can be used to improve and redefine the United Nations, but that a definitive answer is impossible as the deadline for the 2030 agenda is 11 years away, making it unclear whether the goals will be reached or if important development goals and targets will be left behind.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>ASEAN</b>	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
<b>AU</b>	The African Union
<b>DSDG</b>	Division for Sustainable Development Goals
<b>ECHR</b>	European Court of Human Rights
<b>EU</b>	The European Union
<b>ICC</b>	International Criminal Court
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>MDG</b>	Millennium Development Goal
<b>NATO</b>	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
<b>NGO</b>	Nongovernmental Organization
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNDESA</b>	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>UN WOMEN</b>	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
<b>WB</b>	World Bank
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization
<b>WTO</b>	World Trade Organization
<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme
<b>UNFCCC</b>	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

The greatest challenges that the world face today transcend national borders and it is therefore necessary that these challenges be addressed jointly by all countries by realizing their mutual dependence. This international cooperation requires a global system or framework for managing it. Our current international system, including the United Nations, was created in a different era, following the Second World War. The United Nations was set up in 1945 with the intention of keeping international peace and security, build friendly relations between nations and obtain international cooperation. The United Nations began with a shared vision of keeping the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century from playing out like the first half. But the world and the threats and challenges it faces has changed significantly since then. It has therefore become relevant to question whether the United Nations is fit for the purpose to deal with the challenges and risks of the 21<sup>st</sup> century or if our present world has outgrown our international system.

For over seventy years, the UN has been part of shaping the world we know today. The UN have constantly been relied upon to respond to humanitarian disasters and to coordinate international efforts to relieve poverty and challenges of climate change, human rights and pandemics. In 2015 the UN marked its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary and it has become difficult to imagine a world without the UN even though it has experienced many ups and downs over the years. The UN has represented hope for a better world preventing conflict and raising awareness of importing issues such as poverty, human rights, and gender equality. The organization has been the foundation and source of many concepts and ideas during its 70 years, including concepts such as human development, peacekeeping, and sustainable development. Furthermore, the UN has sparked global networks and partnerships and it is a central part of global governance. However, even though it is possible to point to accomplishments in many areas of the UN, it is equally possible to point to the shortcomings and failures of the UN.

It is often said that the founders of the UN would not recognize the world today, a world facing issues such as climate change, overpopulation, terrorism, and cyber-attacks. One of the great transformations has been the making of a global community which goes far beyond the imagination of the founders. At the same time, much remains which the war-beaten generation of 1945 would



recognize; from power tensions and threat of nuclear war, to destructive nationalism and mass displacement. States continue to have a crucial role in global governance (Mingst, Karns & Lyon 2017). Therefore, efforts towards improving global governance needs to tackle both old and new challenges as well as address emerging and ancient realities.

The UN has received much praise and supporters of the UN argue that if the UN did not exist, a similar organization would have been created (Ibid.). However, the UN has also received much critique. The UN was established shortly after World War II under very specific circumstances. Since its establishment, the world has changed significantly but the basic structure and institutional landscape of the UN have remained unchanged. The UN system have been heavily criticized amongst other for its lack of change and adaption to present-day issues and challenges. Even though the UN and the world have experienced dreadful events there have not been any noteworthy changes to the organization (Weiss 2016).

In 2015, building on the MDGs, the UN and its member states adopted the SDGs. By adopting the SDGs, the UN recommitted itself to realize the MDGs as well as to go beyond the MDGs by focusing on social, economic, and environmental issues. Furthermore, the UN pledged to end poverty permanently and to take action on issues such as inequality, climate, health, and technology. The 2030 agenda presents a shared outline for peace and security for the planet and the people.

Whether the UN is already changing and adapting to the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is an interesting research topic, including the impact and influence of the new 2030 agenda and the SDGs on the challenges of the UN and its future role as a global actor.

## 2 RESEARCH QUESTION

Based on the presented research topic above, the overall goal of this thesis is to analyze the SDGs and if they are responding to the critique of the UN. This thesis seeks to further research the effect of the SDGs and their influence on the UN and its challenges. In doing so, the thesis examines the challenges of the UN. The thesis argues that the influence of the SDGs could be helpful in improving and redefining the UN.

In order to guide the research process, the following research question is formulated.

### RESEARCH QUESTION:

***Can the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals be used to improve and redefine the United Nations?***

In order to answer the above research question, it is necessary to answer the following sub-questions:

- a) What challenges are the United Nations facing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?
- b) In what way do the Sustainable Development Goals respond to the critique of the United Nations?
- c) Are the United Nations responding to the challenges by shifting from the Millennium Development Goals to the Sustainable Development Goals?

Part (a) explores the different challenges and limitations which the UN have been criticized of having. This is explored by presenting and reviewing relevant literature on what is wrong with the UN and the critique of the organization.

Part (b) identifies several challenges of the UN and SDGs relevant for addressing these challenges and analyzes selected SDGs and how they relate to the challenges of the UN.

Part (c) provides a broad view of the change in attitude from the MDGs to the 2030 agenda.

## 2.1 SCOPE AND DELIMITATIONS

Firstly, there are several transnational organizations and institutions of global governance, this thesis merely concerns the UN. This thesis focuses on exploring the influence of the SDGs on the challenges and problems of the UN. The UN is a complex organization and there are many areas and parts where challenges can be found. Therefore, the thesis focuses on a limited number of challenges and the UNs 2030 agenda. The thesis is limited to a specific theoretical framework regarding the challenges of the UN and other challenges which the UN might face are not taken into consideration. In regard to the data, other aspects, besides the SDGs, which could be having an effect on the UN are not taken into account in the analysis of this thesis as it focuses on the SDGs and their influence and effect on the UN. Consequently, the analysis deals mostly with internal challenges of the UN and the SDGs.

## 2.2 THESIS OUTLINE

To answer the research question, the thesis is structured as follows. The thesis starts with a presentation of the relevant literature on the challenges of the UN with point of departure in “What is wrong with the United Nations and how to fix it” by Thomas G. Weiss (2016). In the thesis, Weiss (2016) is used as the theoretical framework. The following methodology section reflects on the philosophical framework of the thesis, and the data collection.

The thesis then gives a brief presentation of the United Nations, including the structure of the organization and a presentation of the UNs development goals. This is followed by an analysis which analyzes selected SDGs and how they relate to the challenges of the UN.

The last part of the thesis discusses the findings of the analysis. This is done by looking at the SDGs and discussing whether they co-align with the purpose of the UN. Furthermore, the section discusses the increasing power of the third UN, including SDG 17 in the discussion. Lastly, this section entails a reflection on the theoretical and methodological choices and consequences in this thesis.

Finally, the thesis concludes and answers the research question and presents a perspective on the possibly subjects which could be interesting and relevant for further research.

### 3 THEORY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, I will examine some of the main problems and issues that the United Nations have been criticized of having. The literature review presents critique of the United Nations giving special attention to the book *“What is wrong with the United Nations and how to fix it”* by Thomas G. Weiss (2016). This is followed up by critiques from other scholars including critique which agree and even elaborate on the criticism set forth by Weiss (2016) as well as criticism which focus on other areas of the United Nations.

#### 3.1 GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

Weiss (2016) defines global governance as: ... *“collective efforts to identify, understand, or address worldwide problems that go beyond the capacity of individual states to solve”* (Weiss 2016: 227).

Global governance regards political cooperation between transnational actors whose aim is to negotiate and join forces on responses to problems and challenges which transcend national boundaries. Global governance includes a variety of cooperative, problem-solving activities which might be informal, such as practices and guidelines or temporary coalitions, or formal in the form of rules, laws and treaties and institutional structures established in order to manage communal affairs through a combination of actors such as IGO, states, and NGOs. Global governance entails institutions such as the World Bank and the UN which have limited power when it comes to enforcing compliance (Weiss 2016). Governance represents a process of institutions coordinating and managing international affairs. As such global governance becomes: *“... the totality of institutions, policies, rules, practices, norms, procedures, and initiatives by which states and their citizens try to bring order and predictability to their responses to such universal problems as warfare, poverty, and environmental degradation”* (Weiss 2016: 222).

The UN is the only intergovernmental organization with a truly global scope and an almost universal membership base which has an agenda entailing the largest range of governance issues. As an intergovernmental organization, the UN is built up of its member states, who choose what issues and subjects they will allow the UN and its organization to address and what resources the UN will

provide (Mingst, Karns & Lyon 2017). The UN diplomats are joined by NGOs, corporations, and civil society organizations in discussing issues both within and surrounding the UN in addressing the growing demands of a complex and globalized world, the increasing demands for global governance to manage transboundary problems such as terrorism, pandemics, and climate change. These increasing demands are testing the capability of the UN member states to engage in international cooperation and the UNs ability to function effectively (Ibid.).

### 3.2 WHAT IS WRONG WITH THE UNITED NATIONS

The United Nations has received much praise and recognition. According to Staur (2014), the UN possess several strengths, including its universal membership, its more effective partnership between developing and developed countries compared to other international forums, and that it is the best, and only, international organization able to manage the complexity of globalization. Supporters of the United Nations argue that if the United Nations did not exist, a similar international organization or institution would have been created (Mingst, Karns & Lyon 2017). However, the UN have received its fair share of critique, from Staur (2014) included.

The United Nations was established after the second World War under very specific historical settings and circumstances. Since then the United Nations have experienced a massive expansion in the number of member countries while the world has undergone decolonization processes and have seen great geopolitical changes as new economic powers have emerged. However, while the world has changed substantially since the establishment of the United Nations, the basic structure and institutional landscape of the world's organizations have, according to several scholars, pretty much remained the same.

Over the years, the United Nations system has become heavily criticized. Numerous scholars have come to express their concern and what they understand to be wrong with this intergovernmental organization including critique of its lack of change, development and adaption to modern-day

challenges. One of these scholars is Thomas G. Weiss. In his book: *"What is wrong with the United Nations and how to fix it"*, Thomas Weiss (2016) argues that the United Nations system is in desperate need of substantial change and transformation as it has not been able to adapt to the global challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. *"On the one hand, the framers of the UN charter would today have trouble recognizing the world organization because of extensive institutional adaptations since 1945, when many contemporary topics... were not on the international agenda. On the other hand, the founders would certainly find a familiar state-centric and decentralized institutional approach to problem solving that is incapable of addressing the kinds of life-threatening global challenges increasingly and routinely confronting humanity"* (Weiss 2016:3). Weiss (2016) argues that the United Nations for decades have been the paradigm of international relations and yet, there have not been any noteworthy changes to this paradigm since its establishment right after World War II, even though the world and the system have experienced extensive and shocking events such as the Cold War and 9/11 since then. Weiss (2016) questions what it will then take for the United Nations to change. Global institutions have never been more challenged than now nor more needed (Weiss 2016).

The book addresses the bigger questions of international relations and its structure as well as the interactions between states and how these should be organized in order to be able to tackle global issues facing the world today. In his diagnosis of the United Nations, Weiss (2016) considers four different levels of analysis, starting with a macroscopic perspective which is the relationships between the United Nations and the individual member states. He then considers the relationships between the different groups of states inside the United Nations and moves on to the many components and agencies of the United Nations and the clashes between these. Lastly, he considers the micro level of the United Nations which entails its employees, officers, and civil servants (Ibid.).

Weiss (2016) presents four major problems of the United Nations; national sovereignty (*Westphalia, alive but not well*), artificial groupings (*North-South theater*), lack of coordination (*Dysfunctional family*), and excessive bureaucracy and limited leadership (*Overwhelming bureaucracy and*

*underwhelming leadership*). The first two being a consequence of the UNs membership structure and the second two being a consequence of the UNs bureaucracy.

### 3.2.1 NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY

The problem with national sovereignty is, according to Weiss (2016), that the UN ends up managing global challenges based on the interest of member states, even though the most urgent challenges transcend national boundaries, such as in the case of human rights or where national interests often get in the way of human welfare. This is also the case when it comes to climate change, for example in the case of CUP15 in Copenhagen 2009, with the member states inability to agree on any major climate reform or concrete steps to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> (Stauer 2014). The UN was founded with the intention to serve and protect sovereign states but the global problems facing the world today requires an approach closer to world government (Ibid.).

### 3.2.2 ARTIFICIAL GROUPINGS

Weiss (2016) argues that there are artificial groups in the UN between member states from the North and the South. These artificial groupings are hurting the UN as the groups rarely reflect a set of common interests and instead end up paralyzing discussions (Ibid.). Furthermore, Staur (2014) argues that the change in the global power structure, with emerging countries, such a China and India, becoming more dominant players, is a paradigm shift of major importance for the UN. Mingst, Karns & Lyon (2017) points to this change in the power and the UN's lack of adaption to it as one of the UNs major problems, arguing that the Security Council still is structured in a way that reflects the power realities in 1945. All efforts to update the member structure have so far failed despite strong agreement on the need for reform. The voting in the Security Council, with the five permanent members having veto right, reflects a world long gone and is, according the Mingst, Karns & Lyon (2017), a core dysfunction in the UN as it leads to intergovernmental gridlock between the permanent five and the rest of the member states. Mingst, Karns & Lyon (2017) argues that it is necessary to create a new representation system in the Security Council which is more flexible to future shifts in power. Stauer (2014) also points to a shift in the power structure with the emerging

of non-state actors, such as multilateral corporations, international media, and global civil society organizations wanting to be part of the decision-making process alongside the UN member states. In addition, regional organizations, such as NATO, AU, EU, and ASEAN, are also becoming a bigger part of the international system (Stauer 2014).

### 3.2.3 LACK OF COORDINATION

Weiss (2016) argues that there is a lack of coordination between the many UN agencies, often having overlapping goals, which have them competing for investments and funding. Weiss (2016) describes the UN as a system made up of incoherent and disconnected agencies which are highly independent and spread worldwide. This has led to inefficiencies, overlapping functions, and duplication of work which consequently have compromised the UN's delivery on important challenges and issues such as the environment, women, and Internally Displaced People. The lack of coordination between the agencies and the multiple overlapping programs have made the UN slow when it comes to responding to humanitarian crisis such as HIV/AIDS and Ebola. Weiss (2016) argues that the UN's organizational structure creates either paralysis or competition over turf and resources.

### 3.2.4 EXCESSIVE BUREAUCRACY & LIMITED LEADERSHIP

Lastly, Weiss (2016) looks at the second UN, pointing out the UN's weak and limited leadership and its excessive bureaucracy and claims this to be a major issue for the UN and its ability to efficiently handle the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Mingst, Karns & Lyon (2017) joins Weiss (2016) on this point, arguing that the United Nations' agencies and bureaucracies are not fit to deal with rapid change or generate new and innovative thinking. Weiss (2016) argues that the overwhelming bureaucracy, filled with quotas and government nominations, have resulted in selection criteria for recruiting that are more associated with nationality than with competencies leading to selection of incompetent individuals. The UN is facing difficulties regarding recruiting and retaining qualified staff as well as promoting gender balance. From the establishment of the UN, the five permanent member states in the Security Council have held the right to nominate and basically select the officials occupying the cabinet of the Secretary General, a selection procedure that also applies to



many other positions in the UN. The staff and its impact and quality are, according to Weiss (2016), a variable that easily can be altered compared to the other problems and challenges that the UN is facing.

### 3.2.5 FIXING THE UNITED NATIONS

Weiss (2016) suggests several solutions for fixing what is wrong with the UN. Weiss (2016) argues that the solutions which he suggests are not all necessarily feasible. However, some of the solutions are grounded in past experiences and examples. Weiss (2016) points to the evolution of the Responsibility to Protect doctrine as an example of how new attitudes towards state responsibility and human rights are creating change. In discussing solutions to national sovereignty Weiss (2016) states that: *“The cure is a more inclusive definition of the vital interests of sovereigns. But even making modest inroads to include enlightened self-interest in erecting barriers to infectious diseases would constitute a substantial palliative to what ails the United Nations”* (Weiss 2016: 162). The UN member states have been able to move beyond the North-South alliances when it comes to issues such as women empowerment and human security as these issues shift the focus from individual states to individuals. Furthermore, in some cases the UN have created centralized funds in order to respond to crises which have encouraged better coordination between the UN agencies and departments. In improving the bureaucracy and civil servants of the UN, Weiss (2016) suggests a better representation of women in the UN, structured job rotations, a younger and more innovative staff, and more discipline for UN peacekeepers.

Conclusively, Weiss (2016) suggests that the international relations system makes a shift from global governance to global government. Weiss (2016) argues that the earlier generations of internationalist, more specific the internationalists of the 1940s, spoke highly and seriously of the world’s need for a world government whereas the internationalists of the 21<sup>st</sup> century hide behind the vague concept of global governance. Weiss (2016) does recognize the achievements which the UN has reached occasionally, bringing together the UN, national governments, and NGOs such as with the establishment of the Responsibility to Protect doctrine. The MDGs (and the SDGs) are also

the work of global governance created by the UN in collaboration with diplomats as well as outside experts from both the North and the Global South. According to Weiss (2016) global governance can be defined as: “... *the totality of institutions, policies, rules, practices, norms, procedures, and initiatives by which states and their citizens try to bring order and predictability to their responses to such universal problems as warfare, poverty, and environmental degradation*” (Weiss 2016: 222). Is global governance then enough? According to Weiss (2016) the biggest weakness of global governance is that its supporters and advocates regard global governance as the end goal instead of the steppingstone to global government. A more transient and temporary approach might be effective when a crisis arises, but Weiss (2016) argues that predictable and institutionalized responses are necessary in order to deal with recurrent challenges.

Weiss (2016) does not expect global government to become a reality any time soon and argues that his suggested solutions for fixing the UN are neither based on a miracle happening nor on a scientific breakthrough but instead are based on specific and reassuring examples which are possible to repeat. The UN, as an organization, is not yet equipped for making its own policy slogan; “*Delivering as One*”, a reality, a policy which was voiced by secretary general Kofi Annan and sustained by his successors. This global policy was meant to inspire coordination of efforts in serving the countries where the UN is doing its work and to move the UN towards operational efficiency. Weiss (2016) argues that the member states, especially the donor states, should demand more centralization and that this centralization should be applied across all the UN agencies and activities. Furthermore, Weiss (2016) adds that it is necessary that the World Bank and the IMF becomes part of “a more cohesive international regime”. This brings us back full circle to one of the main problems: national sovereignty. The nations’ officious protection of state rights is a core weakness standing in the way of “the consolidation of the organization’s power”. But there is hope. Weiss (2016) argues that national sovereignty is not necessarily unchallengeable or absolute, pointing to examples such as the EU and the ECHR which shows that national sovereignty can be adapted and changed through institutions which becomes better than the sum of its parts. And that is a great start.

## 4 METHODOLOGY

This section presents and reflects on the philosophical framework applied in the thesis and considers the chosen methods used to answer the research question: *Can the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals be used to improve and redefine the United Nations?* The following section offers a philosophical foundation for the thesis and presents the ontological and epistemological base. The methodological choices for data collection and analysis are described and discussed reflecting on the limitations and the practical capability. This section will include the overall empirical basis of the thesis and the choice of methods for data collection and the processing of this data. Furthermore, the scientific validity of the data will be discussed.

### 4.1 PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE

The aim of this section is to provide a philosophical foundation for this thesis and present the ontological and epistemological foundation. “... *assumptions about human knowledge and about the nature of the realities you encounter in your research inevitably shape how you understand your research questions, methods you used and how you interpret your findings*” (Crotty 1998: 129). It is therefore essential to explain the assumptions which underlie the thesis in order to understand its implications for the research. In understanding the philosophy of science/research two concepts, ontology and epistemology, are introduced. Ontology can be defined as: “... *philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality*” (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson 2012: 18). Epistemology can be defined as: “... *a general set of assumptions about ways of inquiring into the nature of the world*” (Ibid.). Knowledge is not simply knowledge. Making ontological and epistemological considerations are relevant as obtaining knowledge is not a given process. What is thought to be acceptable knowledge is related to different philosophies of science (Fuglsang, Hagedorn-Rasmussen & Olsen 2007). Research philosophy assumes how to perceive the world and therefore the adopted research philosophy guides how the knowledge is developed in the thesis. I do not intent to discuss or explain each research philosophy and method as I intent to keep this section related to this thesis. The purpose is to present the assumptions about the nature of the reality as well as how the knowledge is attained in this thesis, including what the chosen methodological

paradigm means for this particular thesis and what its possibilities and limitations are. The philosophical foundation depends on the methodological starting point, aim, and design (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson 2012).

Rationalism argues that it is necessary to have a theory about what is to be investigated before it is possible to do a scientific study. Before embarking on the actual study concepts and models need to be developed in order to explain the issues from multiple sides (Holm 2018). Rationalism is based on the fact that the researcher has some knowledge in advance whereas empirical research assume that the researcher knows nothing in advance. Rationalism requires that the researcher have some thoughts on the areas which the researcher wish to investigate in order to find what is relevant to continue working on (Ibid.). In researching the SDGs, concepts and knowledge as well as a theoretical framework were present before researching the data. The SDGs were specifically researched in regard to thoughts on the challenges of the UN, looking for areas of the SDGs that could influence the UN.

Kenneth Gergen, an American social constructivist, presents five different types of theories which deals with the world as a social construction: social constructionism, constructivism, radical constructivism, sociological constructionism, and social constructivism (Gergen 1999 in Holm 2018). These different distinctions, however, can be disregarded and combined to a more general term and position of social constructivism. Social Constructivism is the view that reality is something which is created by our discourses about the world. Reality does not exist outside our discursive construction of the reality. Social constructivism invites the researcher to critically review conventions and prejudgments (Holm 2018). This gives great insides into society and can therefore be a strong analytical instrument. Diagnosing what is wrong with the UN and what can help correct the ills is a reflection of a variety of perspectives and realities which depends on the analytical lenses of the researcher.

## 4.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design involves a framework of methods and techniques for efficiently answering the research question (Fuglsang, Hagedorn-Rasmussen & Olesen 2007). In planning for the answering of the research question there are several elements to consider such as the purpose of the research, the research strategy, and the role of the researcher (Ibid.). There are several types of research design. In this thesis, the purpose is to present a descriptive, diagnostic, and explanatory research about the UN and its challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Descriptive research is theory-based which offers insights into the how and why of research (Ibid.). This thesis wishes to describe if and how the SDGs are improving the UN. Diagnostic research is about evaluating the cause of a specific problem (Ibid.). This research design has three parts; inception of the issue, diagnosis of the issue, which will be touched upon in the theory section of the thesis, and solution of the issue, which is the main focus of the research as it seeks to examine in what way the SDGs are responding to the UN's issues and if the SDGs can be used to improve and redefine the UN. Explanatory research seeks to explain unexplored aspects of a topic through details about the what, how, and why (Ibid.). The purpose of the research is to increase the understanding of the SDGs' impact on the UN and provide, by analyzing the data, a better understanding of the topic explored in the research question.

Lastly, it is important to be aware of the double hermeneutics which is present in any social science and the researcher must therefore continuously be attentive to and examine the different meanings and interpretations that arise from context dependency (Sayer 1992).

## 4.3 DATA COLLECTION

The data collected for this thesis is secondary and mainly qualitative, but quantitative data is also collected. Qualitative data gives a holistic understanding as well as insights into complex realities and help capture underlying meanings and perceptions (Desai & Potter 2006). Quantitative data make it possible to be more objective while qualitative data entails leads to more subjective interpretations. Incorporating quantitative data limits the risk of the analysis being polluted by

wrong assumptions and biases. Furthermore, quantitative data increasing the opportunity for generalization (Ibid.).

The main data source of the thesis is data from the UN which includes UN reports such as the UN's report on progress towards the SDGs, as well as data from UN websites such as the website for the SDGs which entails information about the SDGs, their purpose, targets, and progress. The data material additionally includes reports, not produced by the UN, such as the Global Gender Gap Report (World Economic Forum) and relevant papers and articles. Some of the SDG targets are qualitative whereas some are more quantitative.

The credibility of research is depended on the concepts of validity, reliability, and generalization. The intention to generalize the findings in this thesis is limited as the research specifically is based on the UN and the SDGs. Findings about the UN and the SDGs are difficult to relate to other institutions and organizations as the UN is a unique international organization and the SDGs are an agenda created by the UN. The objective is to highlight specific issues, solutions, and improvements related the UN. The objective is not to transfer the findings in this thesis to other transnational organizations. However, the validity and reliability are of great importance for this thesis and have been carefully considered.

#### 4.3.1 SECONDARY DATA

The fact what the data for this thesis is based on secondary data has some strengths and some limitations. Data from the UN are big studies based on large pools of data collected from its 193 member states. Data such as reports compiled by the UN are very comprehensive and provide easy access to data which is collected and produced by the UN agencies as well as other international agencies. This comprehensive data strengthens the reliability. The UN has its own statistics division (the United Nations Statistics Division) which strives for a high level of accuracy and reliability and they regularly update its data and correct any errors (UN Data). However, there is of course a risk of bias, as the UN might present its data in a more compelling way. Secondary data can be subjective and have been pre-interpreted in a certain way. Secondary data from the UN might therefore reflect biases of those in power. An advantage of secondary data is the extent and range of the data

available which strengthens the validity (Fuglsang, Hagedorn-Rasmussen & Olsen 2007). One of the often challenges with primary data is representativeness. However, with UN data this is less problematic as the UN collects extensive data from 193 member states making the data very representative and comprehensive. However, secondary data have limitations. Firstly, the researcher has no control over the data collection or data processing as the data was collected for another purpose and the analyst might need to read between the lines to uncover limitations of data such as websites and articles (Ibid.). Furthermore, the data could be too general and not cover the exact information needs of the researcher. The comprehensive data which the UN has made available offers valid insights for further research.

## 4.4 DATA ANALYSIS

In investigating the future role of the UN with point of departure in the SDGs, and more specifically their effect on the improvement and renewal of the UN, certain questions become relevant to ask. How can the improvement and success of the UN be judged? Which criteria and measures can be used? The UN is an institution with numerous parts, so is it even possible to measure its success or failure as a whole or should it be evaluated in parts? How can it be answered whether the UN is meeting the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Which frame of reference should be used?

Weiss (2016) will be used as a theoretical framework. Weiss (2016) presents four major challenges of the UN and which will serve as the framework for the analysis of the potential of the SDGs to impact the development of the UN. The theoretical framework is presented in the theory section of this thesis. However, how can the improvement and success of these four challenges be judged? What indicators can be used to detect progress within these four challenges of the UN? Weiss (2016) presents several solutions for each of the four challenges of the UN. As Weiss (2016) and the four main challenges of the UN are used as the theoretical framework in this thesis, the suggested solutions will be used as indicators for measuring progress and analyzing the SDGs and whether they can be used to improve and redefine the UN and mitigate its challenges as well as analyzing if the UN and the SDGs are responding to these four challenges.

In analyzing the data, the data (the SDGs) have been coded according to the theoretical framework, including the challenges and solutions presented by Weiss (2016), in order to get at more systematic view of the data and to examine which SDGs are relevant in regard to the four main challenges of the UN.

### 4.4.1 DATA CODING

Coding is an analytical process where data, both quantitative and qualitative, is categorized in order to facilitate analysis (Desai & Potter 2006). Coding helps transform information or observations into meaningful and cohesive categories suitable for analysis. Codes are the concepts which link data to theory. The codes can be predefined by the researcher or they can occur inductively from the coding process (Ibid.). It is important to have a clear idea of the theoretical background so not to overlook potentially important information in the coding process. The coding in this thesis is deductive as the concepts and theories which will be used to process the data have been selected in advance. Theories and concepts together with the research question control the data chosen in the coding (Ibid.).

Weiss (2016) serves as the theoretical framework and the four challenges of the UN presented by Weiss (2016) will be the focus in the analysis, analyzing whether the SDGs are helping the UN solve these challenges. As mentioned above, Weiss (2016) suggests several solutions for each of the challenges. The aim of the data coding is to analyze/process the SDGs and whether they align with these solutions.

Weiss (2016) suggests 15 solution subjects to the four challenges of the UN. Three solutions for the challenge of national sovereignty, three

Challenges	Solutions	Keywords
National Sovereignty	International Peace & Security: R2P, Regional Groupings	human rights, responsibility, protect populations, duties of states, human welfare, EU, NATO, AU
	Human Rights: European Court, Protection Machinery	human rights, civil, social, cultural and economic rights, collective conciliator, international protection
	Sustainable Development: Health & Pandemics	health, elimination of pandemics, WHO, HIV/AIDS

Table 1: Example of data coding



solutions for artificial grouping, four solutions for the challenge of lack of coordination, and five solutions for the challenges of excessive bureaucracy and limited leadership. The four major challenges of the UN have been split into these suggested solutions. Each solution is then accompanied by several keywords which sum up the subjects and areas which are touched upon in each solution section presented by Weiss (2016). An example of this division, including the keywords, can be seen in Table 1 above. The data (the SDGs) are coded in accordance with the solutions and the respective keywords.

The full data coding chart can be found in Appendix 2.

4.4.2 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS: SDG SELECTION

The empirical findings of the data coding will be presented in this section. Weiss (2016) presents three solutions for the challenge of national sovereignty, three solutions for the challenge of artificial groupings, four solutions for the challenges of lack of coordination, and five solutions for the challenge of excessive bureaucracy and limited leadership. The SDGs relating the most to the solutions, presented by Weiss (2016) is SDG 16 which relates to 12 out of 15 of the solutions. SDG 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 9, and 12

Challenge	Solutions	Keywords	Sustainable Development Goals														
			GOAL 1	GOAL 2	GOAL 3	GOAL 4	GOAL 5	GOAL 6	GOAL 7	GOAL 8	GOAL 9	GOAL 10	GOAL 11	GOAL 12	GOAL 13	GOAL 14	GOAL 15
National Sovereignty	International Peace & Security: R2P, Regional Groupings	human rights, responsibility, protect populations, duties of states, human welfare, EU, NATO, AU															
	Human Rights: European Court, Protection Machinery	human rights, civil, social, cultural and economic rights, collective, conciliator, international protection															
	Sustainable Development: Health & Pandemics	health, elimination of pandemics, WHO, HQU/WHO															
Artificial Groupings	International Peace & Security: Landmines, Human Security	partnerships, human security, human rights, unite, people-centered, gender equality, environmental issues															
	Human Rights: Universality in Vienna, the Rome Statute	human rights, women's rights, NGOs, international Criminal Court															
	Sustainable Development: Millennium Development Goals, Global Compact	MDGs, SDGs, women's rights, development, environmental degradation, new partners, labor rights, human rights															

Table 2: Example of data coding

related to the lowest number of solutions by relating to only 2 out of 15 solutions. The top five SDGs, SDG 5, 10, 13, 16 and 17, relates to respectively 6, 8, 8, 10, and 12 out of 15 solutions. The sixth highest scoring goal, SDG 8, related to 4 out of 15 solutions. The majority of hits is to be found in the top section regarding the challenges of national sovereignty and artificial groupings where corresponding solutions get 41 hits from the SDGs. The solutions in the second half, regarding the challenges of lack of coordination, and excessive bureaucracy and limited leadership, get 31 hits from the SDGs.

Based on the data coding, five SDGs have been found to be especially relevant. This concerns SDG 5, SDG 10, SDG 13, SDG 16, and SDG 17. These SDGs relates to between 6 and 12 out of 15 solutions. The empirical findings regarding these five SDGs will be presented below.

SDG 5 concerning gender equality showed to be relevant in 8 out of 15 of the solutions, covering the challenges of national sovereignty, artificial groupings, lack of coordination, and excessive bureaucracy and limited leadership (see Appendix 2). Gender equality, women's rights, women in development, delivering as one, gender balance, and better representation of women are some of the keywords mentioned in the solutions presented by Weiss (2016) to the challenges of the UN, which relates to SDG 5. In discussing the challenge of lack of coordination, Weiss (2016) argues that: *"Lack of coordination and overlapping jurisdiction among multiple UN agencies has also hindered the UNs effectiveness at promoting women's empowerment, which has considerable ramifications for women and for the planet"* (Weiss 2016: 104). Furthermore, in regard to a solution to the challenge of excessive bureaucracy and limited leadership; "International Peace & Security: Disciplining Peacekeepers, Resolution 1325", Weiss (2016) presents the following: *"Recognizing that women have a vital role in conflict resolution and peacebuilding, and that peace is directly linked to equality between men and women, the resolution urged member states and the secretary general to mainstream a gender perspective and to appoint more women to decision-making positions at all institutional levels, but particularly senior ones"* (Weiss 2016: 208).

SDG 10 concerning reducing inequalities shows to be relevant in 10 out of 15 of the solutions, covering the challenges of national sovereignty, artificial groupings, lack of coordination, and excessive bureaucracy and limited leadership (see Appendix 2). Human rights, human security, civilian rights, under-represented nationalities and human development are some of the keywords mentioned in the solutions presented by Weiss (2016) to the challenges of the UN, which relates to SDG 10. In discussing a solution to national sovereignty; "Human Rights: European Court, Protection Machinery", Weiss (2016) presents the following: *"... the second half of the twentieth century brought conceptual and practical challenges to traditional notions of state sovereignty. The rapid development and expansion of the human rights regime, fueled by the work of the UN and the*

*proliferation of NGOs in the second half of the twentieth century, challenged state sovereignty”* (Weiss 2016: 153). Furthermore, in regard to a solution to artificial groupings; “International Peace & Security: Landmines, Human Security”, Weiss (2016) argues the following: *“Another issue that unites parts of both the North and South is the notion of human security, which focuses on the security of individual human beings, in contrast with the national security of the countries within which such individuals live”* (Weiss 2016: 165).

SDG 13 concerning climate action shows to be relevant in 6 out of 15 of the solutions, covering the challenges of national sovereignty, artificial groupings, and lack of coordination (see Appendix 2). Protecting the environment, environmental degradation, environmental issues, and elimination of pandemics are some of the keywords mentioned in the solutions presented by Weiss (2016) to the challenges of the UN, which relates to SDG 13. In discussing the challenge of lack of coordination, Weiss (2016) mentions that: *“What subject requires more pulling together of distinct perspectives than the protection and restitution of the natural environment?”* (Weiss 2016: 107).

SDG 16 concerning peace, justice and strong institutions shows to be relevant in 12 out of 15 of the solutions, covering the challenges of national sovereignty, artificial groupings, lack of coordination, and excessive bureaucracy and limited leadership (see Appendix 2). Accountability, integration of institutions, under-represented nationalities, human security, and discipline unites are some of the keywords mentioned in the solutions presented by Weiss (2016) to the challenges of the UN, which relates to SDG 16. In discussing a solution to artificial groupings, “International Peace & Security: Landmines, Human Security”, Weiss (2016) mentions the following: *“That is, instead of arguing that important new priorities require new institutions and posts, existing institutions can be reoriented...”* (Weiss 2016: 166).

SDG 17 concerning partnerships for the goals shows to be relevant in 8 out of 15 of the solutions, covering the challenges of national sovereignty, artificial groupings, lack of coordination, and excessive bureaucracy and limited leadership (see Appendix 2). Outsiders, partnerships, NGOs, and new partners are some of the keywords mentioned in the solutions presented by Weiss (2016) to

the challenges of the UN, which relates to SDG 17. In discussing a solution to artificial groupings, “Sustainable Development: Millennium Development Goals, Global Compact”, Weiss (2016) argues the following: *“Another way to move beyond traditional roles is to bring new partners and counterparts into conversations”* (Weiss 2016: 180). Furthermore, Weiss (2016) also argues that: *“The private sector – in partnership with other nongovernmental actors – should help realize a more sustainable and inclusive global economy”* (Ibid.).

## 5 THE UNITED NATIONS

The United Nations was established in 1945 at the end of World War II, wishing to prevent future wars. Here, the initially 51 countries dedicated themselves to maintaining international peace and security. The number of member states has grown increasingly over the years and today the UN has 193 members, representing countries from all over the world. According to the UN, the organization is open to: *“all peace-loving states that accept the obligations contained in the United Nations Charter and, in the judgment of the organization, are able to carry out these obligations”* (UN Charter Chapter II).

The UN has its roots in the League of Nations which was established after World War I, with the goal of promoting international cooperation and achieve peace and security, including preventing wars through disarmament, collective security, and peaceful negotiations. The League of Nations ended its activities after it failed to prevent World War II (Mingst, Karns & Lyon 2017). Several of the UN’s organs and agencies resembles the structure of the League of Nations. However, the UN is a very different organization especially with its attention to economic and social development (Ibid.).

According to the UN Charter, the UN has four main purposes; 1) To maintain international peace and security, 2) To develop friendly relations among nations, 3) To cooperate in solving international problems and promoting respect for human rights, 4) To be a center for harmonizing the actions of nations (UN Charter Chapter I). The UN’s purpose of maintaining international peace and security has had its challenges, especially in the early decades of its existence, due to the Cold War between the Soviet Union (and its allies) and the United States (and its allies). The tensions of the Cold War

deeply affected the UN and its functions during the UN's first 45 years. The Cold War often left the UN paralyzed. Furthermore, the widespread decolonization after World War II in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia led to the UN being confronted with extensive economic, political, and social issues (Weiss 2016).

Over the years, mainly after the end of the Cold War, the UN's role and purpose expanded from focusing on peace and security to including a variety of global concerns such as healthcare, human rights, refugees, the environment, and criminal justice. While many support the UN's extended responsibilities, some have argued that the UN might be overstepping its boundaries and purpose. The 21<sup>st</sup> century has brought new challenges to the UN such as humanitarian crises, civil wars, large refugee flows, international terrorism, and an unpredictable geopolitical climate (Mingst, Karns & Lyon 2017).

## 5.1 CHALLENGES OF THE 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY

Critics of the UN argue that the UN is not equipped to deal with the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But what are the most pressing challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century which the UN needs to become better at dealing with? The UN is facing internal challenges as presented and discussed in the theory section of this thesis. However, what outer challenges are the world, and therefore the UN, facing today? *"We are meeting at a time of immense challenges to sustainable development..."* (Sustainable Development 2030 Agenda). It is difficult if not impossible to predict which kinds of global development will have the most impact over the next 10 to 15 years (Staur 2014). There are many different views, positions, and attitudes towards what issues are currently the most significant. UN has defined what they believe to be the most important challenges of the world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. *"As the world's only truly universal global organization, the United Nations has become the foremost forum to address issues that transcend national boundaries and cannot be resolved by any one country acting alone. To its initial goals of safeguarding peace, protecting human rights, establishing the framework for international justice and promoting economic and social progress, in the seven decades since its creation the United Nations has added on new challenges, such as climate change, refugees and AIDS."* (UN Global Issues). The UN has stated 22

global issues that the world is facing, and which transcend national boundaries. The 22 global issues according to the UN are: Africa, Ageing, AIDS, Atomic Energy, Big Data for the SDGs, Children, Climate Change, Decolonization, Democracy, Ending Poverty, Food, Gender Equality, Health, Human Rights, International Law and Justice, Migration, Oceans and the Law of the Sea, Peace and Security, Population, Refugees, Water, and Youth (Ibid.).

## 5.2 THE STRUCTURE OF THE UN

The UN has, since its establishment in 1945, been a complex organization, and it has only become more complex since then as the number of agencies, funds, and programs have multiplied. The UN includes six main organs, which are named in the UN charter; *The General Assembly*, which consist of all 193 member states and is the main policymaking body of the UN, *The Security Council*, consisting of five permanent members (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) and 10 elected members serving two year terms and which oversees actions ensuring international peace and security, *The Secretariat*, led by the Secretary General and carries out the daily talks of the UN, *The Economic and Social Council*, consisting of 54 members states elected for three-year terms by the UN General Assembly, making recommendations and policies concerning social, economic, and environmental issues, *The International Court of Justice*, which is the UNs primary legal organ responsible for settling legal disputes submitted by member states, and *The Trusteeship Council* which, however, ceased to function in 1994 (UN Main Organs).

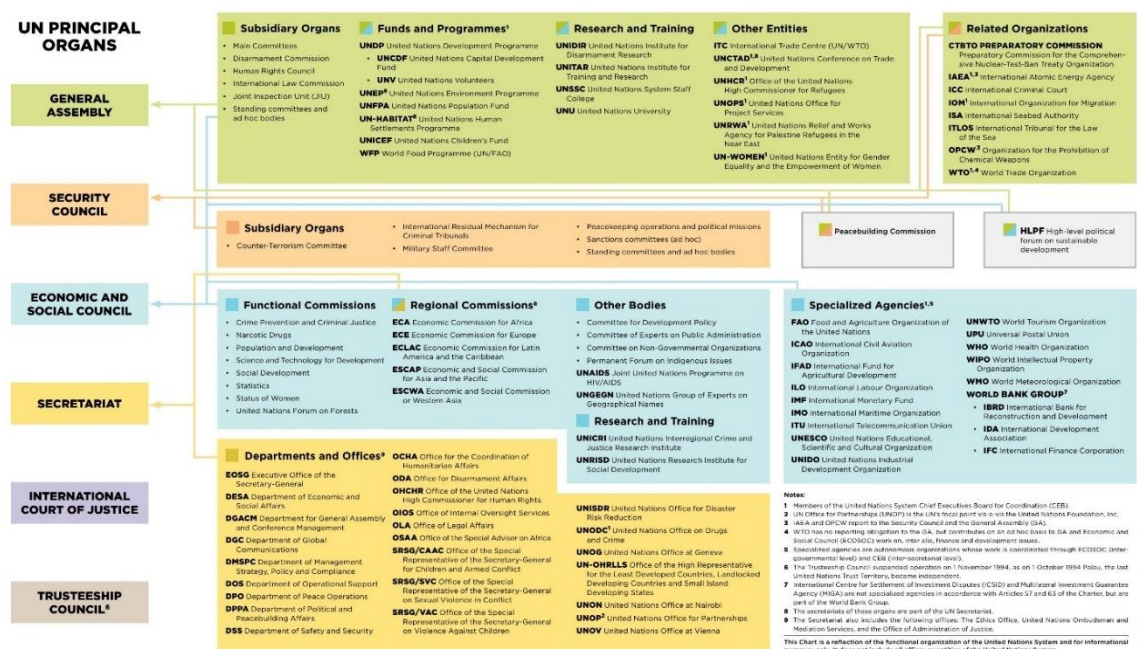


Figure 1: Organizational Chart of the UN System (Large size chart can be found in Appendix 1)  
Source: United Nations Website, [www.un.org/en/pdfs/18-00159e\\_un\\_system\\_chart\\_17x11\\_4c\\_en\\_web.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/pdfs/18-00159e_un_system_chart_17x11_4c_en_web.pdf)

Furthermore, the UN entails a number of UN entities, funds, and programs as well as several UN specialized agencies. The UN entities, funds, and programs are independent organizations created by the UN. They have their own budgets, but they are still part of the UN and are considered subordinate to the UN as they apply to UN rules and regulations. These entities, funds, and programs include UNICEF, WFP, and UN WOMEN. The leaders of these entities are appointed by the UN Secretary General ([www.unsystem.org](http://www.unsystem.org)). The UN specialized agencies are almost entirely autonomous organizations brought into a relationship with the UN through negotiated agreements. Some of these agencies were established before the UN, others simultaneously with the UN, and yet others were created by the UN itself (Ibid.). The specialized agencies are independent international organizations with their own budgets and rules, and they choose their own leaders. These specialized agencies include organizations such as the WHO, WTO, and IMF (Ibid.).

### 5.2.1 THE FIRST AND SECOND UN

According to Staur (2014), the terms “organization” and “system” are being used interchangeably when discussing and referring to the UN. It is necessary to make a distinction between the UN as an



intergovernmental organization and the UN as a secretariat, a distinction between what is also called the first UN and the second UN (Staur 2014).

The first UN is the stage for decision making. It is a forum, framework, and meeting place for the member states. The first UN is where the UN member states meet, negotiate, and make decisions (Mingst, Karns & Lyon 2017). What the first UN can achieve is a reflection of the shared aspirations of the member states and it is therefore entirely dependent on what the 193 UN member states can and will agree on. If for example the UN member states agree on the need for coordinated humanitarian action to prevent the spread of a disease, the UN can help ensure the needed support for the implementation (Staur 2014). However, if the member states fail to come to an agreement the UN can become paralyzed (Ibid.).

The second UN entails the UN secretariats whose officials work for the UN member states. However, they still have a certain margin maneuver. Besides the secretariat, the second UN includes the UN staff members of the UN organizations who enable the first UN to meet and help along the negotiations of the first UN with analyses and proposals. The second UN is also responsible for implementing the decisions made by the first UN (Mingst, Karns & Lyon 2017). The second UN can be regarded as an international bureaucracy which is staffed by civil servants from across the world (Weiss 2016).

Many scholars identify the two UNs, the first UN composed of member states and the second UN composed of the secretariats. A third UN is often also recognized. The third UN is the network surrounding the first and second UN consisting of NGOs, independent commissions, researchers, consultants, for-profit corporations, activists, the media, and civil society organizations (Weiss, Carayannis & Jolly 2009). Mingst, Karns & Lyon (2017) recognizes four types of non-state actors which make up the third UN: NGOs, academics and experts serving as consultants, prominent individuals and independent commissions, and corporations and foundations. This network is associated with the UN, but it is not an integral part of the UN. The third UN and its power have grown a lot but is often overlooked in studies of the UN. The third UN is taking a more active role in the UN pushing for research, action, and policies as well as mobilizing public opinion and contributing to UN operations (Ibid.). Several institutions which are not states or creations of states contribute to and often circumscribe deliberations and actions by the first or the second UN.



## 5.3 DEVELOPMENT GOALS

In 2000, the Millennium Development Goals were agreed upon by the UN and the member states which provided a significant framework for international development. The adoption of the MDGs made the member states commit to a new and global partnership. The MDGs consisted of eight international development goals focusing on extreme poverty, universal primary education, gender equality, child mortality, maternal health, HIV/AIDS, environmental sustainability, and global partnerships, to be reached by 2015 (UN Millennium Goals).

### THE EIGHT MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS:

- **Goal 1:** Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- **Goal 2:** Achieve universal primary education
- **Goal 3:** Promote gender equality and empower women
- **Goal 4:** Reduce child mortality
- **Goal 5:** Improve maternal health
- **Goal 6:** Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- **Goal 7:** Ensure environmental sustainability
- **Goal 8:** Develop a global partnership for development

(Source: [www.un.org/millenniumgoals](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals))

Great progress has been made since 2000 in several areas, however, according to the UN itself the progress has not been even, especially when it comes to Africa and the world's least developed countries (The Millennium Development Goals Report 2015). When the goals reached their end in 2015, a final report on the MDGs concluded that the MDGs were responsible for creating the most successful anti-poverty movement in history (Ibid.). The share of undernourished people in developing countries fell by almost half, the enrollment rate in primary school in developing countries reached 91%, including a much higher number of girls in school, compared to 2000. Remarkable gains were also made in regard to health and diseases, including the fight against malaria and HIV/AIDS as well as maternal mortality (Ibid.). In conclusion, the report found that the 15 years of effort to achieve the eight MDGs had largely been successful confirming that setting

goals can help people out of poverty, improve gender equality, health and well-being (Ibid.). However, the report also argues that the job is unfinished and that there is still work to be done in order to end hunger, achieve gender equality, and to improve health and primary education. The report argues that the UN and the world must shift to a more sustainable path (Ibid.).

Building on the MDGs the UN and the member states adopted the 17 Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 and historically pledged to end poverty everywhere, permanently. With the announcement of the SDGs in 2015, the UN recommitted itself to fully realize the MDGs, but also to go further beyond the MDGs by focusing on both economic, social, and environmental areas (Sustainable Development 2030 Agenda). In announcing the SDGs, the UN argued that by taking a more integrated approach, the new 17 goals and 169 targets are deeply interconnected and several elements across the goals and target are cross-cutting (Ibid.).

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which was adopted by all the UN member states in 2015, offers a shared outline for peace and prosperity for the planet and the people on in. The 2030 agenda primarily consist of the 17 SDGs, that are an urgent call for action in areas such as; inequality, health, education, energy, climate, ocean, urbanization, and technology, and requires an international partnership.

#### **THE 17 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS:**

- **Goal 1:** No poverty
- **Goal 2:** Zero hunger
- **Goal 3:** Good health and well-being or people
- **Goal 4:** Quality education
- **Goal 5:** Gender equality
- **Goal 6:** Clean water and sanitation
- **Goal 7:** Affordable and clean energy
- **Goal 8:** Decent work and economic growth
- **Goal 9:** Industry, innovation and infrastructure
- **Goal 10:** Reducing inequalities

- **Goal 11:** Sustainable cities and communities
- **Goal 12:** Responsible consumption and production
- **Goal 13:** Climate action
- **Goal 14:** Life below water
- **Goal 15:** Life on land
- **Goal 16:** Peace, justice and strong institutions
- **Goal 17:** Partnerships for the goals

(Source: [www.sustainabledevelopment.un.org](http://www.sustainabledevelopment.un.org))

The SDGs build on years of work by the UN, including the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA). The Division for Sustainable Development Goals (DSDG), a division under the UNDESA, acts as the secretariat for the SDGs and is responsible for providing substantive support for the SDGs, evaluation of the UNs implementation of the SDGs, and help facilitate the engagement of all stakeholders (Sustainable Development Goals). According to the UN, the SDGs address the global challenges the world face today, including poverty, inequality, climate, prosperity, environmental degradation, and peace and justice. The goals are interconnected working towards the motto of “*Leave No One Behind*” (Ibid.).

As mentioned above, the UN has faced criticism. The UN has been criticized of promoting globalization as well as not being effective in solving major problems, being too bureaucratic, and giving some member states more power than others. But while all organizations have defects and shortcomings, many international leaders and experts agree that the UN still plays a critical role in securing peace, prosperity, and stability throughout the world (Mingst, Karns & Lyon 2017).

## 6 THE FUTURE OF THE UNITED NATIONS

As I see it, there are three possible scenarios or solutions for the UN in the future:

1. Shot down the UN and establish a new/different IGO. *“One might ask, will they scrap the UN itself and create an entirely new institution for global governance?”* (Mingst, Karns & Lyon 2017: 346).
2. Continue as it is, with no or only minor changes. In other word: let the UN run its course.
3. Rethink or improve the UN.

In the following analysis I wish to explore option 3 further as scenario 1 arguably is unrealistic, and scenario 2 is inadequate.

*“The UN may have more reach than any other IGO, but that has never meant that it has had the resources, authority, competence, and coordination capabilities needed to address the many challenges it has faced”* (Mingst, Karns & Lyon 2017: 335). But the UN, including its reach, has had instrumental influence on the world. The UN is a great forum for agenda setting as the UN general assembly makes it possible for the member states to raise important issues setting new agendas for NGOs, states, corporations and the UN itself. The UN has played an active part in expanding the perception of security from state security to human security helping the member states protect individuals. Furthermore, the UN introduced the idea of human development changing the traditional economic thinking, which focused on growth in GNP as the measurement for development, to instead think of development in terms of its effect on people such as their health, level of education, income, and well-being (Mingst, Karns & Lyon 2017). The development of ideas has been a vital part of how the UN has made a difference. The idea of human development has led to the development of both the MDGs and the SDGs focusing on the improvement of human well-being. Setting, promoting, and monitoring goals, like the MDGs and the SDGs, have over the years served as the focus of the UN for the mobilization of interests and actions.

Mingst, Karns & Lyon (2017) argues that it will take an extreme event for the UN member states to finally make the necessary changes. When the member states come in need of a solution for war or for climate change and cannot find one, then this absence of solution will open the case for

reformation and bettering of the UN. It took a world war (World War II) to make the creation of the UN possible, replacing the League of Nations, and it will, according to Mingst, Karns & Lyon (2017), take a similar crisis to make a renewal of the UN possible. *“Until these sense of crisis at the UN is strong enough to make governments let go of their own agendas, there cannot be the kind of cathartic recommitment and renewal of the UN proper that is required”* (Mark Malloch Brown in Mingst, Karns & Lyon 2017: 346). So while we wait for this major crisis that, according to Mingst, Karns & Lyon (2017), will reform and rethink the UN, it becomes interesting to investigate if the UN already is changing, maybe not in revolutionary ways but in smaller more subtle ways, and responding to the critiques of Weiss (2016) and other scholars. The SDGs, which were approved in 2015, serve as the focus of the UN and its operations until 2030. Could the SDGs, which the UN and the member states are working towards reaching in 2030, be moving the UN in a certain direction helping the UN improve and respond to the critiques?

Could the SDGs be helping solve these problems? In the following analysis the SDGs effect in improving and redefining to UN will be explored.

## 7 ANALYSIS

In the following analysis I use Weiss (2016) and his four major challenges of the UN as the theoretical framework. The analysis will concern the first and second UN, as the challenges set forth by Weiss (2016); national sovereignty, artificial groupings, and lack of coordination, concerns the first UN, and excessive bureaucracy and limited leadership concerns the second UN. SDG 5, SDG 10, SDG 13 and SDG 16 showed from the coding to be greatly related to the challenges of the UN and the solutions suggested by Weiss (2016) and will be the point of departure in the following analysis of if and how the SDGs are helping solve the challenges of the UN. Since SDG 17, which also showed to be highly relevant. concerns the third UN, it will be touched upon in the discussion of the third UN and its increasing power.

The initial thought was to separate the sections in this analysis into the four major challenges set forth by Weiss (2016), with a section for each challenge. However, seeing as these four main challenges and their solutions are somewhat overlapping, the analysis will be separated by SDGs with a section for each chosen SDG. As mentioned, SDGs 5, 10, 13, and 16 have been chosen as they showed, from the coding, to be particularly relevant for several of the four challenges and their solutions.

In September 2015 the leaders of the world gathered at the UN to launch the new global goals, the SDGs, hoping to promote economic, social, and environmentally sustainable development led by the motto; *“Leave No One Behind”* (Sustainable Development Goals).

## 7.1 SDG 5: GENDER EQUALITY

In discussing the challenges of the second UN, Weiss (2016) suggests measures to help value the, often overlooked, international civil servants of the UN. Weiss (2016) argues that this area of the UN is an area where improvements and reforms have been few. In order to improve the international civil service, Weiss (2016) urges several solutions such as structured job rotations, easing mobility, engaging the UN employees in the decision-making process, an idea fostering culture, and a better representation of women. As

mentioned, Weiss (2016) argues that not much

improvement has been made to the second UN, but maybe the SDGs can promote the solution.

Weiss (2016) mentions a better representation of women as a possible solution to some of the challenges of the second UN, a solution which have some resemblance to SDG 5.



Source: Sustainable Development SDG 5

With the SDGs, the UN member states committed to ending poverty and to leave no one behind, including women and girls (SDG 5). In adopting the SDGs, the UN recognized the importance of gender equality in achieving all 17 goals and the full potential of the UN: *“Realizing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls will make a crucial contribution to progress across all the goals and targets. The achievement of full human potential and of sustainable development is not possible if one half of humanity continues to be denied its full human rights and opportunities”* (Sustainable Development 2030 Agenda).

The goal of SDG 5 is to: *“Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”* (Sustainable Development SDG 5). Inclusiveness and equality have been a focus point for the UN as it has been highly focused on its motto: “We the People”, working towards dignity and the equal worth of all people. Former secretary general of the UN, Kofi Annan, stated that: *“It is impossible to realize our goals while discriminating against half the human race”* (Mingst, Karns & Lyon 2017: 21). Gender equality is arguably important for the UN in achieving its goals. The UN has spearheaded numerous efforts, including UN Women, in the pursuit of equal opportunities and inclusiveness. Furthermore, the UN’s focus on inclusiveness have expanded and have come to also include poverty, disabled people, children, and migrants. However, the focus of the SDG 5 is on gender equality and empowering girls and women around the world. But do the UN itself practice what it preaches regarding SDG 5?

It has been noted by many people that the UN faces some challenges when it comes to inclusiveness and gender equality regarding its own personnel and management (Sengupta 2015). Weiss (2016) also points to this issue and argues in the solution: “International Peace & Security: Disciplining Peacekeepers, Resolution 1325”, that better representation of women will help solve the challenge of excessive bureaucracy and limited leadership. No woman has held a high-level post or position in any UN agency until the late 1980s and the share of women in these high positions today is still somewhat small. Just about 20% of the UN’s 193 member states are represented by women (Ibid.). Ecuadorian politician María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés is only the fourth woman in the UN’s 73-year history to have been elected the President of the UN General Assembly. Furthermore, the UN has never had a female Secretary General. *“On the one hand, there has been much progress since women first fought for their inclusion in the UN charter, on the other hand, after sixty years of struggle, one*

*could expect more as well from the world body whose power depends on its moral authority”* (Charlotte Bunch in Weiss 2016: 107). Swedish politician, Margot Wallström, have argued that women’s rights are of crucial importance to global security and peace (Sengupta 2015).

The UN needs to widen its own net and practice what it preaches in order to remain legitimate and relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. With gender equality on its agenda, one might think that the UN would be a frontrunner for women in its workforce in comparison to other institutions, however, the efforts made in achieving gender equality in this world institution have, according to some, been less than impressive. The UN continues to struggle with a limited representation of women at the UN senior levels in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Weiss 2016). Even though the UN is still struggling in this area there have been some progress including the creation of the Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women in 1997. In 2000, in continuation of the Millennium Declaration, the UN Security Council approved resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, which recognizes the importance of women in the preventing and resolving conflicts, peace negotiations, and humanitarian response as well as the importance of equal participation in the promotion of peace and security (Weiss 2016). This marked a commitment from the UN to gender mainstreaming and the acknowledgement that gender equality is linked to peace. Resolution 1325 urged the UN member states to appoint and employ more women to decision-making positions at all institutional levels including senior level positions. However, a 2006 assessment of the resolution’s impact noted that women continued to be under-represented at UN senior level positions (Weiss 2016). Since resolution 1325 was approved in 2000, six additional resolutions regarding women, peace, and security have been approved. Furthermore, the UN Security Council approved a thorough review and assessment of the progress of the original resolution 1325, which concluded that: *“much of the progress toward the implementation of resolution 1325 continues to be measured in firsts rather than as standard practice”* (Weiss 2016: 208). However, it also noted several steps moving gender equality forward, linking the international attention to gender equality, set forth by the UN, to progress in this area (Ibid.).



The SDGs, especially SDG 5, continues the international attention to gender equality and arguably the progress. However, several supporters of gender equality have stressed their concern for SDG 5 as it is only one out of 17 goals whereas gender equality formerly where one out of 8 MDGs. This can be regarded as a weakening in the UN's commitment to and focus on gender equality (Kim 2017). But SDG 5 includes focus and attention to the importance of women's equal opportunities for leadership at all levels, a focus which was somewhat lacking in the MDGs. The goal of MDG 3 was to: *"Promote gender equality and empower women"* (UN Millennium Goals), but it only included one target: *"Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferable by 2005, and at all by 2015"* (Ibid.). MDG 3 also gave some attention to the representation of women in national parliaments, an area which did see some progress in the period of the MDGs (Ibid.). However, the scope of gender equality was more limited, and not much attention where given to women and leadership, especially on the global level. The UN's efforts on gender have broadened in scope with the adoption of the SDGs. Gender equality might only be one out of 17 goals but it is broader in its attention and effort to the issue and it includes nine targets about gender equality. According to the assessment of resolution 1325, international attention leads to some progress (Weiss 2016). With the adoption of the SDGs, the UN have adopted a more nuanced approach to gender equality including a target focusing on women and their equal opportunities for leadership positions which might help bring attention and progress in this area, including within the UN itself.

### 7.1.1 MORE SECRETARY THAN GENERAL

SDG 5 includes target 5.5: *"Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life"* (Sustainable Development SDG 5). The second UN is faced by difficulties in regard to recruiting and retaining qualified staff and securing gender balance (Weiss 2016). From the beginning of the UN, the five permanent member states have held the power to nominate and essentially choose the UN officials, a procedure which have come to apply to many other positions within the UN (Ibid.). The UN organization is facing challenges with gender imbalances which does not align with the UN's goal to ensure women's equal opportunities for decision-making positions. Women play an important part in peace building and conflict resolution, and gender equality is directly linked to peace (Ibid.).

United States Ambassador Samantha Power is aware of the importance of pushing for the inclusion of more women: *"You do see women like me pushing for inclusion of women in peace processes around the world. But that is not because I am a woman. That is because the United States recognizes that when women are involved in peace processes, they are more likely to be durable, more likely to actually bring peace to societies over time."* (UN News). SDG 5, including target 5.5, could be pushing for a change in the UN organization which could help resolve the challenges of excessive bureaucracy and limited leadership. The UN itself argues that: *"Women and girls must enjoy... equal opportunities with men and boys for employment, leadership and decision-making at all levels"* (Sustainable Development SDG 5). The UN's overwhelming bureaucracy which is dominated by quotas and government nominations, have resulted in recruiting and selection criteria that are based more on nationality than on competencies (Weiss 2016). To ensure equal opportunities for employment and leadership, as expressed in SDG 5, changes need to be made within the UN organization and its recruitment processes. Changing the recruitment processes to consider competencies rather than nationality could help the UN to be more efficient and better at handling rapid change and generating new and innovative thinking. A factor that could reduce the UN's excessive and ineffective bureaucracy, which, according to Weiss (2016), currently is, a major issue for the UN.

SDG 5, particularly target 5.5, might also be helpful in relieving the problem with national sovereignty and artificial groupings. SDG 5 is relevant for two of the solutions for national sovereignty and relevant for all three solutions suggested for artificial groupings (see coding chart in Appendix 2). In order to achieve gender equality, the UN member states need to come together and set aside national interest, especially when it comes to the UN's own organization.

In 2016, when it was time for a new UN Secretary General to be elected, many were hoping that the UN would elect its first female leader (BBC 2016). Former UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-Moon expressed that it was high time for a female head of the UN after more than 70 years of male UN leadership. Seven out of 13 candidates were women, including a former prime minister, foreign ministers, and several UN top officials. However, those who were wishing to see a woman be elected the new UN Secretary General in 2016 were disappointed. The Campaign "Elect a Woman UN

Secretary General” called it a *“disaster for gender equality”* and argued that: *“There were seven outstanding female candidates and in the end, it appears they were never seriously considered... We thought the UN could reform and move into the 21<sup>st</sup> century with gender equality. But they are still making backroom deals among the old boys club”* (Lynch 2016). The UN Secretary General is elected by the UN Security Council and then appointed by a majority vote by the UN General Assembly. However, since the UN General Assembly has always appointed the candidates recommended by the UN Security Council, it is, in reality, solely the UN Security Council that chooses the next head of the UN (Mingst, Karns & Lyon 2017). This means that 15 out of 193 member states gets to be part of the selection.

At the 2016 election the Security Council where represented by fourteen men and one woman (Sengupta 2015). According to Argentine foreign minister, Susana Malcorra, who was in the early running of the UN General Secretary election, women do not stand a chance in the UN Security Council; *“You don’t have a chance if you’re a woman... It’s not a glass ceiling, it’s a steel ceiling”* (Lynch 2016). However, some argue that whether you are a male or a female candidate the biggest factor in determining the final nomination is the so-called backroom deals with the member states of the Security Council: *“This refers to the unfortunate practice of major powers extracting promises from candidates in return for their support”* (BBC 2016). As argued by Weiss (2016), a major problem for the UN is that the member states are focused on their own national interests which often get in the way of proper managing global challenges. Many diplomats are concerned that the members of the Security Council, especially the permanent members, base their selection on which candidate bends more easily to their national interests and wishes rather than basing their selection on the qualifications of the candidate leading to the Secretary General of the UN being more of a secretary than general (Mingst, Karns & Lyon 2017). *“It is geography, then it is horse-trading on state interests, much more than personal qualities of the candidate”* (Louise Arbour, Canadian jurist, UN high commissioner for human rights 2004-2008 in Sengupta 2015). As mentioned, it is the 15 members of the Security Council who nominates the candidate for UN Secretary General who then is presented and appointed by the UN General Assembly. In nominating the final candidate for the position of Secretary General, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council; Great Britain, Russia, the United States, China and France, have veto rights which means that they can veto any candidate and thereby eliminate them from the running. This means that the 15 member

states of the Security Council, especially the five permanent members, possess major power and influence. This power structure is, according to Mingst, Karns & Lyon (2017), one of the UN's major problems as the Security Council reflect the power realities in 1945 and not the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Furthermore, the five permanent members' veto right reflects a world long gone and it leads to intergovernmental gridlock and groupings between the five permanent members and the rest of the UN member states.

The Security Council needs to more flexible to shifts in power, and many diplomats and civil society activists argue that if the election process is not changed the UN will become irrelevant, outdated and unable to handle the most pressing global challenges (Mingst, Karns & Lyon 2017). SDG 5 could help resolve these issues. *"We will work for a significant increase in investments to close the gender gap and strengthen support for institutions in relation to gender equality and the empowerment of women at the global, regional and national levels"* (Sustainable Development SDG 5). To achieve gender equality, it is necessary to give women a fair and equal chance for power, including within the UN itself, which could involve the election process for Secretary General to become fairer for everyone, women included. *"All top positions globally, women should have an equal chance to compete for them"* (Sengupta 2015).

Weiss (2016) suggests that the attention to gender equality could help solve the issue of artificial groupings: *"Another issue that helped bring fresh air into the [North-South] theater... came to fore when the UN and its associated agencies began to pay more attention to the role of women and gender in development"* (Weiss 2016: 177). SDG 5, including target 5.5, could help move the UN in a new direction, as it is necessary to disregard national interests and artificial groupings and renew the power structure of the UN, if the UN wants to achieve gender equality and live up to its own goals. SDG 5 includes target 5.C: *"Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels"* (Sustainable Development SDG 5). This target could help move the UN member states away from the challenges of national sovereignty, as the UN member states need to set aside their own interests and come together in order to agree on sound policies and enforceable legislation for gender equality and get behind a common UN agenda.

### 7.1.2 GENDER AGENDA

The SDGs are to be reached at 2030 but some progress have already been made, also regarding SDG 5. Weiss (2016) argues that the challenges of excessive bureaucracy and limited leadership can be helped from within the UN by changing the recruitment process and include more women. The UN has attempted to advocate gender equality from within. Earlier this year, the president of the UN General Assembly created a new group called “Gender Equality Leaders” which members’ job would be to advise the president on ways to improve the UN’s work for gender equality and address the UN’s own gender imbalances (Blum 2019). However, some argue that this gender equality panel is not very effective in making a difference for women and that it is disconnected from the work of the SDGs and UN Women.

A real impact would require the UN to lead by example and practice what it preaches, which again would require a change in the organizational culture of the UN (Ibid.). But the UN has responded to this criticism by establishing a taskforce in charge of moving the UN to gender parity by 2030. According to the taskforce, 61% of the UN’s international staff is male, 71% of the UN’s fieldworkers are male, and only one out of six committees in the UN General Assembly has a female chair. Hopefully this task force and its goal to move the UN to gender parity by 2030 can help solve the UN’s challenges of excessive bureaucracy and limited leadership by bringing more women into the organization and change the organizational culture.

The UN’s record on women is much better externally than internally, such as the UN Women, which, amongst other, have created the Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women, a fund which already has granted more than 128 million dollars to 462 different programmes focused on women around the world (Ibid.). The UN Women has also appointed high-profile ambassadors for gender equality such as female soccer player Marta Vieira da Silva and actresses Emma Watson and Anne Hathaway as well as supporting the reform of equal opportunity laws across the world (Ibid.). According to a UN report (2019), the level of political participation is low which is undermining the ability of achieving SDG 5. Women remain underrepresented in both managerial positions and in political leadership at all levels, but little progress have been made. The number for women in management positions has increased in all regions of the world, except in least developed countries, since 2000.

In the beginning of 2019, the average standing of women in national parliament was 24.2% up from 19% in 2010 (UN report 2019). The report showed that when gender quotas are legislated and adopted the number of women elected at national and local levels increases significantly (Ibid.). However, the report does not specifically mention any data on the proportion of women within the UN itself and the progress hereof.

While the UN itself may promote inclusiveness and gender equality, there are also member states and groups within the UN who use the UN as a forum to push back and even block such initiatives. Some member states might agree on gender equality when it comes to opportunities in health and education but be less agreeable when it comes to gender equality in economy and politics, including gender equality in the UN system. Gender equality and women's rights have been very limited in countries such as Saudi Arabia, rights which have been heavily discussed during the last decades, due to the strict sharia law. Seeing as Saudi Arabia is a member of the UN, their application of sharia law has often been discussed in relation to gender equality, as some have been concerned whether the sharia law aligns with the UN's goals for gender equality (Weiss 2016).

While the inclusion of gender equality on the development agenda are beneficial to the challenges of the UN, as showed by the data coding (see Appendix 2), SDG 5 is relevant for all four challenges. However, it could have complications for the issue of artificial groupings as the status of women and women's rights are noticeably different around the world, with some member states of the South having aspirations close to the North while the more conservative member states of Asia and the Middle East have a different outlook on the matter of gender equality (Weiss 2016).

Countries such as Canada have followed the need for implementing gender mainstreaming and have put great effort into making it a point to appoint women to high-level and decision-making positions within their government. Liberia have appointed women to powerful ministerial positions such as the ministry of defense, finance, justice, and chief of police (Ibid.). Such efforts to ensure the representation of women in the decision-making should serve as a great example and motivation for the UN. Although many UN member states have made progress in fighting gender inequalities since the SDGs were adopted in 2015, some countries have moved backwards. In 2016, the World Economic Forum published the "Global Gender Gap Index", examining gender equality within the

areas of health, education, economy, and politics. And while the report shows that several countries have made great progress in reducing the gender gap, some countries' gap has widened ([www.reports.weforum.org](http://www.reports.weforum.org)). When it comes to gender equality in education, the world is seeing great progress, however, the progress is challenged in economic and health related areas (Ibid.). With the current trend and progress, the general gender gap will be closed in 83 years (Ibid). It can therefore be argued that even though progress is being made, it is not moving fast enough if the goal of gender equality is to be reached by 2030.

Gender equality will not automatically be resolved by poverty reduction nor by economic and social development as the SDGs innately assumes (Kim 2017). It might just be the other way around. According to the 2019 UN report, there is no way what the UN and the world can achieve the 17 SDGs if they do not achieve SDG 5, gender equality (UN report 2019). Hopefully this realization will push the UN on the gender agenda which in turn could help relieve several of the challenges facing the UN, including its challenges with excessive bureaucracy and limited leadership and national sovereignty.

There is a common consensus that progress through all of the SDGs will be delayed if gender equality and the empowerment of women are not prioritized (Mingst, Karns & Lyon 2017).

## 7.2 SDG 10: REDUCED INEQUALITIES

The UN was established in 1945 by sovereign states who sought to protect themselves against external violence and aggression (Weiss 2016). As stated in article 2 of the UN charter, sovereign equality is an essential building block of the UN: *“The organization is based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all its members”* (UN Charter Chapter I). National sovereignty results in global challenges being managed based on the interests of member states although the most pressing challenges transcend national boundaries. The UN was established with the intention to protect and



Source: Sustainable Development SDG 10

serve sovereign states, however, national interests often get in the way of human welfare (Ibid.). SDG 10 concerns an overall goal to *“reduce inequality within and among countries”* (Sustainable Development SDG 10). SDG 10 includes target 10.6: *“Ensure enhanced representation and voice for developing countries in decision-making in global international economic and financial institutions in order to deliver more effective, credible, accountable and legitimate institutions”* (Ibid.).

While countries in developing regions of the world, according to the UN report on the SDGs (UN report 2019), represent more than 70% of the membership in the General Assembly and WTO, the representation and voting share in other international organizations are less than satisfactory. Reforms to change this imbalance are being negotiated in the IMF, and the WB adopted changes in 2018 (Ibid.). However, a full implementation of these reforms will leave the developing countries with about 40% of the voting rights, which is quite short of the 75% which the developing countries represent in the WB, in terms of the number of countries (Ibid.). Furthermore, even though the developing countries represent more than 70% of the membership in the UN General Assembly, their share of voting power in the UN Security Council is less equal. The distribution of power in the Security Council is unequal as the five permanent members possess a great deal of power compared



to the others. In addition, no developing countries in the regions of Africa and Latin America<sup>1</sup>, are part of these powerful permanent members. Europe, however, is heavily represented in the Security Council. Under the UN charter, all member states are obligated to comply with decisions made by the Security Council (UN Charter Chapter I). As the Security Council, and especially the five permanent members, essentially holds the power to choose the UN officials and can make decisions which affect all member states, the power within the UN is arguably unequal. That the five permanent members of the Security Council possess veto rights follows various examples of inequality. The membership of the UN Security Council has not changed much since its start in 1945, however, the number of member states in the UN have expanded greatly since then which have changed the relative power of these member states (Mingst, Karns & Lyon 2017). The only change that have been made to the Security Council membership was the addition of four new, non-permanent member seats in 1965. The difference in power between the five permanent members and the rest of the member seats have created a very unequal and inefficient Security Council (Ibid.).

In November 2018, María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, the UN General Assembly President, opened a debate about the need for reform in the Security Council arguing that in order to meet today's challenges and the increasingly complexity of international security the UN Security Council needs to reform and adapt its membership structure to improve the representation of underrepresented regions such as Africa (UN General Assembly Session 2018). However, even though the membership structure of the Security Council has been on the General Assembly's agenda for more than two decades, no agreement on a reform have so far been made (Ibid.).

The Security Council needs to adapt to the political realities (Ibid.). It is necessary for the member states of the UN to set aside their national interests and power in order to make the power more equal and enhance the representation and voice of developing countries as well as to become more inclusive.

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<sup>1</sup> Only the Asian country China, which is still technically a developing country, is part of the permanent five

### 7.2.1 HUMAN RIGHTS

Human rights are part of several of the solutions suggested by Weiss (2016). Human rights are mentioned in the keywords and are part of seven of the presented solutions (see Appendix 2). Human rights are a vital part of the UN's purpose, and more than 90% of the SDGs' 169 targets can be linked to international human rights ([www.sdg.humanrights.dk](http://www.sdg.humanrights.dk)). SDG 10 and its targets to reduce inequality within and among countries are highly related to human rights, including target 10.3: *"Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard"* and target 10.2: *"By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status"* (Sustainable Development SDG 10). Human rights go beyond sovereign states as it focuses on human security rather than state security. This focus on human security instead of state security is partly due to the involvement and attention of the UN (Weiss 2016). Focusing on humans and human security could be helpful in resolving the challenge of national sovereignty. *"... we pledge that no one will be left behind. Recognizing that the dignity of the human person is fundamental..."* (UN Leaving No One Behind 2018). The commitment to human rights is strongly present in the SDGs and the 2030 agenda reaffirming that the SDGs are guided by the principles and purpose of the UN Charter.

Human rights might be useful in making roads in the fortress of national sovereignty.

#### 7.2.1.1 RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT

The development of the UN's doctrine Responsibility to Protect (R2P) have created new attitudes towards sovereign states and their accountability towards human rights performances both nationally and internationally (Weiss 2016). Sovereign equality also means that member states are equal in the eyes of the law meaning that no state is better than another and that member states national laws including their behavior towards its citizens is of no business to other member states. This has long been the foundation of the UN and international law. However, human rights and especially the development of international human rights laws are challenging the sovereign equality (Ibid.). This have created a dilemma dealing with both the responsibility to protect the

individual state and at the same time protect the individual human beings. Both sovereign equality and human equality are both about protecting the weaker from the stronger (Ibid.). Human rights are making inroads in state sovereignty. The Responsibility to Protect was first adopted by the UN member states in 2005 and addressed four major issues; genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity (Udenrigsministeriet). The Responsibility to Protect challenges both the principle and the practice of sovereign equality. In the case that a national government fails to assure the safety of its citizens, the international community can intervene (Ibid.). The Responsibility to Protect has made a shift in the concept of sovereignty by challenging the perception that state sovereignty is absolute. The commitment to the doctrine has been reaffirmed by the Security Council in over 80 resolutions (Weiss 2016).

Weiss (2016) presents the responsibility to protect doctrine as a possible solution (“International Peace and Security: R2P, Regional Groupings”, see Appendix 2) for the challenges of national sovereignty: *“The normative logic of R2P underscores a state’s responsibilities and accountabilities to domestic and international constituencies for its human rights performance... The content of sovereignty has thus been redefined to be more inclusive of the rights of individuals”* (Weiss 2016: 138-139). Human rights are reshaping international law as it prioritizes human equality over sovereign equality. The focus on human rights and equality is redefining the principle of sovereign states, from being a principle of control, authority and non-interference to be a principle of state responsibility for its people including the well-being of the people and human rights (UN Office of the High Commissioner). SDG 10, including target 10.2 and 10.3, would help development and focus on human rights and equality – supporting the R2P doctrine. In order to achieve SDG 10 as well as live up to the R2P doctrine, the UN needs to keep developing sovereignty, and the sovereign states need to come together and disregard national interest and their strong wish to protect their sovereignty.

Moving from the MDGs to the SDGs have heightened the focus on human rights and inequality, especially with SDG 10 which is dedicated to reducing inequalities, recognizing that human rights are an important part of achieving sustainable development. The MDGs acknowledged the importance of certain economic and social rights but ignored other central aspects of human rights (Ibid.). In contrast, human rights are strongly represented in the SDGs as it covers many issues

related to human rights, such as cultural, political, social, economic, and civil rights (Ibid.). SDG 10 is affirming the responsibility of the UN member states to respect, protect, and promote human rights.

SDG 10 and the attention to inequality could also be helping the UN member states move away from the artificial groupings, as it shifts the focus from states to individuals. One of the major challenges which cripples the UN is, according to Weiss (2016), the artificial division between member states from the North and the South. This is a division which originates from the Cold War and which rarely reflects a set of common interests and often ends up paralyzing discussions on important issues including reforms to the Security Council, as in the case of Zimbabwe who succeeded in protecting itself from sanctions because of support from other African countries (Weiss 2016). But the UN member states have been able to break the North-South coalitions on issues such as human security (Ibid.). The SDGs, including SDG 10, are highly focused on human rights, and there have been important efforts, like the Human Rights Up Front initiative, working towards reshaping the UN culture and its decision-making processes.

### 7.3 SDG 13: CLIMATE ACTION

The goal of SDG 13 is to *“Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts”*. Might this goal unite the member states and disregard national sovereignty and the North-South divide? Climate change is not a national problem as other countries’ actions on this subject affect everyone. According to the UN, climate change is affecting every continent and every country (Sustainable Development SDG 13). A state cannot control the national climate changes as changes happening in one country might be due to actions of another



Source: Sustainable Development SDG 13

country. If a country decides to take extensive actions to stop and prevent climate changes in its own country, it cannot fully stop changes from happening without other countries making changes as well. Climate change is global, and the prevention hereof is global. Often, the countries who have contributed the least to the creation of climate change are the most vulnerable to the effects of climate change and those least capable to protect themselves (The Economist 2018). *“Climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time and its adverse impacts undermine the ability of all countries to achieve sustainable development”* (Sustainable Development SDG 13). National sovereignty has gotten in the way of human welfare, including climate change, as in the case of CUP15 in Copenhagen in 2009 where the member states were unable to agree on major climate reform (Staur 2014). The MDGs included one goal to ensure environmental sustainability. The SDGs are more comprehensive, acknowledging the importance of climate change in sustainable development and they grasp different areas of this issue. The SDGs include SDG 13, climate action, which is dedicated to take action to mitigate climate change. In addition to SDG 13, the SDGs also include SDG 6: clean water and sanitation, SDG 7: affordable and clean energy, SDG 12: responsible consumption and production, SDG 14: life below water, and SDG 15: life on land (Sustainable Development Goals). The UN needs to downgrade national interests and sovereignty in order to be able to agree on major climate reforms.

### 7.3.1 THE PARIS AGREEMENT

In addressing climate change and amid the introduction of the SDGs (including SDG 13), countries adopted the Paris Agreement in 2015 at the COP21 in Paris. The Paris Agreement, building on the convention from Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and the Kyoto agreement from 1997, and which is a part of the UNFCCC, was signed and entered into force in 2016. With the Paris Agreement, the countries agreed to combat climate change and intensify the actions, including agreeing to limit the rise of the global temperature striving for 1.5 degrees (UN Paris Agreement). According to the UN report (2019), 195 countries have signed the Paris Agreement, 186 of them being parties to the agreement, including large greenhouse gas emission countries such as China, India, and the United States (USA, however, have expressed its intent to leave the agreement). In accordance to the Paris Agreement, the countries must plan, determine and regularly report on their contributions to lessen global warming (Ibid.). With the Paris Agreement the countries of the world joined together and took a

common cause in the fight against climate change. For the first time, practically every country in the world committed to limit greenhouse gas emissions. *“No nation, not even one as powerful as ours, can solve this challenge alone... And no country, no matter how small, can sit on the sidelines. All of us had to solve it together”* (former president of the United States, Barack Obama, in Zavis, Megerian & Yardley 2015). It is the first obligating and universal environmental agreement since the parties to the UNFCCC started holding meetings and conventions around the world in the early 1990s. At the Kyoto meeting in 1997 in Japan, no universal agreement was made as only developed states, excluding the United States, agreed to limit emissions, and at a conference in 2009 in Copenhagen, Denmark, discussions ended without any binding agreement (Zavis, Megerian & Yardley 2015). However, scientists have acknowledged that the commitments outlined in the Paris Agreement will not solve the environmental crises but argued that the agreement had succeeded in establishing a framework for a universal response to the climate challenge (Ibid.). In addition, the UNFCCC is the primary international forum for discussing and negotiating international response on climate change. According to the UN, the Paris Agreement is an essential part of achieving the SDGs and it has provided the world with a roadmap for climate action (UN Paris Agreement). With the Paris Agreement it can be argued that the member states have come together, setting aside the challenges of national sovereignty and artificial groupings.

However, climate change and climate action might deepen the North-South divide. While climate change affects every country, developing countries are the most affected by climate change and at the same time the countries least able to afford the consequences of climate change. Developing countries are very vulnerable to climate change as their ability to both prevent and respond to the impacts are limited. *“... poor countries are not only predicted to bear the brunt of the increase in average temperature, but also to suffer from higher variation...”* (The Economist 2018). Furthermore, developed, industrialized countries are historically those most responsible for the changes in the climate but the ones who are least effected by the consequences. *“... countries in the northern latitudes, which are mostly rich, will not be affected nearly as much... the countries that bear the most historical responsibility for climate change are likely to be the ones least harmed by its consequences...”* (Ibid.). This could lead to conflicts between the North and the South, with the South demanding that the North, as they are mostly responsible for the changes in climate, makes

changes and that it is solely the North's responsibility to prevent and take action in regard to climate change. In addition, it could make the North more resistant to make changes as they are not seeing the same consequences. The challenge of national sovereignty could also be affected by this, with countries who experience the least consequence deprioritizing SDG 13, as climate action becomes less of a national concern for these countries.

This difference in responsibility have been noted by the UN and its member states in the “Common but Differentiated Responsibilities” principle (CBDR), which was formalized in the UNFCCC as Principle 7 in the Rio Declaration in 1992 (Weiss 2016). This principle was incorporated into the 2030 agenda and have become universally applicable to all the UN member states. The CBDR principle states that all member states are responsible for addressing climate change but also that the member states are not equally responsible for previous environmental damages, including paying to repair them (Ibid.). The principle is arguably a way to overcome the different views between developed and developing countries. As the wealthy North have contributed the most to climate change, the argument of the principle is that the greater share of the responsibility for the repair should fall to these countries (Ibid.).

### 7.3.2 COORDINATING FOR CLIMATE

There is, according to Weiss (2016), a lack of coordination between the numerous UN agencies. The UN agencies often have overlapping goals which lead to an internal competition for investments and funding. The UN system is very decentralized and is the opposite of a top-down hierarchy: “*The orchestra pays minimum heed to its conductor*” (Weiss 2016: 101). Looking at the UN’s organizational chart (see Appendix 1), the overlapping and intersecting responsibilities are, according to Weiss (2016), very obvious and this structure has led to inefficiencies and duplication of work and have compromised the UN’s actions on important issues such as the environment. Climate challenges require a multi-disciplinary perspective and efforts across sectors, however, the UN’s climate efforts are located in many different and separate parts of the UN system (Ibid.). In discussing solutions to

the challenge of lack of coordination, Weiss (2016) argues that: *“What subject requires more pulling together of distinct perspective than the protection and restitution of the national environment”* (Weiss 2016: 107). The UN has set up centralized funds, such as the Global Environment Facility and the Central Emergency Response Fund, in responds to climate crises. These centralized funds have been successful in encouraging coordination between UN departments.

## 7.4 SDG 16: PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS

The goal of SDG 16 is to: *“Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”* (Sustainable Development SDG 16). The first part of this goal is very much related to human rights and inequalities such as target 16.B: *“Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development”* (Ibid.). Human rights and its effects on the challenges of the UN was touched upon in the section on SDG 10, and this section will therefore mainly be focused on



Source: Sustainable Development SDG 16

the second part of the goal which are about building effective and accountable institutions. SDG 16 includes target 16.6: *“Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels”* (Ibid.). Transparent and effective institutions at all levels also includes the UN. The lack of coordination within the UN have, according to Weiss (2016), made the UN inefficient. The UN's overlapping work and intersecting responsibilities are arguably not making the UN very transparent as it is unclear which part of the organization is handling and responsible for which issues. For the



UN themselves to become more transparent will require structural changes to make room for better coordination within the UN. Furthermore, the UN's inefficiencies and duplication of work have made the UN slow in responding to humanitarian crises (Weiss 2016). In order to be an accountable organization, the UN needs to be better at responding to humanitarian crises. SDG 16 could be moving the UN towards changing its organizational structure and improve its coordination as it focuses on building strong institutions.

#### 7.4.1 REPRESENTATIVE DECISION-MAKING

SDG 16 includes target 16.7: *“Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels”* (Sustainable Development SDG 16). As pointed out by Mingst, Karns & Lyon (2017), the UN has failed to adapt to the change in power structure arguing that the UN Security Council still is structured in a way which represents the power realities of 1945. Ensuring inclusive and presentative decision-making at all levels arguably also include the international level and the UN. Furthermore, SDG 16 includes target 16.8: *“Broaden and strengthen the participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance”* (Sustainable Development SDG 16), which entails indicator 16.8.1: *“Proportion of members and voting rights of developing countries in the institutions of global governance”* (Ibid.). The strengthening of developing countries in global governance and the proportion of voting rights of developing countries bring us back to the challenges of national sovereignty and to some extent also the challenges of artificial groupings.

As discussed in the section of SDG 10, the developing countries' voting rights are, when it comes to international institutions and global governance, unequal, including in the UN itself. While developing countries have a great voting share, more than 70% of the membership, in the General Assembly, the developing countries' share of votes in the UN Security Council is less equal and representative. The power structure in the Security Council is far from representative as it represents the power structure of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and not the 21<sup>st</sup> with the five permanent members possessing a great deal of power in comparison to the other member states, including developing countries (Mingst, Karns & Lyon 2017). Changing the membership structure of the

Security Council have been on the agenda of the General Assembly for over two decades but an agreement to reform the Security Council have yet to be reached (Ibid.). However, it is necessary that the Security Council adapt to the political realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century if the UN and its member states are to reach SDG 16. This will arguably require the UN member states to set aside national interests and loosen the protection of national sovereignty in order to make the power structure of the UN more equal and improve the inclusion and representation of developing countries. Furthermore, the member states need to disregard the North-South divide in order to broaden and strengthen the participation of developing countries in the decision-making.

The MDGs paid no attention to the improvement of institutions, including global governance. The SDGs are more comprehensive as the 2030 agenda, alongside a wide range of economic, social, and environmental goals and targets, promises more inclusive societies and institutions with attention to global and democratic governance (Sustainable Development 2030 Agenda).

## 7.5 GLOBAL AGENDA

In addition to the above chosen SDGs, the shift from the MDGs to the SDGs have brought about changes in general. The transition from the MDGs to the SDGs has marked major changes in both content and process. The MDGs were mainly focused on absolute poverty and developing countries and challenges in developing regions which the world needed to come together to solve. It can be argued that this focus on developing countries keeps the North-South divide intact as it leaves the North aiding in solving the problems and challenges in the South. The SDGs are more uniting, disregarding the North-South divide, as the SDGs concern all nations and challenges which all nations need to work on solving within their own country as well. The SDGs consist of problems and goals which relate to every country, not just challenges related to developing nations. According to the UN, the SDGs are the most inclusive process in the history of the UN (UN Office of the High Commissioner). A process which included the voices of developing countries, whereas the MDGs were handed down from above (Ibid.).

The SDGs are in many areas different from the MDGs. They do not just differ in regard to the number of goals and targets, but the purpose and political process of the SDGs are also different from the MDGs. The SDGs are making inroads in the North-South divide (Fukuda-Parr 2016). The MDGs were a North-South divided development agenda, the goals and target of the MDGs, such as the goal of universal primary education, were mainly related to developing countries. Furthermore, the MDGs were mostly great at communicating a clear development aid agenda and mobilize support from the international community. The SDGs on the other hand are a global agenda for sustainable development and the goals and targets are more universal as they are related to all countries not just developing countries (Ibid.). The MDGs and the 21 targets were mainly limited to a focus on poverty and meeting basic needs. The MDGs only related to issues regarding the global South arguing that the North should aid the global South in solving these issues. In contrast, the SDGs incorporates ending poverty, however, the 17 goals and 169 targets, have a broader agenda which includes social, environmental, and economic sustainability (Ibid.). The SDGs represent a more complex agenda and includes more aspects on issues such as women. SDG 5 focusing on women and gender equality includes targets related to violence, sexual and reproductive health, women's rights, technology, and legislative change. Furthermore, gender issues are also present in several of the other SDGs regarding issues such as health and education. Another core feature of the SDGs is the inclusion of an implementation aspect, recognizing the need for change in policies and mobilizing financial resources. The 2030 agenda incorporates an economic dimension into its goals, such as SDG 8, an area which the MDGs did not consider (Ibid.). SDG 16 regarding human rights and governance relates not only to institutions of national governance but also global governance.

Human rights have become increasingly recognized as being essential in achieving sustainable development. The MDGs focused on certain economic and social rights but neglected some important human rights linkages to development. However, human rights are strongly grounded in the SDGs. The MDGs mainly applied to developing countries whereas the SDGs are more universal and relevant to all countries as every country have progress which needs to be made towards sustainable development (UN Office of the High Commissioner). The SDGs are a shift from the traditional development model and more narrow vision of the MDGs as the SDGs provide a broader perspective on development covering many issues related to human rights such as social, political, civil, economic and cultural rights.

The SDGs are multifaceted recognizing that poverty and development are complex and structural problems. The 2030 agenda is a more universal agenda applying to all countries, grounded in the respect, protection, and promotion of human rights. The SDGs are the result of a comprehensive consultation process which involved all member states of the UN as well as civil society organizations. The UN itself argues that the SDGs are transformative, comprehensive and inclusive striving to leave no one behind, reaffirming the responsibilities of all member states to protect human rights (Ibid.).

### 7.5.1 GLOBAL ATTENTION

According to Mingst, Karns & Lyon (2017), ideas are some of the most noteworthy contributions the UN have made to the world. Both the first, second and third UN have been a part of generating these ideas as well as providing a forum for debating and promoting ideas, as well as a forum for implementing ideas and policies. The UN are excellent at creating awareness, focus, and attention as in the case of the 2030 agenda. Numerous countries, governments, schools, universities, organizations, and

companies are discussing and incorporating the SDGs and communicating how they are working with and contributing to these goals. People, including politicians, are wearing SDG pins (Ibid.). What the UN puts on its agenda, gets enormous attention. UN agendas are very powerful and have a huge international reach. The UN sets the global, sustainable agenda.

Just by simply putting subjects like gender equality, inequality, climate action, peace and strong institutions, and partnerships on the agenda, with the SDGs, the UN is creating great awareness and action around the world.



*Mærsk: Sustainability Strategy*

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## 7.6 PARTIAL CONCLUSION

The analysis of this thesis explored the SDGs' effect on the challenges of the UN and in improving and redefining the UN.

SDG 5, regarding gender equality, were relevant in 8 out of 15 solutions (to the UN's main problems, according to Weiss (2016)), including excessive bureaucracy and limited leadership. The overwhelming UN bureaucracy have resulted in recruitment which is more associated with nationality than competencies leading to an incompetent UN staff, which among other is facing problems with gender imbalance. SDG 5 focusing on gender equality, including within the UN itself, brings attention and progress to this subject. SDG 10, regarding reduced inequalities, were relevant in 10 out of 15 solutions, including artificial groupings. Artificial groupings between states from the North and the South is crippling the UN and often end up paralyzing discussions on important issues. SDG 10, focusing on inequality, can move the UN away from artificial groupings, as it shifts the attention of the UN from states to individuals. SDG 13, regarding climate change, were relevant in 6 out of 15 solutions, including solutions to the challenges of national sovereignty. Climate change affects all countries. SDG 13 is dedicated to take action against climate change. SDG 13 can downgrade national interests and sovereignty as disregarding these are necessary for the UN member states to agree on major climate reforms, as in the case of the adoption of the Paris Agreement. SDG 16, regarding peace, justice and strong institutions, were relevant in 12 out of 15 solutions, including solutions to the challenge of lack of coordination. The inefficiency of the UN has made the UN slow when it comes to responding to humanitarian crises (Weiss 2016). SDG 16, which involves building strong institutions, can move the UN towards making changes to its organizational structure and improve coordination within the UN.

The transition from the MDGs to the SDGs have brought on great changes. While the MDGs only applied to developing countries, the SDGs and the 2030 agenda entails a more universal framework that apply both developing and developed countries. The SDGs are a change from the MDGs more traditional model of development, providing a more transformative agenda. Human rights are a big part of the SDGs moving the attention away from national security and towards human security. The UN is great at creating awareness and attention, including to the SDGs and the 2030 agenda. By focusing on important issues such as inequality and climate change, the UN generates massive attention to these issues around the world.

## 8 DISCUSSION

In this section I wish to discuss the purpose of the UN and whether the SDGs co-align with this purpose. I then wish to discuss the increasing power of the third UN, including actors such as multinational corporations and NGOs, and its future role in the UN's power structure. In addition, I wish to include SDG 17, concerning partnerships for the goals, in the discussion of the third UN.

### 8.1 THE PURPOSE OF THE UN

The purpose of the UN, according to the UN Charter, is to maintain international peace and security, to develop friendly relations, to achieve international cooperation, and to be a center for harmonizing the actions of nations (UN Charter Chapter I). Do the Sustainable Development Goals co-align with the purpose of the UN? Should the UN be responsible for all these challenges represented in the SDGs? Is it the UN's job to do all this or are the UN taking on too much?

*"The United Nations today leads what seems at times like a double life. Pundits criticize it for not solving all the world's ills, yet people around the world are asking it to do more, in more places, than ever before"* (Former Secretary General Ban Ki-moon in Mingst, Karns & Lyon 2017: 335).

With 193 member states and the extended use of the UN as a platform for discussing anything which just slightly has something to do with the term international or global, there is no subject that is not on the agenda.

According to the UN, what the UN does is: maintain international peace and security, protect human rights, deliver humanitarian aid, promote sustainable development, and uphold international law (UN Charter Chapter I). Human rights are mentioned seven times in the UN Charter, which makes promoting and protecting human rights a key purpose and guiding principle of the UN. Human rights are an essential part of the UN Charter: *"... to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small"* (UN Charter Preamble). Human rights are especially represented in SDG 10 which focuses on reducing inequalities. SDG 5 focuses on gender equality which also relates to the UN Charter of

equal rights of men and women. Furthermore, a purpose of the UN is: *“... to develop friendly relations among nations based on respects for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples”* (UN Charter Chapter I). SDG 10 regards equality, including equality among nations which resonate with the UN Charter. The commitment to human rights is highly present in the SDGs and the 2030 agenda. This affirms that the SDGs at least in regard to human rights, are guided by the purposes and principles of the UN Charter which is grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and international human rights treaties. One of the purposes of the UN, which is stated in the UN Charter, is: *“... to achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character”* (Ibid.). International co-operation and partnerships are represented in SDG 17 which concerns partnerships for the goals. One of the main purposes of the UN is to maintain international peace and security. Furthermore, the UN Charter set an objective: *“... to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligation arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained”* (UN Charter Preamble). SDG 16 focuses on peace, justice and strong institutions which arguably relates to the UN Charter.

The purpose of the UN is strongly present in the SDGs. Of course, the SDGs are broader than the purpose as it covers several more goals and areas than touched upon above. It can be discussed if this is simply the UN adjusting the SDGs to the challenges and complexities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and that the goals are all related to the UN purposes. Maintaining international peace and security is a very broad term and purpose and it can therefore be argued that all the SDGs are related to this purpose. However, the development from the eight MDGs to the 17 SDGs might also be an example of the UN trying to cover too much or being pushed by its 193 member states to cover everything.

## 8.2 THE POWER OF THE THIRD UN

Several of the SDGs are relevant in solving the issues and challenges of the UN and ensuring that these goals are reached are therefore important. In this section, the role of the third UN and its influence on the first and second UN will be discussed, including SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals.

Some private companies now have wider spheres of influence than states and civil society organizations can mobilize millions of supporters in a short amount of time. Decades before the presence of social media, Boutros-Ghali, the then UN Secretary General, called CNN the 16<sup>th</sup> member of the Security Council (Mingst, Karns & Lyon 2017).

The global power structure has changed a lot since the establishment of the UN in 1945 as with the emerging of non-state actors such as multilateral corporations and global civil society organizations wanting to have a bigger part in the decision-making process together with the UN member states (Stauer 2014). The power of the third UN is increasing with some actors having revenues/economies or members which exceed small countries (Mingst, Karns & Lyon 2017).

It can be discussed if some of these powerful non-state actors should be part of the UN and whether these actors getting a seat at the table with the UN member states could help dissolve some of the challenges of the UN such as national sovereignty and artificial groupings. Recruiting actors from the global civil society, such as multinational companies and NGOs, to the UN, could maybe be helpful in changing the direction and nature of the UN cooperation process. The third UNs interactions with the first and second UN have an effect on ideas, agendas, and policies as the third UN provides resources and services and even funding (Mingst, Karns & Lyon 2017). The third UN actors are independent from governments and the UN Secretariat.

There has been a rapid growth in the influence of NGOs in global policies and within the UN. Some of the NGOs advocate a specific cause such as children, human rights or the environment while others provide services such as humanitarian aid and disaster relief. Some NGOs are large and transnational such as the Red Cross, Save the Children and Amnesty International (Ibid.). A few NGOs currently have the right to participate as observers in sessions of the UN General Assembly as well as limited access to meetings of the UN Security Council. NGOs, such as Doctors Without Borders, who provide relief aid, have also gained a voice in Security Council deliberations. NGOs are an important and integral part of the third UN but their power and participation within the UN is still somewhat limited, with NGOs questioning: *"We are being listened to but are we being heard?"* (Mingst, Karns & Lyon 2017: 102). Corporations are also an important part of the third UN. The Global Compact initiative have been an important milestone in the creation of public-private partnerships (Mingst, Karns & Lyon 2017). Global Compact is a corporate initiative which was



designed to integrate corporations into the UN system and to support the UN goals as well as mainstream human rights including labor rights and environmental practices in business activities (UN Global Compact). The Global Compact is arguably moving the UN towards a more active engagement with the private sector. However, this initiative has not yet had an impact on the decision-making process of the UN. The UN also engage in partnerships with foundations.

It is therefore relevant to discuss if civil society actors, given their global influence, should have their own forum and even be given a seat at the table within the UN system. This could arguably add some transparency to the UN and the international political process, and it might also add accountability which is part of SDG 16. Furthermore, it would require a revision of the UN Charter which could open a window for Security Council reform which is needed to help solve the challenges of national sovereignty and artificial groupings. Partnerships have become a major source of funding for the UN and these partnerships have influenced ideas on how development should be achieved and who should deliver it (Mingst, Karns & Lyon 2017). Furthermore, partnerships with corporations can tap into resources which goes beyond those of the UN member states and grow the UN's role in global governance. Partnerships with the private sector and NGOs could be helpful in realizing a sustainable and inclusive global economy.

### 8.2.1 SDG 17: PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS

Partnerships are important for the future of the UN. Weiss (2016) suggests partnerships for several solutions to the challenges of the UN. SDG 17 concerns this subject and relates to 10 out of 15 solutions presented by Weiss (2016) (see Appendix 2). It is therefore relevant to discuss if and how the SDGs are helping facilitate these partnerships.

According to the UN, improved international corporation is needed in order to ensure sufficient means of implementation to achieve the SDGs (UN Report 2019). The SDGs include goal 17 which regards engaging the third UN and includes target 17.16: *“Enhance the global partnership for sustainable development, complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, to support the achievement of the*

*sustainable development goals in all countries, in particular developing countries”* (Sustainable

Development SDG 17). Furthermore, SDG 17 includes target 17.17: *“Encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships”* (Ibid.). With this goal, the UN is focusing on and recognizing the power of the third UN and the importance of including the third UN in achieving the SDGs and solve the challenges of the UN.

Decentralization have, according to Weiss (2016), been the preferred trend for the UN for decades, leading to a lack of coordination. National disasters have showed that it is possible for the UN to organize and coordinate international interventions. Powerful third UN actors could push and maybe even force more centralization and coordination efforts. Noteworthy achievements of occasionally and loose coalitions which brings together governments, NGOs, and other actors have been reached through initiatives such as the establishment of the ICC which was a government/NGO corporation, the R2P doctrine, a summit of world governments, and the international convention against land mines, originally a NGO campaign (Weiss 2016).

The demands for the UN to take action on issues such as human rights, climate change, economics, and security have increased. However, ideas on how to solve these issues and the resources required for addressing them are ever more often coming from NGOs as well as from public-private partnerships with foundations and corporations (Mingst, Karns & Lyon 2017). It is necessary to



Source: Sustainable Development SDG 17

mobilize governments and the civil society around the 2030 agenda. It is important that the coordination structures and partnerships between these actors go beyond superficial information exchange (Sustainable Development 2030 Agenda). All sectors and actors need to come together to achieve the SDGs. This, however, might require the “promotion” of the third UN.

Getting multinational corporations and NGOs a seat at the table could help dissolve the challenges of the UN, including national sovereignty and artificial groupings, as the UN then will not solely consist of countries as other actors also will be in play, who is less concerned with national interests and without the same North-South divide history. Furthermore, involving the third UN more in the UN system could also help improve the second UN as NGOs and corporations might be more focused on competencies which hopefully could rub off on the UN’s bureaucracy. *“Such partnerships represent a new way to govern the world”* (Thomas G. Weiss in Mingst, Karns & Lyon 2017: 342). However, different interests between NGOs as well as between NGOs and private companies might possible lead to conflicts and paralysis, just as in the case of the member states and the many UN units. In addition, even though NGOs and corporations are less concerned with national interests, they could still be looking out for their own interests.

It can be discussed if integrating the third UN is a necessity. The power structure of the world has changed greatly since the establishment of the UN in 1945, and it is important for the UN to adjust to this shift in power in order to stay relevant. Not acknowledging the increasing power of these actors and institutions, several of which are powerful and economically strong, could make member states, who do not approve of the UN actions or is unhappy with the weak performance of the UN, turn to these new institutions and actors and bypass the UN, which will marginalize the UN undermining the legitimacy of the UN as the primary global institution. Other global institutions could thereby end up replacing the UN because the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century might outrun the capacity of the UN.

## 8.3 METHODOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES

In this section I wish to discuss and reflect on the theories used as well as the methods used in the thesis. Firstly, I wish to reflect on the theoretical framework and starting point of the thesis. This will be done through a discussion of the primary theory and theoretical framework used in this thesis. Next, I wish to reflect on the methodological choices. This will be done mainly by focusing on a discussing of the data sources. Since the introductory methodological section of this thesis, in justifying the choice, primarily argues for the benefits and strengths of the theories and methods, this section will mostly be focusing on the limitations and criticism of these theories and methods.

### 8.3.1 REFLECTIONS ON THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As argued by Weiss (2016), diagnoses of what is wrong with the UN reflects a variety of perceptions and realities which depend on the analytical lenses of the viewers as well as the viewers values, national origins, gender and age. Weiss (2016) is just one perception, one theoretical perspective, and there are arguably different approaches to the challenges of the UN and research on the subject. The SDGs might be affecting and improving the UN in other areas than the four challenges explored in this thesis.

Weiss (2016) presents four major challenges of the UN; national sovereignty, artificial groupings, lack of coordination, and excessive bureaucracy and limited leadership. However, it can be discussed whether these four challenges are overlapping and coherent and even are the result of one major problem. National sovereignty and artificial groupings are somewhat the same as they both are about member states looking out for themselves by making horse deals and protecting national interests instead of coming together as one to focus on what is the best and most effective solution, like choosing the Secretary General based on competencies. National sovereignty has, according to Weiss (2016), led to some less than effective selection criteria, including choosing the Secretary General, but also in the recruitment of other UN employees. It can therefore be argued that national sovereignty has caused the UNs excessive bureaucracy and limited leadership. Furthermore, lack of coordination and excessive bureaucracy might be two sides of the same coin. National sovereignty

and national interests could simply just be the main problem causing all the other problems. National interests have led to artificial groupings and an unequal voting system and power structure. This culture at the top might be reflected down through the organization creating excessive bureaucracy, limited leadership and a lack of coordination. The focus is not on solving international problems but on serving national interests. The coalition of national interests which oppose an integrated UN system have crippled the UN and maintained a feudal structure of separate organizations which have made coordination difficult (Weiss 2016). The challenges of the UN come full circle back to the elephant in the room; national sovereignty. The guarding of national rights and interests are as much an obstacle to the consolidation of the organization's power as it is the cause of the organization's weaknesses. All the challenges, argued by Weiss (2016), are interrelated, making it difficult to point to solutions for each problem as they might just be one big problem.

Weiss (2016) suggests several proposals for fixing the UN, proposals which are largely in agreement with what Kofi Annan (Secretary General of the UN from 1997-2006) recommended at a high-level panel in 2005 (Mingst, Karns & Lyon 2017). This included a proposing that national interests be redefined, establishing coalitions across the first, second and third UN, and increasing the UN Secretariats' autonomy, such as in regard to staff recruitment, in order to allow for an emphasis on competences rather than nationality and political status (Ibid.). Arguably many of the UN's problems stem from politics, as the UN member states have a tendency of praising national interests either through policies or blockage. So, politics offers a test against which UN reform proposals should be measured including the reform proposals presented by Weiss (2016). National interests will probably not be washed away by bureaucratic changes, it can therefore be discussed whether Weiss' (2016) suggestions for fixing the UN are feasible or simply aspirational. Furthermore, if it is assumed that reforming the UN is a political job and not a managerial job what forces are needed in order to create these institutional changes and reforms. How can a reform mindset be adopted amongst the first, second and third UN in the absence of a World War? It could have been interesting to examine this perception and analytical lens.

### 8.3.2 REFLECTIONS ON THE METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Weiss (2016) as a framework gives an excellent review of the challenges and issues the UN is facing as well as suggestions for how to fix these issues. However, the role of the individual and the managerial perspective could have been explored further making the argument stronger and more comprehensive. Even though one of the issues of the UN is its lack of coordination, causing the UN to not always act as one cohesive organization, and the excessive bureaucracy and limited leadership within the second UN, it is also important to beware that the individual employees within the UN represent the UN's basic entity and the source of action.

It can therefore be discussed if incorporating more primary data, such as interviews, could have given a more human and individual perspective into the challenges of the UN and the SDGs' effect on the UN. Interviews as a method is an efficient tool in getting a detailed understanding of one or more people's ideas, attitudes, experiences and motivations (Desai & Potter 2006). Creating primary data by for example conducting interviews and thereby considering the role of the individuals within this organization could have contributed with a different analytical perspective to the research presented in this thesis. Primary data, including interviews, could have been used to dig deeper into the feminist perspective and gender equality within the UN and how the women working within the organization experience this issue as well as the progress in this area. Furthermore, interview as a method could have gained an inside perspective on what the individuals working within the UN think is needed for the UN to change as well as what is needed in order to solve gender inequality within the UN.

Interviewing people working within the UN organization could also help gain a better understanding of the challenge of the second UN, i.e. the excessive bureaucracy and limited leadership, and how this challenge is affecting the employees, how they experience this problem and what change they think could solve it. Primary data, especially interviews, could have given a more specific, personal and in-depth view of the UN from those experiencing the UN from within. This of course would greatly narrow the scope of the research and it would not have been possible to explore several challenges and solutions of the UN. The research would be more specific and less general, limiting the scope and parts of the UN which would have been explored. Furthermore, data collecting would

be a more comprehensive, difficult and time-consuming process, rather than, as done in this thesis, using the data already collected and available from the UN. Neither methodological approach is better than the other, they simply approach the research differently and give different insights into the challenges of the UN. However, it could have been beneficial to complement the secondary data with primary data.

### 8.3.2.1 WHAT IS WRONG WITH THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

In this section I wish to critically discuss the SDGs, including its limitations. The SDGs are the empirical foundation of the thesis and it therefore seems relevant to discuss the limitations of this data source.

The SDGs undoubtedly expanded the development agenda and received broad support from many NGOs (Mingst, Karns & Lyon 2017). The SDGs as a data source are very broad and comprehensive. Lots of data material are assembled regarding the UN and the SDGs, including numerous reports and documents. The reliability and validity of the data material, including the SDGs, have been presented in the methodological section of this thesis. This section will therefore critically discuss the limitations and critique of the SDGs.

The SDGs have been criticized of trying to include too many people and concerns in the goals which have created a list of goals and targets that are too broad, unattainable and unfocused. *“Having 169 priorities is the same as having none”* (Bjørn Lomborg in Weiss 2016: 177). The formulation of 17 sustainable goals and 169 targets are too expansive in order for national governments to assign sufficient resources to each of the 17 goals and 169 targets (The Economist 2015). Choices are therefore necessary as not all member states will be able to meet all the targets. This gives room for governments to simply focus on the targets which they are best suited to achieve and allows them to claim success without really addressing main issues. *“Something for everyone has produced too much for anyone”* argued the Economist in 2015 (Ibid.). While the SDGs present a broader agenda than the MDGs, there is a risk that the most important and transformative goals will be neglected through national selectivity. This leaves the question of which of the 17 goals and 169 targets will

receive policy attention and resources? The selectivity might lead to goals, which could have addressed the structural issues of the UN, to be ignored (Fukuda-Parr 2016). The SDGs undoubtedly expanded the development agenda compared to the MDGs, however the limited agenda of the MDGs made it easier to judge and expose governments for not working towards the goals. This is somewhat more difficult with the comprehensive agenda of the SDGs. Furthermore, some argue that instead of trying to include everything in the goals the UN would be better off focusing on the most urgent and fundamental priorities.

In contrast to the MDGs, the SDGs apply to all countries, however, the national progresses on the SDGs are to be monitored by national governments, reporting on themselves and their progress. This means that the countries can pick and choose which results to report or ignore (Weiss 2016).

The SDGs have been criticized of being contradictory. As an example, SDG 8 and the target of continued global economic growth (GDP growth) could be contradictory to SDG 12 (ensuring responsible consumption and production), undermine SDG 10 (reducing inequalities) and SDG 15 (ecological sustainability). In addition, measuring progress of the SDGs can be challenging as several of the SDGs' 169 targets and 232 indicators are not quantified. Measurability of the SDGs will depend on the availability of data. Furthermore, it is difficult to judge and predict the future relevance of the SDGs, which were agreed upon in September 2015, as they first are due to be reached in 2030.

The data sources of the SDGs therefore have some limitations. Progress of the SDGs are in some areas difficult to measure and there could be some bias in the data, especially regarding progress data, as the member states' national governments themselves are in charge of reporting its progress regarding the goals back to the UN.



## 9 CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to examine the SDGs and whether they are responding to the critique of the UN. The purpose of this study has been to explore the effect of the SDGs and their influence on the UN and its challenges. The thesis investigated if the influence of the SDGs could be relevant in improving and redefining the UN by seeking to answer the research question: *Can the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals be used to improve and redefine the United Nations?* In order to answer this question secondary data, including both qualitative and quantitative data, was collected. The main data source was collected from the UN websites, including the UN's website on the SDGs, entailing data regarding the SDGs' purpose, targets, and progress. In order to better analysis the SDGs and examine their relevance in regard to the main challenges of the UN, the SDGs were coded according to the theoretical framework consisting of the four challenges and 15 solutions presented by Weiss (2016). The UN has been heavily criticized for its lack of change, development and adaption to the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In discussing what is wrong with the UN, Weiss (2016) addresses international relations, the structure of the UN, and the interactions between the member states. Weiss (2016) presents four major problems of the UN; national sovereignty, artificial groupings, lack of coordination, and excessive bureaucracy and limited leadership. These problems are a consequence of the membership structure of the UN as well as a consequence of the UN's bureaucracy.

The SDGs proved to be relevant in responding to the four main challenges of the UN, especially SDG 5, SDG 10, SDG 13, SDG 16, and SDG 17. National sovereignty leaves the UN managing global challenges based on national interest even though the challenges facing the world transcend national boundaries. SDG 10 and its focus on human rights is useful in making inroads in the fortress of national sovereignty as human rights go beyond sovereign states. It is necessary, both regarding SDG 5, gender equality, and SDG 13, climate action, to disregard national interests in order to agree on and implement major reforms. There is an artificial divide between the member states from the North and the South, which is hurting the UN as this divide rarely reflects common interests and instead paralyzes the UN. While both SDG 5 and SDG 13 are beneficial in responding to the issue of the artificial groupings these subjects could also lead to complications of this issue. Conservative member states of Asia and the Middle East have a different attitude towards gender equality than

the North and some member states of the South. The complex structure of the UN has led to a lack of coordination between the numerous agencies which often are overlapping, leading to inefficiencies. SDG 16 and its focus on creating strong institutions can move the UN to make changes to organizational structure, improving coordination. SDG 13, climate action, requires efforts and pulling together across agencies and sectors. This has led the UN to set up centralized funds which have been successful in encouraging coordination. Excessive bureaucracy and limited leadership have restricted the UN's ability to handle challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century efficiently and have left the UN with issues of an incompetent staff and gender imbalance. SDG 5, concentrating on gender equality, also within the UN organization, have brought attention and progress to the issue.

The transition from the MDGs to the SDGs marked changes to both content and process. While the MDGs only applied to developing countries, the SDGs present a more universal framework which apply to all the member states of the UN, arguing that every country has progress to make towards sustainable development. Furthermore, SDGs are a shift from the traditional model of development and provides a more transformative vision which goes beyond the narrower vision of the MDGs. The SDGs address a more multi-faceted agenda including broader definitions of issues such as gender equality. In addition, human rights have become an essential part of the SDGs shifting the attention from national security to human security.

Partnerships are important for the UN's future. SDG 17, regarding partnerships for the goals, were relevant for 8 out of the 15 solutions presented by Weiss (2016). The world's power structure has changed a lot since the establishment of the UN. In order to stay relevant, the UN must adjust to this shift in power. This could be done by integrating multinational corporations and NGOs in the UN system, giving them power equal to that of member states. Involving the third UN more in the UN system could be necessary in order to maintain the legitimacy of the UN.

It is not possible to give a definitive yes or no answer to whether the SDGs will help improve and redefine the UN by helping solve the challenges which the UN is facing and thereby leverage the UN into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The actual significance of the SDGs will not be known until 2030 when the SDGs have its deadline. The SDGs can be used to improve and redefine the UN but as the deadline for the SDGs is 11 years away, it is unclear whether the SDGs will be reached or if important goals and target will be left behind.

Weiss (2016) argues that the international system must make a shift from global governance to global government, as predictable responses are needed to deal with recurrent challenges. It could be interesting for future research to explore the concept of global government and whether the SDGs are moving the UN and the international system towards global government, exploring the differences and possibilities between global governance and global government. Global government does not yet exist making it interesting to research how global government should be structured to avoid the same issues and limitations as global governance, including the UN, and how to best structure it to enable it to handle the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Seeing as the concept of global government has yet to become a reality, it would be relevant to discuss if global government even is possible, how it would work, and how a shift towards global government would solve the challenges of the UN. Furthermore, it could be relevant to study the challenges of the UN in light of Benedict Anderson's (1983) theory of *Imagined Communities*, highlighting the national or even transnational imagined communities within the UN.

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- Sustainable Development SDG 10: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg10>
- Sustainable Development SDG 13: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg13>
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## APPENDIX OVERVIEW

Attached are the following appendixes:

- **Appendix 1:** United Nations Organizational Chart
- **Appendix 2:** Data coding



[https://www.un.org/en/pdfs/18-00159e\\_un\\_system\\_chart\\_17x11\\_4c\\_en\\_web.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/pdfs/18-00159e_un_system_chart_17x11_4c_en_web.pdf)





## APPENDIX 2: DATA CODING

Challenges	Solutions	Keywords	Sustainable Development Goals																
			GOAL 1	GOAL 2	GOAL 3	GOAL 4	GOAL 5	GOAL 6	GOAL 7	GOAL 8	GOAL 9	GOAL 10	GOAL 11	GOAL 12	GOAL 13	GOAL 14	GOAL 15	GOAL 16	GOAL 17
National Sovereignty	International Peace & Security: R2P, Regional Groupings	human rights, responsibility, protect populations, duties of states, human welfare, EU, NATO, AU																	
	Human Rights: European Court, Protection Machinery	human rights, civil, social, cultural and economic rights, collective conciliator, international protection																	
	Sustainable Development: Health & Pandemics	health, elimination of pandemics, WHO, HIV/AIDS																	
Artificial Groupings	International Peace & Security: Landmines, Human Security	partnerships, human security, human rights, unite, people-centered, gender equality, environmental issues																	
	Human Rights: Universality in Vienna, the Rome Statute	human rights, women's rights, NGOs, International Criminal Court																	
	Sustainable Development: Millennium Development Goals, Global Compact	MDGs, SDGs, women in development, environmental degradation, new partners, labor rights, human rights																	
Lack of Coordination	International Peace & Security: Rapid Reaction, Central Emergency Response Fund	humanitarian crises & response, competitive compassion, food aid, civilian rights, R2P																	
	Human Rights: Funding Central Activities	human rights, accountability, funding, central fund																	
	Sustainable Development: Bringing the Bretton Woods Institutions into the Fold, the Peacebuilding Commission	delivering as one, integration of institutions, protecting the environment, peacebuilding, efficiency																	

