

# **LINKING THE SDGS WITH HUMAN RIGHTS: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF PROMOTING GOAL 17**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is grounded in different international human rights instruments. Human rights (HR) principles and standards are strongly reflected in several of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and targets. Furthermore, SDG 17 emphasizes partnership as a key to achieving all of the SDGs. This article examines the SDGs-HR linkage in general, as well as specific HR principles that can be advanced by the achievement of SDG 17. Opportunities and challenges to promote Goal 17 of the SDGs that directly affect certain HRs are also examined. A review of relevant literature, 2030 summit documents, and outcomes of recent international conferences on the SDGs is undertaken in order to determine the progress made towards forging regional and global partnerships for the SDGs, as envisaged in Goal 17. This article finds that the absence of a political will and commitment, increased isolationist policy, narrow nationalism and poor rule linkage at national and international levels are some of the obstacles to the attainment of Goal 17. Yet, opportunities abound to promote the Goal. The article recommends a genuine commitment to implementing the SDGs by encouraging the South-South and North-South to prevent the SDGs from becoming a mere wishlist. Synergy between the government, individuals, civil society organizations (CSOs) and transnational corporations (TNCs) is equally very important.

**Keywords:** Human rights, sustainable development goals, partnership for the goals.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In anticipation of the 2015 deadline of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the United Nations (UN) member states equally established a new successor programme, namely, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).<sup>1</sup> The summit outcome document, built around 17 Sustainable Development Goals and entitled *Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, was approved by the 193 Member States of the United Nations.<sup>2</sup> The SDGs provide a global vision for balancing economic growth, social development, and environmental protection over the next fifteen years.<sup>3</sup> The SDGs constitute an ambitious, bold and universal sustainable development agenda that aim to end poverty and promote prosperity by 2030, while addressing complex environmental challenges. The SDGs address the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development and are designed to be pursued in a holistic and comprehensive manner.<sup>4</sup> Integrated development, therefore, is at the heart of the 2030 Development Agenda, as reflected in the SDGs.<sup>5</sup>

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- 1 United Nations, *Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly on 25 September 2015 A/RES/70/L.
  - 2 United Nations, *Transforming our World* (n. 1). See also Damilola Olawuyi and Olaitan Olusegun, "Achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals on Biological Diversity in Nigeria: Current Issues and Future Directions" (2018) 7 (1) *Global Journal of Comparative Law*, pp. 37-60.
  - 3 S Sarvajayakesavalu, "Addressing Challenges of Developing Countries in Implementing Five Priorities for Sustainable Development Goals" (2015) 1(7) *Ecosystem Health and Sustainability*, p. 24.
  - 4 R Stephan *et al*, "Water-Energy-Food Nexus: A Platform for Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals" (2018) *Water International* 1-7, at 3.
  - 5 The the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development contains five P's that are fundamentals for transforming our world. Achievement of these five P's could lead to the future we want by 2030. These P's are: **People**: the international community is committed to the realization of all human beings fulfilling their potential in dignity and equality by ending poverty and hunger in all their forms and dimensions. **Planet**: protect the planet and its resources from degradation for the present and future generations. **Prosperity**: all human beings can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives and that economic, social and technological progress occurs in harmony with nature. **Peace**: foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies which are free from fear and violence. **Partnership**: mobilize the means to implement, focus on the poorest and most vulnerable with the participation of all countries, all stakeholders and all people. The interlink age and integrated, universal nature of the SDGs demands cooperation of the international community to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

The idea of partnerships is at the very heart of the 2030 Agenda.<sup>6</sup> SDG 17, for example, underscores the need for enhanced partnership – globally, regionally and nationally – in order to achieve all the SDGs in a coherent manner.<sup>7</sup> SDG 17 calls for the revitalization of global partnerships for sustainable development, an explicit acknowledgement of our collective ability to achieve the SDGs on multi-stakeholder partnerships at diverse levels.<sup>8</sup> The very purpose of Goal 17 is to bring together different organizations, as well as individuals, to collaborate towards advancing the ambitious agenda of the SDGs. This includes cooperation on key human rights issues that may impact several of the SDGs, for example, on water, energy, food and the environment. Through a holistic assessment, actions and measures that negatively impact one goal or sector could be spotted and reconsidered before approval.<sup>9</sup> Thus, SDG 17 contains key enablers for action across the entire SDGs framework. It aims to facilitate an intensive global engagement in support of the implementation of all the other goals and targets bringing together governments, the private sector, civil society, the United Nations system and other actors, as well as mobilizing all available resources.<sup>10</sup> This goal could also further stress the importance of stakeholder engagement in implementing the SDGs through partnerships. Strengthening institutional, financial, scientific, and technological capacities will be key to the success of the SDGs. The targets would greatly benefit from further specification and quantification. This global Goal is so ambitious that it could hardly be realized by the effort of one country. Knowing the impossibility of SDGs' attainment by individual nation, the document included

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6 From a UN perspective, “partnerships” could be among “[s]tates, civil society, local authorities, private sector, scientific and technological community, academia, and others”; see UN, “Partnerships for the SDGs: Global Registry of Voluntary Commitments & Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships”, available online: <<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnerships/about>> accessed 12 May 2019.

7 International Council for Science (ICSU) and International Social Science Council (ISSC) *Review of Targets for the Sustainable Development Goals: The Science Perspective* (Paris: International Council for Science, 2015), p. 84.

8 M. Beisheim, N Simon, “Multistakeholder Partnerships for Implementing the 2030 Agenda: Improving Accountability and Transparency” *Analytical paper for the 2016 ECOSOC Partnership Forum* 11 March 2016 <<https://www.un.org/ecosoc/sites/www.un.org.ecosoc/files/files/en/2016doc/partnership-forum-beisheim-simon.pdf>> accessed 21 November 2018.

9 Olawuyi and Olusegun (n. 3)

10 United Nations, *Transforming our World* (n. 2). Art. 39.

strengthening the means of implementation through partnership.

To avoid the SDGs becoming a “wish list” with little prospect of implementation, it is important that this goal matches the level of ambition of the overall SDG framework.<sup>11</sup> To implement the idea of partnerships successfully, as envisaged in the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, it is essential to swiftly move from commitment to action, especially given that the Agenda is a political commitment and not a legally binding document.<sup>12</sup> Highlighting how the SDGs could impact extant human rights obligations could provide a basis for strong, inclusive and integrated partnerships between human rights and other institutions.<sup>13</sup>

This article examines different core international human right instruments that have strong relevance and implications for attaining the SDGs. The article is divided into six sections. Following this introductory section, section 2 explains SDGs-HR linkage with a focus on key human rights issues promoted by the realization of SDG 17. Section 3 examines opportunities for forming partnerships for the Goal. Section 4 explores the legal challenges of promoting partnership for the goals, while section 5 offers recommendations on how gaps that stifle partnerships for the Goal may be addressed. Section 6 is the conclusion.

## 2. HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE SDGS

The SDGs call for building peaceful, inclusive and well-governed societies with responsive institutions as the basis for shared prosperity.<sup>14</sup> Fundamentally, they recognize that many of the development goals cannot be attained without addressing human rights and complex humanitarian issues at the same time. The universal application to all countries while recognizing their different realities and capabilities show a similarity of features between the SDGs human rights. And since the

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11 ICSU, ISSC (n. 6) 81.

12 Olawuyi and Olusegun (n. 3).

13 In the 2030 Agenda entitled *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* Sustainable Art. 39-46 are about the means of implementation which is Goal 17. While the goals and targets of the SDGs are treated in a different section Goal 17 has been dealt with twice – under the means of implementation section and under goals and targets section. This shows the weight given to G17 and its importance in achieving other SDGs.

objectives are not independent of each other, they need to be implemented in an integrated manner. At the international level, most notably at the level of the United Nations (UN), the prevailing view is that both concepts are strongly intertwined given that achieving human rights is both a tool and an objective of development. Pursuant to this view, development is no longer perceived in narrow terms as mere economic growth but encompasses all aspects of human development.<sup>15</sup> Focusing on human rights as tools, the Danish Institute for Human Rights has developed *The Human Rights Guide to the SDGs*.<sup>16</sup> The Guide shows how human rights and the SDGs are tied together in a mutually reinforcing way in which binding human rights obligations underpin a political commitment to the SDGs. The Guide shows that a majority of SDGs targets – 156 of the 169 targets (or more than 92 per cent of them) – reflect substantial provisions of international human rights and labour standards. The Guide allows the user to work with the convergence of human rights and the SDGs in planning, programming, monitoring, evaluation and reporting, which means human rights offer guidance for implementing the SDGs.

Human rights are, literally, the rights that one has because one is a human being.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, human rights are universal: something which all men everywhere, at all times, ought to have; something of which no one may be deprived without a grave affront to justice; something which is owed to every human being simply because they are human.<sup>18</sup> Even though the SDGs did not use an unequivocal language or word that specifically refers to human rights, both the means and end result of the SDGs' realization promote human rights. Therefore, human rights and SDGs are complementary rather than competing.

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14 United Nations, *Transforming our World* (n. 1).

15 Eva Brems, Christophe Van der Beken and Solomon Abay Yimer, "The Nexus between Human Rights and Development from International and Ethiopian Perspectives" (2015) 111 *International Studies in Human Rights*.

16 Danish Institute for Human Rights, *The Human Rights Guide to the Sustainable Development Goals* <<http://sdg.humanrights.dk>> accessed on 23 May 2019.

17 Siobhán McInerney-Lankford and Hans-Otto Sano, *The World Bank Study of Human Rights Indicators in Development* (Washington DC: World Bank, 2010), p. 3.

18 M. Cranston, *What Are Human Rights?* (Taplinger Publishing Co 1973), p.36. See also J. Nickel, *Making Sense of Human Rights: Philosophical Reflections on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (University of California Press, 1987), pp. 561-2.

## **2.1 Related Human Rights that Could Be Promoted by the Achievement of Goal 17**

The SDGs aim to end poverty in all its forms everywhere and bring prosperity by 2030.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the 2030 Agenda sees human rights and development as indivisible. Achievement of each SDG promotes certain human rights. The development of the Agenda is grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights treaties. Therefore, the SDGs are a further reflection of the development foundation in human rights. This means that the achievement of certain goals of SDGs will inevitably promote a related human right. In the section below, three human rights that could be promoted by the achievement of SDG 17 are explained in detail.

### **2.1.1 Right of all People to Development and International Cooperation**

Since the 1950s and 1960s, developing countries have canvassed vigorously for the recognition of the right to development as a human right in international law. Despite some opposition, the UN declaration on the right to development was adopted in 1986.<sup>20</sup> As enshrined in the UN declaration,<sup>21</sup> the right to development is an inalienable human right that all people are entitled to enjoy. The right to development is the right of peoples and individuals to the constant improvement of their well-being and to a national and global enabling environment; which is conducive, just, equitable, participatory, human-centred and respectful of all human rights.<sup>22</sup> Obviously, the 2030 Agenda, which is the manual of the SDGs, is grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights treaties. Thus, promotion of the SDGs in one way or another promotes human rights. Among some of the human rights that can be promoted by SDG 17, right to development is one.

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19 See SDG 1, United Nations, *Transforming Our World* (n. 1).

20 Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Dialogue on Globalization *Occasional Paper* No. 23 (2006), 4.

21 Art. 1.1, UN General Assembly, *Declaration on the Right to Development: Resolution/Adopted by the General Assembly*, 4 December 1986, A/RES/41/128.

22 Siobhán McInerney (n. 17) 66.

Goal 17 has about 19 targets whose achievement promotes different human rights. The first target of SDG 17 is *strengthening domestic resource mobilization, including through international support to developing countries, to improve domestic capacity for tax and other revenue collection*.<sup>23</sup> Human rights law recognizes that a lack of resources can impede the realization of human rights. Some human rights obligations are of a progressive kind, while others are immediate.<sup>24</sup> For economic, social and cultural rights, states have a core obligation to satisfy the minimum essential level of each right which is the duty to fulfil; unlike that of civil and political right where the state is obliged not to interfere in the enjoyment of the right.<sup>25</sup> Right to development is of socio-economic nature. It means the state has a duty to fulfil this human right with available resources. This duty is hardly possible for developing countries which have limited resources. Cognizant of all these, the 2030 Agenda made partnership a core strategy for the attainment of SDGs. Different human right instruments<sup>26</sup> require the state to create favourable conditions for achieving the right to development. Honouring commitments made by developed countries to support developing countries may help the latter to fulfil some of the socio-cultural human rights. This is the second target of Goal 17 and has something to do with the right to development, especially for least developed countries provided its implementation is to promote the Right to Development (RtD). Moreover, targets of Goal 17.3, 17.4, 17.5, which aims at assisting the least developed countries by mobilizing additional financial resources, providing long-term debt sustainability and investment promotion have great value in the

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23 United Nations, *Transforming our World* (n. 2) parts dealing with goals and targets.

24 See general comment No. 3 of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, <<http://www.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cescr/comments.htm>> accessed on 23/4/2017.

25 United Nations New York and Geneva Frequently Asked Questions on A Human Rights-Based Approach to Development Cooperation (2006), 9.

26 Article 3 (1) of United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development obliges states to create nationally and internationally favourable conditions for enjoyment of the right to development. ICESCR under its article 2(1) wants states party to the convention to take steps individually and through international assistance and cooperation, especially economic and technical, to maximize its available recourses with a view to progressive full accomplishments of the rights recognized in the covenant.

promotion of RtD. Generally, attainment the above-listed targets of Goal 17 promotes the right of all people to development.

### **2.1.2 Right of all People to Self-Determination**

The right of all people to self-determination is enshrined in international<sup>27</sup> as well as regional<sup>28</sup> human right instruments. The right to self-determination is a wide concept and one part of human right. The ordinary dictionary meaning of the right to self-determination is the right of a country and its people to be independent and to choose their own government and political system.<sup>29</sup> According to the UN Declaration on the right to development, the right to self-determination includes the right to exercise the inalienable right to full sovereignty over all their natural wealth and resources.<sup>30</sup> Thus, one cannot attach the right to self-determination only to form or establish an independent state. The right to self-determination also refers to the right of all peoples to choose their own manner of pursuing social, economic and cultural development.<sup>31</sup> Promoting the right of self-determination is core; as it indeed is a pre-condition for the exercise of all other rights. Thus, promoting the right of all people to self-determination is another way of enhancing the right to development as we are making individuals determine freely on the types of activity they want to engage in to bring about development. By creating a conducive condition for individuals as well as groups promoting the right to self-determination, development will be enhanced. By doing so human right-development linkage will be made reinforcing. Goal 17 of SDGs aims at promoting this human right through domestic resource mobilization, coherence in global policy processes is frustrating the implementation of positive

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27 The right to self-determination is granted to all peoples in article 1 of both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

28 The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights Article 20(2). The article recognizes all peoples, whether colonized or oppressed, as right holders of the right to self-determination.

29 *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*.

30 Article 1(2) of the UN Declaration on the right to development says "The human right to development also implies the full realization of the right of peoples to self-determination, which includes, subject to the relevant provisions of both International Covenants on Human Rights, the exercise of their inalienable right to full sovereignty over all their natural wealth and resources."

31 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Article 3.



measures supportive of indigenous peoples' self-determination and sustainable development.

## **2.2 Right to Enjoy the Benefits of Scientific Progress and its Application**

This right is enshrined in international human rights instruments like the UDHR<sup>32</sup> and ICESCR.<sup>33</sup> The right of everyone to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress is made possible with the promotion of technology transfer, capacity building and trade. Even though not limited to Goal 17, three G17 targets deal directly with technology transfer for the enjoyment of its scientific progress and application for everyone to enjoy as a human right. The enjoyment of technological advancement is obviously made easy for everyone with a triangular strengthening of the North-South and South-South partnerships at regional and international levels. This partnership is useful in that the developing countries, being poor in innovation, cannot enjoy the benefits of scientific breakthroughs without cooperation. This idea could be inferred from the reading of Target 17.6 of the Transformative the 2030 Agenda, which emphasizes enhancing North-South and South-South cooperation. One of the targets of the 2030 Agenda aims at promoting development, transferring, disseminating and diffusing environmentally sound technology to developing countries on favourable terms, including occasional and preferential terms as mutually agreed.<sup>34</sup> When technology becomes accessible to everyone, the right enjoyment of scientific progress will be promoted inevitably.

Target 17.8 deals with capacity building to promote the enjoyment of the benefits of scientific progress particularly in developing countries. This, obviously, cannot be done without international support. Hence, partnership is crucial for promoting the right of everyone to enjoy these benefits. The 2030 Agenda is an ambitious one that is designed not to

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32 Article 27(1) of UDHR says everyone has the right to participate freely in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.

33 Under article 15 of ICESCR speaks of enjoying the benefit of scientific progress and its application to the human right of every one. It also says state parties to the present covenant recognize the benefits to be derived from the encouragement and development of international contacts and co-operation in the scientific and cultural fields.

34 United Nations, *Transforming our World* (n. 2) target 17.7.

leave anyone out or behind. For this to happen requires revitalizing and enhancing global partnerships. There is a need for an intensive global engagement that supports the implementation of this Goal by bringing together governments, civil society organizations, and the private sector to mobilize all available expertise and resources towards its end. In general, by strengthening the implementation and revitalization of a global partnership for sustainable development, the right of everyone to enjoy scientific breakthroughs will be guaranteed.

### **3 OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARTNERSHIP FOR THE GOAL**

The theory behind a partnership approach is summed up by the Kashmiri saying: “one plus one equals eleven.” In other words, the sum is greater than the individual parts. Such collaboration can ensure that development initiatives capture the creative potential of diverse actors for deeper impact, foster local ownership for sustainability, and are integrated for effectiveness in addressing complex problems or new opportunities. The 2030 Agenda recognizes that its achievement is predicated on cooperation between different sectors and actors.<sup>35</sup> The summit document in its preamble called on all countries and stakeholders to develop an action plan that would guide the actions of all countries from 2015-2030. Furthermore, the UN General Assembly decided to convene a high-level political forum to follow up on the implementation of the goals and targets of the SDGs, particularly those relating to financing the goals.<sup>36</sup>

As a follow-up, a conference of the Heads of State and Governments and High Representatives took place in Addis Ababa from 13 to 16 July 2015 to discuss partnership approaches for financing the SDGs.<sup>37</sup> At the conference, countries affirmed their strong political commitment to address the challenge of financing and to create an enabling environment at all levels for sustainable development in the spirit of

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35 UN-DESA supporting the sustainable development goals through multi-stakeholder partnerships – ensuring that no one is left behind (2016), 18.

36 See UN Resolution 68/204 of 20 December 2013, in which it was decided to convene a third international conference on financing for development, as well as its resolutions 68/279 of 30 June 2014 and 69/278 of 8 May 2015.

37 United Nations New York Third International Conference on Financing for Development, Addis Ababa Action Agenda (2015), pp. 1-68.

global partnership and solidarity.<sup>38</sup> The final document has been endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 69/313 of 27 July 2015.<sup>39</sup> These international conferences provide great plurilateral opportunities for strengthening partnership for the goals. As envisaged, the 2030 Agenda provided for several high-level fora, some of which have held and agreed as bilaterally as well as multilaterally on matters relating to SDGs. For instance, the Dubai Declaration was adopted at the first High-Level Forum: Space As a Driver for Socio-Economic Sustainable Development, Dubai, United Arab Emirates, on 24 November 2016. The agreement was meant to boost cooperation between the UN Space Affairs Office and UAE.<sup>40</sup> The declaration asserted that space exploration is a long-term driver for innovation, strengthening international cooperation on an all-inclusive basis, and creating new opportunities for addressing global challenges.

Several global multi-stakeholder partnerships focus on specific sustainable development issues that help revitalize partnership.<sup>41</sup> For example, the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, Open Government Participation, and Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data are groups that all synergize to revitalize partnership. Similarly, committed individuals, civil society organizations as well as corporations have established different initiatives to support the SDGs by enhancing awareness and providing financial support. For instance, the Opportunity Knock Your Door global ambassador programme which has been circulating on the social media can be mobilized for their 1 million-person impact campaign to support the SDGs. In Ethiopia, the youths have been trying to disseminate information on the SDGs and climate change through the Youth Negotiation on Climate Change Convention (YNCCE). They have been recruiting undergraduate students for training on climate change and their coming together gives them an opportunity to form partnerships

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38 Ibid.

39 Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (Addis Ababa Action Agenda) **A/ RES/69/313**.

40 Report on the United Nations/United Arab Emirates High-Level Forum: Space as a Driver for Socioeconomic Sustainable Development (Dubai, United Arab Emirates, 6-9 November 2017).

41 S. Monitoring, S. D., Group, A. W., Goal, S. D., States, M., & Assembly, U. N. G. "A Guide to Engaging with Your Government on the Sustainable Development Goals (2016)", p. 10.

for awareness generation which, in turn, contributes to the realization of the SDGs.

More importantly, there are many regional and global unions that can do a lot to help achieve the G17 targets if they stick to the concerns of the SDGs. The SDGs are so comprehensive that they include provisions that help form partnerships and monitor progress on the implementation of the SDGs at national, regional and international level. If countries implement the SDGs as agreed, they will build a strong partnership to attain most of the Goals.

#### **4 CHALLENGES TO SDGS: GOAL 17 IN FOCUS**

The 2030 Agenda provides an opportunity to address the persistent challenges facing the world, including poverty, growing inequalities, and environmental degradation. Through it, world leaders have committed to addressing the economic, social and environmental issues standing in the way of sustainable development.<sup>42</sup> However, progress on translating the goals and visions of the SDGs to reality has been slow and uncoordinated. This section examines key challenges that may impede the realization of the 2030 Agenda in general as well as Goal 17 of the SDGs in particular.

##### **4.1 Non-Binding Nature of the 2030 Agenda**

As earlier mentioned, a key challenge of Goal 17 arises from the nature of the agenda itself. The SDGs are generally non-binding on the countries. There is, therefore, no concrete mechanism for ensuring responsibility and accountability for progress towards meeting the SDGs.<sup>43</sup> Mechanisms to do this need to link across local, national and international scales. Discussions are ongoing on how to monitor and evaluate progress at the national level. There is a need to measure both “inputs” (i.e., did nation X invest what it promised in addressing issues A, B, and C), as well as “outcomes” (i.e., were the actually goals to eradicate poverty, improve health, and provide access to water, food and energy in nation X achieved?). These are crucial and powerful

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42 PAGE (n. 3) iii.

43 World Economic Forum, “3 Challenges Facing the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals” <<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2015/08/3-challenges-facing-the-uns-sustainable-development-goals>> accessed on 20 April 2019.

ways of feeding back into the policy and political arena to hold responsible stakeholders to account. Owing to the non-binding nature of the 2030 Agenda on the countries, achievement of Goal 17 in all the countries is unlikely. It is obvious that the LDCs have a shortage of resource to achieve prosperity in 2030. This is why Goal 17 rests on global partnerships for finance, technology, and capacity building. But the developed countries usually do not fulfil their promises and once there are no sanctions for the breach, it is easy to predict that many countries may not achieve the SDGs.

#### **4.2 Weak Governance and Narrow Nationalism**

Good governance, which is synonymous with democratic governance, is possible when democratic values and norms are engraved into the functioning of the state, society and its institutions.<sup>44</sup> The importance of good governance and the strengthening of trust in government are fundamental for achieving the SDGs. Where there is no democracy and institutions that promote good governance is ineffective; which in most cases is prevalent in developing countries which also impact forming partnership. SDGs are likely to fail unless far more attention is given to addressing governance challenges crucial to their implementation.

In the broadest sense, governance refers to how societies make decisions and act. It is about the mechanisms we use to work together in society to solve shared problems. For the SDGs, this involves considering how government, business, non-governmental organizations, civil society and researchers will work together. Governance fundamentally underpins our ability to get things done in society, yet there are numerous failures in governance everywhere: weak safeguards in the global financial system, coups against elected national governments, the multi-decadal struggle to take global action to manage greenhouse gas emissions and climate change. In LDCs, where autocratic government rules, even foreign aid which is supposed to promote SDGs is unlikely implemented for what it is given. In such a

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44 See M. S Grindle, "Good Enough Governance Revisited" (2007) 25 (5), *Development Policy Review*, pp. 533-574; A Chris, and G Alison, "Collaborative Governance in Theory and Practice" (2007), p. 18, *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, pp. 543-571; also Government of Nepal, *National Planning Commission on Sustainable Development Goals, 2016-2030, Preliminary Report* (2015), p. 59.

scenario there is a high probability of losing partnership which may affect achievement of the SDGs and Goal 17 in particular. Thus, governance poses a challenge to the realization of the SDGs in general and Goal 17 in particular.

Within a year after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, it became obvious that the SDGs may not be realized without a revitalized global partnership given the emergence of two nagging issues that could affect partnership significantly. These are the Brexit vote and rise of isolationism under the presidency of Donald Trump.<sup>45</sup> With these two developments, the same international community that committed to forming a strong partnership to achieve SDGs now appears to be pursuing a narrow nationalism, which is as alarming as it is contrary to the spirit of forming a partnership for global development. Therefore, alongside the challenges of good governance, poverty, inequality and so on, narrow nationalism has become a challenge to Goal 17 of Sustainable Development Goals.

### **4.3 Lack of Political Commitment**

Progress on the realization of global partnership commitments related to SDG 17 is currently slow. More importantly, a number of commitments on trade, aid, investment and financing for the development of the LDCs have not been significantly met. Countries promise to unite against certain global problems at different fora but rarely show commitment to those promises because of their conflicting interests. For example, while SDG 17 envisages the need for accelerated financial assistance from the developed countries to the developing world, it is difficult to measure effectively the current level of additional financial flow to developing countries.<sup>46</sup> This lack of political commitment towards the SDGs is a practical challenge that can stifle its achievement. Curiously, the growing protests all over America over climate change do not seem to translate to greater government commitment to the realization of SDGs, particularly Goal 17.

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45 See Rosalyn Kutsh, "Sustainable Development no Longer a Focus as Trump Administration Battles Multilateralism at the United Nations" (2018) *Political Review* <<http://fordhampoliticalreview.org/sustainable-development-no-longer-a-focus-as-trump-administration-battles-multilateralism-at-the-united-nations/>> accessed 12 May 2019.

46 Challenges facing the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (n.33).

## 5 ADDRESSING THE GAPS: RECOMMENDATIONS

Partnership is a vehicle for supporting government-led actions in achieving the SDGs. Ever since the Millennium Declaration in 2000, partnership has been increasingly recognized as a pivotal means of implementing the global development agenda. The achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals requires different sectors and actors working together in an integrated manner by pooling financial resources, knowledge and expertise. Cross-sectoral and innovative multi-stakeholder partnerships will play a crucial role if the world is to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

As advocated in the preamble of the 2030 Agenda, the SDGs are people-centred and planet-sensitive. Thus, achieving the SDGs increases the well-being of people without posing a risk to nature. Consequently, to promote the SDGs is to promote human rights. Goal 17, which is vital for the realization of other SDGs, has 19 targets, which, if achieved, can help promote human rights such as the right of all people to development, international cooperation, self-determination as well as the right of everyone to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its application.

However, four years into the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, progress in forming partnerships for its achievement is proceeding at a slow rate. Lack of good governance, lack of political commitment, narrow nationalism, the non-binding nature of SDGs are among the challenges confronting Goal 17 of SDGs thereby affecting the willingness to protect or make people enjoy their chain of fundamental human rights. Implementation of the 2030 Agenda requires a level of integration and collaboration across various actors. Thus, strengthening the commitment to partnership and cooperation is consequential to the achievement of the SDGs and enjoyment of the various shades of human rights.

To tackle these challenges and strengthen partnership for the achievement of the SDGs and human rights, the following action points will be required over the next few years:

### 5.1 Need for Greater Political Will

The unprecedented commitment shown at the approval of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development must be repeated by strengthening international, regional and national partnerships for the SDGs, as envisaged under Goal 17. The overall objective of achieving sustainable development is only possible by building partnerships and designing policy strategies that are mutually supportive. Promoting

partnership for the G17 actually requires countries to view things broadly and holistically. This could be achieved when political leaders demonstrate greater political will and commitment to spearhead collaborations and maintain an open dialogue with all stakeholders, including the furthest behind.

## **5.2 Legally Binding Accord Or Protocol on the SDGs**

The SDGs continue to be viewed as political documents that have no binding effects. This raises the need to address the challenges arising from the non-binding nature of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development in general and Goal 17 in particular. The international community needs to change the political document into a binding document, protocol or an accord that elaborates concrete and measurable action plans in the context of the SDGs. For example, ending poverty in all its forms, in all nations, by 2030, needs the cooperation of all people, including, for instance, the Overseas Development Assistance (ODA). This is envisaged in the the 2030 Agendadocument which emphasizes the need to address resource gaps of developing and least developing countries through financial assistance by developed countries. However, because of the voluntary and non-binding nature of the SDGs, it is difficult to measure to what extent countries are channelling ODAs to developing countries to support progress towards the SDGs. Lack of clear and measurable results on SDG implementation could be addressed by changing the political document to a legally binding one. Moreover, mere deliverance of ODA may not help unless there is a system of evaluation for its implementation to promote SDGs. This calls for the establishment of monitoring systems to collate information on the progress made with respect to each of the SDGs. Clear and measurable targets of the SDGs can help advance several human rights on food, water and education among other things.

## **5.3 Strengthening Leadership and Accountability to Tackle Governance-Related Challenges**

Empirical evidence supports the positive relationship between good governance and sustainable development.<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, bad

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47 Kempe Ronald Hope, Practitioner Perspective toward Good Governance and Sustainable Development: “The African Peer Review Mechanism Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration, and Institutions,” (2005) [18:2], pp. 283-311.



governance is a hindrance to an effective partnership. Without good governance, it is tough to bring relevant stakeholders (such as civil society, individuals and business organizations) to work together at the right time and place to solve complex poverty and sustainability problems. By strengthening leadership, accountability and governance could easily be achieved. This, in turn, strengthens partnership for G17 and will be an engine to pool resources for accomplishing the SDGs and human rights.

Synergies between governments, individuals, civil society organizations, business organizations as well as transnational corporations are, therefore, very important since all the goals of the 2030 Agenda could hardly be achieved without strengthening global partnership. A system-wide approach to partnerships for the 2030 Agenda and stronger institutional response is needed to enhance a South-South and North-South synergy for SDG implementation. Moreover, it will be good for the UN to develop a common approach to partnerships and engage more effectively with the public-private sector, including building consistent due diligence standards on existing best practices in revitalizing partnership.

## **6 CONCLUSION**

It is hardly possible to achieve the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development without partnerships between governments, the private sector and civil society. Building effective international, regional as well as national collaborations is, therefore, crucial. This article has evaluated available opportunities and challenges pointing to the need to revitalize partnership for the accomplishment of the SDGs. The existence of different high-level political fora that brings the governments of UN member countries together to discuss how to achieve SDGs through partnership, the emphasis given to partnership in the 2030 Agenda document, and the launch of different initiatives at individual and organizational level are among opportunities that can strengthen global partnerships for the attainment of the SDGs. However, the non-binding nature of the SDGs document itself, lack of good governance, and lack of political commitments are among challenges that must be addressed to further enhance broad-based and effective partnership for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development.