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# Integrated Policymaking

## Choosing an Institutional Design for Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

*Anita Breuer  
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## Foreword

This Discussion Paper is part of DIE's research project "Implementing the Agenda 2030: Integrating Growth, Environment, Equality and Governance". Political coherence and integration are central in planning, designing and addressing the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This project aims at analysing how political institutions and processes need to be shaped to allow for an integrative instead of an isolated implementation of the SDGs. Negative interactions between SDGs arise when the achievement of one goal constrains – or even impedes or reverses – the achievement of other goals (trade-offs). Increased availability of electricity and use of groundwater pumps for irrigation, for example, can improve food security. At the same time, however, groundwater pumping can accelerate the depletion of water resources and aquifers. To minimise trade-offs, political institutions and processes need to be shaped in a way that priorities are set and compromises can be found.

The research project is funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). Valuable comments from colleagues definitely enriched our thinking about SDG implementation and improved our empirical analysis. We presented the results of our empirical analysis at the annual International Conference for Sustainable Development (ICSD) organised by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) in New York in 2018 and at the annual conference of the European Consortium for Political Science Research in 2018. We are grateful for the helpful comments which we received from colleagues in academia and policymakers during these conferences. Their complementary perspectives enriched this paper substantially. We are also grateful for the assistance of our coder team, which coded the institutional design of SDG-implementing countries. The coding constituted the basis for a reliable database. Namely, we would like to thank Bugra Ahlatci, Paula Alejandra González Mateus, Lucas Leopold, Ramona Hägele, Julian Rossello, Paul Thalmann, and Semyon Pavlenko. Last but not least, we would also like to extend our gratitude to our team colleagues Ines Dombrowsky, Hannah Janetschek and Daniele Malerba at the German Development Institute / Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE). They played an important role in developing the typology of institutional designs for SDG implementation and commented on the Discussion Paper. Responsibility for errors remains our own.

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## Abbreviations

CoG	Centre of Government
HDI	Human Development Index
HLPF	United Nations High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MSP	multi-stakeholder partnership
NCSD	National Councils for Sustainable Development
NSDS	National Sustainable Development Strategy
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PPP	public-private partnership
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
VNR	Voluntary National Report

## Executive summary

The implementation of the 2030 Agenda poses new challenges to political institutions and processes. If the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with their 169 targets are to be implemented in an integrated way, innovative governance approaches will be needed. In order to exploit synergies and mitigate trade-offs between the individual SDGs, their implementation should be networked, should function at all levels from local to global, and should be multi-scale.

This Discussion Paper addresses the institutional dimension of the Sustainable Development Goals and how it is influenced by political factors. National bodies to coordinate SDG implementation were being created as of late 2015. However, many countries yet have to transform their newly created legal frameworks into operational institutions. So far, it is too early to make empirically substantiated statements about how effective these infant institutions will be in simultaneously achieving the interrelated SDGs. In a first step – and as a basis for future analyses on effectiveness – it is important to know if, and which, institutional designs are in place, and why they were chosen.

The aim of this paper is twofold: First, it seeks to assess governments' proposals for institutional designs for SDG implementation at the national level and identify patterns of institutional designs. It does so by analysing and coding the Voluntary National Reviews from 2016 and 2017 of 62 signatory states, including OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) and non-OECD countries<sup>1</sup> from all world regions and income groups. Second, it aims to explain which political and socio-economic factors shaped these institutional designs. We cover factors related to the interplay between individual dimensions of institutional designs, the political regime, the system of government, and the form of state organisation.

Improving our understanding of institutional choices is highly relevant for several reasons. First, it allows us to identify the root causes of reform blockades on the one hand and enablers of institutional reforms on the other. Second, it is likely to generate different country groupings, for example by income group, level of development, type of political regime, state capacity, or various combinations of these factors. Such a clustering of countries makes it possible to develop systematised reform options and recommendations for countries with similar constellations, thereby enabling more efficient and context-sensitive policy advice (see, for instance, Paasi, 2005). Third, it helps in the identification of entry points for inter- and transnational support of integrated SDG implementation. Fourth, it allows us to establish whether there is a need to create transnational administrations.

The empirical analysis shows that seven institutional designs can be distinguished. The majority of countries have opted for a design that promotes political support at the highest level along with cross-sectoral, horizontal integration, but has significant shortcomings in terms of social inclusiveness and vertical coordination across different levels of government. When asking which determinants shape these patterns, our findings reveal

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1 Out of the 62 countries analysed, 12 are OECD and 50 non-OECD countries.

that horizontal integration becomes more likely with higher socio-economic development. Moreover we find that governments which operate in a politically stable environment are less likely to spread the responsibility of implementing the SDGs across many different line ministries. Moreover, we find that vertical integration and societal integration are interdependent and mutually enforcing.

Altogether, this study represents a first step towards theory-led empirical investigation of the institutional requirements for integrated SDG implementation. As such, it seeks to add to and complement the fast-growing scientific literature responding to the need for enhanced policy coherence for the 2030 Agenda. Methodologically, it contributes to an improved observation of institutional set-ups for integrated SDG implementation. Based on an innovative database, it builds a baseline for future empirical analysis of institutional design and effective SDG implementation.

### *Policy recommendations*

The findings of the empirical analysis of institutional designs for integrated SDG implementation have various implications for policymaking at the national and the global level.

**Implementing a global agenda locally requires the careful choice of ministries in the lead of the process.** Ministries of foreign affairs are in the lead in SDG implementation in 27 out of 62 cases. Although the Agenda 2030 is a global agenda, which is to be implemented in both global *and* domestic arenas, it seems to be perceived as a mainly international agenda by almost half of the governments analysed. Although international action is crucial for addressing the global problems formulated in the SDGs, the domestic arena must not be left behind for several reasons. First, holding governments accountable for SDG implementation requires strong domestic accountability relations between state and society. Second, a firm implementation of SDG policies is an important element to prepare individuals and societies for an active role in the transformation to sustainability. Therefore, sharing responsibilities for SDG implementation between ministries of foreign affairs and ministries dealing with domestic affairs is a necessary condition for successful SDG implementation.

**Choosing lead ministries beyond “the usual suspects” (such as environment ministries) will be necessary in order to address the key dimensions of the 2030 Agenda.** Environment ministries rank second after foreign affairs in leading SDG processes in the countries analysed. Although high responsibility by environment ministries might increase synergies with the Paris Agreement, there are downsides of this approach. Environment ministries typically belong to the “weaker” ministries, which have to court the support of stronger ministries. This has led to a watering down of sustainability strategies in the past (for instance: less environment, more economics). Ministries should thus be mandated in a way that all three dimensions of the 2030 Agenda (economic, social, and ecological) are covered. Involvement of finance ministries is important too because the SDGs will remain at the margin of state decision-making if not properly addressed in budgets. As a consequence for international development cooperation, negotiations with implementing governments should foster the involvement of particularly relevant line ministries in the national institutional design for SDG implementation.



**Make sure relevant non-state and local stakeholders are involved in national decision-making.** A considerable number of countries have chosen an institutional design in which three or more sector ministries are involved in the implementation process. These are, at least theoretically, favourable conditions for horizontal integration. However, there is still a substantial lack of better integration of sub-national entities and civil society actors. Although the latter are often integrated into working groups and committees, they ultimately have no say in decision-making processes at the national level. Given the high relevance of local solutions for SDG implementation and the constructive role non-state actors – including epistemic communities – have been playing in raising awareness for and formulating the SDGs, they should also be part of decision-making processes. Vertical integration is not only a question of political power; it also requires improving local capacities. In particular, local institutions in developing countries often cannot participate in political decision-making because of a lack of human and financial resources. This recommendation resonates with SDG 17, which calls for multi-stakeholder partnerships for SDG implementation. From the perspective of international development cooperation, it is crucial not only to negotiate and cooperate with governmental bodies at the national level but to expand cooperation for SDG implementation to sub-national entities and civil society actors. However, the examples of Switzerland and Chile show that OECD donor countries themselves do not necessarily have a better record in vertical integration than developing countries. Integrating sub-national entities and civil society remains a universal task for all types of countries.

**Monitoring the establishment of institutional designs for integrated SDG implementation.** In many countries, new institutions have been established with the aim of integrated SDG implementation, at least on paper. However, it is too early to tell whether they have indeed been established, work effectively and efficiently, and whether they are/will become a relevant point of reference for a country's policymaking. However, there is a general common understanding that strong institutions are crucial for SDG implementation. It is thus relevant not only to develop indicators for measuring the achievement of the SDGs themselves but also to assess the strengths of the institutions charged with SDG implementation and whether these institutions actually make a difference. In addition, the national institutional designs for integrated SDG implementation vary with regard to age and level of innovation. In some countries, governments have established new institutions to oversee and coordinate SDG implementation whereas in other countries this mandate has been conferred to previously existing institutions whose structure was not (or was only slightly) changed.

Other countries simply extended the institutions set up for the purpose of national development planning or implementing national climate strategies. However, literature on economics and natural resource government has shown that institutional path dependence may create rigidity even within new institutional arrangements. In light of this – and given that we still know very little about the effectiveness and efficiency of the different SDG implementation regimes – it will not only be important to monitor their impact but also to investigate the political dynamics, constellations, and logic that led to their adoption.



## 1 Introduction

The implementation of the 2030 Agenda poses new challenges to political institutions and processes. If the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their 169 targets<sup>2</sup> are to be implemented in an integrated way<sup>3</sup> (2030 Agenda, Article 13; see UN General Assembly, 2015, p. 5), innovative governance approaches will be needed. In order to exploit synergies and mitigate trade-offs between the SDGs, their implementation should be networked, should function at all levels from local to global, and should be multi-scale (Leininger et al., 2018).

Although sustainable development has been playing an increasingly relevant role on the international agenda since the early 1990s, no substantive efforts towards integrated implementation have been made. Instead, the international community has focused on the concept of good governance, which is conceived as a precondition for effective development policies (Fukuyama, 2016, p. 91). Governance reforms have addressed the efficiency and accountability of state institutions as well as the participation of civil society in these institutions in specific sectors. Despite continuing efforts to coordinate policies for national development between sectors and actors (for an overview, see Ugland & Veggeland, 2006; Candel & Biesbroek, 2016; Candel, 2017; Tosun & Lang, 2017; Trein, Meyer, & Maggetti, 2018), political and administrative efforts to integrate various sectors are still limited.<sup>4</sup> To date, the implementation of development policies in many countries is therefore far from integrated and is still characterised by sectoral approaches as well as clearly delineated ministerial responsibilities. The reasons for this “stickiness” and institutional inertia are manifold and can include costs, uncertainty, path dependence, power, and legitimacy (Munck af Rosenschöld, Rozema, & Frye-Levine, 2014). As a result of these structures and practices, potential or actual trade-offs between policy goals are often not dealt with explicitly, sometimes even undermining the achievements of other goals (Breuer, Janetschek, & Malerba, 2019).<sup>5</sup> For instance, increased availability of electricity and the use of groundwater pumps for irrigation can improve food security. At the same time, however, groundwater pumping can accelerate the depletion of water resources and aquifers. In order to address such potential trade-offs, it is essential to prioritise and integrate interests and goals (see also Box 1). Against this background, the Agenda 2030 that was adopted in 2015 calls for deep institutional transformation and reform to achieve the SDGs.

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2 For an overview of the SDGs, see <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300> (accessed 4 July 2019).

3 Literature on policy integration usually refers to “integration” as a dimension on which policies in a specific issue area can be assessed as being more or less coherent. Integration can thus be conceptualised as a continuum that ranges from “least coherent” to “fully coherent” (see, for instance, UN [United Nations], 2018).

4 Coordination is the systematic and regular exchange (ranging from merely sharing information to a strict division of labour) between development actors. In development policy, coordination is a means to divide labour and avoid double work as well as increase policy coherence (Torsvik, 2005). Hence, coordination does not necessarily lead to policy integration but policy integration is not possible without coordination (Peters, 2015; Tosun & Lang, 2017).

5 Prior to the SDGs, Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) was the pioneer approach for embedding water policies into inter-sectoral approaches. This analysis, thus, draws on the findings of this literature (Dombrowsky, 2010).

National bodies to coordinate SDG implementation were being created as of late 2015. However, many countries yet have to transform their newly created legal frameworks into operational institutions. It is thus far too early to make empirically substantiated statements about how effective these infant institutions will be in simultaneously achieving the interrelated SDGs. In a first step, and as a basis for future analyses on effectiveness, it is important to know if, and which, institutional designs are in place, and why they have been chosen.

Over the past two years, the institutional challenges associated with SDG implementation have been addressed in several international policy reports (among them, OECD [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development], 2016; UN, 2018; and CCIC [Canadian Council for International Cooperation], 2018) which focus on different selections of countries as well as on different dimensions of policy integration and policy domains.<sup>6</sup> What these reports have in common is that they describe the mechanisms and challenges of SDG implementation from a governance and policy perspective but provide limited evidence of institutional designs within implementing countries. In particular, none of these reports analyses the question regarding which factors shape governments' institutional choices vis-à-vis the attainment of an integrated implementation of SDG policies. Yet, improving our understanding of institutional choices is highly relevant for several reasons. First, it would allow us to identify the root causes both of reform blockades and of enablers of institutional reforms (for example, Tosun, 2013). Second, it is likely to generate different country groupings, for example according to income group, level of development, type of political regime and state capacity, or various different combinations of these factors. Such a clustering of countries would make it possible to develop systematised reform options and recommendations for countries with similar constellations, thereby enabling more efficient and more context-sensitive policy advice (for example, Paasi, 2005). Third, it would help to identify entry points for inter- and transnational support to integrated SDG implementation (see, for instance, Tosun, 2013; Tosun & Peters, 2018; Tosun, De Francesco, & Peters, 2019). Fourth, it would allow us to establish whether there is a need for creating transnational administrations (for instance, Stone & Ladi, 2015).

Against this background, the aim of this paper is twofold: First, it seeks to assess governments' proposals for institutional designs in implementing the SDGs at the national level and to identify patterns of institutional designs in OECD and developing countries. Second, it aims to explain which political and socio-economic factors shaped these

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6 Based on a survey of 33 countries – out of which 29 are OECD member countries – the OECD (2016) renders a descriptive account of national bodies for SDG implementation with a particular focus on “horizontal” policy coordination and the role of Centres of Government (CoG) in the implementation process. CCIC 2018, in turn, is a report commissioned by civil society organisations, which provides an analysis of 42 of the 43 Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) produced for the United Nations High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) in 2017, with a particular focus on the engagement of non-state stakeholders and links between national SDG implementation to national and international human rights frameworks. The United Nations (2018) reviews 60 of the 65 countries that presented VNRs in 2016 and 2017. The report provides an analysis of both the formal institutional structures of national bodies for SDG implementation, as well as tools and instruments that are important for policy integration, including national development strategies and plans, the budget process, the role of the public service, procedures for monitoring and review, and the role of parliaments and Supreme Audit Institutions.

institutional designs. We cover factors related to the interplay between individual dimensions of institutional designs, the political regime, the system of government and the form of state organisation.

Theoretically, this paper also contributes to integrating the strands of literature on rational choice theories of policymaking, historical institutionalism, and governance reforms. In so doing, it aims to contribute to a better understanding of the political determinants of institutional design choices for implementing sustainability policies. Conceptually, it offers a typology of national regimes for SDG implementation, which can inform future empirical analysis, in particular cross-national analysis on effective integrated policy implementation and on qualitative studies on institutional patterns for integrated policymaking. Finally, methodologically, it provides a new dataset on the different types of national implementation regimes for the SDGs.<sup>7</sup>

In view of the above, the paper seeks to answer the following research questions:

*RQ1: How are national bodies for SDG implementation designed?*

*RQ2: Which political factors shape governments' institutional design choices concerning SDG implementation?*

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: In the next (second) section, we introduce a four-dimensional typology of national bodies for SDG implementation. This typology is based on literature at the intersection of rational choice theory, policy analysis, political regimes, and governance reforms. In Section 3, we develop four hypotheses about the interaction between the different dimensions of the types of institutional design and the influence of political factors on the choice of institutional design. In the fourth section we introduce the data and methods used in the empirical analysis. To address the first research question, in this section we identify seven possible types of institutional designs and apply them to those countries that presented a Voluntary National Review (VNR) on the 2030 Agenda in 2016 and 2017. This offers a systematic, descriptive overview of the proposed formal structures of national bodies for SDG implementation. To address the second research question in Section 5, using different econometric models we first analyse how political and cost factors influence governments' institutional design choices regarding SDG implementation. In this section, we also analyse design choices regarding the various different dimensions of our typology and how they interact with each other. The sixth section of the Discussion Paper concludes with a summary of the results, an outlook on future research needs, and policy recommendations for integrated policy implementation.

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<sup>7</sup> The dataset is available from the authors on request.

**Box 1: Exemplifying trade-offs between SDGs: the negative externalities of wind power in Mexico**

Introducing new policies such as renewable energies can foster trade-offs between SDGs and create social conflict if inclusive and integrated governance is missing. Following the liberalisation of its energy market in 2013, Mexico has become a regional leader in the production of renewable energy (SDG 7). However, issues of social justice and peace (SDG 16) and land control by small-scale peasants (SDG 1.4 and 2.3) associated with the production of wind energy were not integrated into Mexico's policy approach. Trade-offs and social conflicts related to the production of wind energy were caused by inadequate multi-level governance as well as a lack of inclusive governance. Both are characterised by top-down decision-making within a weak institutional framework, and exclusive decision-making.

Technical studies have identified the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in the federal state of Oaxaca as the most attractive region in the country to implement wind farms. At the same time, however, Oaxaca is one of the poorest Mexican states with 62 per cent of its mostly indigenous population living under the poverty line and 23 per cent living in extreme poverty (2017). Wind energy planning has so far been a predominantly federal responsibility, with minor or no participation by the regional government (Oaxaca state) and local authorities and populations that are directly affected by the wind parks.

In view of Mexico's limited economic and technological capacities, it was considered essential to attract foreign private investment to develop the country's wind potential. After a long phase of state-led development beginning in the 1990s, Mexico engaged in neoliberal structural adjustments. The liberalisation of the energy sector and land tenure regimes paved the way for wind power as a profit-driven industry and enacted the introduction of private investment in the rural landscape of the Isthmus, which had previously mainly been organised through social and collective forms of property. Consequently, multinational foreign enterprises emerged as the main protagonists in exploiting wind power.

Wind energy in Mexico is being developed under a legal framework of self-supply (*autoabastecimiento*) that allows private power producers to partner with industrial off-takers, who invest in the project in order to benefit from a long-term fixed price for their electricity. By August 2015, the installed capacity in the Isthmus was 2,160 MW, from over 2,000 wind turbines, out of which only 7 were publicly owned.

Over the past years, the Isthmus region has experienced increasing socio-environmental conflicts that are not only threatening continued expansion of wind development but also social stability. Since the initial negotiations between private foreign investors and the federal government, indigenous communities have made demands for comprehensive information about wind energy projects, to which the government did not respond. The resistance of local residents against large-scale wind energy projects is mainly targeted at the lack of formal participatory consultation (SDG 16.7), illegal and unfair leasing contracts, and the meagre compensations offered to land holders by private investors. While the worldwide average of payments to landowners fluctuates between 1 and 5 per cent of wind farms' gross income, on the Isthmus these average between 0.025 and 1.53 per cent. Furthermore, with the majority of energy generated going to industrial off-takers in distant cities, impoverished residents of the Isthmus are not benefitting directly from the product that is being produced on their lands.

Source: Leininger et al., 2018, p. 113

## 2 A four-dimensional typology of national bodies for integrated SDG implementation

The SDGs were established on the central insight from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) process that systemic change cannot be reached through single-sector approaches. Given its indivisible nature, implementing the 2030 Agenda will require the dismantling of traditional silos in order to achieve policy coherence across different policy sectors, government levels, and societal actors (ECOSOC [United Nations Economic and Social Council], 2016; Leininger et al., 2018). Overall, there is consensus that a truly integrated implementation of the SDGs will require deep institutional reform and innovative institutional approaches.

However, as countries are still experimenting on how to best deliver on the 2030 Agenda (Persson, Weitz, & Nilsson, 2016), there is no single institutional model that has been empirically proven to be most efficient in addressing the implementation challenges of the SDGs (OECD, 2016). However, previous research on the effectiveness of development policies highlights the relevance of four factors that are crucial for successfully achieving the SDGs (see, for example, Newig & Fritsch, 2009). In addition, policy reports and briefings, as well as speeches at high-level international events consistently emphasise these same factors:

- High-level political leadership (see Abbott & Bernstein, 2015; United Nations, 2018),
- Horizontal coherence across policy sectors (see UNDP [United Nations Development Programme], 2017),
- Vertical coordination across levels of state and government (see UNDP, 2017; ICSU [International Science Council], 2017), and
- Multi-stakeholder engagement (Dodds, 2015; Beisheim & Simon, 2016; Stafford-Smith et al., 2017).

Taking up on these findings and common sense in policymaking, we propose a four-dimensional typology for the categorisation of national bodies<sup>8</sup> for SDG implementation. The typology considers the following dimensions of policy coherence: i) political leadership, ii) horizontal integration, iii) vertical integration, and iv) societal integration. The rationale underlying the choice of these dimensions is described below and summarised in Table 1.

### 2.1 Political leadership

The most important place for horizontal policy coordination and management of horizontal issues is generally assumed to be located at the Centre of Government (CoG), that is, the chief executive and the central agencies serving that executive (Peters, 2015; OECD, 2016). However, prime ministers and presidents themselves often merely play a symbolic role in these policy processes. They normally do not possess the capacity to produce effective coordination as they have insufficient time resources to coordinate the abundance of activities of the ministries under their oversight. Rather than this, they develop staffs, organisations, or agencies that assist them in this task, such as ministries or general-secretariats of the Presidency, offices of the president or prime minister, or cabinet offices.

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8 “National” refers to implementation in signatory states of the Agenda 2030 and not to a specific level of the state. Our typology explicitly acknowledges different state levels.

It is important to note that structural definitions of CoG categorise only those institutions as belonging to the CoG that directly and exclusively support the head of government (Alessandro, Lafuente, & Santiso, 2013). When managing cross-sectoral policy issues, one advantage of CoG agencies over sector ministries is that their capacities are not tied up through the delivery of goods or services to the general public. Since they exclusively provide advice to the chief executive, they have more flexibility to adapt to changing issues, for instance by creating task forces or temporary structures.

By contrast, functional definitions of CoG also categorise those institutions as belonging to the CoG that perform supra-sectoral, whole-of-government functions, particularly with regard to planning, coordination, political management, or monitoring (Alessandro et al., 2013). In addition to the institutions mentioned above, functional definitions of CoG may thus also include institutions that are not directly part of the presidency or core executive, such as ministries of planning or finance. In this paper, we adopt the latter functional approach.

Research on the National Councils for Sustainable Development (NCS), which were created in the follow-up to the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, indicates that support and leadership by the CoG is conducive to effective policy coordination. UNDP (2017), for example, finds that NCSs that were located within a specific ministry did not often have the necessary political power to effectively coordinate sustainable development matters whereas countries that located their NCSs under the office of the president or prime minister noted that this high-level position ensured effective coordination. In a similar vein, Osborne, Cornforth and Ullah (2014) found NCSs with ministerial members to be a useful means of securing an integrated government approach to sustainable development when led or given strong support by a head of state. By contrast, however, according to these authors, NCSs composed exclusively of prime ministers found it hard to develop the necessary longer-term vision that transition to sustainability requires. Another important aspect pointed out in the literature is the key role of finance and planning ministries (Swanson, Pintér, Bregha, Volkery, & Jacob, 2004; Cheru, 2006; Whitfield, 2009). As these authors explain, the cross-cutting vision and specific objectives formulated in a national sustainable development strategy will likely remain at the periphery of government decision-making if they are not adequately considered in budget planning and fiscal priority setting.

On the downside, relying exclusively on the CoG for policy coordination may produce adverse, centralising effects. Sometimes the source of conflict over certain issues and policies can be more easily identified at the lower working levels of government. Where this is the case, by the time the CoG learns about a conflict, valuable information about what actually caused the conflict may be lost and, with it, the government's ability to solve the coordination problem that caused the conflict. As Guy Peters (2015) adequately puts it: "The top-down approach common to coordination may often not match the bottom-up reality of the problems" (p. 75). With a view to efficient coordination, it thus appears desirable that national bodies for SDG implementation should enjoy support from the highest level of government while at the same time being composed in a way that allows sector ministries and sub-national bodies to bring in both their expertise and their practical working experience.

Regarding the dimension of political leadership, it is thus essential to ask the following questions: *Where in the executive is the national body for SDG implementation located? Who presides over the body?*



## 2.2 Horizontal integration

Given the interlinked character of the 2030 Agenda, it is frequently postulated that SDG-implementation bodies with an inter-ministerial, cross-sectoral set-up should be better suited to identifying cross-cutting issues and address linkages and interdependencies between the SDGs and their targets than those that are located in a single specific ministry (UNDP, 2017; UNDESA [United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs], 2018; OECD, 2016).

This claim is supported by research on National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDS) of the 1990s and early 2000s. In their comparative analysis of 19 NSDS of developing and developed countries, Swanson et al. (2004) criticise that these strategies typically focused on only one or two dimensions of sustainable development. While national environmental strategies were sophisticated in their understanding of sustainability principles, they were usually weak in understanding the linkages with the social and economic dimensions of sustainable development. Similarly, Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) considered social and economic aspects but generally offered little in the way of environmental aspects. In a similar vein, Gjoksi, Sedlacko and Berger (2010), who compare the NSDS of 29 European countries, find that, typically, ministries of the environment were in charge of the implementation and monitoring of these processes. Belonging to the weaker ministries in many countries, ministries of the environment often found it necessary to court more influential actors to gain support. Consequentially, according to the authors, the disadvantaged negotiation position of environment ministries often led to a “watering down” of NSDSs (Gjoksi et al., 2010, p. 5).

These findings suggest that national bodies for SDG implementation will only be able to balance the interdependencies between the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of the 2030 Agenda if they profit from the expertise and experience of the relevant ministries active in these areas.

Regarding the dimension of horizontal integration it is thus essential to ask: *How many, and which ministries, are formally represented in the national body for SDG implementation? Which ministry, if at all, has the political power and will to take decisions?*

## 2.3 Vertical integration

There is broad agreement in the international policy community that an integrated implementation of the 2030 Agenda will require policy coherence between different levels of government (for example, UNDESA, 2018; OECD, 2016). The majority of SDGs involve both a sub-national and local dimension. Local governments play an important role in formulating, implementing and delivering services. They are thus crucial in strengthening the ownership and legitimacy of SDG policies by linking the implementation of the Global Agenda to the needs of the local communities that are affected by and can profit from these policies (UNDESA, 2018). For this reason, strategic and effective national action for sustainable development needs to catalyse action at the sub-national and local levels and manage interdependencies between these levels (Swanson et al., 2004; Ongaro, 2015). However, there is a caveat with regard to integrating sub-national institutions in developing

countries: here, sub-national institutions often lack human capacities and financial resources for fulfilling their mandates and, thus, their integration might turn out to be ineffective.

However, vertical integration comes at a cost. Decentralisation of the responsibility for SDG implementation to lower levels of government may require the creation of additional structures, legislation and regulation, along with monitoring and evaluation. Moreover, the coordination and alignment of SDG action undertaken at different levels of government with diverging policy priorities and political agendas may be difficult and includes the risk of diluting such SDG action (UNDESA, 2018). Based on research on national climate mitigation action, Pisano, Mulholland and Berger (2016), for example, caution that vertical integration may not be appropriate in all contexts or at all stages in the design and implementation of sustainability action.

These concerns can be reflected in the formal structure of national bodies for SDG implementation: When it comes to SDG implementation, national governments may shy away from giving sub-national governments a permanent seat at the table, including a formal voice and vote. Instead, they can opt to collect the input of sub-national governments by means of technical working groups without formal decision-making power. Alternatively, they may opt to involve them for a limited period of time or for specific purposes such as national consultation processes aimed at prioritising SDG action; efforts of information dissemination, diffusion and awareness-raising; or monitoring and evaluation.

Regarding the dimension of vertical integration, it is thus essential to ask the following questions: *Are sub-national governments formally and permanently represented in the national body for SDG implementation? Or are they members of permanent working groups that report to the national body?*

## 2.4 Societal integration

Throughout the 1990s, over the process of the MDGs after 2000 and debates about global governance, growing consensus emerged among the actors involved and in the literature that traditional governmental approaches were no longer sufficient in managing sustainable development (Dodds, 2015). As a result, today, the demand to apply a governance approach and formulate as well as implement the SDGs with the widest possible societal participation – from contestation to decision-making power – is almost ubiquitous in policy reports and government documents dealing with the 2030 Agenda. The rationale behind this demand is that societal participation is indispensable if policy is to be integrated (Nordbeck & Steurer, 2015). There is general agreement that building the integrated visions and strategies that are needed to support sustainability transformation requires a broad societal consensus that can only be achieved through the engagement and inclusion of major societal groups, including businesses, trade unions, academics, and civil society organisations. In addition, compliance with the principle of “leaving no one behind” will also require engagement with the full diversity of societal stakeholders, including representatives of marginalised and minority groups (UNDESA, 2018). At the most basic level, awareness about and ownership of the SDGs by the whole of society need to increase if the 2030 Agenda is to succeed. Not less importantly, addressing the investment gap for attaining the SDGs will not be possible without the engagement of the private sector (Sachs & Schmidt-Traub, 2015).

Clearly, building situations in which public, social, and private stakeholders from the same sectors and across sectors pool their resources and competencies to commonly and effectively address the SDGs will require building institutional frameworks and structures that are able to reconcile and integrate the diverging needs and interests of these stakeholders. Research on integrated strategies in European environmental policymaking during the 2000s observed considerable variation regarding institutional approaches to involving stakeholders in sustainable development processes (Nordbeck & Steurer, 2015). With regard to timing, for example, stakeholder participation was most common in the phase of formulating national sustainability strategies but often petered out afterwards (Gjoksi et al., 2010; von Raggamby & Rubik, 2012). While some countries relied on punctual and temporary participation via roundtables and conferences, others opted for a longer-term institutionalisation of stakeholder participation via National Councils for Sustainable Development. Another form of bringing key actors of civil society, governments and business together is through public-private partnerships (PPP) or multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSP) for sustainable development. A cross-national study by Pattberg, Biermann, Chan and Mert (2012) found that such partnerships were mostly implemented in OECD countries, rather than in least developed countries.

It is also important to note that multi-stakeholder engagement does not only entail benefits but also comes with certain risks. Most frequently mentioned in this regard are the potential negative side-effects that come with private sector involvement (refer to Beisheim & Simon, 2016; Pattberg et al., 2012). As the authors of ECOSOC (2018, p. 5) put it: “Private sector financing of the SDGs has its limits in the profit maximising rational of private sector activities, as ultimately the SDGs are public goods that cannot become bankable projects.”

Regarding the dimension of societal integration, it is thus essential to ask the following questions: *Are non-state stakeholders formally and permanently represented in the national body for SDG implementation? Or are they members of permanent working groups that report to the national body? In addition, which stakeholders are represented?*

<b>Table 1: Four dimensions of a typology for national bodies for SDG implementation</b>	
<b><i>Dimension</i></b>	<b><i>Guiding question</i></b>
<b>Political leadership</b>	Where in the executive is the national body for SDG implementation located? Who presides over the body?
<b>Horizontal integration</b>	How many, and which ministries, are formally represented in the national body for SDG implementation? Which ministry, if at all, has the political power and will to take decisions?
<b>Vertical integration</b>	Are sub-national governments formally and permanently represented in the national body for SDG implementation? Or are they members of permanent working groups that report to the national body?
<b>Societal integration</b>	Are non-state stakeholders formally and permanently represented in the national body for SDG implementation? Or are they members of permanent working groups that report to the national body? In addition, which stakeholders are represented?
Source: Authors	

### 3 Institutional designs and political factors shaping them: hypotheses

In this analysis, we make a threefold argument regarding the impact of political and cost factors on institutional design choices. The first argument is that the design choices are interdependent. This argument draws on rational choice theories of policymaking. Decision-makers will take into consideration the benefits and costs of their actions and act accordingly (North, 1990). The establishment of an institutional structure for the implementation of the SDGs requires initial investments as well as follow-up costs. The more complex an institutional structure, the higher the expected transaction costs that arise during the implementation phase (see Tosun et al., 2019). For instance, the more line ministries or non-state actors involved in policy formulation and SDG implementation, the higher the transaction costs. We pose the question whether the political actors are more willing to accept the non-monetary and financial transaction costs that arise from the need for horizontal coordination at the level of line ministries or those transaction costs that arise from the interaction of subnational entities and civil society actors? We contend that a rational policymaker will attempt to reduce the costs associated with either dimension. However, avoiding coordination costs altogether will be impossible as the 2030 Agenda explicitly asks for the adoption of an integrated and coherent approach (SDG target 17.4).

Based on these considerations, we expect a trade-off between horizontal integration on the one hand and vertical and/or societal integration on the other hand. Our first hypothesis thus postulates a negative relationship between the number of line ministries involved and the involvement of subnational entities and/or non-state (civil society) stakeholders.

*H1a: The greater the number of line ministries involved in the implementation of the SDGs, the smaller the likelihood of the involvement of subnational entities.*

*H1b: The greater the number of line ministries involved in the implementation of the SDGs, the smaller the likelihood of the involvement of non-state stakeholders.*

Conversely, however, there is good reason to hypothesise that there will be a mutually reinforcing effect between the involvement of subnational entities and civil society organisations. The literature on multi-level governance has shown that civil society organisations have better access to policymakers at the local and regional level. For instance, the literature on climate policy experiments has shown that, at the local level in particular, alliances between policymakers and civil society organisations are easy to form (refer, for instance, to Andonova, Betsill, & Bulkeley, 2009; Kern & Bulkeley, 2009). Hence, we expect that vertical integration is conducive to societal integration and vice versa.

*H2a: The inclusion of non-state stakeholders increases the likelihood of involving subnational entities in the implementation of the SDGs.*

*H2b: The inclusion of subnational entities increases the likelihood of involving non-state stakeholders in the implementation of the SDGs.*

As already elaborated above, the costs incurring from the establishment of institutional arrangements refer to investment and follow-up costs. The first two hypotheses addressed the latter issue. We now turn to our second argument, which relates to the issue of investment costs. In this context, a frequently made argument is that the design of institutions depends on state capacities (see Chindarkar, Howlett, & Ramesh, 2017; Fukuyama, 2017). Countries with

a well-equipped and capable public administration should be in a position to propose more complex institutional designs that better capture the mandate of the 2030 Agenda to pursue cross-sectoral policy integration.

*H3a: The greater the level of socio-economic development of a country, the greater the likelihood of involving a higher number of line ministries.*

*H3b: The greater the level of socio-economic development of a country, the greater the likelihood of the involvement of subnational entities.*

*H3c: The greater the level of socio-economic development of a country, the greater the likelihood of the involvement of non-state stakeholders.*

Considering again the costs associated with institutional design (see Pierson, 2000) and the path dependency of institutional choices (Thelen, 1999; Steinmo, 2008), we expect that features of the political system (government system and political regime) and the state organisation will influence the institutional design choices for SDG implementation. In general, we assume that institutions for SDG implementation are part of the political system and state organisation. As such, their functions, composition and design are likely to be adapted to their systemic and organisational context in a specific country. However, a systematic analysis of how these factors interact in institutional design choices is still missing.

First, the government system influences the number of actors involved in policymaking. Presidential systems concentrate power in the executive, which limits the scope and strength of line ministries' mandates. In turn, parliamentary systems give more power to individual line ministries and are thus more inclined to involve them in policymaking. Changing this basic division of labour in a government system would increase costs for the system as a whole beyond the process of SDG implementation. We would thus not expect this to happen.

Second, democratic political regimes, which by definition open up political processes to non-state actors, can be expected to choose an institutional design which allows for civil society participation. Conversely, autocratic regimes are less likely to open up their policy processes to societal actors, unless they control societal participation. Costs for an open, uncontrolled societal inclusiveness are too high in autocratic regimes because opening up the regime might cause changes in the power structures and thus endanger the position of power holders (Olson, 1993).

Third, centralised states with no additional autonomous units are likely to maintain their basic design choice and are thus likely to favour exclusive institutional arrangements. Conversely, systems that are decentralised with autonomous units favour more inclusive institutional designs as they already have such arrangements in place. In addition, autonomous units should have financial resources which are independent from the national units of government. Their resources are, thus, crucial for SDG implementation.

*H4a: Parliamentary systems have a greater likelihood of involving a higher number of line ministries in the institutional design for SDG implementation.*

*H4b: The more liberal, participatory or deliberate a regime, the greater the likelihood of involving non-state stakeholders.*

H4c: *Countries with autonomous sub-federal units have a greater likelihood of involving subnational entities in the institutional design for SDG implementation than countries without autonomous units.*

#### 4 Clarifications on data and methods

The present analysis focuses on the institutional design that governments proposed for national SDG-implementation bodies. It relies on our own coding of countries' Voluntary National Reports (VNR) presented to the UN High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) in 2016 and 2017. The total number of countries covered by our original dataset is 62.<sup>9</sup> The VNRs were coded by at least two persons separately and checked afterwards for consistency by a third person.<sup>10</sup> When inconsistencies were observed, a fourth person (who in each case was one of the authors of this study) took an executive decision on the final coding of the data point concerned. In light of the nature of the documents coded, the authors had to take executive decisions regarding ambiguous coding in about 20 per cent of all data points. This is due to the fact that the wording of the VNRs is more open to interpretation than we had originally anticipated. Yet the fact that the data was coded by multiple coders along with our own expertise regarding the characteristics of the data makes us confident about the quality of the database. The instructions according to which the data were coded were also subject to iterative processes, whereby the initial guidelines were revised multiple times in order to ensure that they were straightforward to understand and implement.<sup>11</sup> In sum, the database is likely to represent a solid base for empirical analysis, except for the fact that it suffers from the flaw of containing relatively few observations at this point.<sup>12</sup>

Our analysis rests on four dependent variables, which are based on the rationale of the four dimensions of policy coherence introduced in Section 2 (political leadership; horizontal integration; vertical integration; societal integration). For an overview, see Table 2.

First, **political leadership** refers to the mandate, establishment of the institutional set-up for SDG implementation and the responsibility to oversee the implementation of SDGs. In our coding, political leadership takes the values 0 to 3, indicating whether no leadership of the implementation process is assigned (0), leadership is assigned to the CoG (1), to one or several line ministries (2), or in cases where there is a co-leadership by both CoG and line ministries (3).

Second, **horizontal integration** refers to the number and type of line ministries represented in the national SDG-implementation body; our data differentiates between the categories of

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9 The total number of VNRs presented in 2016 and 2017 was 65. Out of these, the VNRs of China and Samoa are not available online. Togo presented a VNR in both 2016 and 2017. Our analysis only considers Togo's VNR of 2017.

10 On this occasion, we thank Bugra Ahlatci, Paula Alejandra González Mateus, Lucas Leopold, Ramona Hägele, Julian Rossello, Paul Thalmann, and Semyon Pavlenko for their support in coding the data.

11 The coding instructions are available from the authors on request.

12 We are currently in the process of extending the database to include the 42 VNRs that were presented at the meeting of the HLPF from 9 to 18 July 2018 in New York.

economy, environment, social, and sustainability as well as foreign ministries and the residual category of other ministries. In cases where ministries mentioned in the VNR are responsible for two of these six resorts, we assigned it to one category only. More specifically, we assigned it to the category that was mentioned first. This was only the case in two instances in which the ministries in charge of environmental issues were at the same time in charge of sustainable development. When the VNRs mentioned any of these ministries as being represented in the national body for SDG implementation, we assigned it the value 1 (and 0 otherwise) and then computed the count variable on that basis.

Third, our indicator for the dependent variable **vertical integration** is the involvement of subnational entities in the implementation process. Our coding categories differentiate between membership in the national SDG-implementation bodies themselves or membership in permanent working groups or technical committees that report to these national bodies. The variable vertical integration is coded in a binary manner, taking the value 1 if subnational entities were members of the national SDG-implementation body itself or 0 if they were merely organised into permanent working groups or technical committees.

Our fourth dependent variable **societal integration** refers to the involvement of non-state stakeholders. Our coding scheme differentiates between stakeholders from the categories science, business, academia, development cooperation and intergovernmental organisations. With regard to the latter two categories, considering that we had some least developed countries in our sample, we believed it was important to account for the involvement of this type of actor as well. For the present analysis, we collapsed these categories into a single category termed societal integration. As with vertical integration, this variable was coded in a binary manner, taking the value 1 only if non-state stakeholders were members of the national SDG-implementation body itself or 0 if they were merely organised into permanent working groups or technical committees.

Analytical category	Variable	Obs.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.
DV	Leadership	62	1.47	0.84	0	3
	Leadership CoG	62	0.66	0.48	0	1
	Leadership ministry	62	0.40	0.49	0	1
H1a & H1b	Line ministries	62	2.08	1.68	0	6
H2b	Subnational entities	62	0.39	0.49	0	1
H2a	Civil society	62	0.50	0.50	0	1
H3	HDI 2016 (education and health)	61	80.57	53.85	1	179
H3	Income group	62	3.68	1.33	1	5
H4a	Government fractionalisation	59	0.29	0.29	0	0.82
H4a	Political stability	61	-0.05	0.90	-2.41	1.40
H4a	Government system	60	0.83	0.98	0	2
H4a	Heterogeneity	58	0.40	0.20	0.07	0.84
H4b	Participatory democracy	59	0.40	0.19	0.05	0.67
H4b	Liberal democracy	59	0.50	0.27	0.06	0.89
H4b	Deliberative democracy	59	0.50	0.28	0.03	0.91
H4c	Autonomous	60	0.22	0.42	0	1

Source: Authors

Based on our hypotheses, we identify eight indicators to measure the independent variables. The level of socio-economic development of a country was our first independent variable (H3a and H3b). We use two indicators to measure socio-economic development. We choose the two social dimensions of the Human Development Index (HDI) to measure the level of social development of a country. They refer to education and health in a society. HDI 2016 contains the country ranks of the Human Development Index 2016. The greater the values reported in Table 2, the lower the human development level of the countries. Furthermore, we use the income categories of the World Bank to measure the level of economic development. The World Bank's Income Groups differentiate between low income countries, middle income countries (lower and upper) and high income countries. We expect that the higher the income of a state is, the more likely that its institutions are capable and effective.

The subsequent variables all refer to the government system (H4a), political regime (H4b) and state organisation (H4c). Data is taken from the Quality of Government (QoG) Cross Section dataset (Coppedge et al., in press) and the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project (Pemstein et al., 2018). The Government System (`dpi_system`) differentiates between presidential (0), assembly-elected president (1) and parliamentary (2) systems. Government fractionalisation (`dpi_gf`) assesses how united the government is. A higher score indicates a greater probability of finding officials from different parties and thus more parties in government. Political stability (GoG code: `wbgi_pve`) measures perceptions of the likelihood of political instability and/or politically motivated violence. Higher values indicate a higher perceived political stability. Heterogeneity assesses the degree to which a country is fragmented with regard to religion (`al_religion`), language (`al_language`), and ethnicity (`al_ethnic`) as an additive index. The political regime is measured with the Participatory Democracy (`vdem_partdem`) and Liberal Democracy (`vdem_libdem`) and Deliberative Democracy (`vdem_delibdem`) indices of V-Dem. Similar to previous measurement, higher values indicate higher levels of democratic accountability and participatory or liberal democracy. The data is used as given and not modified by mathematical operations such as taking the natural logarithm.

In light of the measurement level of the data and its distributional characteristics, we fitted maximum-likelihood-based regression models for testing our hypotheses. For examining the determinants of horizontal integration, we computed Poisson regression models for count data. The characteristics of the data allowed us to fit a regular Poisson model and did not require negative binomial models or zero-inflated models. Turning to vertical and societal integration, the binary coding of the dependent variable required the fitting of logistic regression models. Despite the relatively small number of observations, all models performed well. However, we had to adjust the estimation models slightly for the dependent variables in order to optimise the model fits.

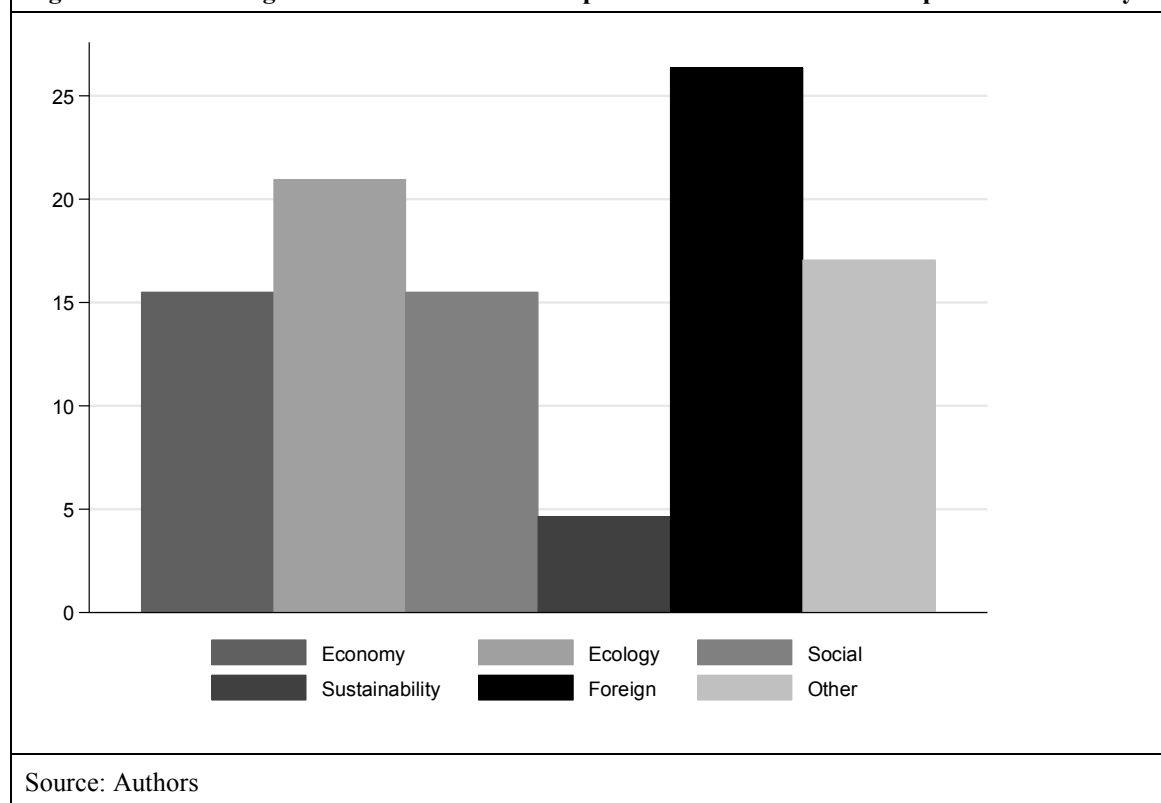


## 5 Empirical analysis

### 5.1 Assessment: types of governance regimes for SDG implementation

In this section, we identify the different types of governance regimes for SDG implementation by using descriptive statistics. We start by identifying the composition of national SDG-implementation bodies and its implications for our first dependent variable, **political leadership**. Figure 1 gives an overview of how often VNRs mentioned the individual line ministries as being members of the national SDG-implementation body as a percentage share. We can infer from the bar graphs that the ministries of foreign affairs and environmental protection are most frequently mentioned in the VNRs. The assignment of responsibility to the ministries of foreign affairs is plausible when bearing in mind that the SDGs are an international policy agenda, which will require a considerable degree of coordination among implementing states. On the other hand, it raises the question of whether national SDG-implementation bodies are not – to some extent – an effort in showcasing activities related to the 2030 Agenda internationally, rather than an attempt to achieve cross-sectoral policy coordination domestically. The prominent role of environment ministries suggests that the 2030 Agenda is still mainly perceived as an environmental agenda, which is interesting considering the wide range of topics covered by the SDGs.

**Figure 1: Percentage share of line ministries represented in national SDG-implementation body**

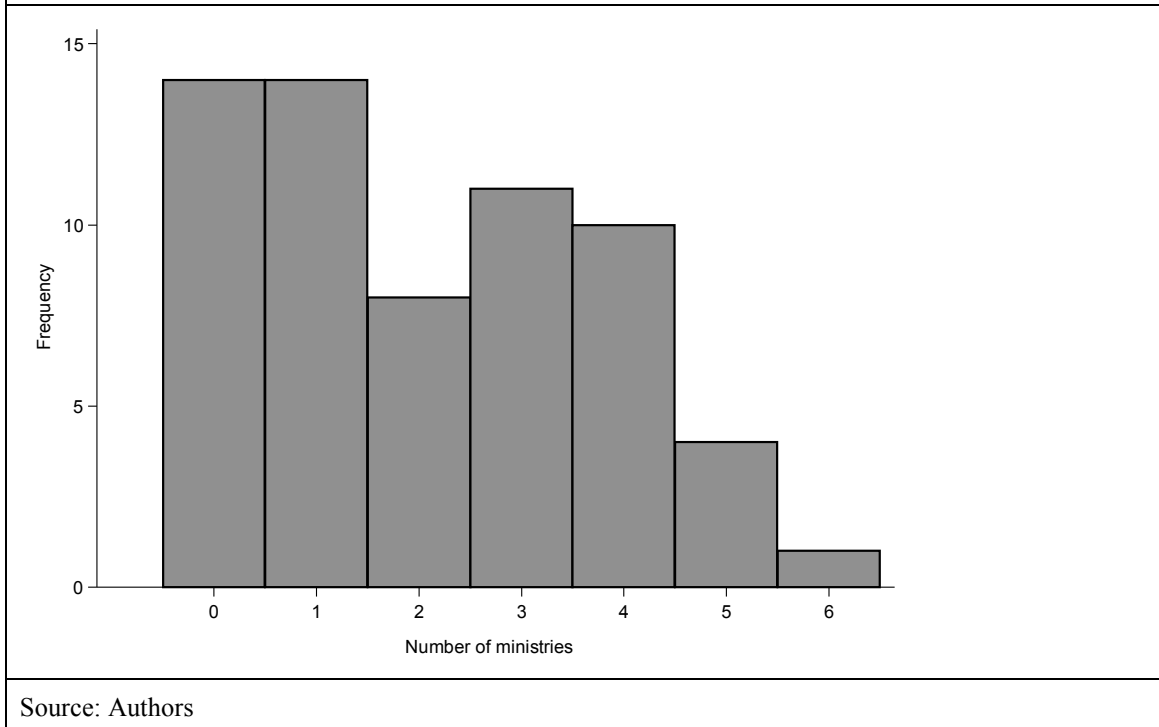


The above identified dominance of the ministries responsible for foreign affairs and the environment even persists when we inspect the descriptive statistics for our dependent variable **political leadership**, that is, for those line ministries that are indicated as presiding over the national body for SDG implementation.

It is worth examining the issue of political leadership in detail. In fact, in our sample of 62 countries, 32 assigned the leadership to the CoG, 16 to one or multiple line ministries, and 9 assigned it jointly to the CoG and line ministries. The VNRs of 5 countries do not clarify the question of political leadership. Therefore, with regard to our first research question, we can highlight two features of the institutional design of the SDG implementation regime: First, the majority of countries assigned the leadership to the CoG. Second, the assignment of leadership to the CoG does not automatically entail that no or only a small number of line ministries are involved. In fact, we observed an involvement of line ministries in about 78 per cent of all cases. In most of these cases, it was the ministry of foreign affairs and/or the environment ministry that played a key role. We will examine more systematically below whether the assignment of the leadership explains the number of line ministries involved.

Figure 2 presents the distribution of our dependent variable **horizontal integration** as a histogram, that is, the number of line ministries represented in the national body for SDG implementation. We can see that the distribution of the data is skewed as we have more observations for smaller numbers of ministries than for greater numbers. There were as many countries where no line ministry was involved in the implementation process as countries where a single line ministry was assigned this responsibility. This distributional property needs to be taken into account when fitting the estimation models. The mean value of ministries represented in the SDG-implementation body is two (with a standard deviation of 1.68). In sum, we can state that in the great majority of cases (namely 78 per cent), at least one line ministry was represented. As a result, we are confident that it is appropriate to concentrate on the line ministries in order to examine the degree of horizontal integration.

**Figure 2: Histogram of the number of line ministries represented in national SDG implementation bodies**



An even more detailed insight is offered by Table 3, which gives an overview of the distribution of the individual countries along the following four dimensions: The horizontal

axis shows the number of line ministries represented in the national SDG-implementation body (that is, it captures the dimension of horizontal integration of our typology). The vertical axis captures different combinations of the remaining three dimensions: the involvement of the CoG (that is, the dimension of political leadership); the involvement of subnational entities (that is, the dimension of vertical integration); and the involvement of the civil society (that is, the dimension of societal integration). Given our interest in specific constellations of these three binary variables, we present the eight ( $2^3$ ) possible constellations in which they can emerge. The most exclusive constellation is one where neither the CoG (= 0), nor subnational entities (= 0) nor civil society actors (= 0) nor any line ministry are represented in the SDG-implementation body (in fact this would most likely mean that no specific body had been set up or mandated with coordinating SDG implementation). We coded “0” when subnational entities or civil society actors were represented in working groups or committees but were not represented in the national body. We assume that being represented in the national body makes a substantial difference because subnational entities and civil society actors do not take part in political decision-making for SDG implementation if they are only represented in working groups and committees. The opposite, most inclusive scenario is one where CoG, vertical integration and societal integration all have a value of 1 and 3 or more line ministries are represented. These two constellations can be considered as extreme types of institutional design choices for SDG implementation. The remaining categories are hybrid forms, that are still either exclusive (if only one dimension has the value 1) or more inclusive (if two dimensions have the value 1). It should be noted that a constellation in which only subnational entities are included is not observed in our data.

Remarkably, the largest group by far corresponds to the more exclusive types where the CoG is involved, but neither subnational entities nor civil society organisations enjoy formal decision-making power in the national SDG-implementation body. Within this group, the majority of country cases fall into the group where three or more ministries were involved. The second largest group refers to the most inclusive constellations in which the CoG as well as subnational entities and non-state stakeholders were represented in the SDG-implementation body. Within this group, distribution across the number of line ministries involved was more heterogeneous although we also had the most observations in the group where three or more ministries were involved. Two more constellations are worth mentioning: Switzerland and Chile on the one hand and the Netherlands on the other hand. In the case of Switzerland and Chile, we observed no formal representation of actors other than line ministries in the national SDG-implementation body.<sup>13</sup> However, in both cases, the number of ministries involved was on the higher end, with three or more. The institutional design in the Netherlands was also interesting as the VNR neither mentions any line ministry nor a CoG institution as a member of the national body for SDG implementation but rather subnational entities and non-state stakeholders are formally represented.

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics of the variables that entered our analyses as dependent or independent variables. The first three variables **horizontal integration**, **vertical integration** and **societal integration** serve as dependent variables, but they will also enter the analyses as explanatory variables.

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13 In both VNRs, the authors state that civil society actors will be represented in the implementation process but do not specify how.

<b>HORIZONTAL INTEGRATION</b>					
		<b>No ministry</b>	<b>One ministry</b>	<b>Two ministries</b>	<b>Three and more ministries</b>
<b>Political support by CoG Vertical Integration, SOCIETAL INTEGRATION</b>	<b>CoG involved= 0</b> <b>Vertical integration = 0</b> <b>Societal integration= 0</b>				Switzerland Chile
	<b>CoG involved = 1</b> <b>Vertical integration = 0</b> <b>Societal integration = 0</b>	Malaysia Togo Uruguay	El Salvador Ethiopia Norway Portugal	Costa Rica France	Azerbaijan Argentina Bangladesh Colombia Egypt Germany Maldives Mexico Monaco Montenegro Morocco Slovenia South Korea Sweden Venezuela
	<b>CoG involved = 0</b> <b>Vertical integration = 1</b> <b>Societal integration = 0</b>				
	<b>CoG involved = 0</b> <b>Vertical integration = 0</b> <b>Societal integration = 1</b>		Cyprus Luxembourg Panama		
	<b>CoG involved = 1</b> <b>Vertical integration = 1</b> <b>Societal integration = 0</b>	India	Denmark Philippines Tajikistan		Belgium Nigeria
	<b>CoG involved = 0</b> <b>Vertical integration = 1</b> <b>Societal integration = 1</b>	Netherlands			
	<b>CoG involved = 1</b> <b>Vertical integration = 0</b> <b>Societal integration = 1</b>	Botswana Jordan Kenya Madagascar Zimbabwe	Belize	Qatar Sierra Leone Uganda	Thailand
	<b>CoG involved = 1</b> <b>Vertical integration = 1</b> <b>Societal integration = 1</b>	Benin Georgia Honduras Peru	Afghanistan Czech Republic Nepal	Belarus Finland Italy	Brazil Estonia Indonesia Guatemala Japan Turkey

Source: Authors

## 5.2 Driving factors: what matters for horizontal and vertical integration?

We would like to begin the discussion by explaining the **horizontal integration** of line ministries involved in the implementation of the SDGs. In order to do so, we inspected the results of the Poisson models fitted. The coefficients are reported as odds ratios and therefore take only positive values. Odds ratios smaller than 1 indicate a negative relationship between a covariate and the dependent variable and odds ratios greater than 1 point to a positive relationship.

Being a higher income country increases the odds that a greater number of line ministries are involved, given that the other predictor variables in the model are held constant (compare Table 4). The same findings were obtained when using HDI 2016 instead of the income group: a lower rank in the index reduced the odds for a greater number of line ministries.

Government fractionalisation increases the number of line ministries involved. Fractionalisation produces significant and positive coefficients in three models and at the 10 per cent-level. Thus, the odds for the involvement of a greater number of line ministries increased with government fractionalisation. Political stability produced significant odds ratio smaller than 1 across all model specifications, indicating a negative relationship between stability and the degree of horizontal integration.

As we can infer from Table 4, the variables gauging the type of government system, type of political regime and the degree to which a country has committed itself in the VNRs to vertical and societal integration fail to produce significant coefficients.

In sum, we can interpret from these findings that the level of socio-economic development – approximated by means of income levels – plays an important role for the number of ministries involved. The less affluent and developed a country is, the fewer ministries will be involved in the SDG implementation process. The same logic holds true for politically stable countries, which are less likely to spread the competence for implementing the SDGs across many line ministries.

<b>Table 4: Findings for horizontal integration</b>				
	<b>Odds ratios</b>	<b>Odds ratios</b>	<b>Odds ratios</b>	<b>Odds ratios</b>
CoG leadership <sup>#</sup>	1.449 (0.710)	1.078 (0.549)	1.232 (0.616)	0.931 (0.480)
Ministry leadership <sup>#</sup>	2.119 (1.056)	1.579 (0.827)	1.695 (0.877)	1.305 (0.699)
Co-leadership <sup>#</sup>	1.373 (0.750)	1.081 (0.614)	1.013 (0.593)	0.832 (0.498)
Income group	1.417 (0.171) <sup>***</sup>		1.434 (0.174) <sup>***</sup>	
HDI 2016	0.988 (0.003) <sup>***</sup>		0.988 (0.003) <sup>***</sup>	
Government fractionalisation	1.721 (0.628)	1.894 (0.691) <sup>*</sup>	1.872 (0.700) <sup>*</sup>	2.054 (0.773) <sup>*</sup>
Political stability	0.620 (0.107) <sup>***</sup>	0.508 (0.104) <sup>***</sup>	0.613 (0.109) <sup>***</sup>	0.509 (0.105) <sup>***</sup>
Assembly-elected <sup>##</sup> (government system)	1.506 (1.021)	1.281 (0.899)	1.452 (0.979)	1.249 (0.868)
Parliamentary <sup>##</sup> (government system)	1.095 (0.235)	0.997 (0.215)	1.123 (0.244)	1.019 (0.221)
Liberal democracy	0.683 (0.349)	0.646 (0.328)	0.660 (0.350)	0.613 (0.321)
Subnational entities			0.909 (0.216)	0.938 (0.221)
Civil society			0.771 (0.168)	0.777 (0.171)
<i>N</i>	57	57	57	57
<i>AIC</i>	213.548	210.116	215.323	212.198
Notes: * p < 0.10, ** p < 0.05; *** p < 0.01. <sup>#</sup> base category: no leadership; <sup>##</sup> base category: presidential. "Autonomous" not covered here because both variables refer to the vertical relationship of state organisation. Source: Authors				

Turning to vertical integration, we obtained the following findings (see Table 5). If line ministries are assigned the leadership in the SDG implementation process, the odds of including subnational entities in the relevant governing bodies are significantly lower. In contrast to Hypothesis 1a, while the number of line ministries involved does not possess any explanatory power for vertical integration, countries that involve civil society have odds of including subnational entities. In these countries, the odds of involving subnational entities are between 10 and 12 times larger than in countries that abstain from involving civil society. Lastly, it is not surprising from a theoretical standpoint that countries with autonomous sub-federal units have greater odds for including subnational entities because their financial resources are key for SDG implementation.

<b>Table 5: Findings for vertical integration of subnational entities</b>			
	<b>Odds ratios</b>	<b>Odds ratios</b>	<b>Odds ratios</b>
Civil society	11.009 (9.619)***	10.015 (8.589)***	11.622 (10.474)***
Number of ministries	1.284 (0.289)	1.297 (0.295)	1.351 (0.321)
CoG leadership <sup>#</sup>	0.255 (0.274)	0.300 (0.311)	0.262 (0.279)
Ministry leadership <sup>#</sup>	0.111 (0.123)**	0.117 (0.128)**	0.099 (0.111)**
Participatory democracy	38.809 (101.310)		
Liberal democracy		11.499 (21.801)	
Deliberative democracy			19.866 (36.602)
Assembly-elected government system <sup>###</sup>	0.936 (2.482)	0.949 (2.533)	0.685 (1.886)
Parliamentary government system <sup>###</sup>	1.246 (0.972)	1.235 (0.965)	1.256 (0.984)
Income group	0.833 (0.324)	0.847 (0.332)	0.801 (0.309)
Heterogeneity	1.496 (3.186)	1.725 (3.675)	1.527 (3.282)
Autonomous	8.875 (9.279)**	8.321 (8.626)**	8.441 (8.947)**
<i>N</i>	56	56	56
<i>AIC</i>	77.833	78.187	76.977
Notes: * p < 0.10, ** p < 0.05; *** p < 0.01. <sup>#</sup> base category: no leadership; <sup>###</sup> base category: presidential. Source: Authors			

As discussed above and outlined in Table 5, there is a relationship between vertical and societal integration. This relationship is confirmed by the analysis of societal integration as presented in Table 6. As we can see, countries that involve subnational entities in the SDG implementation process have about 6 times greater odds of also involving civil society actors. Although involving civil society should be more likely in democratic regimes given the democratic principle participation and political equality, regime type had no explanatory power for societal integration in this model.

<b>Table 6: Findings for societal integration</b>			
	<b>Odds ratios</b>	<b>Odds ratios</b>	<b>Odds ratios</b>
Subnational entities	6.518 (4.772)**	6.141 (4.454)**	6.783 (5.042)**
Number ministries	0.734 (0.145)	0.739 (0.148)	0.723 (0.146)
CoG leadership <sup>#</sup>	0.307 (0.295)	0.270 (0.257)	0.303 (0.290)
Ministry leadership <sup>#</sup>	0.253 (0.241)	0.238 (0.226)	0.266 (0.254)
Participatory democracy	0.154 (0.362)		
Liberal democracy		0.506 (0.842)	
Deliberative democracy			0.270 (0.421)
Assembly-elected government system <sup>###</sup>	0.311 (0.551)	0.263 (0.466)	0.336 (0.602)
Parliamentary government system <sup>##</sup>	0.517 (0.378)	0.495 (0.365)	0.513 (0.375)
Income group	1.082 (0.354)	1.009 (0.332)	1.079 (0.343)
<i>N</i>	58	58	58
<i>AIC</i>	79.021	79.499	78.953
Notes: * p < 0.10, ** p < 0.05; *** p < 0.01. <sup>#</sup> base category: no leadership; <sup>##</sup> base category: presidential. Source: Authors			

Summing up, the analyses presented in Tables 4 to 6 reveal two important insights: First, a national government's likelihood for broader horizontal integration of line ministries is most strongly related to the level of socio-economic development of a country and to political stability. With regard to the latter, surprisingly, *less* stable countries tend to integrate more extensively horizontally than stable countries. This latter finding is quite counterintuitive and further research will be required to understand the mechanisms that drive horizontal integration.

Second, while there is no relationship between horizontal integration and the other two types of integration, we observed a stable and mutually enforcing relationship between vertical and societal integration. This finding suggests that the latter two dimensions are more similar than the first.



## 6 Conclusions and policy recommendations

In this study, we posed two research questions: The first referred to the empirical characterisation of policy integration within the context of the SDGs. On the basis of the VNRs submitted to the United Nations in 2016 and 2017, we were able to show that there are seven institutional design choices that national governments have taken. The largest group of the countries analysed in this study (15) opted for an institutional design that ensured high-level political leadership by the CoG along with horizontal integration through the formal engagement of three or more line ministries. However, sub-national units and civil society stakeholders were not formally represented in this approach. Only a relatively small number of countries (6) opted for a design that complied with the call for high-level political support, horizontal integration, vertical integration and societal inclusiveness.

The second research question concerned the determinants of these patterns. Our findings revealed that horizontal integration becomes more likely with higher socio-economic development. When governments operate in a politically stable environment, they are less likely to spread the responsibility of implementing the SDGs across many different line ministries. Vertical integration and societal integration are interdependent and mutually enforcing. As we have pointed out above, countries are still experimenting on how to best deliver on the 2030 Agenda and there is no single institutional model that has been empirically proven to most efficiently address the implementation challenges of the SDGs. However, the literature on the effectiveness of development policies and previous sustainability efforts reviewed in Section 2 of this paper point to the relevance of four factors (high-level political leadership; horizontal integration; vertical integration; and societal inclusiveness) for successfully achieving the SDGs.

In sum, the empirical analysis supports all of our hypotheses except the hypotheses that relate to the relationship between horizontal and vertical integration (H1a), the relevance of the type of government system (H4a) and political regime (H4b). In other words, neither parliamentary government systems nor democratic regimes seem have an influence on the number of line ministries (horizontal integration) or civil society actors (societal integration) involved.

Overall, we were able to witness some innovative approaches to the challenging task of attaining sustainable development. Evidently, in the present analysis, we were not able to discuss the *performance* of the respective institutional models as the process of choosing the institutional design for SDG implementation is still ongoing in many countries and it is still too early for empirical studies evaluating the effects of institutional design on SDG achievement. Limitations of this study include the small database and the relatively preliminary measurement of our independent variables. Although we used established indicators, they must be further theorised for the purpose of answering our specific research questions and their correlations must be further examined. The next steps in this project will thus be to, first, expand the dataset with the coding of VNRs submitted in 2018 and 2019. Second, we will need to operationalise the independent variables in a more refined and sophisticated manner. In particular, empirical evidence across countries has shown that state capacity is crucial for the establishment of strong institutions and effective policy implementation. In further research we will thus aim at complementing the variable “level of socio-economic development” with a measurement of state capacity. From an additional theoretical perspective, a promising way to improve this study would be to include various

measurements of accountability. Hence altogether, rather than offering conclusive findings, this study represents a first venture into the theory-led empirical investigation into the institutional conditions for integrated SDGs implementation that are currently emerging, along with the factors that drive institutional innovation or inertia.

### *Policy recommendations*

The findings of the empirical analysis of institutional designs for integrated SDG implementation have various implications for policymaking at the national and the global level.

Implementing a global agenda locally requires the careful choice of ministries to lead the process. In 27 out of 62 cases, ministries of foreign affairs are in the lead in SDG implementation. Although the Agenda 2030 is a global agenda, which is to be implemented in domestic and global arenas, it seems to be perceived as an international agenda by almost half of the governments analysed. Although international action is crucial for addressing global problems formulated in the SDGs, the domestic arena must not be left behind for several reasons. First, holding governments accountable for SDG implementation requires strong domestic accountability relations between state and society. Second, a firm implementation of SDG policies is an important element to prepare individuals and societies for an active role in the transformation to sustainability. Sharing responsibilities for SDG implementation between ministries of foreign affairs and ministries dealing with domestic affairs is thus a necessary condition for successful SDG implementation.

**Choosing lead ministries beyond “the usual suspects” (such as environment ministries) will be necessary in order to address the key dimensions of the 2030 Agenda.** Environment ministries rank second after foreign affairs ministries in leading SDG processes in the countries analysed. Although the high responsibility of environment ministries might increase synergies with the Paris Agreement, there are downsides to this approach. Environment ministries typically belong to the “weaker” ministries, which have to court the support of stronger ministries. This has led to the watering down of sustainability strategies in the past (that is, less environment, more economics). Ministries should thus be mandated in a way that all three dimensions of the 2030 Agenda (economic, social and ecological) are covered. Involvement of finance ministries is important too because SDGs will remain at the margin of state decision-making if not properly addressed in budgets. As a consequence for international development cooperation, negotiations with implementing governments should foster the involvement of particularly relevant line ministries in the national institutional design for SDG implementation.

**Make sure relevant non-state and local stakeholders are involved in national decision-making.** A considerable number of countries have chosen an institutional design in which three or more sector ministries are involved in the implementation process. These are, at least theoretically, favourable conditions for horizontal integration. However, there is still a substantial lack of better integrating sub-national entities and civil society actors. Although they are often integrated in working groups and committees, they have no say in decision-making processes on the national level. Given the high relevance of local solutions for SDG implementation and the constructive role non-state actors – including epistemic communities – have been playing in raising awareness for and formulating the SDGs, they should be part of decision-making processes. Vertical integration is not only a question of political power. It also requires improving local capacities. In particular, local institutions

in developing countries can often not participate in political decision-making because of a lack of human and financial resources. This recommendation resonates with SDG 17, which calls for multi-stakeholder partnerships for SDG implementation. From the perspective of international development cooperation, it is crucial to not only negotiate and cooperate with governmental bodies on the national level but also to expand cooperation for SDG implementation to sub-national entities and civil society actors. However, the examples of Switzerland and Chile show that OECD donor countries themselves do not necessarily have a better record in vertical integration than developing countries. Integrating sub-national entities and civil society remains a universal task for all types of countries.

**Monitoring the establishment of institutional designs for integrated SDG implementation.** In many countries, new institutions have been established with the aim of integrated SDG implementation, at least on paper. However, it is too early to tell whether these institutions have actually become operational, work effectively and efficiently, and whether they have become a relevant point of reference for a country's policymaking. However, there is a mutual recognition that strong institutions are crucial for SDG implementation. It is thus relevant not only to develop indicators for measuring the achievement of the SDGs themselves but also to assess the strengths of the institutions charged with SDG implementation and whether these institutions actually make a difference. In addition, the national institutional designs for integrated SDG implementation vary with regard to age and level of innovation. In some countries, governments have established new institutions to oversee and coordinate SDG implementation whereas in other countries this mandate has been conferred on previously existing institutions whose structure was not (or only slightly) changed.

Other countries simply extended the mandate of existing institutions for the purpose of national development planning or implementing national climate strategies. However, literature on economics and natural resource government has shown that institutional path dependence may create rigidity even within new institutional arrangements (see, for example, Godden, Ison, & Wallis, 2011; Schreyögg & Sydow, 2010). In light of this, and given that we still know very little about the effectiveness and efficiency of the various different SDG implementation regimes, it will not only be important to monitor their impact but also to investigate the political dynamics, constellations and logic that led to their adoption.



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