

# **The Impact of Global Governance Networks on Social Innovation for Sustainable Development**

## **Linking Setup, Enablers and Cooperation Results of the Managing Global Governance (MGG) Network**

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## Abstract

Networks as relational infrastructure play an important role in strengthening cooperative efforts toward sustainable development. This paper analyses the Managing Global Governance (MGG) Network – a transnational, multi-stakeholder network that employs collaborative training, knowledge cooperation and policy dialogue instruments. The network includes members from Brazil, China, the EU, India, Indonesia, Mexico and South Africa. To understand how the implementation of Agenda 2030 through cooperation in networks can be fostered, this paper examines the conditions under which global governance networks create impact.

Using a literature review, external evaluation studies and 27 qualitative interviews, the paper categorises impact across four levels: individual, organisational, network and systemic–institutional. Additionally, it analyses the impact on the network itself – not only as an enabler of impact but also as a subject affected by cooperation within the network. In this context, several types of impact can be distinguished, ranging from improved international cooperation structures to behaviour change and the reorientation of organisational policies.

We conclude that three dimensions of a network's setup are key to enabling social innovation for sustainable development:

1. the composition of network members
2. the cooperation infrastructure
3. the cooperation culture.

These insights contribute to the ongoing debate on how to link change at the individual level with transformation in more institutionalised structures – particularly in organisations and broader systemic contexts. The paper is especially relevant for scholars engaged in network analysis and development, decision-makers involved in transnational multi-stakeholder networks, and international cooperation actors aiming for sustainable development impact.

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Bonn, September 2025

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Abstract

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## Abbreviations

ASCI	Administrative Staff College of India
BMZ	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
CO <sub>2</sub>	carbon dioxide
CSIS	Centre for Strategic and International Studies
DEI	diversity, equity and inclusion
ENAP	National Institute of Public Administration of Brazil
EU	European Union
G20	Group of Twenty
GIZ	Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
IDOS	German Institute of Development and Sustainability
MGG	Managing Global Governance
NeST	Network of Southern Think Tanks
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PRODIGEES	Promoting Research on Digitalisation in Emerging Powers and Europe Towards Sustainable Development
QCI	Quality Council of India
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
TCU	Brazilian Federal Court of Accounts
UN	United Nations
UNFSS	United Nations Forum on Sustainability Standards
VSS	Voluntary Sustainability Standards
2030 Agenda	2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

# 1 Introduction

The multitude and density of global crises and the need to accelerate the implementation of the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development amid close global economic and social interdependencies call for an intensification of collaboration across nations, actors, disciplines and networks (De Moor, 2018, p. 31; Messner & Scholz, 2018). Networks are likely to be having a major impact (Lynders, 2024; Plastrik et al., 2022), but exactly what impact are they having, and how is this impact created? What are the factors necessary to make this impact more likely?

A central starting point is the insight that international cooperation becomes easier and more effective if it is characterised by an open and honest dialogue and shared responsibility for global affairs that is perceived as mutually beneficial, trustful and fair by all involved parties (see (Messner et al., 2016; Messner & Weinlich, 2016)). What should this cooperation look like in practical terms? What elements does it contain? To realise the potential of transnational networks to bring about the social innovation necessary for sustainable development, we need to better understand the conditions under which individuals and organisations can collaborate effectively.

Here, we build on a conceptualisation of global governance networks as a key structure of cooperation for social innovation, understood as a key facilitator of sustainable development.<sup>1</sup> Applying a broad definition, we consider contributions to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as laid down in the 2030 Agenda, as “impact towards sustainable development”. This paper examines the conditions under which global governance networks create social innovation in order to accelerate progress towards sustainable development.

The conditions under which networks generate this impact are multidimensional. They range from internal factors such as network capacities to external factors such as political circumstances and windows of opportunities. For our analysis of the conditions of the impact of networks, we focus on internal aspects as the key enablers.

In this context, we relate three aspects: (1) the internal setup of networks, (2) the impact networks (can) have on sustainable development, and (3) the interrelation of the two variables.

The paper employs a mix of impact assessment methods to investigate these aspects. In its empirical section, the paper draws on the experiences of the Managing Global Governance (MGG) Network,<sup>2</sup> a transnational multi-stakeholder global governance network with members from Brazil, China, the European Union (EU), India, Indonesia, Mexico and South Africa that offers collaborative training, research and policy dialogue instruments. With a focus on a limited set of self-reported impact examples, as presented by network members, enriched by selected evaluations and statistics, we organise the impact on three levels – the individual, the organisational, and the systemic–institutional.<sup>3</sup> In this way, the study also contributes to the debate on how to link change at the individual level with change in more institutionalised structures, in particular in organisations and in wider systemic setups. In this vein, the paper

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1 In the following we use impact and performance interchangeably. See Section 2.1, where impact is defined.

2 Understanding the conditions for impact of this particular case study, the MGG Network, is of particular relevance for the work of the authors as we have a central role in facilitating its activities, and strive for the optimisation of its impact by improved prioritisation, network development and implementation.

3 The study does not attempt to present the full history, rationale, design and all known impact generated by the MGG programme since 2007. The elements presented and analysed here serve the purpose to provide the context necessary to analyse and put in perspective the number of impact examples as self-reported by network members. For further information on the methodology, see Section 1.2.

contributes to a better understanding of opportunities and forms of interventions in and by networks as part of a complex global governance architecture (see Kim, 2020).

By clarifying which activities, cooperation formats and actor constellations create which type of impact, the findings can help direct network and cooperation initiatives. Consequently, the results are of relevance not only to scholars interested in network analysis, but also decision-makers in inter- and transnational cooperation that operate or interact with global governance networks.

## 1.1 Global governance networks and global sustainability challenges

The investigation of the conditions under which networks develop the capacity to have a positive impact on sustainable development starts with the question of the relevance of networks in the global efforts for sustainability transformations,<sup>4</sup> especially through global partnerships as defined in SDG 17. Globally interconnected sustainability challenges require systemic approaches. In research and the public debate, *technological innovation* is often assigned an important role, based on high hopes that challenges can be addressed with techno-fixes (Lucatello & Reiners, 2024). The basis on which to make large, intentional and equitable social, economic and environmental changes possible, however, is *social innovation*. Building on technological innovations or not, social innovation is understood as “a complex process of introducing new products, processes or programs that profoundly change the basic routines, resources and authority flows, or beliefs of the social system” (Antadze & Westley, 2012, p. 133). It adds value to the entire society, targets human needs and affects the performance of the system as a whole (Plastrik et al., 2022, p. 13).

Networks make social innovation more likely because they can connect the individual with the organisational and wider systemic level. Relevant core potentials of networks include the improvement of the quality and quantity of relations, the mobilisation of leadership, and the provision of a framework for effective intentional initiatives to generate action that leads to breakthroughs. They can provide communication and cooperation channels to make use of the “enormous reservoir of good will and capacity to effect change for the common good” (De Moor, 2018, p. 35). As relational governance structures<sup>5</sup> (Hernandez & Vogel, 2022), transnational networks possess the potential to bring together relevant actors in structured spaces over longer time periods and involve them equally in defining challenges of common concern. In this, they facilitate both sharing of knowledge and creating new solutions (Lynders, 2024, p. 57). Through combining skills, perspectives and resources, networks can transfer the aspirations of social movements into social innovations and help decentralise collaboration to unfold large-scale social change (Holley, 2012, p. 22).

The insight that networks have great potential to provide the cooperation framework and act as catalysts for social innovation in response to systemic challenges has been reflected in development cooperation, too (e.g. Biggs et al., 2010; Castro-Arce & Vanclay, 2020; Dayson, 2017; Grimm et al., 2013; Repo & Matschoss, 2019; Seelos & Mair, 2020; Tanimoto, 2012). Here, research on effectiveness has expanded in the last decades from a focus on the impact of individual and organisations to include the collective impact of networks and larger ecosystems

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4 Transformations are here viewed as: “shifts from regimes associated with unsustainable pathways of development to alternative regimes in which development pathways are or are perceived to be sustainable” (Higham et al., 2024, p. 477).

5 The term “relational governance” comes from the legal domain and has been used in economic and management literature (Li et al., 2021). Academics in development cooperation use relational governance to elaborate principles that promote trust and collaboration among different stakeholders (Gimenes et al., 2022).

(Plastrik et al., 2022, p. 16), and from government-centred activity to “network politics” (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2016).

In the context of global sustainability challenges, global governance networks can play an important role. They have developed as an attempt to bring together dispersed governance capacities to improve the delivery of policies (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2016, p. 6) and, to this end, to unite the resources, skills and perspectives of the private sector, civil society, academia and the government in pursuit of shared goals (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2016, p. 3). In this way, they can “combine the voluntary energy and legitimacy of the civil-society sector with the financial muscle and interest of businesses and the enforcement and rule-making power [...] of states and international organizations” (Huppé et al., 2012; see also Reinicke et al., 2000) in Eilstrup-Sangiovanni (2016, p. 7) grounded in evidence-based research.

Global governance networks<sup>6</sup> can be understood as

a relatively stable horizontal articulation of interdependent, but operationally autonomous[,] actors who interact through negotiations [...] which take place within a relatively institutionalized framework of contingently articulated rules, norms, knowledge and social imaginaries, that is self-regulating within limits set by external agencies and which contribute to the production of public purpose in the broad sense of visions, ideas, plans and regulations (Soerensen & Torfing, 2007, p. 197).

This definition encompasses key aspects, which are included in other network concepts too. As a “pluri-centric” form of governance (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2016, pp. 3-5), global governance networks bring together diverse actors to share knowledge, resources, information and expertise, and to integrate inter- and transdisciplinary capacities across segments and levels of society. The cooperation of these actors takes place with a certain degree of institutionalisation. Participants remain formally independent and operationally autonomous, but the networks embody (voluntary) processes of coordination and negotiation towards consensus finding, aimed at achieving specific outcomes, typically some notion of public good. These structures are often characterised by flat hierarchies, which allow for participation and integration. At the same time, they can face the challenge of fragmentation arising from loose structures, such as problems in strategic decision-making, participants being cut off from relevant information or the exclusion of potentially valuable input from marginal actors (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2016, p. 10). If solutions to these problems are provided, global governance networks can ensure fast and efficient information flow, and support an atmosphere of learning, innovation, creativity, prototyping and quick testing, with a feedback culture necessary for innovative solutions (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2016, p. 8; Plastrik et al., 2022, p. 24).

## 1.2 Methodology

This study examines the conditions under which global governance networks create impact towards sustainable development. The empirical case study is the MGG Network, for which both authors work on a daily basis. Being core actors of the network facilitation team for more than seven years puts us in the privileged position of easy access to data, to be able to follow internal functioning and dynamics of collaboration, and to connect internal and external reports and

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6 There are multiple global governance networks that share one or two of these approaches (transdisciplinary, transnational and multi-stakeholder). They often set different foci either on research, policy innovation or leadership training to promote sustainable governance. Three examples that share similar criteria to the case study, the MGG Network, are: Future Earth (<https://futureearth.org>); Network of Foundations Working for Development (netFWD) (<https://www.oecd.org/en/networks/network-of-foundations-working-for-development.html>); and the Global Governance Futures (GGF) (<https://www.ggfutures.net/>). Mapping the landscape of global governance networks and specifying similarities and differences is a task for further research.

evaluations to the network's theory of change. The advantage of examining something we have access to can be a disadvantage, as distance often makes a neutral assessment easier. By making roles and research processes transparent in detail, however, we try to allow for a proper assessment in the given setup. Beyond that, based on a constant reflection about our roles in the network development, and our ability to stimulate and steer internal processes, we tried to counter a possible biased or distorted view.

The main approach of the study is to collect and analyse the network members' reports of impact, originally coined as their "change stories". These stories are examples of successful change towards sustainable development at different levels. Following the respondents' own understanding of how and where the network, or their participation in network activities, contributed to impact, these reports constitute the central data set. In total, 27 self-reported impact stories have been collected for this study, while many further examples of impact of the network could not be included yet.<sup>7</sup>

The individual narratives were collected in a two-step approach. Network members were invited to share their story in a semi-structured qualitative questionnaire with open text boxes.<sup>8</sup> The call to complete the questionnaire was published on the network's internal online platform,<sup>9</sup> a community platform with social media elements (opportunity to post text and pictures) and online collaboration opportunities (event management, discussion forums, document repository). The online questionnaire, which today is a permanently available tool, resulted in 12 completed questionnaires in the period from May 2022 to December 2023.

The open call and the collection of responses in the online questionnaire was complemented by approaching network members individually in virtual individual interviews. These interviews took place between the beginning of 2022 and the end of 2023, and resulted in 15 interviews. The interview guideline included the same questions as the online questionnaire, and additionally provided more space for interviewers to ask follow-up questions, and for respondents to elaborate on details.

The questionnaire focused on the following questions:

- What change did network members experience as induced or powered by the MGG Network?
- What role did the MGG Network play?
- What factors made this change a success?<sup>10</sup>

After the first set of 15 interviews, we analysed the responses and updated the online questionnaire to streamline responses with different levels of impact that could be condensed from the initial data set.

All "change stories" collected up to September 2022 were published on the MGG website at the occasion of an online conference to celebrate the 15th anniversary of the MGG programme. The online event also featured a virtual story-telling session, where network members could share their stories with peers, and exchange, in small groups, their views on factors that supported their successes.

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7 The list of all interviews can be found in Annex 3.

8 The interview guideline can be found in Annex 2.

9 See <https://mgg.network/>

10 The online questionnaire can be found in Annex 1.

In September 2023, 120 network members came together in Bonn, Germany for the “MGG Global Network Conference”. The gathering was used to advertise the collection of “change stories”, and motivated an additional 12 network members to fill out the online questionnaire. All 27 interviews (from the questionnaire and virtual interview) were summarised in one-pagers, which the alumni commented and approved. They have been published consecutively on a dedicated section of the MGG online platform.

Beyond the data collected through online questionnaires and interviews, the following analysis is based on the reports of external survey and evaluation experts who, on a regular basis, conduct tracer studies in the network and, in particular, following the main training and dialogue format of the MGG programme, the MGG Academy.

To monitor the Academy’s achievements, an external evaluating company regularly conducts online surveys with current Academy participants. These tracer studies are carried out in the weeks before the Academy begins, targeting upcoming participants, and again approximately one year after the programme has concluded. For example, the tracer study from 2018 includes results from both before participants attended the Academy and one year after they completed the programme. This research uses data collected between 2018 and 2024. Relevant sections of the tracer studies can be found in Annex 3. This data is analysed against the background of a literature review of social impact assessment, especially in the philanthropic sector and in global governance network research aiming to support sustainability transformations.

### **1.3 Main findings of the study**

Based on qualitative research and the literature integration, we found that global governance networks have the potential to make social innovation that advances sustainable development more likely. They may have an impact at different levels: individual, organisational, systemic–institutional and at the level of the network itself. This impact unfolds in various types: competencies and career development of individuals, re-orientation of own behaviour towards sustainability, creating a common understanding and improved international cooperation, the development of innovative solutions, and the implementation of these solutions by decision-makers within but also beyond the network.

In order to unfold this impact through cooperation in global governance networks, three conditions are essential to consider: (1) the composition of the group, (2) the cooperation infrastructure and (3) the cooperation culture (see Figure 8 in Section 5.1). First, the composition of the network members should be of a multi-stakeholder and inter-/transdisciplinary nature. Also, among the key factors of success is that of uniting the diversity of the actors by a central theme visibly directed to sustainable development and global cooperation. Secondly, the cooperation infrastructure ideally comprises a longer joint dialogue or learning element complemented by continuous opportunities to meet and interact that provides a common point of reference for a high proportion of network members. Thirdly and crucially, the cooperation culture in the network should foster trust among members and a basic level of group cohesiveness (we-identity), and also provide transparent communication channels and opportunities for reciprocal, fair interaction that add to reputation. Innovative and interactive cooperation methods that help network members to think “outside the box”, and leadership competencies such as communication or future thinking, but also the reflection of own values, roles or norms, are key to nurturing such a cooperation culture (see also Reiber, forthcoming).

## 1.4 Structure of the paper

In the following section, the paper proceeds with an explanation of relevant concepts of impact (assessment) and related theories of change. In this context, the paper develops the approach of assessing the collective impact of global governance networks in terms of the social innovation they generate. For the analytic grid that also captures conditions of cooperation, we address both the outcome and impact of collaborative action and network setups as potential success factors that make impact more likely. In Section 3, we focus on the MGG Network, and connect the theory of change and network setup analysis to our case study. Based on the online questionnaire responses and interviews conducted as described before, the paper then presents examples of how and what kind of impact MGG has achieved across different impact levels. In Section 4, we link features in the MGG Network's setup to impact achieved, and present findings on their interconnection in the sense of "success factors for network impact". In the final section, the paper offers a reflection of the findings and challenges of the study, and sets out a follow-up agenda for future research.

## 2 Impact leading to sustainable development

The study analyses three aspects of network impact: (1) the impact that networks (can) produce, (2) the setup of networks, understood as a combination of impact-enabling factors, and (3) the interrelation of the two variables. In preparation for this, we elaborate in the following section on the definitions of impact, and introduce key terms for impact-assessment in development cooperation. Referring to existing discourses in the field, we introduce the concept of a "theory of change", which structures the main components of an impact process in an ideal-type sequence that leads to "social innovation".

On this basis, we identify four levels at which network impact occurs: the individual, the organisational, the systemic–institutional level, and the network-level, which can transcend the other three levels. In a second step, we build on the concept of collective impact to develop our analytic focus on the internal setups of global governance networks as the space for collaboration that can enable social innovation.

### 2.1 Impact assessments via theories of change in development cooperation

Impact is the effect that an action, activity, service or measure has on someone or something. It involves change, making a difference. Whereas services, actions or activities of an entity such as a network are considered "outputs", and are closely tied to the cooperation infrastructure of a network, impact is a consequence of these achievements (Kurz & Kubek, 2021, p. 8). It refers to "significant or lasting changes in people's lives, brought about by a given action or series of actions" (Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014, p. 120). Consequently, impacts are changes that an individual, an organisation, a network or another entity achieves through their work on a specific target group (Kurz & Kubek, 2021, p. 7). In the context of networks, we are concerned only with impacts that could not be produced by an individual acting without the network (see Provan & Kenis, 2008, p. 230).

The assessment of impact, also referred to as "social impact assessment", "impact measurement", "results-based management" or "social performance measurement", is linked to the information needed to understand the performance of a given network. Beyond that, it includes the decisions taken on the basis of this information to optimise processes relevant to impact. Hence, beyond the academic interest, impact assessment serves the purpose to guide and

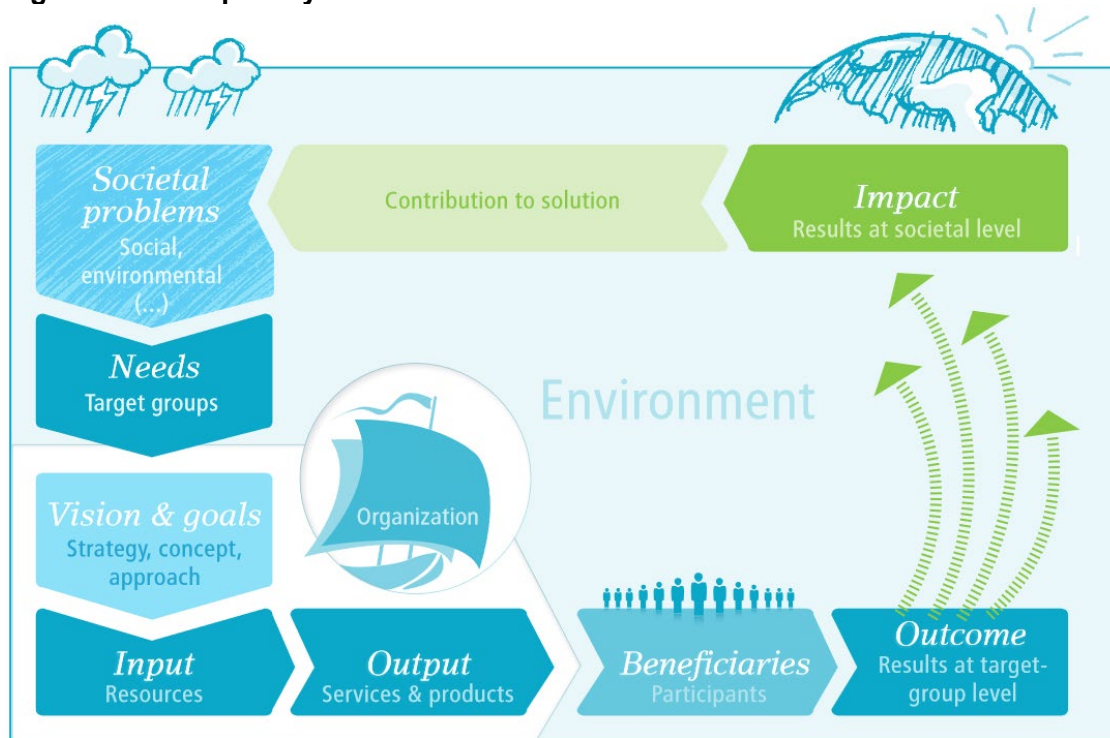
improve actions of actors to enable them to strive for impact in an informed way (Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014, p. 122). Faced with the need to adapt to changing environments, impact assessments help individuals, implementing organisations and networks alike to find out how activities, services and measures perform – whether or not they create a particular type of effect, and what the most promising entry points are for achieving greater leverage (Corvo et al., 2021, p. 2).

Achieving impact starts with defining the objective of collaboration. To be effective in a targeted manner, activities should follow a strategy that sets out which form of intervention may bring about the desired change. In such a “theory of change”, actors combine their (long-term) goals with a causal logic of effects. This reflects the conditions in which the actor operates, and the process of targeted interventions required (Valters, 2022). Interventions can directly contribute to the achievement of goals, or do so indirectly when they establish a prerequisite for an intervention that is necessary in a longer chain of effects.

Theories of change and impact assessment have, for a long time, played an important role in international development cooperation, where it is employed to improve the credibility and legitimacy of development initiatives (Vähämäki et al., 2011, pp. 2-4). Whereas early concepts of social impact assessment date back to the 1970s (Vanclay, 2020), the current results-oriented approach developed in the 2000s, and includes the introduction of the OECD concept of “management for development results” in 2005 (Vähämäki et al., 2011, p. 14). However, a one-size-fits-all results-based management approach does not exist. There are research gaps at different levels, notably the impact of global governance networks on (sustainable) development (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2016), and the link between changes in the lives of individuals and societal change (Vähämäki et al., 2011). Such conceptual diversity and gaps in knowledge of the conditions that lead to impact are problematic in academic terms, and they come with operational consequences for networks in the field of development cooperation. The assessment of collaborative work is not only necessary in order to evaluate and improve a network’s impact, but is often also needed to satisfy the accountability expectations of (funding) partners.

Theories of change connect input (invested resources), output (the immediate results of input, a service or product), outcome (change resulting from output) and impact (the wider and long-term effects of outcome) with the challenges (and needs arising from them) that require addressing. The concept of the theory of change plays a prominent role in development cooperation. To illustrate, the Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), a central provider of Germany’s international cooperation services, measures its results in terms of the categories of output, outcome and impact. They describe output as changes achieved through their activities (e.g. products, transferred knowledge, new skills), outcomes as direct short- and medium-term results of an activity (including benefits for the target group and any concomitant behavioural changes), and impact as longer-term, overarching development results (GIZ, 2020). In a similar vein, the German Institute of Development and Sustainability works with a theory of change that connects the institute’s activities across the fields of research, policy advice and training to outputs, outcomes and impacts that contribute to developing sustainable futures (IDOS, 2024b).

Putting emphasis on the lasting and structural nature of impact, leads on to a discussion of social innovation. Social innovation is defined as “a complex process of introducing new products, processes or programs that profoundly change the basic routines, resources and authority flows, or beliefs of the social system in which the innovation occurs” (Antadze & Westley, 2012, p. 133). Social innovation involves groups of people developing solutions to such demands, and although it is a collective activity, it is not a mass movement, which is located on the demand side. Figure 1 visualises the interconnected elements involved in creating impact in terms of the water cycle, and an organisation as like a ship, harnessing the power of the elements (strategy, resources, services and products) to make progress towards a beneficial outcome that creates impact.

**Figure 1: The impact cycle**

Source: Kurz & Kubek (2014)

In practice, however, the areas of outcome and impact cannot always be rigidly differentiated (Harding, 2014), as it is done in the above-mentioned GIZ definition. Arguably, for research institutions such as IDOS, where the MGG programme is implemented, such differentiation is not always sensible, as the mode of operation differs from that of implementing agencies. Providing policy advice or facilitating “actionable research” may not necessarily result in long-term impact for numerous reasons, including causes rooted beyond the quality of research or the evidence-basis of the recommendations. Impact assessment therefore needs to take into account that research organisations have a rather limited corridor of direct contributions to development. In contrast to the rigid definition of impact – as for instance applied by GIZ (see above) – for the purpose of this study we thus focus both on immediate, measurable outcomes and on the longer-term impact of collaborative work of network partners.

## 2.2 Impact-enabling setups of global governance networks

Interested in a better understanding of the conditions under which the impact of global governance networks on sustainability challenges occurs, the study follows the guiding assumption that a network’s internal setup is one of the key enabling factors. In view of this analysis, the concept of *collective impact* provides suitable tools. Collective impact is a framework for collaborative social change (Ennis & Tofa, 2020). It refers to the “commitment of important actors from many different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem” (De Moor, 2018). In more detail, the “collective impact framework involves cross-sector, interdisciplinary collaborative work aimed at addressing complex social problems” (Ennis & Tofa, 2020, p. 3). Typically, “it involves stakeholders such as organisations, community leaders, government and business, coming together to develop a common understanding of a problem and working collaboratively to address it” (Kania & Kramer 2011). This participatory multi-stakeholder approach is important in our context, as solutions to complex systemic sustainability challenges require contributions from, and the meaningful collaboration of, a heterogeneous group of actors from different backgrounds, including countries, sectors and

disciplines. This principle is enshrined in the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals, in particular “Goal 17 – Partnership for the Goals”.

The concept of collective impact thus stresses key aspects relevant for the analysis of networks, understood as the space where social innovation – as a form of collective impact – can take place or be initiated (Plastrik et al., 2022, p. 13): the composition of actors, their collaborative work, their commitment and the structure supporting interactions. Connected to the debate about global governance networks and the impact debate in the development cooperation field, these aspects can be translated in a broader sense to three relevant categories as key components to analyse a network. In very simple terms, a network is a social structure that consists of actors that interact with each other (Marin & Wellman, 2011; Scott, 2012). On the relevance of interaction, three fundamental questions can be asked:

1. Who cooperates? – *the composition of network members*
2. On what structural bases do actors cooperate? – *the cooperation infrastructure (including input and output)*
3. How do actors cooperate? – *the cooperation culture of a network.*

**(1) The composition of members** of a network is crucial, as the members provide the knowledge, skills and social and political capital that can be employed in collaborative action that leads to social innovation. Any transformation requires, amongst other things, the right combination of expertise (Lazarus & Funtowicz, 2023), along with access to information and decision-making processes. In other words, whether or not a network can achieve impact depends on the members whose cooperation it makes possible, and on whether these members consider the network to provide a valuable match-making function that will help them to work (reciprocally) towards their own goals.<sup>11</sup> Network members are typically individuals, but, in principle, entire organisations or sub-units of entities can be regarded as members.

**(2) The cooperation infrastructure** refers to the tools, mechanisms and structures that enable relevant decision makers to access a network of other like-minded people, who contribute expertise and have the capacity to shape decisions or outcomes in line with their objectives. It includes resources and instruments that enable collaboration between network members. As such, the impact assessment may consider them as in both the input and output area.

**(3) The cooperation culture** in a network is determined by the values, norms and principles that characterise the approach of the network members to cooperation. Cultures may vary across the different “behavioural dimensions” of cooperation (Messner & Weinlich, 2016), such as trust among network members, decision-making and enforcement processes in the network, stronger or weaker hierarchies in the governance setup, and the strength of a common identity.

Clearly, the three key aspects of a network setup are interdependent. To illustrate, cooperation infrastructure and culture influence which actors can be attracted to join network activities. Similarly, the composition of actors comes with strong implications for the reputation of the network and has an effect on infrastructural elements (e.g. financial resources) and cooperation culture. The availability of a cooperation infrastructure, in turn, affects the possibility of self-organisation (Biggs et al., 2010; Vogel, 2021) and thereby the cooperation culture of a network.

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11 Further information can be found in Reiber & Eberz, 2024, p. 64, in the section “Identifying and connecting change makers”.

## 2.3 Impact of global governance networks

When we take a closer look at impact on sustainable development in the context of networks and collaborative cooperation, it becomes clear that it can take many different forms. The reason sits in the integrated and global nature of the 2030 Agenda and the (potentially) wide range of areas where networks operate. To illustrate, relevant impact can occur across the entire spectrum of SDGs, from poverty reduction, to climate action, to the development of public–private partnerships. It can span all political levels, from the local to the global. In this context, a highly institutionalised nature of impact, such as is represented in the form of social innovation, is relevant and ultimately desirable. At the same time, contributions that seem to be smaller or initially of a temporary nature, can constitute important steps towards a fundamental change in the field of sustainable development.

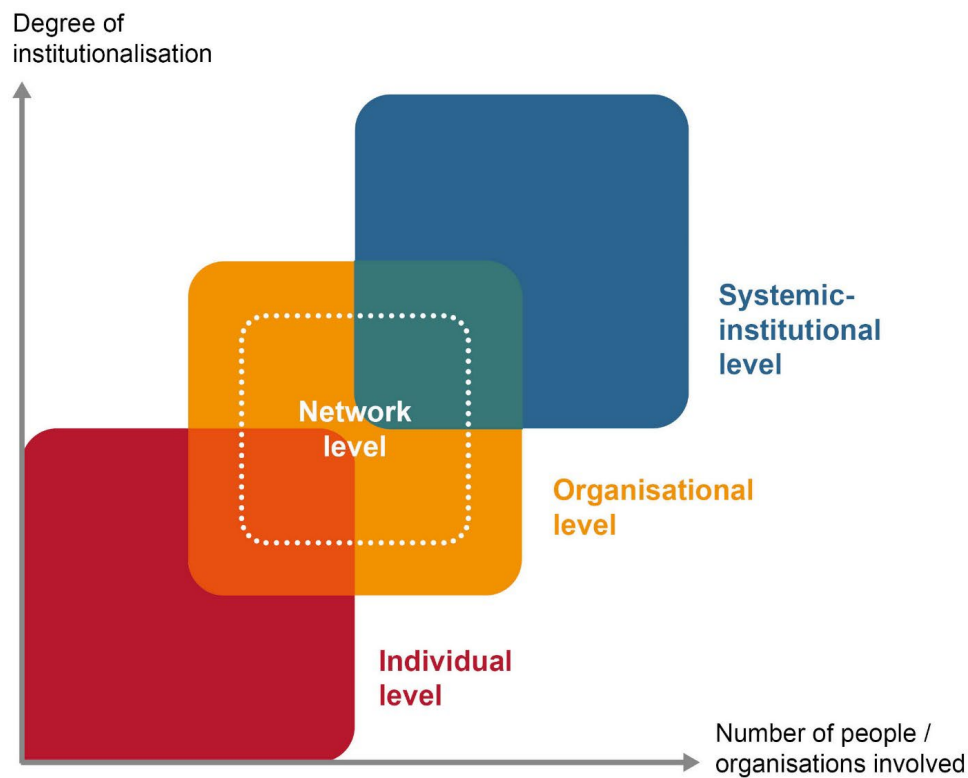
Against this background, our analysis applies a flexible scheme to grasp different types of impact along two basic dimensions: the number of people affected and the degree to which a change is institutionalised, in the sense of being lasting and of a structural nature. Along these criteria, we can differentiate three levels of impact (Vogel & Reiners, 2022).

The **individual level** of impact refers to the situation when network activities affect a person's life. To illustrate, the output of a training format provided by the network can be the strengthened competencies or the enlarged network of a civil servant. Impact at the individual level takes place when these competencies or network contacts lead the individual realise progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Analytically, impact also takes place at the level of the individual when the effect can be seen on a group of individuals as, for instance, when a cohort of trainees benefits from competence development.

The **organisational level** is addressed when structural change can be observed for an entity, for instance a public body or a company. To illustrate, a network activity may lead to a curriculum update of a training institution. The analytical level of organisations is also addressed when a group of organisations undergoes such a change. The level of institutionalisation is typically higher in this context due to the “stickiness” of organisations and their formalised governance structures.

Impact takes place at the **systemic–institutional level**, when network activities result in fundamental change in wider (political, societal, economic) systems. Network members might influence international discourses and understandings of “good practice” regarding training related to the 2030 Agenda, or contribute in another form to the structural re-shaping of the training landscape. This highest degree of institutional change is based on deep epistemic and societal rootedness, and a wide range of actors, individual and organisational, perpetuating and protecting the innovation.

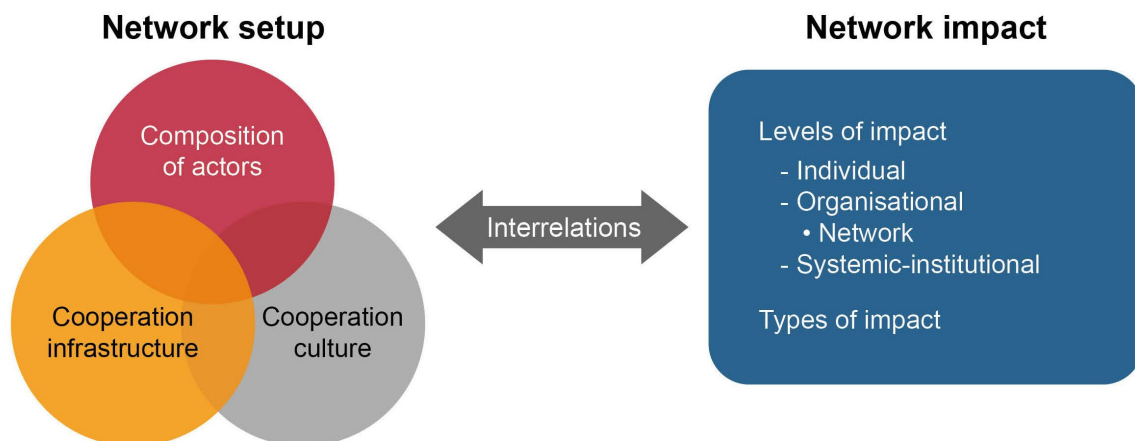
Last, but not least, a particular impact level for transnational network activities is the **network** itself. Network activities can be mutually reinforcing, and, linked to the network's size, character and modus operandi, collaborative work can affect the setup of the network. In most cases, this impact would qualify as organisational-level impact (at the level of the network's partner organisations, and for the network as a form of organisation) but is mostly grounded initially in individual change. However, in principle, the re-structuring of very large and highly influential networks can also come with impact at the systemic–institutional level. For the purpose of this study, these self-related effects are treated as a distinct category of impact.

**Figure 2: Impact levels**

Source: Authors

Figure 2 illustrates the approach. The spectrum of impact is here marked on the one side (x-axis) by the number of people involved and on the other side (y-axis) the degree of institutionalisation. The greater the number of people involved in a change process, the further right on the graph the change can be located. Similarly, the longer, the more regular, natural or integrated a change, the higher it is located within the spectrum of change. Both axes can be viewed as a continuum or as fluid, because in many concrete cases investigated over a comparatively short period of time, it is hard to conclusively determine how many people exactly were affected, both directly and indirectly, and how deeply a certain impact has ultimately been rooted in the respective system. Consequently, the assessment is not purely quantitative. While that is a start, qualitative elements – narratives of the depth of change – have to be taken into consideration, too.

Building on these conceptual underpinnings, Figure 3 presents the interrelations between the impact of networks at different levels and the network setup as introduced in Section 2.2. Essentially, it condenses the research framework of this study, illustrating our research interest in the interconnection between network setup and impact created by the network at the individual, organisational and systemic–institutional level. Beyond this interrelation, the study also investigates the types of impact that are created.

**Figure 3: Linking network setups and impact**

Source: Authors

### 3 The Managing Global Governance Network

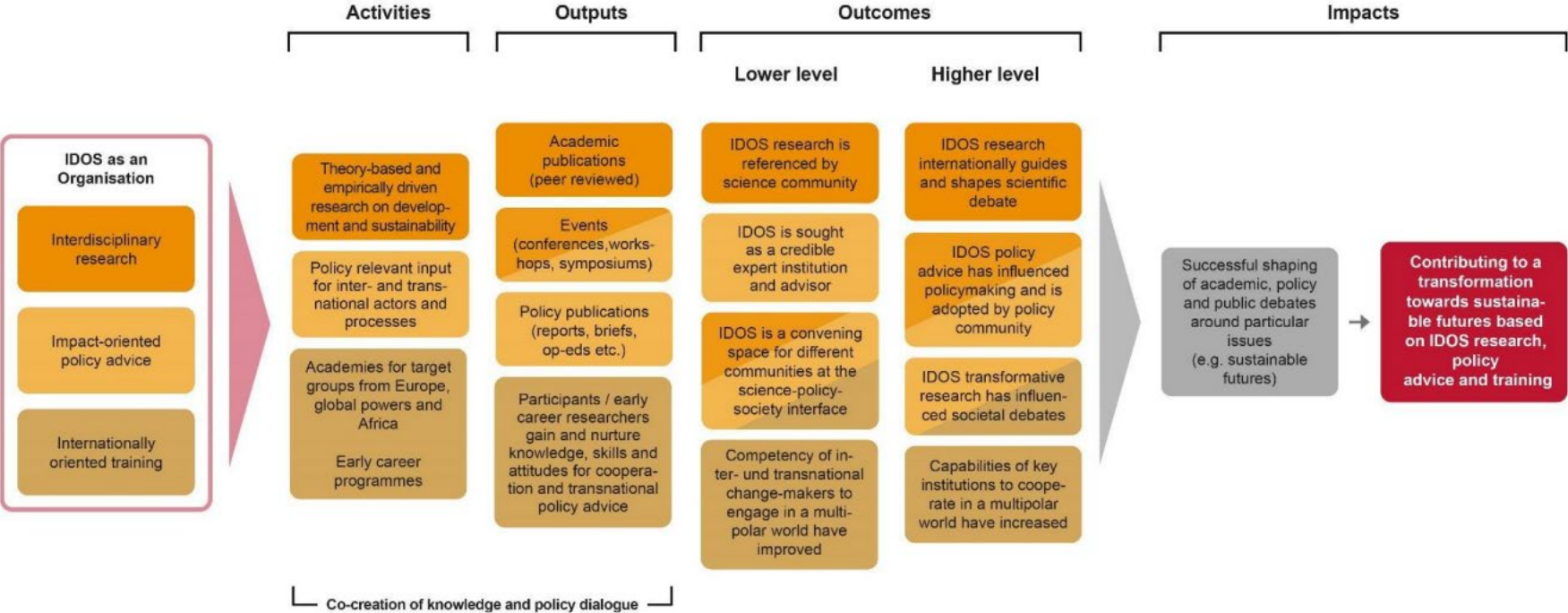
Our study of a global governance network that strives for a positive impact on sustainable development is the Managing Global Governance (MGG) Network. Analysing MGG with reference to the conditions that facilitated impactful collaborative action, we will, in a first step, present its theory of change as well as its cooperation setup along the categories of composition, infrastructure and culture. In preparation for this, a brief introduction on background and history will help understand the network development since 2007. In a second step, we will scrutinise the impact of the network achieved across different levels and types of impact.

#### 3.1 Background and objectives of the MGG Network

MGG is a transnational and interdisciplinary multi-stakeholder network, which has been developed since 2005 (Fues, 2018a). Funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and the Ministry of Culture and Science of North Rhine-Westphalia, the German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS) has the central role in implementing, maintaining and nurturing its activities. In 2025, the network encompasses around 500 individual network members and around 100 organisations that are or have been involved in its activities. According to the terms of reference, the MGG programme's activities are aimed at the joint development and implementation of contributions to address global sustainability challenges.

The MGG programme operates within the framework of IDOS's theory of change (IDOS, 2024b) and conceptualisation of pathways to impact. At IDOS, impact is defined as successful shaping of academic, policy and public debates as contributions to a transformation that leads to sustainable futures. Consequently, the impact assessment for the MGG Network is aligned with the institute's strategic mandate to implement interdisciplinary research, impact-oriented policy advice and internationally oriented training. In this vein, the objectives of individual projects and networks are evaluated in view of their scientific, advisory and educational outcomes across planning and reporting cycles. The assessment focuses on both quantitative and qualitative indicators – such as publications, policy influence and engagement with target groups – emphasising the importance of substantiated narratives and plausibly argued links between research activities and observed changes in discourse or practice (IDOS, 2020).

Figure 4: IDOS theory of change



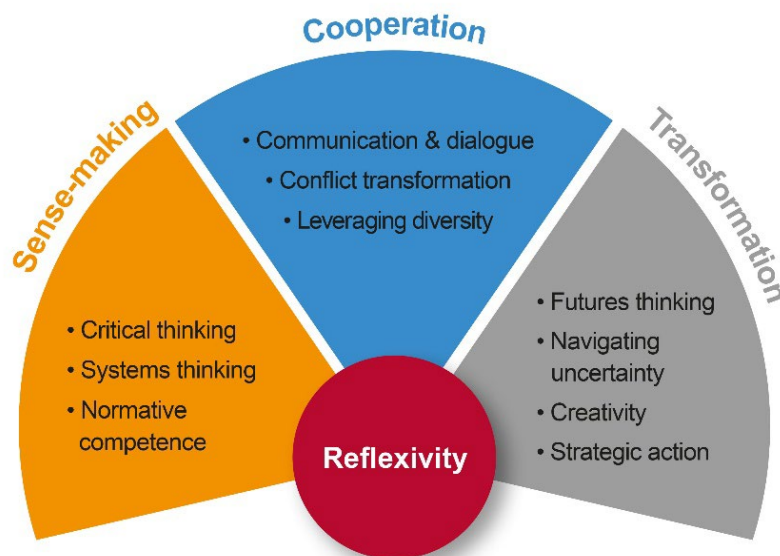
Source: IDOS (2024b, p. 43)

The institute employs external evaluations, feedback mechanisms, tracer studies and qualitative assessments, such as policy interactions and alumni engagement, to highlight success beyond numerical metrics. Consequently, the activities of MGG and its impact assessment are embedded in the institutional framework of IDOS, and in particular its department “knowledge cooperation and training”, mandated to develop individual competencies, shape organisational cultures, foster institutional linkages and promote self-sustained networks.

Building on this, MGG's work starts from the assumption that a commonly agreed agenda is key to addressing any (sustainability) challenge. Despite growing contestation amid geopolitical tensions, the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs offers such a global reform agenda, agreed upon by all member states in the UN General Assembly. As an existing and transparent system of goals that also provides guidance for local and regional actors, it offers a common point of reference for collective action. The ambitious and interrelated goals of the 2030 Agenda, however, exceed the scope of action of individual policies and individual states. They can only be achieved in a cross-sectoral and cross-policy approach through cooperation between government institutions, academia, civil society and the private sector, when cooperation and cross-border problem-solving go beyond intergovernmental processes. MGG's setup as a multi-stakeholder network is based on this understanding. Following a concept for global cooperation by the German government, MGG brings together actors from countries with wide global reach: Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Mexico and South Africa, as well as from Germany and the EU. Cooperation with these rising global powers is of particular importance, as they combine aspiration for global influence and regional impact due to their geographical and demographic situation as well as their economic and political development. At the same time, they face enormous internal development challenges (see: BMZ (Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development), 2021).

## **3.2 MGG's theory of change**

MGG's theory of change operates in the context of the IDOS theory of change (Figure 4), which strives for successful shaping of academic, policy and public debates in view of transformations towards sustainable futures based on IDOS research, policy advice and training (impact). In this context, MGG and IDOS employ academic publications, events, policy publications and competence development (outputs) to contribute to the institute's ambitions. In the specific setup of a global governance network, MGG's theory of change is based on a combination of (1) relevant actors, (2) an effective cooperation infrastructure that develops and employs the competencies combined in the network, and (3) a distinct form of cooperation culture. In this context, competence is understood as a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes, enabling an actor's effective engagement in various situations and contexts (Reiber, 2025, pp.62-67). MGG considers a dedicated set of competencies as key to enabling change towards sustainable development. These competencies (Figure 5) are needed for sense-making (including systems thinking, normative competence and critical thinking), innovation and transformation (including futures thinking, leveraging creativity and strategic action), and cooperation competencies (including reflexivity, communication and dialogue, conflict management and leveraging diversity) (Reiber, 2025, Reiber & Eberz, 2024; Chattopadhyay, 2018).

**Figure 5: Competencies for sustainable futures**

Source: Reiber (2025)

### *(1) Composition of network members*

With the ambition to bring together a strong representation of these competencies so that peer learning across sectors and countries can unfold, the network implements a member selection and on-boarding strategy. The overarching objective is to bring together “change-agents” and key organisations whose collaboration allows for targeted transnational and transdisciplinary work towards global sustainable development (Reiber & Eberz, 2024). This approach ultimately aims to impact the domestic and international spheres, and follows the insight that interdisciplinary and inter-sectoral collaboration increases the possible impact of initiated processes (Biggs et al., 2010, p. 4).

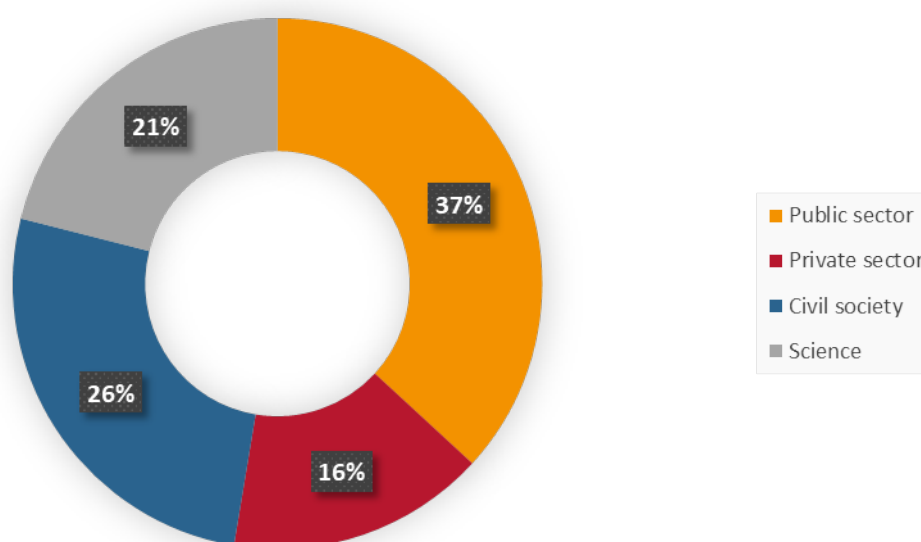
Consequently, the selection of network members is based on criteria regarding the relevance of applicants’ work area for sustainable development and global cooperation, individual expertise and qualification, organisational affiliation and position therein, as well as motivation and change-making potential. On this basis, what is aspired to is a balanced representation of countries, sectors (government institutions and public administration, research institutions and think tanks, international organisations, civil society, the private sector, arts), disciplines and gender. Also, a strong diversity in terms of cultures, socio-economic status and personalities (Domínguez, 2021) is considered as beneficial to the multi-stakeholder setup needed to address the systemic nature of sustainability transformations (Andrade, 2020).

Recruitment and on-boarding of network members can take two forms. Either candidates are accepted in response to an open call for application for one of the activities, or they are invited to participate in an activity based on their reputation and recommendations from network members. A key activity for bringing new members to the network is the Academy that runs about three months every year. Here, participants are accepted only in response to an open call against the complex set of criteria and quotas previously mentioned.<sup>12</sup> Although opportunities for candidates from different nationalities to participate in time-intensive activities abroad are not equal, continuously high number of applications demonstrate interest in the format and the ensuing network membership from all partner countries and regions (MGG, 2025a).

<sup>12</sup> For a complete overview of the Call for Application see <https://mgg.network/page/mgg-academy>.

Partner organisations play an important role in the strategic development of the network, as their quality, position and relevance translate into opportunities for the network as a whole to have impact. An organisation is considered a partner if individual employees or affiliates are network members, and if the leadership of the organisation supports the organisation's affiliation to the network. MGG seeks to build lasting cooperation among institutional partners by engaging multiple individuals from the same organisations over time, while also fostering diversity and openness by facilitating exchange across different partner institutions, and by continuously welcoming new actors into the network. Among long-standing partners are organisations that have proved to play a key role in driving sustainable transformations both in the domestic context and in global discourse. For example, in the public sector, partner organisations with multiple individual network members include the Ministry of Environment and the Central Bank of Brazil, and the Ministry of Finance in Indonesia. A cooperation agreement with the German Federal Foreign Office ensures joint training and dialogue activities with international diplomats. In the field of academia and think tanks, leading organisations such as the Shanghai Institutes of International Studies (SIIS), the Research and Information System for Developing Countries in India (RIS), the Institute of Applied Economic Research (IPEA) in Brazil, the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Indonesia, or Instituto Mora in Mexico are cases in point. Leading universities and training institutions for the public sector are key partner organisations as well, including the National School of Government of South Africa (NSG), the Administrative Staff College of India (ASCI), the National Institute of Public Administration of Brazil (ENAP), or the National Institute of Public Administration of Indonesia (NIPA/LAN). Civil society organisations with a global orientation, and innovators from the private sector, for instance working for Amazon, complement the mix of organisations. Figure 6 illustrates the sectoral distribution of MGG Academy participants between 2018 and 2024.

**Figure 6: MGG Academy participants per sector 2018–2024**



Source: Own calculation based on MGG Academy Participants Statistics 2018-2024

## (2) Cooperation infrastructure

MGG offers a multi-layered cooperation infrastructure that facilitates both the further development of competencies and cooperation in the network, aiming to unfold the potential for change-making. The infrastructure comprises: an annual training and dialogue format (MGG Academy), knowledge cooperation and policy dialogue initiatives across relevant issue areas, and a set of instruments to continuously strengthen the bonding and cooperation of members.

At the centre stands MGG's annual three-month training and dialogue format on global cooperation towards sustainable development: the MGG Academy.<sup>13</sup> Since 2007, it brings together around 22 highly qualified professionals every year from government institutions, think tanks and research institutions, civil society and the private sector from Brazil, China, Europe, India, Indonesia, Mexico and South Africa. The participants are recruited in line with the above-mentioned selection strategy, with a particular focus on mid-career candidates (three to five years of professional experience), typically in the age range between 25 and 40, who have demonstrated a strong change-maker spirit, with the aim of unfolding their potential to initiate change processes and further grow as decision-makers in the future. With academic modules, leadership trainings, and a practice-oriented phase, the Academy develops and nurtures the competencies necessary for addressing global challenges. This set of elements also includes a two-week dialogue format called "International Futures", which is implemented in cooperation with the German Federal Foreign Office. In this way, the Academy includes the realm of diplomacy in its cooperation approach, and enlarges the cooperation infrastructure with access to other networks, such as the Diplomacy by Networking initiatives (IDOS, 2024a).

Employing an integrated set of innovative methods, the MGG Academy allows participants to experience and practise a distinct form of collaboration in a highly heterogeneous environment as "labs of cooperation". In this way, the Academy, on the one hand, serves the function of bringing new members to the network every year. Additionally, it significantly shapes the cooperation culture of MGG and also prepares effective implementation of other network activities by providing substantial dialogue and cooperation experiences and establishing a common identity.

Network activities beyond the MGG Academy take place in the field of knowledge cooperation and policy dialogue. Here, topic-specific meetings in sub-groups of the networks, be it peer-exchange formats, workshops, publication projects or side events at international conferences, are typical instruments that allow for collaboration towards joint impact. Seeing that broad acceptance of action strategies can best be achieved if actors are equally involved in problem analysis and the production of solutions, MGG largely follows a combination of participatory processes and bottom-up approaches, complemented by strategic leadership of IDOS in the definition of the areas for knowledge cooperation and policy dialogue. Collaborative projects can be initiated during the Academy or following the initiative of IDOS or another partner organisation or group of partners. Where there is a substantial shared interest among a large group of network members, IDOS facilitates cooperation between these members, using the programme's core funding, provided the cooperation ideas are aligned with the network's vision in promoting the 2030 Agenda through global cooperation, and the current thematic priority areas. The main areas of cooperation that have emerged from this approach are:

- (1) Training and Learning – to strengthen capacity development and training capacities across the network;
- (2) Global Partnerships – to jointly work on concepts, conditions, forms and forums of global cooperation; and
- (3) Digitalisation – to explore the interface of digital and sustainability transformations.

Regular meeting opportunities for network members accompany these elements of the cooperation infrastructure, both online and in person, be it in national or regional sub-groups of the network, or network conferences open to the participation of members from all countries and regions. With a particular focus on bonding and the strengthening of a sense of belonging, these

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13 The duration of the programme has changed during the 17 years of implementation. In 2025, the core format takes three months.

meetings support the connection of members across different cohorts of the MGG Academy, sectors and geographic distribution.

All activities are backed by a digital infrastructure, namely a closed MGG online platform that allows members to connect, exchange and collaborate online. Core functions of the platform include: finding network members or organisations based on fields of expertise, staying up to date with network activities around the globe, and engaging in thematic discussions in forums. The platform also offers publicly accessible websites used to communicate about the network and disseminate results. Liaison people (former alumni) act as focal points in each country with the aim of boosting national network initiatives and supporting the general coordination of activities on a country level.

### *(3) Cooperation culture*

As described before, MGG's theory of change envisages the achievement of collaborative impact on sustainable development as a form of social innovation, by combining a distinct composition of members and their (strengthened) competencies (individuals and partner institutions) with a core infrastructure for network cooperation. At this, MGG aims to establish a specific culture of cooperation based on concepts of the "behavioural dimensions" of cooperation. The starting point is the understanding that collective action is most successful if it is grounded in reciprocity, which relies on fairness, communication, a we-identity, reputation and trust (Messner et al., 2016). MGG tries to address and incorporate these enablers in its cooperation environment (Figure 7).

**Figure 7: Cooperation hexagon**



Source: Own presentation adapted from the cooperation hexagon by Messner et al. (2016).

Aligning the network's activities to the needs of its members is key to the network's success (Vogel, 2021); members who benefit from the network are more likely to support its activities, and a member's positive experience of network support increases the chance that this member supports other network members or activities in return on another occasion. In this vein, reciprocity is understood as a key enabler of cooperation. It can be achieved by implementing network activities that are considered mutually beneficial. To illustrate, organisations sending employees to the Academy gain value in the form of strengthened competencies of their staff and network embeddedness in return for seconding their employees for several months. At the

same time, the dialogues at the Academy, and therefore the Academy as a whole, could not take place without these secondments. MGG also tries to ensure reciprocity in its knowledge cooperation and policy dialogues initiatives by identifying topics for cooperation in bottom-up processes, and by developing respective events and projects in a participatory manner. For instance, when partner organisations host knowledge cooperation or other network meetings, they co-design the meeting programme and can shape it in line with their own interests and needs. In a similar manner, they may contribute to the establishment of working areas in the network. To illustrate, the cooperation between training institutions for the public sector in the “Training and Learning” work areas of MGG started with discussions in the Academy 2016 and an international peer-exchange 2018 facilitated by MGG.<sup>14</sup> The strong participation of a wide spectrum of network members in the ensuing cooperation, including the joint implementation of a series of online trainings during the Covid-19 pandemic, illustrates how network members can contribute to and benefit from the activities at the same time.

Fairness is linked to reciprocity and can be considered as the aversion of inequality (Fehr & Schmidt, 1999). MGG activities aspire to ensure this through joint programming of activities (see above), a systematic feedback and evaluation scheme, and through the continuous improvement of the programme’s diversity. The programme’s diversity, also discussed under the concept of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), finds expression, for instance, in the development of a guideline for preventing discrimination and harassment by network members and IDOS. Accordingly, measures to include DEI principles in the curriculum of the Academy have been set up. This is complemented by incorporating DEI principles into the evaluation mechanisms.

Trust is a crucial precondition for successful collaboration in highly heterogeneous setups like the MGG Network, where members come from diverse national, cultural, political, sectoral and disciplinary backgrounds (Benetytė & Jatuliavičienė, 2013; Holley, 2012; Jarvenpaa et al., 2004; Messner et al., 2016). Consequently, both the Academy and other formats within the cooperation infrastructure invest substantial time in building trust. This occurs through leadership modules, coached small-group projects, and network meetings that enable exchange, perspective-sharing and emotional engagement (Vogel, 2021). Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000, p. 556) define trust as “one party’s willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open”. Building on this, scholars have identified core dimensions of trust relevant to collaborative processes: benevolence, reliability and predictability, competence, honesty, openness, and personal familiarity and intimacy (Leighton et al., 2016; Seppänen et al., 2007). In the MGG context, benevolence and familiarity are fostered through informal activities and personal interactions; reliability and competence are demonstrated in collaborative project work; and honesty and openness are encouraged through structured reflection and feedback sessions. To support the development of such trustful relationships, MGG relies on four key instruments: inclusive spaces for dialogue, shared experiences and goals, structured reflection and feedback, and long-term engagement across formats and generations (Cheng et al., 2016; Clark et al., 2020; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000).

Consequently, network activities, be it in the Academy or in international conferences, purposefully incorporate activities that allow for collective experiences that evoke emotions, thereby bridging (cultural) differences and supporting mutual trust formation. In Section 5.1 on how a network setup makes impact more likely, empirical illustrations and their effects will be presented.

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14 See an explanation of the emergence of the working strand Training and Learning in Section 4.4. and on the IDOS website: <https://www.idos-research.de/en/managing-global-governance/implementation-of-the-2030-agenda/> and the MGG platform: <https://mgg.network/page/training&learning>.

Continuous communication serves as the backbone to support meaningful cooperation (Ennis & Tofa, 2020, 34). As indicated before, communication is also a condition to establish trustful relations (Messner et al., 2016, p. 54). In the MGG Network, communication is facilitated by various formats, both online (via an actively managed platform, national and thematic chat groups, email, messenger groups) and in-person (in national, global, or topic-specific meetings in sub-groups). As a common working language, all communication is carried out in English, and, consequently, language proficiency is a precondition for accession to the network and thus a criterion in the selection process for all cooperation formats. Communication in a foreign language typically requires additional time, and comes with a higher potential for misunderstandings. Members of the network are sensitised to these challenges. In the Academy, for instance, learning agreements regularly address communication challenges.

Also, alternative forms of communication are employed to encourage participants to engage with each other, including elements of art and theatre. For gatherings, the programme design attributes great importance to sometimes difficult transnational communication, and typically includes formal exchange formats in different group sizes, to cater to the needs of different communication styles, as well as substantial time for informal and small-group communication. Beyond the enabler function for network cooperation – and, ultimately, impact – informal, trust-based communication spaces are extremely precious, particularly in times of increasing political tensions and global polarisation. These individual interactions contribute to the cooperation culture among network members, who include political decision-makers and researchers from participating countries.

Behavioural science literature has shown that a collective identity is an enabling factor for international cooperation. This aspect is also referred to as a “we-identity” (Messner & Weinlich, 2016 Vogel, 2021). We-identities are a set of collective norms and beliefs that support the building of mutual trust. Ideally, the network collectively creates and nurtures a group identity that can comprise a common understanding of the network’s purpose, vision, mission, competencies, values and leverage points. It also refers to having a common agenda (Ennis & Tofa, 2020, p. 34; Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014, p. 126). In the MGG Network, nurturing and further developing a joint identity is an ongoing process that includes different deliberate elements. The network’s purpose, vision and mission is transparently communicated to all sides, and addressed repeatedly in the network’s formats, for instance in the opening and closing days of the Academy or during national and global network meetings. The MGG online platform makes transparent core components of the common identity too, including norms, values and goals such as the dedication to collaboratively generate impact on progress towards sustainable development. Further elaborating and continuously updating the network’s identity takes place during network meetings, where dedicated discussions are facilitated, or by setting up sub-groups in the network to explore the complex.

A final key enabler for cooperation is reputation (Messner & Weinlich, 2016), referring to the opinion or judgement of network members and externals about the network. This aspect is thus connected to visibility and documented impact of a network, and the trustworthiness (predictability) of behaviour. Others need to know, based on past performances, how trustworthy someone is as a partner to realistically assess whether cooperation is possible. Reputation also comprises the representation of other principles and enablers of cooperation, such as fairness, trust and reciprocity (Castelli et al., 2010). In the case of MGG, the network strives to build reputation through excellence in its cooperation formats, facilitated by the inclusion of international experts and the optimisation of cooperation infrastructure based on evaluation. Beyond that, reputation of network partners and international visibility plays an important role too. Against this background, MGG tries to be actively involved in high-level political and advisory processes. Crucially, reputation as an impact-oriented global governance network comes from success in achieving impact. Here, the network’s communication tools and the continuous collection of successful impact stories are important.

## **4 The quest for impact: empirical evidence and stories of change**

In the previous section, we defined impact as purposefully directed changes that an individual, organisation, a network or larger entity achieves through their work on a specific target group (Kurz & Kubek, 2021, p. 7). The changes become visible at the individual, organisational, systemic–institutional or network level as a new product, process or programme that may change basic routines, resources and authority flows, or beliefs of the social system in which the innovation occurs, (see Antadze & Westley, 2012, p. 133).

The MGG Network strives for this form of social innovation. Results from the tracer studies from 2018 to 2022 show that between 60% and 87% of the respondents declare themselves to have initiated or to have been involved in concrete change processes. (Uzbonn, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022)

In order to better understand the impact achieved and the specific conditions that make impact more likely, it is worth looking at the individual change stories, clustered according to the different levels of impact they achieved: individual, organisational (and network), systemic–institutional. In practice, most change stories address two or all three levels of impact, but typically one level is dominant. At the same time, the link between individual changes and systemic–institutional changes is not always easy to trace, as impact chains of effect can be long, and include invisible elements that make transition spaces fluid. The basis of this empirical part are the change stories reported by network members. Since they are reported from an individual perspective (and not from a programme viewpoint), they contain many references to individual improvement of competencies, which – in terms of MGG’s theory of change – count as output. But since this is often difficult to clearly differentiate from outcome, and because it forms the basis for further change, we present this individual level here too.

### **4.1 Individual level**

The programme’s impact on the individual level becomes visible in concrete practices, actions or products within the working area of a network member. The most common way through which MGG activities affect individual members is the Academy; 70% to 100% MGG participants (fully) agree, in the tracer studies between 2018 and 2022, that competencies that are important for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda have been strengthened through the participation in the MGG Academy (Uzbonn, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022). Beyond that, 69% of the interviewed alumni of the Academy report that their career development has been influenced at least partly by the participation in the MGG Academy (Kompetus, 2021, p. 44).

The following statements, extracted from the interviews conducted, illustrate the development of such competencies:

MGG nurtured my abilities as a workshop facilitator and event moderator. The programme's confidence-building environment equipped me with the skills needed to conduct engaging and meaningful activities. (Simran Dhingra, India, Academy 2022)

Through MGG I have learned to estimate what are sustainable practices, that you need a comprehensive picture of the challenge, including all perspectives of actors involved and a vision that change towards a sustainable future is possible. (Garry Armando Reagen, Indonesia, Academy 2019)

It was amazing to reflect at how this immersive programme [i.e. MGG Academy] reshaped our perspectives on international cooperation and sustainable development. (Barole et al., 2024)

In the virtual Academy in 2021, I learned to think out of the box, acknowledge diverse perspectives as a treasure and use them to come up with different, innovative solutions to global challenges. Communication is key for successful cooperation. (Nisheeth Srivastava, India, Academy 2021)

Whereas competence development qualifies as a direct output of the network's activities, impact on the individual level becomes visible when network members employ the developed competencies for further change. A typical example of such change is when network members shift their working area to prioritise a topic more closely related to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, such as improving finance structures in climate change and sustainability or promoting CO<sub>2</sub> neutral mobility.

I quit my comfort zone and moved to contribute to the issues of climate change and sustainability challenges utilising my past skills set. [...] I am now working on how Environmental, Social and Governance policies can help sustainability, especially small enterprises, and make them climate competitive. (Honey Karun, India, Academy 2016)

Network members further report that due to their experience in the Academy they gained access to a network of sustainability experts and found new jobs with more relevance for sustainability transformations. The tracer study for the Academy 2022 documents that 24% of the participants were given more tasks related to the 2030 Agenda after completion of the Academy; 30% of the respondents relate these changes directly to the Academy, and 70% partly to it (Uzbonn, 2024, p. 22).

I am professor, researcher and the coordinator of the master's degree in international development cooperation in Mexico. It was a job that was offered me for my CV, but above all for being part of MGG. (Blanca Elena Gómez García, Mexico, Academy 2021)

Others mention that after participating in the Academy, they have realised that they want to understand global challenges from a more profound and comprehensive perspective, including that of involved actors. In this context, it is interesting to note that the tracer study proved that 'system thinking' has consistently been rated highly as a competence gained through MGG.<sup>15</sup> This assessment suggest that participants recognise the importance of the competence in their work, particularly for tackling complex, interconnected challenges. In this vein, the interviews reflect how MGG positively impacts the participants' aim of having a more global or systemic perspective on certain topics, such as diversity in leadership.

Together with the experiences I have made in the MGG Academy, I realised that many practices in the energy sector lack a comprehensive view of all involved parties. [...] This made me decide to go for a PhD elaborating this comprehensive picture. (Garry Armando Reagen, Indonesia, Academy 2019)

The most important change that happened in my professional life after the MGG Academy is that I received the Humboldt Chancellor Fellowship in order to further work on the topic of diversity in leadership programmes. (Tâmara Andrade, Brazil, Academy 2021)

These examples illustrate how MGG fuels the desire to work on sustainability-related issues, which can result in further personal development by pursuing a PhD or renowned fellowship

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15 System thinking reaches an average score given by participants from 4.8 in 2018 to 5.6 in 2022 (on a scale from 1 to 6, with 6 indicating a very high level of agreement or usefulness of that competency).

programme backed by additional funding to pursue insights from the Academy. Improved expertise and international career development ultimately come with chances to contribute to global debates, participate in the systemic–institutional arena, and to access relevant forums. The promotion of network members to international organisations is a case in point, as happened for instance to a network member, who moved from the Indonesian National Bureau of Standardisation to the central secretariat of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO).

Impact on the individual level also becomes visible (and fungible) when network members change their communication on sustainability-related topics to diverse target groups, be it in publications, newspaper contribution or on social media. Increased communication can be both a reflection of the cooperation approaches of MGG and the involvement of different network members:

Inspired by the vibrant Glocal village at MGG [Academy] 2022, I initiated a podcast named “Going Glocal”. The name itself encapsulates the essence of MGG’s philosophy – the concept that our ideas, like the world, should have no boundaries. (Simran Dhingra, India, Academy 2022) <sup>16</sup>

Mauricio D. Aceves from my batch started writing regularly for Gateway House (Aliasger Bootwallas’s Home Institution) on issues of West Asia and foreign relations. (Ali Bootwalla, India, Academy 2022).<sup>17</sup>

To sum up, impact on the individual level typically materialises in the form of strong development across a wide spectrum of competencies needed for international cooperation and sustainability transformations. Based on deepened and widened knowledge, the range and number of individual sustainability-oriented initiatives increases too. Following strengthened awareness and knowledge, network members change their communication – individually, and in country teams – to advance the sustainability agenda through publications or other media. If communication and dissemination addresses decision-makers in the global governance arena, we can assume the ambition to achieve impact at further levels, including the systemic–institutional. The developed competence set can also constitute the basis for academic promotion and the decision to advance expertise in specialised fields, for instance in the form of pursuing a PhD or taking up a fellowship. More often than that, however, impact takes the form of a change in job and career development, which can be facilitated by the reputation associated with the Academy training programme, or with contacts in the network that support job promotion. Most importantly, the aspiration to change the position is typically associated with the ambition to engage more (profoundly) with sustainability.

## 4.2 Organisational level

In many cases, impact on the individual is – and is aspired to be – the first step towards larger sustainability-oriented change processes. On the organisational level, it takes place when processes, programmes or other type of actions within an organisation are altered following an initiative of, or the collaboration with, the network, its actors and infrastructure. Whereas the

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16 The podcast can be found here:

[https://open.spotify.com/show/48GicVQnE51jv4Ja92BbP?si=eUMSQeRGRfyEme9DqnsuBA&utm\\_source=whatsapp&utm\\_medium=whatsapp&nd=1&\\_branch\\_match\\_id=1262681721794004715&\\_branch\\_referrer=H4slIAAAAAA8soKSkottLXLy7IL8IMq9TLyczL1k8udrJ0DHQ1NHNOAgAUGnqOIAAAAA%3D%3D](https://open.spotify.com/show/48GicVQnE51jv4Ja92BbP?si=eUMSQeRGRfyEme9DqnsuBA&utm_source=whatsapp&utm_medium=whatsapp&nd=1&_branch_match_id=1262681721794004715&_branch_referrer=H4slIAAAAAA8soKSkottLXLy7IL8IMq9TLyczL1k8udrJ0DHQ1NHNOAgAUGnqOIAAAAA%3D%3D). Accessed: 19 May 2025.

17 The contribution of Mauricio D. Aceves for Gateway House India can be found here:

<https://www.gatewayhouse.in/author/mauricio-d-aceves/>. Accessed: 19 May 2025.

individual level involves only one or a few actors, at the organisational level, more people than one network member must be subject to impact; it needs to be a group of members or additional colleagues, an entire unit, or more. In this sense, impact at the individual level is an integral element of broader impact at the organisational level. Organisational change is, hence, a level at which impact on and of individuals can be multiplied. At the same time, organisational change involves a stronger degree of institutionalisation as impact becomes embedded in organisational structures. Consequently, in our view, impact at the organisational level ranges from the changed behaviour of multiple individuals in the same organisation to changes in an organisation's internal *modus operandi*, policies or strategic orientation. Naturally, similar impact on a larger number of organisations, in parallel, is possible too.

In the MGG context, organisational change is often connected to the Academy's impact on participants, when the learning and dialogue experience of an individual is the starting point to develop related training formats for their home organisation or external partners. Given the multiplication function of trainers, alumni of the Academy thereby advance progress towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda through the development of competencies in a wider set of individuals. The following quotes illustrate this type of impact:

Within the (MGG) Academy I have learned [...] how to design virtual workshops and how to prioritise the most relevant topics for different stakeholder groups to promote the Agenda 2030. Together with another MGG Alumni (2021) we had the opportunity to transfer these learnings into practice and design a virtual workshop for a group of high-ranking public servants in Guadalajara who were planning for sustainable development at the municipal level. We could experience directly how our learnings from the MGG Network made a difference for the work of these public servants, who gained more clarity on how to integrate priorities of sustainable development in their plans. (Miriam Ordonez, Mexico, Academy 2020)

During my MGG journey, I worked on the change-maker project: How to create a deeper understanding of the newly adopted concept of feminist development policy (on a municipal level? [...]) I took this workshop back to my organisation and we were able to realise a team day on [...] this topic with all my 40 colleagues. [...] As a consequence, we included questions in our funding application forms on feminist development policy and how projects deal with gender equality. (Sabrina Dieter, Germany, Academy 2022)

My change story started in the MGG Academy 2019, where I met two fellows who were also interested in mainstreaming gender across all parts of the SDGs. We conceptualised a workshop and facilitated it in the next virtual Academy. I was able to include the learning [...] at my job as a Gender Scientist at the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT). As part of a project on watershed research, we trained 22 technical scientists how to include gender in this engineering and bio-physical science dominated field. [...] I could experience how the awareness level of the participants was changing during the workshop. (Ananya Chakraborty, India, Academy 2019).

The examples illustrate how MGG Network members employ increased knowledge, improved skills and nurtured attitudes to address a larger group of people. The impact on a larger number of individuals from the same organisations translates to changing actions, processes or programme structures within the organisation. The trainings differ in terms of form, scope and intensity. Here, impact is more strongly multiplied when a whole series of seminars is implemented, or when wider audiences are addressed through universities or international organisations.

As a part of the Expert ODS (Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible / Sustainable Development Goals) group, I have a seminar on sustainable governance. It emerges from the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) of the United Nations and the Municipal Studies Center. 23 public servants and specialists from Mexico, Colombia, Germany, Norway and Sweden have participated, exposing successful cases of multi-stakeholder alliances in achieving 16 of the 17 SDGs of the 2030 Agenda. (Blanca Elena Gómez García, Mexico, Academy 2021)

Even stronger impact is achieved when an organisational change starts to formalise and addresses organisational structures or processes. This has happened for instance during the setup of the Policy Unit of the Quality Council of India (QCI) following the contributions of the MGG Network member Rudraneel Chattopadhyay (India, Academy 2017), who led the formation process, reporting to the Secretary General of QCI in August 2019. In the underlying concept note, the working principles of the unit make explicit reference to MGG.<sup>18</sup> Further examples, in which new working routines have been established, document the impact of MGG in the area of management or leadership. A report from a network member exemplifies how the principle of multi-stakeholder engagement and competence development played out in the context of a research organisation.

Alternatives in planning activities and alignment between all parties involved in the projects, as well as the formation of new capabilities for social impact projects in rural development, were some of the changes brought about by the knowledge acquired on my journey at the MGG Academy 2022. (Marcel Artioli, Brazil, Academy 2022)

Whereas sometimes the change initiated at the organisational level is of an incremental nature, possibly less observable to the outside, the MGG trajectory also includes examples with widely visible impact. The strengthening of the sustainability orientation of the Central Bank of Brazil is a case in point, as illustrated by the “Sustainability Dimension of the Agenda BC#”.<sup>19</sup> A MGG Network member played a central role in the development of this initiative, and connected his instrumental contributions to the core of the network’s cooperation infrastructure, the MGG Academy:

Thanks to what I learned at the MGG Academy, I got involved with the early efforts to integrate sustainability into the Central Bank of Brazil operations, acting as a liaison with sustainability NGOs and helping shape grassroot structures that later gave birth to the Sustainability Dimension at the Central Bank of Brazil, integrating environmental and social criteria into the heart of the country’s financial system. [...] The MGG Academy is the source of all of this. Without what I learned there, I couldn’t have been involved in such an important systemic change in Brazil’s financial system. (Raphael Andrezo, Brazil, Academy 2017, forthcoming)

Another example from Brazil, where the MGG Network generated tangible impact at the organisational level, comes from the National School of Public Administration (ENAP). The institution has sent multiple staff members to participate in the MGG Academy, and developed into a key partner in the network’s knowledge cooperation and policy dialogue initiatives. Over the years, sustainability has become part of the organisational culture; today, it is one of its

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18 The concept note is an internal document; it was shown to the authors of this study.

19 The “Sustainability Dimension” (#BC) is an initiative launched by the Central Bank of Brazil in 2020, which aims to integrate environmental, social and climate considerations into the financial system. It comprises a series of measures and rules, including the establishment of the bank’s Social, Environmental and Climate Responsibility Policy. This policy guides the bank’s internal governance and the approach towards the national financial system. For more information see: <https://www.bcb.gov.br/en/financialstability/sustainability>, and the video documentation of the launch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IxYmzkTTVOU>. Accessed 31 January 2025.

strongest fields of expertise. The contribution of MGG to this organisational development is illustrated by the statement of one of the MGG Network members working at ENAP:

Through the MGG Network I have influenced decision-makers to make the 2030 Agenda an integral part of the mind set of our institution, the Brazilian National School of Public Administration (ENAP). We have become a reference training institution in Latin America on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in our curriculum. (João Vitor Domingues, Brazil, Academy 2018)

Additionally, network impact also reaches the organisational level if a new working area linked to sustainable development is introduced in an organisation following the cooperation with the MGG Network. This has been the case for the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Jakarta, Indonesia, an internationally recognised research institution, which belongs to the leading think tanks of Southeast Asia. Whereas the organisation traditionally focused on other topics, the setup of a climate change unit is partly associated with MGG. Today, the institute runs multiple projects in this field.

[...] and in our case [...] we established a climate change network within CSIS, which has been traditionally focusing on trade and foreign affairs. This is a huge success for us. We are now integrating climate studies and disaster risk management within trade economics. (Beltsazar Krisetya, Indonesia, Academy 2019)

The following example of organisational change – in an engineering context – illustrates that such forms of innovation can be historic for an organisation, and potentially involve a high number of sub-units and affiliated individuals:

This year, my dean invited me to become an advisor for international cooperation of my institute. In this function I [...] promoted a competition for our 22 campuses (in Bahia State) to develop a sustainable project related to at least one of the SDGs with an international context. This competition with the focus on the SDGs is completely new to our institute which has a more than 100-year-old history. The institute will offer a financial support for the implementation of the four best project proposals. (Maria Cândida Mousinho, Brazil, Academy 2007)

A distinct type of organisational change is the realisation of new collaborative projects between actors and organisations initiated by the network.<sup>20</sup> Such impact often takes the form of joint publication processes, when more than one organisation contributes to its implementation. This process includes the creation of a common understanding of the research object and its analysis, the generation of new knowledge, as well as the communication of the insights to relevant target groups. In this way, joint publication projects contribute to the formation of a common understanding of sustainability challenges and solutions across organisations. Here, typically, the cooperation in the network takes over the function of an intellectual trigger or matchmaker. The following examples of the G20 Energy Transitions and Climate Finance Task Force Report sheds light on these network-internal processes from two sides:

I was also able to connect with [an MGG alumna from Brazil, Batch 2, 2007] – who was invited to be a member of Gateway House's G20 Energy Transition and Climate Finance Taskforce at the recommendation of the Indian Ambassador to Brazil. (Aliasgar Bootwalla, India, Academy 2022)

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20 See Annex 4 for a graphic showing the publication of joint projects over time.

[...] the Indian Embassy in Brazil invited me to a discussion in a G20 group with Gateway House India (another partner organisation of the MGG Network) on energy transition and energy finance. (Maria Candida, Brazil, Academy 2007)<sup>21</sup>

MGG encouraged research and intellectual growth. Together with two MGG peers, we contributed to an article in the World Public Sector Report 2023 (Lustosa et al., 2023). Our piece highlighted the impact of transnational networks and underscored the indispensable role MGG plays in advancing the SDGs. (Simran Dhingra, India, Carlos Lustosa, Brazil, and Isabela Blumm, Brazil, all Academy 2022)

Building on these examples, we can summarise that impact at the organisational level often starts with the development of individual competence, which is translated into the conceptualisation and implementation of relevant trainings by network members. In this way, they develop among a group of colleagues the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to implement the 2030 Agenda, and the organisation as a whole is better positioned to engage with sustainability issues. Beyond development of competence, organisational impact takes place when partners implement structural changes such as setting up new units or departments, or shifting the focus of research. In this way, they embed the work on sustainability issues deeply in the organisation. Establishing innovative instruments like the “sustainability competitions” in an organisation, where sustainability has not been a priority before, is another way of strengthening organisational structures towards systemic transformations. At the same time, we can observe that engagement in network activities and socialisation within the network’s cooperation culture can trigger organisations to internalise cooperation patterns, taking the form of a change of organisational culture and thematic orientation.

### 4.3 Systemic–institutional level

Global structural change towards sustainable development takes place at the systemic–institutional level. Achieving impact at this level is far-reaching and effective, and therefore most desirable for a network like MGG. At the same time, it is the level where impact is most difficult to achieve. Building on the definition of social innovation towards sustainable development, impact at this level materialises when basic routines, resources and authority flows, or related changes in beliefs of social systems, are modified towards the SDGs (Antadze & Westley, 2012, p. 133). In the area in which MGG operates, cooperation on sustainable development, the social system at the highest political level includes international forums such as the various bodies of the UN and the G20 and its engagement groups, as well as similar related inter- and transnational institutions, forums and processes. Aspirations are thus located at the global political level. However, relevant underlying social systems can also be located at other political levels, such as the regional or national level, with implications for the global level.

Whereas impact at the systemic–institutional level by definition goes beyond the individual and organisational levels, it often builds on developments at these levels and, thus, can include them. Crucially, network impact at the systemic–institutional level is characterised by a higher degree of institutionalisation; change takes place in a higher number of (influential) organisations and on a more regular, possibly more formalised, basis.

A concrete example, which links such a process to MGG, is the change of the composition of stakeholders in the so-called ClimateScanner Initiative. ClimateScanner is a global assessment tool of government actions related to climate change.<sup>22</sup> The initiative has been proposed by the Brazilian Federal Court of Accounts (TCU) as Chair of the International Organization of Supreme

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21 The results of the collaboration in the G20 process can be found in Gateway House, 2023.

22 See <https://sites.tcu.gov.br/climatescanner/ingles.html>

Audit Institutions (INTOSAI). A network member from Brazil working at TCU, who played a central role in its creation and roll-out, testifies to the impact of MGG on the representation of actors (especially from the Global South) in the multi-stakeholder process:

As supervisor of the global initiative ClimateScanner, I insisted, inspired by the MGG Academy, to include various countries from the Global South and Asia (in the executive group). ClimateScanner is an innovative initiative of National Audit Institutions which will provide a global and unprecedented panorama about the challenges, strengths and good practices relating to Climate Crisis. (Carlos Lustosa, Brazil, Academy 2022)

Learning and collaboration principles, including methods as introduced and practised in MGG, have also been integrated into the re-design of a political process in South Africa:

In the context of the Academy I discovered innovative methods, such as Design Thinking, used to break traditional ways of thinking and support to jointly define the problem and come up with new solutions that I now implement in my courses at University. Participants of my courses are usually senior government officials, senior technocrats or other senior political officials who report that using these innovative methods helps to design political processes in a different way. In the National Policy Development Framework 2020 (Presidency South Africa, 2020) this could be materialised. (TK Poee, South Africa, Academy 2018)

The paper also speaks of systemic–institutional changes, when competence and career development, typically understood as impact at the individual level, is translated to impact at a wider national setting. Here, the organisational background can provide a powerful leverage point. The SDG-alignment of government investments in Indonesia through the Ministry of Finance is a case in point:

After going through the MGG Academy, I became, together with my team, the driving force behind strategic projects aimed at embedding sustainability into government frameworks. In 2020, within the Ministry of Finance in the Ministry of Finance (Indonesia), I supported the implementation of a regulation that mandated the alignment of all government investments with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and specific targets. (Radhithono Wicaksono, Indonesia, Academy 2018)

A good example for systemic–institutional impact in the form of institution building is the ongoing cooperation in the MGG Network on Voluntary Sustainability Standards (VSS). VSS offer demand-led or market-based regulatory instruments that can help implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Hernandez et al., 2021). Over many years, the activities of network members have played a catalysing role for inter- and transnational cooperation on the topic, with a strong focus on joint knowledge. The project started in 2015 as a research collaboration of alumni of the Academy and brought forward pioneering publications, including a book and a large number of events focused on knowledge cooperation and policy advice with key actors from the VSS communities in Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Mexico and South Africa, as well as the United Nations Forum on Sustainability Standards (UNFSS). It has also supported the establishment of national VSS platforms in several of the countries – China, Brazil, India and Mexico – typically in collaboration with national standardisation organisations. The national platforms serve as hubs of information on VSS, bring together stakeholders and provide advice to businesses to foster a better understanding and adoption of VSS in local contexts. The network was also successful in bringing together researchers, government officials and stakeholders from the private sector to explore the potentials of VSS in general, and to set up the UNFSS Academic Advisory Council with the participation of a number of MGG Network members.

These systemic–institutional effects of the network in the areas of institution building and agenda setting, and the influence on (inter)national discourses, become visible in the following statements by involved network members:<sup>23</sup>

As a result of my participation in the MGG Academy, I got involved in the working strand on sustainability standards in 2015. After a project spanning several years and connecting across several continents, I published as co-editor, the book *Sustainability Standards and Global Governance: Experiences of Emerging Economies*, together with MGG alumnus Jorge Antonio Perez Pineda and former IDOS researcher Johannes Blankenbach, in 2020 (Negi et al., 2020). [...] Through this process, we strengthened awareness on this topic and fostered academic exchange as well as policy advice among a wide range of actors and international organisations. (Archana Negi, India, Academy 2007)

As a scientist and policy analyst at a Chinese think tank, I had the chance to influence this project on voluntary sustainability standards process on a global level together with my colleagues from the MGG Network. I could contribute with many other MGG colleagues in setting up the Chinese National platform for voluntary sustainability standards. It can be seen as a model for Indonesia's efforts to build its own platform. (Jiahua Cao, China, Academy 2014)

The emergence of the Network of Southern Think Tanks (NeST) is an additional example of how the network unfolded impact on a systemic–institutional level. NeST was established on the sidelines of the first high-level meeting of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC) in Mexico in April 2014 (NeST, 2025). The meeting provided a forum of intricate exchange on norms and practices in South–South Cooperation amongst key researchers with close relations to policy-making in their respective countries. As a sort of sub-network of MGG, NeST emerged with the support of MGG with the aim of “collaboratively generating, systematising, consolidating and sharing knowledge on the South–South Cooperation approaches for international development” (Kompetus, 2021, p. 46). By supporting the institutionalisation of the group, MGG contributed to the creation of an actor in today's research and policy-advice structures for South–South cooperation (Fues, 2018a; 2018b, p. 16; Kompetus, 2021, p. 6).

Building on these examples of systemic–institutional impact, we can summarise that the MGG Network has contributed to diversifying actors in global initiatives, redesigning political processes on a national level based on changes in the cooperation culture, SDG-alignment in government-investments on a national level, and institution-building and agenda setting through the global cooperation infrastructure.

## 4.1 Impact on the network itself

As developed in the conceptualisation of impact (see 2.1), the network itself can be a distinct level of impact. This type of impact materialises when the collaboration of members or partner organisations affects the network, its structure or *modus operandi* as such. Ultimately, network activities may alter the orientation of future activities, the composition of network actors, its cooperation infrastructure or culture. Often these types of impacts are very effective, because they engage members and organisations in long-term processes and support the further improvement of the network's performance. In this understanding, the impact at the network level is a form of impact at the organisational level with potential to reach up to the systemic–institutional level.

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23 Further information on the work of MGG on Voluntary Sustainability Standards can be found at: <https://www.idos-research.de/en/managing-global-governance/voluntary-sustainability-standards-vss/>

In this context, the conceptual relation between a network's activities on the one hand, and impact on the network on the other, is not easy to handle, as the variables must be treated separately, even if they are closely intertwined in reality. Still, the development of a global governance network belongs to the areas in which impact on progress towards sustainable development can become manifest. Consequently, to understand the forms of impact, and the role of networks as enablers, this level of impact should also be tracked and analysed with academic rigour, as far as possible.

An illustrative example in the context of MGG is the case of a Brazilian alumna, Tâmara, whose activities showed different effects on the network. She joined the network through her participation in the MGG Academy, when she was co-founder and director of Vetor Brasil, a civil society organisation based in Sao Paulo that identifies and develops professionals to increase the efficiency of the public sector and reduce social inequalities in Brazil.<sup>24</sup> After completing the Academy in 2021, and building on her experiences therein, she applied – with support from IDOS – for the German Chancellor Fellowship implemented by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. Whereas the use of MGG's cooperation infrastructure thus generated leverage effects (and individual impact), the engagement continued as Tâmara brought a workshop on inclusion and diversity to the 2024 edition of the Academy. Her work thus extended to effects on the network level by changing the Academy curriculum, and the hosting institution of the Academy and her fellowship programme. As a fellow affiliated to IDOS, she made use of her position in the network to work out and help embed institutionally a structural guide and process for preventing harassment and discrimination, which she also documented on social media. Furthermore, she built on IDOS's role in the science system of North-Rhine Westphalia to implement a workshop on diversity, inclusion and equity with more than 15 heads of leadership programmes in the wider region.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, she also contributed to the development of the composition of actors in the MGG Network, as the workshop brought together representatives of leadership programmes that were previously unconnected.

The example illustrates how the targeted use of the network's cooperation infrastructure can lead to impact on the network itself and individual organisations within the network alike, with the potential to reach the systemic–institutional level if further organisations inside and outside the network follow, or at least take inspiration from, the initiated change process.

Another case that illustrates the combination of different impact levels with clear effects on the network level has occurred on the topic of “gender in inter- and transnational cooperation towards sustainable development”. Once again, the core element of MGG's cooperation infrastructure, the Academy, served as the starting point, and was subject to modification as well:

My change story started in the MGG Academy 2019, where I met two fellows who were also interested in mainstreaming gender across all parts of the SDGs. We conceptualised a workshop and facilitated it in the next virtual Academy. [...] I was able to include the learning from the MGG Academy workshop at my job as a Gender Scientist at the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT). (Ananya Chakraborty, India, Academy 2019)

This example illustrates how individual members serve as agenda setters and resource persons in future network developments. Besides the effect on the curriculum of the Academy 2020, further gender-related activities document the agenda-setting impact of the network at the organisational and network level. The cooperation formats that emerged in the network and changed its approach to the topic ranged from internal online events to international research

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24 See [materiais.vetorbrasil.org/central-vetor](https://materiais.vetorbrasil.org/central-vetor).

25 Tâmara Andrade's achievements have been documented on LinkedIn: [https://www.linkedin.com/posts/tamarabandrade\\_diversity-equity-inclusion-activity-7239241206247899136-dbpl/?utm\\_source=share&utm\\_medium=member\\_desktop](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/tamarabandrade_diversity-equity-inclusion-activity-7239241206247899136-dbpl/?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop). Accessed 18 June 2025.

projects<sup>26</sup> and discussion rounds – designed and implemented by network members – at the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development.<sup>27</sup> A case in point is the international research project hosted by IDOS on “Local feminist perspectives as transformation levers for greater gender equality”, in which two network members got involved (Sengupta et al., 2025). Their contributions document how changes, which had originally taken place at the level of the network infrastructure, laid the foundation for collaboration with partners beyond the MGG circles.

Prominent cases that demonstrate how MGG Network activities create long-term impact within but also beyond the network are also the development of thematic working strands. As long-term initiatives in the network cooperation, two examples stand out in this context.

First, under the heading of “Training and Learning - Implementation of the 2030 Agenda with the public sector” the network cooperates on capacity development for the civil service. The cooperation was initiated by discussions and experiences in the Academy 2016 and a peer-exchange in 2018 among national schools of public administration, facilitated by IDOS and the Brazilian National School of Public Administration. The idea of this cooperation is to connect and strengthen key multiplier organisations in MGG partner countries. It follows the rationale that the public sector is of key importance for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and that competent civil servants are needed to localise its objectives. As officials and civil servants acquire relevant knowledge and practical skills at colleges, academies and schools of public administration (SPAs), these training institutions of the civil service are strategic entry points with strong leverage for the integration of the global sustainability goals. At the same time, the interest in exchange is mutual, as documented by the facts that the cooperation idea was originally developed with a participant of the MGG Academy, and included activities with contributions from many partners.

Since the start of this work strand, the network’s related knowledge cooperation and policy dialogue formats in Brazil, India, Mexico, South Africa and at the UN provided space for a systematic and in-depth exchange on strategies for integrating and mainstreaming the 2030 Agenda into course programmes, awareness raising among decision-makers, training for multipliers, and research. The example is illustrative of the impact of organisations and individuals on the orientation of the network. Building on existing cooperation infrastructure elements, network members jointly developed a cooperation agenda, originally as a New York Programme of Action for Schools of Public Administration and partner institutions on the margins of the UN High Level Political Forum 2018, with several updates since then (see .<sup>28</sup> The cooperation, in turn, shows (mutual) leverage effects on the partner organisations, for instance their training curriculums, and has potential for systemic–institutional impact. To illustrate, the Administrative Staff College of India reported that as a consequence of the cooperation the institution would propose a “National Curriculum for SDGs” to the NITI Aayog, a key public policy think tank of the Government of the Republic of India, and pivotal agency tasked with fostering economic development. The proposed curriculum was described by the Administrative Staff College of India (ASCI) to “help in developing localised training tools, courseware and methodologies” (ASCI, 2019).

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26 See: *Local feminist perspectives as transformation levers for greater gender equality*. <https://www.idos-research.de/en/research/description/details/local-feminist-perspectives-as-transformation-levers-for-greater-gender-equality/>.

27 See: *Feminist foreign and development policy – How to encounter anti-gender movement?* <https://mgg.network/networks/events/121923>.

28 For more information on the work in this area, see <https://mgg.network/page/training&learning>

The PRODIGEES (Promoting Research on Digitalisation in Emerging Powers and Europe Towards Sustainable Development)<sup>29</sup> project, initiated and hosted by MGG, is another example that illustrates how actors of the network employed the cooperation infrastructure first to influence the network's orientation and then to generate individual, organisational or systemic–institutional impact. The project was initially conceptualised as the result of a series of network meetings to explore the interconnection of digitalisation and sustainable development, and to identify actors in the network who share an interest in it. With the concluding meeting of that series, in December 2018, a core group decided to run for a competitive EU research and network grant application. Following the success of this application, PRODIGEES materialised as a sub-network of MGG partners interested in creating a deeper comprehensive understanding of the impact of digitalisation across the social, economic and environmental dimension of sustainable development and its governance. Funded by the EU's Horizon2020 programme, the project provides a structured exchange scheme for research and innovation staff, transnational training and multi-stakeholder dialogue to analyse conditions under which positive effects of digitalisation can be realised, while at the same time potential negative effects can be mitigated. The project thus documents the network's ability to employ participatory infrastructure (in this case, the national network meetings of MGG) in view of not only agenda setting for cooperation, but also the setup of complementary infrastructure (structured staff exchange scheme, including financial resources<sup>30</sup>). Beyond the network impact of PRODIGEES, the intensive cooperation among partners to implement more than 70 international research projects in five years comes with a high potential for impact at other levels, in particular the individual and the organisational levels.

To illustrate, at the individual level, the project promoted digital literacy among participants as well as competencies in understanding and using digital technologies for society and the common good. Given the fact that many participants have positions in renowned research institutions or in key institutions of the public sector, including the foreign offices or ministries of environment, this impact reaches individuals with great leverage to shape affairs at the organisational or even systemic–institutional level. At the organisation level, the PRODIGEES project “has had an impact on curricula development, university seminars taught, and bachelor and master theses written” (Schneider, 2025). Impact examples also extend to the inclusion of concepts and use cases of digitalisation across partner countries, for instance from the Global South in European partner institutions. The international exchange has thus “provided differentiated answers to the including and excluding effects of digitalisation in different areas, such as education, finance, access to public services, protection of privacy, and the common good in general” (Schneider, 2025). Policy advice resulting from the project was taken up in the field of “the regulation of AI and the importance of ethical and human rights frameworks to avoid discrimination and digital exclusion” (Schneider, 2025).

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29 See [www.prodigees.info](http://www.prodigees.info)

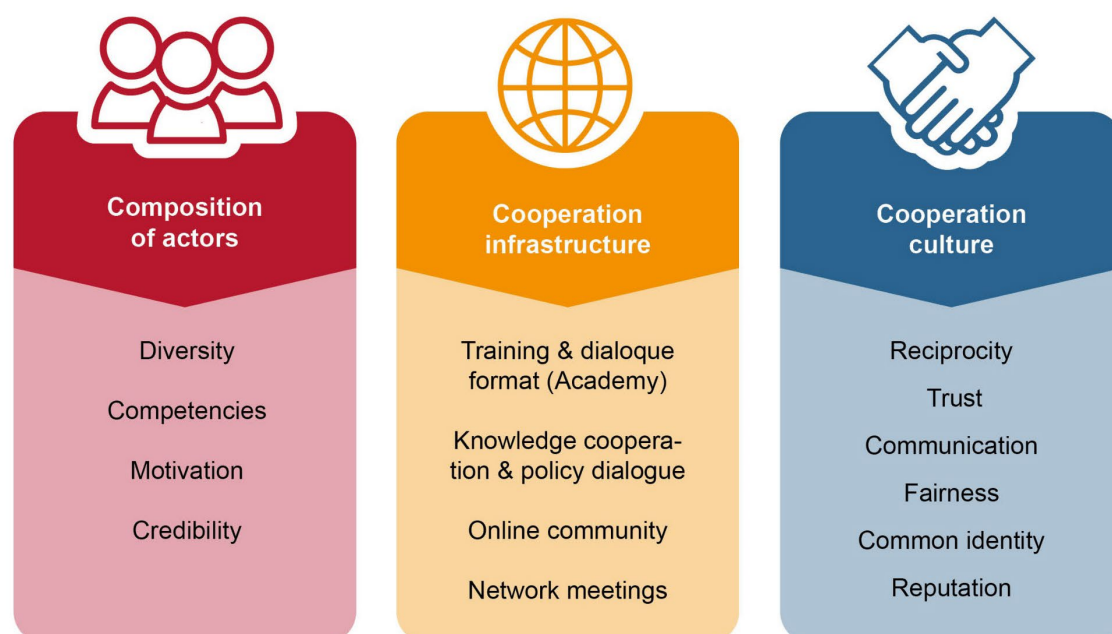
30 The total costs of PRODIGEES as originally specified in the EU Grant Agreement (2019) was EUR 1,067,200 for a period of three years.

## 5 Discussion of results

### 5.1 Enabling factors: how a network's setup makes impact more likely

The study follows the guiding assumption that a network's internal setup provides the enabling framework that make impact more likely. Building on the concept of collective impact (Ennis & Tofa, 2020, p. 3), we proposed to structure the setup of a network along the categories of (1) Composition of actors, (2) cooperation infrastructure and (3) cooperation culture. In Section 3.2, dealing with the theory of change underpinning the work of the MGG, we shed light on the network setup of our case study. After presenting impact that the network has generated across different levels, this section connects setup and impact stories, and discusses what has made impact more likely. How did the elements of the specific network setup foster change, and which factors can be understood as the key enablers of social innovation from the network members' perspective?

**Figure 8: Enabling factors of impact**



Source: Authors

#### *(1) Composition of actors – individuals and MGG partner organisations*

Complex systemic sustainability challenges require contributions from and meaningful collaboration of a heterogeneous group of actors from different backgrounds, including countries, sectors and disciplines. In their responses to the question, where and how the MGG Network made a difference in successfully implementing a change process, members point out as main assets:

- the diversity in the composition of actors and organisations;
- the access to rich expertise and multidimensional perspectives;
- the clear orientation of the work of members and organisations in the areas of sustainable development, international cooperation and global governance; and
- the position and influence of actors in relevant national and global processes.

The mix of expertise and diversity of participants and organisations, in particular the interdisciplinary and transnational character of the network, are mentioned as key enablers of impact by various network members.<sup>31</sup> The MGG Network ties together a community of international experts from diverse organisations, thought leaders and policy-makers working on implementing the SDGs from different sectors and world regions. Alumni perceive the exposure to this diverse group embedded in a multitude of organisations and its broad spectrum of perspectives as decisive to broaden the horizon and create a better understanding of sustainability-related challenges and solutions. In particular, the Academy provides a full picture of priorities linked to sustainable development. This serves as an epistemological lens, offering a more globalised and interconnected perspective, which supports creating positive progress towards sustainability transformations.<sup>32</sup> Due to its hands-on cooperation formats, the network is not only the place where global expertise and diversity are cultivated, it is also seen as a means to connect, to make this expertise and diversity accessible.

Network members report that impact typically starts with increased awareness and the deepening of knowledge on global cooperation following on from network activities such as the Academy.<sup>33</sup> The international orientation of the network members and of their home organisations, and their interest in global (governance) questions, are important for dialogue and the perceived value of the network. The setup of the network is regarded as especially beneficial when the initiatives of individuals are well-matched with organisational priorities at their home organisation and the network's strategic planning.<sup>34</sup> This combination of factors is here referred to as a favourable environment that enables meaningful cooperation.

As highly qualified professionals, many members are already part of other networks before joining MGG. However, these networks sometimes lack the global embeddedness, thereby limiting perspectives on development issues to a domestic or regional dimension. MGG makes a difference for them in this regard.<sup>35</sup> Besides the meaningful connection to experts, contacts with further relevant organisations are also mentioned as beneficial.<sup>36</sup> To illustrate this, the relevance of the network is complemented, according to reports of network members, by access to a variety of other networks, such as Diplomacy by Networking.<sup>37</sup> Being connected and able to work in this international environment also comes with the potential to increase individual and organisational reputation and credibility. Here again, meaningful cooperation is enabled through connection to experts and institutions in the global governance arena striving for sustainable transformations.

Whereas inter- and trans-disciplinarity and transnationality make for the diversity – and heterogeneity – of the network, the objective to promote the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is a uniting element that adds to a cohesion in the composition of actors.

This assessment of network members confirms the selection criteria to attract and bring to the network's cooperation formats participants and organisations with diverse backgrounds with the

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31 See change story Negi, <https://mgg.network/news/963841> and change story Brito, <https://mgg.network/news/1005138>

32 See change story Wickasono, <https://mgg.network/news/1840093>

33 In the tracer study of the MGG Programme 2019–2021, 90% of the interviewed alumni from 2020 confirm that they have gained knowledge on international cooperation (Kompetus, 2021, p. 27).

34 See change story Chakraborty, <https://mgg.network/news/979322>

35 In the tracer study from 2022, 80% of the Academy participants state that the network is very important to them (Uzbonn, 2024, p. 31).

36 See change story Andrade, <https://mgg.network/news/2193569>

37 The Global Diplomacy Lab has been a platform where diverse experts explore new forms of diplomacy to address global challenges. See <https://diplomacybynetworking.diplo.de/diplomacy-by-networking/adresscontact/01-programmes/programme-overview-if>

aim of being able to address the systemic nature of sustainability transformations. The selection of network members is based on criteria regarding the relevance of work for sustainable development and global cooperation, individual expertise and qualification, organisational affiliation and position therein, and of motivation and change-maker potential.

## *(2) Cooperation infrastructure*

The MGG programme offers a multi-layered cooperation infrastructure with the aim of developing competencies to implement the 2030 Agenda and promote impact-oriented cooperation in the network and beyond. The main elements of this cooperation structure are the Academy, the annual training and dialogue format, knowledge cooperation projects and policy dialogue initiatives. These are complemented by social and cultural networking activities geared towards trust-building as well as online tools to support connection, communication and the identification of relevant topics.

Looking at the full set of cooperation formats and instruments, the Academy stands out as a “life-changing experience”<sup>38</sup> and the starting point of a lifelong (learning) journey in the network. Tracer studies show that the vast majority of participants report that the programme benefits them, and that competencies important for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda have been strengthened (Uzbonn, 2018–2022).<sup>39</sup> Most of the network’s impact at the individual level stems from this format. Beyond that, alumni confirm that they were able to build trusting relationships during the three to four months jointly spent together in the Academy. Understanding trust as a fundamental prerequisite for effective cooperation in diverse stakeholder setups, the Academy reinforces a shared foundation for the international group, and fosters a cooperation culture (see below), which also informs other network activities, knowledge cooperation and policy dialogue.

Consequently, the tracer studies on the Academy show that on average, 82% of the alumni rate the Academy as highly or very important for their involvement in ensuing change processes, both at the individual level and in terms of organisational impact and participation in (international) collaborative formats in general (Uzbonn, 2018–2022).<sup>40</sup>

Besides the central role of the Academy in the programme’s cooperation infrastructure, other formats are important to leverage impact linked to the composition of actors, particularly regarding organisational, network and systemic–institutional levels. The tracer studies (Uzbonn, 2018–2022) show that on average, 74.2% of the alumni consider the MGG Network to be (very) important. In 2022, 67% of participants established some form of cooperation with MGG Network members during or after the MGG Academy (Uzbonn, 2022). MGG provides various opportunities for network members to meet, further develop their competencies, collaborate internationally and reinforce the network’s cooperation culture. Network members value the provision of these opportunities and spaces that help incubate successful change processes.<sup>41</sup>

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38 As a Mexican participant has referred to the MGG Academy (Miriam Ordonez Balanzario, Mexico, Academy 2020, <https://mgg.network/news/980019>)

39 In the years 2018–2022, an average 93% of alumni reported that the MGG Academy benefited them (Uzbonn, 2018–2022). Evaluations further show that between 2019 and 2022 over 90% of the alumni (fully) agree with the statement that competences important for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda have been strengthened through the participation in the MGG Academy (Uzbonn, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022).

40 The Kompetus Study also confirms this observation. In the evaluation of the MGG Academy 2019, over 90% of the participants stated that they have developed a stronger interest in creating impact towards the 2030 Agenda. 90% of the interviewed participants from 2019 also plan to initiate concrete projects related to sustainable development (Kompetus 2021, p. 27).

41 The tracer studies from 2018–2022 report that 88.6% of the interviewed alumni continue actively using services, concepts and materials provided by the MGG Network programme after attending the MGG Academy (Uzbonn, 2018–2022). The Kompetus study also confirms this (Kompetus, 2021, p. 43).

In the previously analysed impact examples, the development of the MGG's sub-project PRODIGEES exemplifies network-level impact. This project, which represented a structural upgrade of the cooperation infrastructure for the network, was the result of a series of national network meetings on the same topic: digitalisation towards sustainable development. The mid- and long-term impact of PRODIGEES is yet to be evaluated in detail, but it is already evident that staff exchanges and network-wide activities led to the development of competencies at the individual level, and to the establishment of a specialised collaboration platform among research organisations with great potential for further impact beyond the network. Beyond the PRODIGEES example, evaluations of other network meetings confirm that the meetings contribute to deeper knowledge on sustainable development issues, and the development of ideas of related change processes. For instance, the evaluations of major MGG/PRODIGEES conferences document that participants gained insights of great use for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda (see MGG, 2024; MGG, 2025b).

Targeted knowledge cooperation and policy dialogue formats have proven to be instrumental also for impact at the systemic–institutional level, as the case of the establishment of national platforms for Voluntary Sustainability Standards has shown. Increased awareness of the SDGs and related training needs for the public sector within training institutions of the MGG Network is another example, where the network's cooperation infrastructure, in particular high-level dialogues and international peer-exchange, has enabled impact at the organisational level.

The meeting formats, in person and increasingly online, can enable impact when they help network members to identify suitable leverage points to initiate change processes: MGG's ability to bring the right people together at the right time and place has been reported as a key success factor. In this context, the network's resources are a prerequisite for being represented in international forums and visibly contributing to international debates, such as the UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development or the T20 engagement group. This demonstrable ability to engage in high-level policy discussions is central to the network's attractiveness, as membership provides access to the cooperation infrastructure and comes with individual and organisational reputation and credibility.

### *(3) Cooperation culture*

The culture of cooperation in a network is determined by the values, norms and principles that characterise the interaction of network members. It finds expression in the application of cooperation competencies and methods employed to plan and implement all forms of cooperation activities. In consideration of the heterogeneity of the network, MGG is following a behavioural approach that seeks to facilitate cooperation grounded on reciprocity, trust, communication, fairness, a common identity and reputation (Messner et al., 2016). Even if not all members are aware of the conceptual underpinnings of this approach, the examples presented in Section 4 prove that these factors play an important role in the impact generated by and with the network.

Participants highly appreciate the innovative and interactive methods introduced and practised in the Academy, as well as the formats geared towards network development, knowledge cooperation or policy dialogue (Kompetus, 2021, p. 53). These methods range from conventional discussion formats and participatory planning processes to explorative exercises of future thinking and creative and emotion-provoking processes, including art, theatre, music and nature. In their feedback to network activities and in their impact reports, network members highlight the innovative methods and their use when it comes to thinking outside the box, or re-thinking existing processes in new ways.<sup>42</sup> In particular, methods that allow for changing perspectives and stepping out of one's comfort zone are key components that have been reported to be

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42 See change story Srivastava <https://mgg.network/news/1005109>

effective enablers of impact generation.<sup>43</sup> Network members stress that the exposure to innovative collaboration methods came with new experiences, in particular when it comes to collective group work.<sup>44</sup> These methods not only inspired new ways of learning but also contributed to reflection at the meta-level about transformative learning.<sup>45</sup> This reflective approach to cooperation and learning can thus be coined as one of the enabling components of MGG's cooperation culture.

Practising innovative learning and cooperation methods is complemented by a variety of competencies that are developed and applied in network activities. The tracer study shows that alumni identify a diverse set of competencies associated with the MGG cooperation culture as decisive, including communication, future and design thinking, leadership, conflict and time management, and active listening skills.<sup>46</sup> In this context, the Academy's focus on the philosophy of leadership towards innovation, ethical governance and organisational transformation were mentioned by network members in connection to their change stories.<sup>47</sup> Devoting a substantial amount Academy time to reflecting on one's own values, roles, norms<sup>48</sup> and opportunities speaks to MGG's cooperative culture of critical reflection on targeted action.

Another key enabler mentioned by network members in the context of collaborative impact generation is trust.<sup>49</sup> As with other characteristics of the cooperation culture, trust is hard to measure, in particular for international cooperation in a highly heterogeneous setup. Still, network members refer to the notion in various contexts, as a feeling or state of relationship between members of the same Academy batch, but also in the network more generally. The tracer studies (Uzbonn, 2018–2022) documents this perception of trust, and identifies continuous open and transparent communication as one of the main trust builders.<sup>50</sup> Stemming from the experiences in the Academy, but also other cooperation formats, members highly appreciate and acknowledge the high degree of trust in the network. The perception of MGG as a network of trust is pointed out as not only beneficial for cooperation projects, but also extremely rare. In the sense of a tool to initiate successful change processes through collaborative action, trust belongs to the central characteristics of MGG. In this context, the joint vision of network members related to sustainable development, also mentioned previously in the analysis of the composition of actors (Section 3.2), plays an important role in the impact-enabling cooperation culture.

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43 See change story Reagen <https://mgg.network/news/1290575>

44 See change story Dhingra <https://mgg.network/news/1824082>

45 See change story Ordonez <https://mgg.network/news/980019>

46 In the evaluation of the MGG Academy 2019, 100% of the participants stated that they have improved their competences in the areas of system thinking, cooperation and diversity as well as transformation and innovation. In 2020, 90% of the interviewed participants stated that they have improved their competences in the same areas (Kompetus, 2021, p. 31).

47 See change story Wickasono <https://mgg.network/news/1840093>

48 See change story Ordonez <https://mgg.network/news/980019>

49 In the tracer study, a participant from 2022 highlighted the Academy's role in building trust: "MGG cultivated an environment of trust among its participants. This trust extended beyond the programme, influencing how I approached partnerships and collaborations. It reinforced the belief that trust is a fundamental building block for successful global-local initiatives" (Uzbonn, 2024, p. 33).

50 The interviewed alumni in the tracer study confirm that the MGG programme has established a high level of trust. The study concludes that this is one of the main reasons for well-established relations between the alumni, but also with IDOS and other institutions beyond (Kompetus, 2021, pp. 54, 63).

## 5.2 Types of impact

The paper has presented examples of the impact of the MGG (global governance) network on the individual, organisational and systemic–institutional level. Analysing in particular from the perspective of network members how the network contributed to the change process, different aspects of the network’s setup along the categories of actor composition, cooperation infrastructure and cooperation culture have been identified as impact enablers. In the following, we will draw conclusions regarding the types of impact that MGG members have reported to be as a result of the network. More precisely, we can derive three broader areas of impact generated by the MGG Network:

1. Network members – individual and organisational key partners for international cooperation, such as ministries and international organisations, research organisations, civil society organisations and business – contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Based on the development of relevant competencies in the network’s activities, they:
  - develop common understandings of global challenges (for instance with regard to digital technologies);
  - develop innovative solutions for the implementation of SDGs (for instance through curriculum development, implementation and re-designing of trainings, and as instruments for agenda-setting and awareness-raising); and
  - re-orient the behaviour of individuals in the development of policies towards sustainable development and in the examples they set in their respective domestic and international cooperation environments.
2. Decision-makers in politics, academia, business and civil society beyond the network make use of the solution approaches developed in the network’s activities to implement the 2030 agenda. This happens based on the communication of solutions specifically aimed at target groups (for instance in the form of policy briefs) and the joint development of solution approaches with decision-makers (for instance in high-level exchange and advisory formats).

Looking at these results in more detail, it becomes clear that some elements are direct results of the network’s activities (output), while the utilisation of these results constitutes the basis for further structural changes (outcome/impact). In this way, the network’s impact aligns well with the theory of change of IDOS, the central facilitating organisation for network activities. To illustrate, co-creation of knowledge and policy dialogue as the basis for being sought as a credible expert and advisor, constituting a convening space for different communities at the science–policy–society interface, and competence development of inter- and transnational change makers, belong to both MGG’s and the institute’s impact target system (IDOS, 2024b). The examples collected in this study provide clear evidence of how such results materialised.

Against this background, it is worthwhile to look in more detail at those elements that were mentioned by individual network members as particularly important changes resulting from cooperation in the network. In the interview responses, network members stressed in particular:

- the development of competencies in the form of knowledge, skills, and attitudes relevant for international cooperation and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda;
- career development towards positions with more (meaningful) sustainability orientation and more leverage to implement changes;
- a change in their own behaviour and organisational policies towards better alignment of practices with the 2030 Agenda, including through curriculum development, re-design and implementation of trainings; and

- improved international cooperation, including the advancement of the network's cooperation infrastructure and better access to international experts and high-level forums.

**Figure 9: Impact types highlighted by network members**



Source: Authors

When mentioning competence development, respondents refer to a direct output of MGG cooperation; the evaluations of the Academy, knowledge cooperation formats and network meetings show that participants confirm how their competencies have developed, in particular through the completion of the Academy as the central training and dialogue programme. This development of competencies primarily relates to knowledge, skills and attitudes in the area of sustainable development, as well as leadership skills. Although all participants possess prior expertise in relevant areas, they report that following their attendance, their expertise related to the 2030 Agenda and global governance has grown. The impact on Academy participants often takes the form of a change in perspective that enables them to better grasp the systemic nature of global challenges and the value of diversity. This result is therefore highly relevant to effective development cooperation, seeing that the Academy participants are (or are likely to become) future decision-makers in national and international key organisations.

Another change regularly ascribed to MGG is career development of network members. This result is a type of impact that can be associated with the individual level. However, it implies a general “upgrading” of the network in terms of expertise, decision-making power and potential leverage over time as well. Although not investigated in detail in this study, the examples show career development connected to a mix of factors, including competence development and connectedness to an international network. Career development typically materialises in the first year after the completion of the Academy in the form of promotion, a prestigious fellowship or acceptance to a higher study programme, or the assignment of new tasks with more responsibilities.<sup>51</sup> The German chancellor fellowships of different alumni are a case in point. More responsibility often comes with more decision-making powers to advance a sustainable

<sup>51</sup> See change story Gómez García <https://mgg.network/news/1290585>. The tracer study for the Academy batch of 2022 shows that 59% of the Academy participants were given more responsibilities, 24% were promoted and another 24% were given more tasks related to the 2030 Agenda. 29% of the participants stated that these changes were influenced by the participation in the MGG Academy (Uzbonn, 2024).

development and international cooperation agenda at the individual and organisational level. The implications of the new assignment and job promotions of network members in different Brazilian institutions, including ENAP and the Central Bank, illustrate this type. Clearly, in this context, opportunity and timing plays a role here, when participants return to their home institutions after they have spent a couple of months in Germany. Career development also finds expression in job change outside the original sending organisation. This impact is typically associated with increased awareness about sustainability concerns, so that alumni translate the experiences in the network to the decision that another institution promises greater potential for contributions to sustainable development or international cooperation in the future.<sup>52</sup>

A further type of impact that we can derive is improved international cooperation. This impact type implies better access to and stronger engagement with international experts and high-level forums for network members. At the same time, as shown by the analysed examples, members also advance the infrastructure of the network themselves to increase cooperation and leverage for impact. This happens through expansion to further key organisations, the creation of new organisations, the institutionalisation and professionalisation of network structures, or the creation of dedicated sub-networks, with the result that MGG today consists of about 500 members and 100 partner organisations, with many key actors in international development cooperation around the globe. Crucially, the improvement of international cooperation finds expression in the development of both the joint definition of global challenges and possible solutions. Common understandings and solutions can take many different forms, ranging from co-authored publications to the development of multiannual, multi-partner projects. The list of research papers and policy briefs developed in the MGG framework that come from two or more authors adds up to 98 (from 178 in total) between 2009 and 2024. More than 60% come from authors with different nationalities, thereby preparing ground for common understanding in practical cooperation and building bridges between partners in the participating countries and regions.<sup>53</sup> In the case of the before-mentioned PRODIGEES project, a series of network conferences culminated in the common understanding of how the fields of digitalisation and sustainable development – which, at the time of project development in 2018, were mostly unrelated concepts – and a related staff exchange scheme can be approached. The examples of NeST and the national platforms for VSS show that network collaboration can even lead to institution building. Observations, evaluations and impact reports brought forward many more examples of how collaboration in the network improved international cooperation.

Finally, network cooperation results in the re-orientation of individual behaviour or organisational policies towards sustainable development. This impact type essentially means the applied translation of the upgraded prioritisation of sustainability concerns into action, and thus de facto implementation of solutions. Here, impact starts with everyday life decisions at the individual level, but these practices can change routines within organisations too. Following such individual initiatives or network cooperation formats, the reorientation of government, research and training institutions in the network to integrate the 2030 Agenda or climate change questions in their thinking and field of activity goes up to the organisational and systemic–institutional impact level. New tools to align finances to the SDGs or to monitor climate impact are examples from the MGG Network.

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52 See change story Jaqueline Aguila Baca (forthcoming); See also Jaqueline Aguila Baca summarising her story on LinkedIn [https://www.linkedin.com/posts/jacquelineaguilarbaca\\_my-journey-in-sustainable-digitalization-activity-7293150443411517440-a-Xg?utm\\_source=share&utm\\_medium=member\\_desktop&rcm=ACoAAD\\_R1a8BgviunQTqli2kUIQCUXewG2GIItw](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/jacquelineaguilarbaca_my-journey-in-sustainable-digitalization-activity-7293150443411517440-a-Xg?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop&rcm=ACoAAD_R1a8BgviunQTqli2kUIQCUXewG2GIItw)

53 These numbers have been calculated based on the annual reports of the project between 2009 and 2014 <https://www.idos-research.de/en/managing-global-governance/>. See Annex 4 for a visual representation of this data.

Change in behaviour and policies often comes with an altered form of communication about sustainable development that also addresses actors and target groups outside the original MGG sphere. It includes the founding of relevant research units, changed policy guidelines, or the establishment of sustainability conferences by partner organisations, all initiated by individuals or groups of network members. Another field is curriculum development or the re-design and implementation of training formats. In the MGG context, these formats stand out for two reasons. First, the Academy is the biggest component in the network's cooperation infrastructure and has a foundational role for competence development and the cooperation culture within the network as a whole. Against this background, many participants get inspiration from it in terms of content and methods for the development and implementation of their own training and learning formats; the experience of meaningful training and dialogue apparently feeds the motivation to offer such an experience to more people. Second, what makes this impact type special is its huge potential for multiplying effects; trainings are by design geared towards impact on many individuals and organisations, so that their relevance for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda cannot be overestimated.<sup>54</sup>

## 6 Conclusions

Global governance networks enable social innovation to address complex global problems such as sustainable development. They can provide the space for the complex processes of "introducing new products, processes or programs that profoundly change the basic routines, resources and authority flows, or beliefs of the social system" (Antadze & Westley, 2012, p. 133).

This study sheds light on the conditions that make it more likely that networks will have a positive impact. To analyse the performance of a network, and thereby strengthen its relevance and credibility, a social impact assessment is helpful. In this context, we developed a differentiation across enablers, levels and types of impact. With this innovative analytic framework, we also aim to contribute to the conceptual debate about the impact assessment of global governance and other transnational networks.

This study should not be confused with an attempt to describe the full design and impact of the MGG programme of the last 18 years; it is, rather, a step towards conceptualising and tracking selected cases in order to illustrate the type and quality of impact during this long period. Clearly, the hundreds of network members have created impact in many other forms based on or associated with MGG activities.

With a focus on the experience of network members, we analysed 27 impact stories, enriched by available feedback questionnaires and external evaluations. They show that the MGG Network is full of examples of social innovation at an individual, organisational and institutional-systemic level, and document the relevance of the network. These examples testify that members are interested in working with the network's actors, infrastructure and culture, and that the network facilitators' investments pay off – the network seizes the opportunities to align on objectives, and makes progress towards achieving them.

The analysed impact types, be it career development, implementing trainings or institution building, require more than isolated actions. The outcomes and impact depend on quality cooperation infrastructure nurtured by a cooperation culture based on reciprocity, diversity and trust, which enables meaningful exchange, long-term commitment and collective problem-

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54 The workshop on Feminist Foreign Development Policy implemented in Engagement Global and initiated by Sabrina Dieter (see change story Dieter <https://mgg.network/news/1829943>) or a workshop on the 2020 Agenda in Dolores Britos organisation (see change story Brito <https://mgg.network/news/1005138>) are cases in point.

solving. Such an environment is crucial to drive social innovation, as it transforms fragmented efforts into coherent, synergistic progress across sectors and borders.

Key enablers for this impact can be found in the network setup. In the case of MGG it consists of a diverse group of individuals and organisations with relevant expertise from seven global powers, united by the joint objective to address global sustainability challenges through inter- and transnational cooperation. Given the complexity of global sustainability challenges, the multinational, cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary nature of the network with relevant partners is key. An encompassing cooperation infrastructure ensures continuous communication and offers fair, participatory formats for the reciprocal development of common definitions of global challenges and innovative solutions. The cooperation culture practices the cherishing of inclusion and diversity, and aims at the formation of trust, reputation and a common identity. With the integration of these elements – the right mix of actors, infrastructure and culture of cooperation – impact on sustainable development can materialise in many forms, including improved international cooperation towards the common definition of challenges and innovative solutions, and the (re-)orientation of behaviour and policies even behind the group of members.

For the case of MGG, which has a training and dialogue format at the core of its cooperation infrastructure, the study has shown that the most immediate effects take place at the individual level. Far from being “easy” to achieve - and despite its fundamental nature for the cooperation in the network as a whole -, this result is rather weakly institutionalised as it sits with few people in a hardly formalised setup. Consequently, more intermediary, institutionalised impact at the organisational or the systemic–institutional level is much harder to achieve, and requires a complex favourable cooperation setup. Given its potential scope and institutionalisation degree, it appears most desirable to strive for systemic–institutional impact, the type of impact that has the widest and most lasting effects on the largest number of people. Furthermore, change processes at the systemic–institutional level also build on change processes, skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviour changes at the individual level, often combined with changes at the organisational level. Consequently, it makes sense to take individuals and their embeddedness in cooperation networks as the starting point when it comes to addressing global challenges.<sup>55</sup>

To illustrate how the different types of impact build upon each other, once competencies and awareness of the 2030 Agenda develop (in the case of MGG typically in the Academy), changed patterns of international cooperation and individual behaviour change follow a new prioritisation for contributing to the implementation of the SDGs. This change can spill over to the working environment of network members. Inspired by participatory and inclusive methods that characterise MGG’s cooperation culture, and equipped with respective skills, many network members start communicating (differently) to relevant decision-makers in their organisations. They start implementing workshops, publishing on sustainability-related topics, or re-shaping processes in their home organisations. For many cases in the MGG context, change on the organisational level has started with a training or a joint publication implemented by Academy alumni. These changes bear the potential to create change in a wider social or even international context, if (further) network members and partner organisations team up. We have observed changes on the systemic–institutional level initiated by individuals and due to favourable environments – supportive colleagues, influential positions, professional experiences or networks that complement the new skills and knowledge. Institutional changes can also result from long-standing (knowledge) exchange, which bring together interested actors on a topic of common interest, as the examples of the cooperation of training institutions, VSS and PRODIGEES have shown.

Going back to the definition of social innovation, once new products, processes or programmes are initiated that change basic routines, resources or authority flows and beliefs in the organisational environment, social innovation happens. In the MGG case, impact at the

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55 On this point, see also Reiber & Eberz (2024, p. 65).

individual level can be linked to a change in fundamental beliefs (awareness and knowledge changes) and is applied in one's working environment. Change at an organisational level often takes the form of processes or programmes introduced (trainings, workshops, seminars) or changes in processes implemented within one's organisation. Change at an institutional level refers to change in authority flows or changes in basic beliefs (e.g. due to national policy frameworks having been changed).

Connected to the organisational and network levels of impact, it should not be forgotten that the network's cooperation infrastructure can be of significant permanent value for the work of participating members, including key organisations of the network such as IDOS. For an internationally oriented research organisation whose quality of work also depends on the cooperation opportunities in the partner countries, the value of the network becomes apparent when its members develop research cooperation or establish groups of actors that are then taken up in further research initiatives of the institute. IDOS's cooperation on value chains (linked to VSS) or South–South cooperation (SSC) are examples in this regard. PRODIGEES is a special case of the network's value, as it provided third-party funded cooperation opportunities to all research and innovation staff of IDOS.

Despite these impact examples, we must not confuse favourable conditions with automatism. When opportunities provided in or beyond the network meet willingness to act, change processes towards sustainability transformations are more likely to unfold – but there is no guarantee. In the context of global governance and development cooperation, social innovation typically does not happen in a linear, predictable manner. Any theory of change for networks across different levels will face a variety of uncertainties. Crucially, besides all the network enablers, factors outside the control of the network actors play important roles, ranging from the circumstances of individuals' lives and their level of self-organisation to political conditions and resources supporting or hindering international and sustainability orientations. Against this background, MGG might be an exceptional example in terms of impact achievement, partly thanks to favourable external conditions and related resources that have allowed the network to develop for almost two decades. Certainly, a strong and effective network requires continuous investment from people, resources and time to nurture and develop its infrastructure and culture of cooperation in order to unfold its potential. In this context, it must be mentioned that MGG benefited enormously from being conceptualised, developed and run from the very beginning by individuals who combined thoughtfulness with deep empathy and personal dedication.

Against this background, the study also sets an agenda for future research into how better to grasp the results of network cooperation and to understand the conditions of impact on sustainable development. The expansion of systematically analysed change stories from network members, along with regular network-wide questionnaires beyond a focus on the Academy, will help to strengthen the explanatory value of future studies. Institutionalising impact reporting among network members and connecting the reports to further data sources, possibly employing quantitative instruments of social network analysis, could work in a similar direction. Beyond that, a comparative analysis with networks of a similar kind could help shed light on the conditions of network impact.

The external conditions for inter- and transnational cooperation towards sustainable development between global powers are not getting easier. In times of scarce resources, when the global agenda is being derailed from a common sustainability perspective, lessons on how to optimise the impact of global governance network are more relevant than ever.

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## Annexes

### Annex 1: MGG Network members who contributed change stories

Name	Gender	Batch	Country	Sector	Interview	Online Questionnaire	Published	URL
Yanzhu Zhang	male	2020	China	Policy advice	19.05.2022	x	21.11.2022	<a href="https://mgg.network/news/980072">https://mgg.network/news/980072</a>
Evelien Fiselier	female	2020	EU	Policy advice	25.05.2022	x	x	x
Beltsazar	male	2019	Indonesia	Policy advice	13.06.2022	x	21.11.2022	<a href="https://mgg.network/news/978369">https://mgg.network/news/978369</a>
Ananya Chakraborty	female	2019	India	Policy advice	13.06.2022	x	21.11.2022	<a href="https://mgg.network/news/979322">https://mgg.network/news/979322</a>
Archna Negi	female	2007	India	Academia/policy advice	16.08.2022	x	21.11.2022	<a href="https://mgg.network/news/963841">https://mgg.network/news/963841</a>
Maria Candida Mousinho	female	2007	Brazil	Academia		x	14.03.2023	<a href="https://mgg.network/news/1321975">https://mgg.network/news/1321975</a>
Dolores Brito	female	2017	Brazil	Inmetro/public policy		x	21.11.2022	<a href="https://mgg.network/news/1005138">https://mgg.network/news/1005138</a>
Nesheet Srivastava	male	2021	India	Private sector		yes	21.11.2022	<a href="https://mgg.network/news/1005109">https://mgg.network/news/1005109</a>
Camilla Oliveira	female	2013	Brazil	Public policy/environment		yes	21.11.2022	<a href="https://mgg.network/news/1005135">https://mgg.network/news/1005135</a>
Joao Dominguez	male	2013	Brazil	Public policy/education		x	21.11.2022	<a href="https://mgg.network/news/1005176">https://mgg.network/news/1005176</a>
Miriam Ordóñez	female	2020	Mexico	Academia/policy advice		x	21.11.2022	<a href="https://mgg.network/news/980019">https://mgg.network/news/980019</a>
Garry Armando Readon	male	2019	Indonesia	Government/ministry/energy	05.12.2022	x	14.03.2023	<a href="https://mgg.network/news/1290575">https://mgg.network/news/1290575</a>
Jiahua Cao	male	2014	China	Academia/policy advice	08.12.2022	x	14.03.2023	<a href="https://mgg.network/news/1290580">https://mgg.network/news/1290580</a>
TK Poee	male	2018	South Africa	Academia/public policy	05.12.2022	x	forthcoming	forthcoming
Tamara Andrade	female	2021	Brazil	Academia/public policy	20.12.2022	x	05.11.2024	<a href="https://mgg.network/news/2193569">https://mgg.network/news/2193569</a>
Blanca Elena Gomez	female	2021	Mexico	Academia		yes	14.03.2023	<a href="https://mgg.network/news/1290585">https://mgg.network/news/1290585</a>
José Manuel Rivas Ochoa	male	2005	Mexico	Academia/private sector		yes	03.12.2024	<a href="https://mgg.network/news/2237666">https://mgg.network/news/2237666</a>
Marcel Artioli	male	2022	Brazil			yes	23.02.2024	<a href="https://mgg.network/news/1853358">https://mgg.network/news/1853358</a>
Simran Dighra	female	2022	India	Public sector/FES		yes	05.03.2024	<a href="https://mgg.network/news/1824082">https://mgg.network/news/1824082</a>
Soumya Vinayan	female	2005	India	Academia		yes	07.05.2024	<a href="https://mgg.network/news/1820693">https://mgg.network/news/1820693</a>
Sreerupa Sengupta	female	2019	India	Academia		yes	03.09.2024	<a href="https://mgg.network/news/1840089">https://mgg.network/news/1840089</a>
Honey Karun	male	2016	India	Academy/public policy		yes	01.10.2024	<a href="https://mgg.network/news/1840079">https://mgg.network/news/1840079</a>
Radhithono Wicaksono	male	2018	Indonesia	Public policy/Ministry of Finance		yes	02.04.2024	<a href="https://mgg.network/news/1840093">https://mgg.network/news/1840093</a>
Aliasger Bootwalla	male	2022	India	Policy advice/academia		yes	06.08.2024	<a href="https://mgg.network/news/1824134">https://mgg.network/news/1824134</a>
Carlos Lustosa	make	2022	Brazil	Public sector/auditing		yes	04.06.2024	<a href="https://mgg.network/news/1824136">https://mgg.network/news/1824136</a>
Sabrina Dieter	female	2022	Germany	Public sector/global engagement		yes	02.07.2024	<a href="https://mgg.network/news/1829943">https://mgg.network/news/1829943</a>

## **Annex 2: Interview guideline/questions**

### **15 Years Managing Global Governance –**

#### **Stories to inspire change in and with the MGG Network**

The MGG Network is turning 15 this year. On this occasion, we would like to collect your stories of MGG, ultimately to celebrate the programme's impact, big and small, institutional or personal – make the change that has happened in the last one and a half decades visible and recognise all the efforts that have been made.

Where has MGG had an impact on your life – and if so: how? What are the changes that happened in your working life, your department, your institution, or even your personal life after and through MGG? Are there inspirational stories you want to share?

We would love to get to know anything that has influenced your or others' mind-sets, routines, any ideas, exchanges, networks, initiatives, actions, workshops, publications that you would relate to MGG! We believe there is a lot we can learn from each other, and that we can improve our impact with illustrative stories – and inspire others, too.

If you wish, there will be the opportunity to share your stories and learn from each other at the three-day online event (23–25 November 2022) we will facilitate this year regarding the MGG 15th anniversary. Additionally, there will also be the opportunity to showcase your story on the MGG online platform. We are also planning to award prizes to the most inspirational cases.

#### **What do we mean by Story of Change?**

An MGG story can be any positive change process that was inspired or powered by MGG. It can be an idea to improve working processes in your department, a project you implemented with fellows from the MGG Academy, any kind of publication (from newspaper to internal publications, blogs, scientific articles, strategy document, etc.) you have published, a dialogue you have been involved in, network activities, job promotions or career developments, change of mind-sets, or workshops or conferences you initiated or were a part of. Hence, it can be literally anything that is directly or indirectly connected to the competences, knowledge, skills and mind-set you have further developed in the MGG Academy, or in any other MGG activity (knowledge cooperation, policy dialogue) in the last 15 years.

**Thank you in advance for taking time for this thinking exercise!**

- 1. General Information: What is your name, MGG country, batch?**
- 2. What kind of change (story/project/process) did you experience/initiate or support that was inspired or powered by MGG? Please tell us your story!**  
*(Please be as specific as possible, e.g. "I have implemented a workshop to promote gender equality in our organisation", rather than "through MGG I have learned more on gender inequality".)*
- 3. Aim of your change story? What (global) challenge does your change project or process address?**
- 4. Who is the target group from the activity /experience/ project/ idea (directly and/or indirectly)?**  
*(Who is the target group of the activity? Who is benefitting from your project, idea, process, who is taking part in it, who is using it, whose lives have been changed, working routines, behaviour etc.)*

**5. Who is the target group? (multiple choice)**

- ☐ Political actors
- ☐ Public administration
- ☐ Academia & Think Tanks
- ☐ Civil Society
- ☐ Business
- ☐ Other (please specify)

**6. (if applicable) What are the instruments your activity/project/experience/idea provides?**

*(Workshops, meetings, conversations, trainings, information, papers, guidelines, etc.)*

**7. What change did occur within your target group (immediately and/or in the long-run)?**

*(How did awareness, skills or behaviour of your target group change? How have people, institutions, routines changed? Think of the feedback you have received to your change project/activity)*

**8. At what level did change within your target group occur? (multiple choice)**

- ☐ Individual level (awareness changed)
- ☐ Professional (in your team/ department)
- ☐ Professional (in your organisation)
- ☐ Professional (beyond your organisation)
- ☐ If so: please specify

**9. What type of change did occur within your target group? (multiple choice)**

- ☐ Awareness of target group changed
- ☐ Skills of target group changed
- ☐ Behaviour of target group changed
- ☐ Awareness, skills, behaviour beyond target group changed

**10. In which impact categories does the change refer to? (multiple choice)**

- ☐ Training: Competences, knowledge, skills, or attitudes needed for the implementation of the 2030 agenda have been strengthened
- ☐ Understanding: An agreement on global problems or innovative solutions has been achieved
- ☐ Communication: Knowledge on global problems or innovative solutions has been communicated to a specific target group
- ☐ Application: Decision-makers (in politics, public administration, academia, civil society or business) apply knowledge inspired/generated in/by/with MGG
- ☐ Dialogue: Solutions/strategies have been jointly developed with decision-makers
- ☐ Network development: Structures of the MGG Network have been institutionalised or professionalised
- ☐ Ownership: Personal or institutional buy-in to the MGG Network has been strengthened
- ☐ Others: Please specify

**11. What role did MGG play? Where did MGG make a difference?**

*(Please describe.)*

**12. On which elements of the change process did MGG have a substantial influence?**

(multiple choice)

- ☐ Inspiration
- ☐ Agenda setting
- ☐ Conceptualisation
- ☐ Composition of group
- ☐ Implementation
- ☐ Communication
- ☐ Provide collaboration opportunities
- ☐ Exposure to innovative methods
- ☐ Dissemination
- ☐ Financial resources
- ☐ Support at personal or group level (coaching, feedback, etc.)
- ☐ Other: Please specify

**13. What were key factors for the success? What did you need or do to make it happen?**

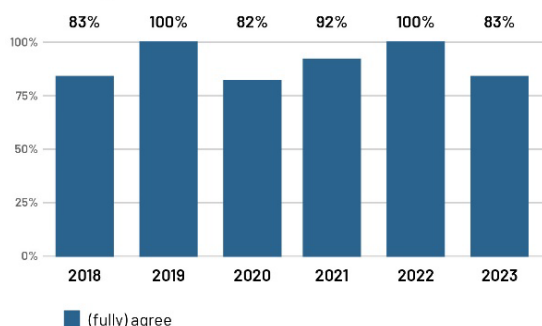
*(What did you invest? People involved, composition of the group, timeframe of the process, financial and material resources, MGG instruments used)*

**14. What were the greatest challenges you had to overcome?**

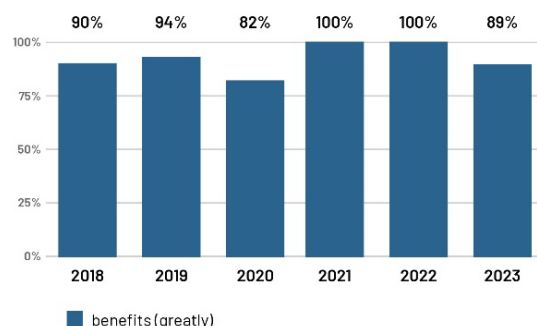
**15. Why is your success story inspiring?** (One sentence for social media)

## Annex 3: Follow-up consultation on MGG Academy 2018–2023: impact of MGG Network

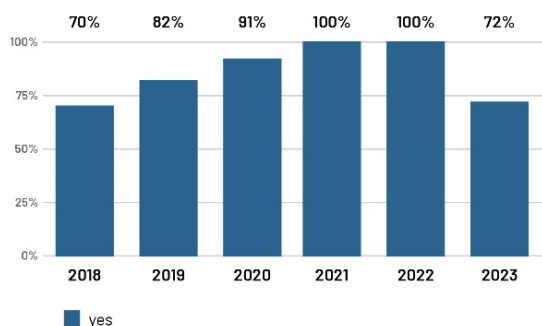
My knowledge, skills and attitudes that are important for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda have been strengthened through the participation in the MGG Academy.



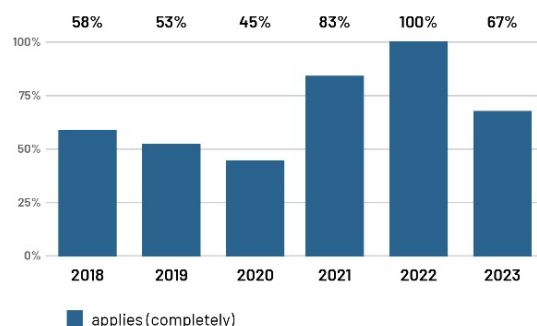
Did the MGG Academy benefit you personally?



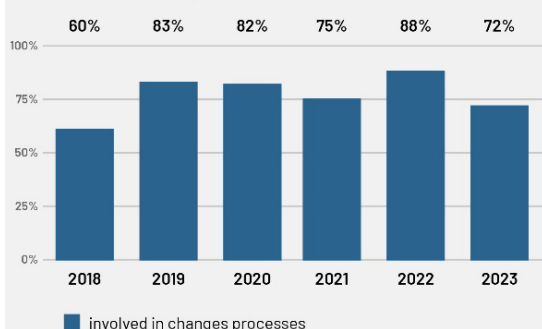
Do you use materials / concepts / services provided in the MGG Academy?



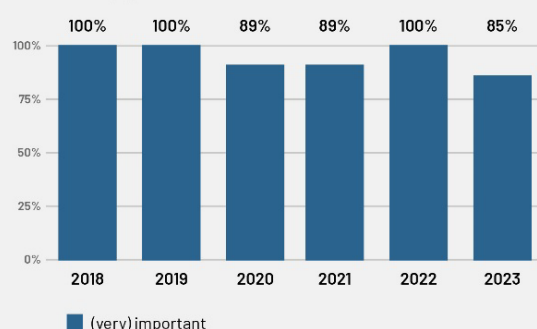
I can apply the ideas and competencies from the MGG Academy in my normal working life.



Have you already been able to initiate concrete change processes in your work that serve to achieve the goals of 2030 Agenda?



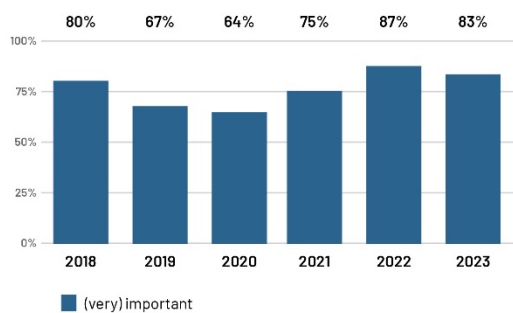
How important is your participation in the MGG Academy for your involvement in these change processes?



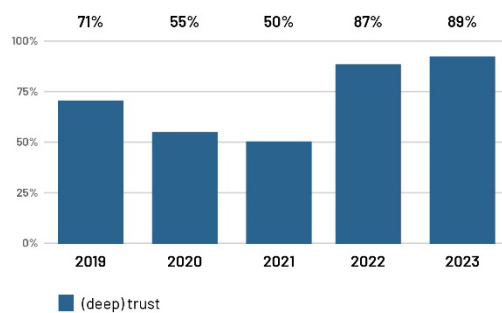
\*Responses refer only to alumni who were involved in change processes.

\*These surveys were conducted 1 year after graduation from the Academy. The values shown include the sum of responses 5 and 6 from the survey.

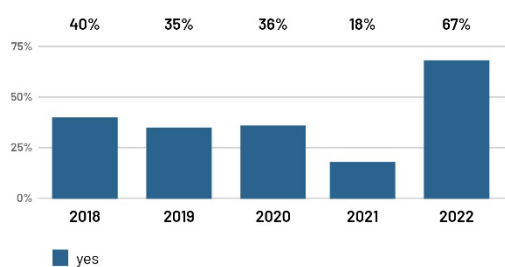
How important is the MGG Network for you?



Considering your experiences during and after the MGG Academy, in how far have you built trust towards the members of your MGG batch in general?



Participants have established cooperation with MGG Network members during or after the MGG Academy:



## Annex 4: Number of MGG publications 2009–2024

