

Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Achievements and Limitations of the G20 Presidency in 2017

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One major objective of the German G20 presidency in 2016/17 was to promote the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are essential to addressing the collective challenges faced by the world. Without G20 countries, these challenges cannot be tackled effectively. Putting the spotlight on the 2030 Agenda in the G20 can generate peer pressure among the world's major economies, initiate fruitful learning processes and contribute to keeping the momentum for transformative change, and achieving the SDGs as well as promoting policy coherence for sustainable development. It is, therefore, commendable that the G20 members, with the adoption of their Action Plan during the Chinese G20 Presidency, are committed to the 2030 Agenda. In this article, we analyse to what extent the German G20 Presidency, building on the achievements of the 2016 Hangzhou Summit, has been successful in leveraging the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and in which ways the G20 was able to make a difference for enhanced global cooperation. The assessment of the German G20 presidency shows that the outcome of the 2017 Hamburg Summit can hardly be considered as a great breakthrough for sustainable development. Yet the Summit does offer opportunities for real progress to promote the implementation of the 2030 Agenda if further action is taken by Member States and the follow-up G20 presidencies on the Hamburg commitments.

Key words: G20, 2030 Agenda, sustainable development, policy coherence.

Introduction

One major objective of the German G20 Presidency was to promote the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development ([G20 Germany 2016](#)). Against this background, this article analyses to what extent the German G20 Presidency in 2017, building on the achievements of the Chinese Presidency, was successful in achieving its objective to leverage the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. We are also concerned to show in which ways the G20 was able to make a difference for enhanced global cooperation.

Adopted by all United Nations (UN) Member States in 2015, the 2030 Agenda aims at improving human development by 2030: for 9 billion people how will this be accomplished in such a way that no one will be left behind in extreme poverty, discriminated against, or has to endure exploitative working conditions. At the same time, the 2030 Agenda states that this push for improved

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human development and global prosperity needs to be accomplished in a way which ensures that it does not worsen the state of the world's natural environment (including its climate, biodiversity, and oceans), and which respects the planetary boundaries. All this is to safeguard coming generations and ensure they can thrive on this planet avoiding abrupt or irreversible environmental changes (Rockström et al. 2009; Steffen et al. 2015) and securing the stability of the earth system that is essential to the future of humankind (WBGU 2014).

The 2030 Agenda includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which are binding for all its signatories and commit them to strengthen international cooperation and a new global partnership (United Nations 2015). The new agenda not only replaces the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), but also formulates a new universal approach that applies to developing, emerging, and developed countries alike. The agenda also links the principle of sustainability with economic, environmental, and social development. Thus, for the second time since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 (Rio Summit), the international community identifies a powerful collective effort to merge poverty alleviation, and sustainability in one agenda.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides a very challenging starting point for efforts of the G20 to define collective action, both in the policy fields covered by finance ministers (e.g. financial regulation, growth, structural reforms, taxation), the finance track, and in the policy fields covered by the Sherpas (e.g. trade and investment, development, health, climate and energy, food security). Achieving the SDGs, i.e. attaining improved human development while reducing the burden on the climate and the natural environment, requires new policy approaches, possibly new institutional arrangements and increased commitment of the private sector, science, civil society, and other societal actors to action towards these transformative goals.

The G20 represents 80 percent of the world's population, economic output, and greenhouse gas emissions. It is thus essential that the G20 support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its ambition to renew the concepts of human development and prosperity within the planetary boundaries. Due to the economic weight and population size of the G20 countries, any change in domestic policies towards sustainable development in the sense mentioned above can generate important global progress. Without a commitment to implementation by the G20 countries, it will be difficult to keep the momentum alive for the 2030 Agenda also beyond the G20, among high-income, middle-income, and least developed countries. Most importantly, if the G20 wants to facilitate, and not undermine, sustainable development, it must use its combined influence to shape global economic governance and international cooperation.

At the Hangzhou Summit in 2016, the G20 made a first important step into this direction by adopting the "Action Plan on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" (G20 2016). The Action Plan identifies fifteen priority sustainable development sectors (SDS) that cover the themes of all G20 work streams. In this Action Plan, the G20 countries committed to engage in individual and collective action in order to promote the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. In the Annex to the Action Plan, each G20 country provides a short overview of its national efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda. Furthermore, the Action Plan describes in detail a number of ways in which Sherpas and the G20 Development Working Group (DWG) can act to support this innovative effort. The G20 Leaders had mandated the Sherpas and the DWG to "act as a coordinating body and policy resource for sustainable

development across the G20” (G20 2016), thus addressing implementation in, and by all G20 member countries, support to low-income and developing countries, and the provision of global public goods.

The German presidency mentioned the 2030 Agenda explicitly in its list of topics for the G20 summit (The Federal Government 2016, 13). This list included innovative topics that had been introduced by the Chinese presidency, notably green finance and the 2030 Agenda, and topics that had already shaped the German G7 presidency in 2015, notably climate change and health. In the beginning of the G20 presidency, German policy circles tended to view it as most effective if treated as a conventional intergovernmental negotiation process. Especially under the impact of the first public pronouncements of the Trump administration, however, this perception changed and an intensive and regular dialogue between Sherpas and the leaders of the Engagement Groups¹ was established. This dialogue added substance and legitimacy to the German position that the G20 has a responsibility to promote international cooperation not only in the interest of its members but also with regard to global common goods. The 2030 Agenda spells out more specifically what the international community has agreed to in this respect, and thus it constituted an important reference of the German presidency. There was also some optimism among negotiators that the 2030 Agenda might be a topic of support and consensus because it had not been labelled negatively by the new U.S. government (i.e. compared to climate change).

Our analysis of the German G20 Presidency shows that, while the outcome of the 2017 Hamburg Summit cannot be considered as a great breakthrough for sustainable development, it can be seen to be a step forward. After all, the G20 have renewed their commitment to the 2030 Agenda in the official Summit communiqué and have managed to agree on additional steps to foster the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. This is a remarkable outcome in light of a highly challenging negotiation context, above all given President Donald Trump’s opposition to multilateralism as well as a number of established common positions of the G20. This commitment provides an important basis for the enhanced implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

In the remainder of this examination, we first outline the main innovative features of the 2030 Agenda (Section 2) and its specific implementation challenges (Section 3). We then analyse the main steps the G20 would have to undertake in order to take up these challenges and use its potential for promoting implementation. Above all, we suggest the G20 must adopt individual and collective action, improve policy coherence, and shape global economic governance and reform international cooperation (Section 4). We follow-up this analysis by assessing the achievements of the 2017 G20 Summit against the background of the 2030 Agenda (Section 5); and we end by offering some concluding comments (Section 6).

¹There are seven groupings of non-state actors that try to influence decision-making processes of the G20. They are called Engagement Groups, and the G20 recognized them officially as such in different years: trade and business associations (B20, since 2008), labour unions (L20, since 2008), civil society organizations (C20, since 2010), research organizations and think tanks (T20, since 2012), academies of science (S20, since 2017), women organizations (W20, since 2015), and youth organizations (Y20, since 2010). As there is no set of rules defining the rights of the Engagement Groups (e.g. to be heard or to participate in the G20 process), their existence and activities vary across presidencies. All seven Engagement Groups were active during the German G20 presidency. For background information, see <https://www.boell.de/en/2016/12/08/solar-system-g20-engagement-groups> and, for the G20 Argentinian presidency in 2018, see <https://www.g20.org/en/g20-argentina/engagement-groups>.

The 2030 Agenda for sustainable development

The preamble of the 2030 Agenda provides a summary of its overarching goals by clustering the seventeen SDGs into five categories (five Ps): abolish extreme poverty and hunger and achieve a life in dignity, equality, and a healthy environment (people); protection of the earth's ecosystems for present and future generations (planet); prosperity of all people through economic and technological progress in harmony with nature (prosperity); peaceful, inclusive and just societies free of fear and violence (peace); and a strengthened international cooperation (partnership) (United Nations 2015). More specifically, the 2030 Agenda covers a broad array of themes, including:

- poverty (SDG 1)
- food security (SDG 2)
- health (SDG 3),
- education (SDG 4),
- gender equality (SDG 5),
- water resources (SDG 6),
- energy (SDG 7),
- decent work and economic growth (SDG 8),
- industrialisation, innovation and infrastructure (SDG 9),
- inequality within and among countries (SDG 10),
- cities (SDG 11),
- consumption and production patterns (SDG 12),
- climate policy (SDG 13),
- oceans (SDG 14),
- biodiversity and forests (SDG 15),
- peace, justice, and effective institutions (SDG 16);
- and partnerships for implementation (SDG 17).

The agenda emphasizes the interdependencies between people, planet, peace, prosperity, and partnership, and between the specific goals and their targets. The targets describe many horizontal linkages; as a rule, they are not only vertically linked to their specific goal, but also to other goals and thus are best described as a "network of targets" (Le Blanc 2015). This is exemplified by the targets of four goals that explicitly connect people and planet: SDGs 6 (water) and 11 (cities) refer explicitly to the social and environmental dimensions; while SDGs 16 (peaceful and inclusive societies) and 17 (partnerships) name the institutions and systemic changes needed for a sustainable management of (global) public goods. SDG 2 (hunger and food security) also refers to the environmental dimension and to resilient agriculture and could thus also be counted as part of this people and planet cluster.

Four goals are dedicated to protecting the earth system and thus formulate requirements for the environmental quality of production processes, transport, waste management, and recycling in industry, agriculture, trade and services: SDGs 12 (consumption and production patterns), 13 (climate policy), 14 (oceans) and 15 (terrestrial ecosystems and biodiversity). In addition, and importantly, SDG 16 formulates the legal and institutional preconditions for the reduction of poverty and inequality, for environmental policies and for a socio-ecological transformation. Without peace, legitimacy, effective institutions, and the rule of law all this is impossible to achieve, and achievements can be reversed within a short time, and with long-term consequences.

At the same time, there are also trade-offs between goals, and even inconsistencies (Loewe and Rippin 2015, ICSU and ISSC 2015, ICSU 2017). The targets of SDG 8 (economic growth and decent work) do not describe parameters for sustainable and inclusive economic and labour market policies. The targets that should ensure that economic growth is decoupled from resource use are not ambitious, but remain very vague. SDGs 7 (energy) and 13 (climate policy) could have been designed to reinforce each other, but SDG 7 lacks a clear reference to greenhouse gas emissions and a target that binds increases in energy supply to large reductions in energy intensity and rapidly increasing shares of renewable energy technologies.

SDG 10 (inequality) is a real innovation as an element of an international agreement at the level of the UN. It reflects the increased political weight of developing countries, and the growing impact of increases in inequality on social cohesion and stable democracies in industrialized countries. SDG 10 raises the issue of discriminations of all kinds but it disregards socio-ecological inequalities (Scholz 2014). This is also true for SDG 17 (partnerships), which describes an open global trade system, stable financial markets and inclusive international institutions as necessary improvements but does not explicitly state that all of them would need to increase policy coherence for sustainable development.

SDGs 17 and 9 emphasize that international cooperation in research, technology development, and deployment urgently needs to be strengthened. A successful green transformation that promotes human development requires strong capacities for knowledge creation and adoption as well as for innovation in economy and society (WBGU 2011).

Two key concepts are missing from the Agenda which are essential for devising long-term strategies that are able to achieve the SDGs in an integrated and adequate way: *decarbonisation* of production and consumption, i.e. beginning with phasing out fossil fuels in order to achieve net zero emissions between 2050 and 2075 (DDPP 2015), and *planetary boundaries* which should not be exceeded in terms of human use of natural resources and sinks (Steffen et al. 2015; see also WBGU 2014 and Brandt 2015). The important constraint introduced by the 2030 Agenda for strategies addressing decarbonisation and planetary boundaries is linked to the social dimension: implementation strategies cannot increase inequalities within and among countries. On the contrary, such strategies must actually try to accommodate the goals of reducing poverty and inequality at the same time.

Implementing the 2030 Agenda

Governments and societal actors now face the challenge of translating the 2030 Agenda into national, sub-national, and local goals and measures. It also requires implementing them through sustainable development strategies at these various levels. The 2030 Agenda ascribes key responsibilities for implementation to national governments that have to connect national policies and plans with the SDGs, and to the contributions of non-state actors that are invited to act independently and to engage in multi-stakeholder partnerships. China presented its comprehensive implementation strategy in late 2015, while industrialized countries needed much more time in order to define their approaches towards implementation (O'Connor et al. 2016; Scholz, Keijzer, and Richerzhagen 2016).

Since 2016, countries have been presenting their voluntary national reviews on implementation at the UN High-Level Political Forum, which meets every July in New York (Tosun and Leininger 2017). These meetings are an incentive for engaging in implementation, and they could turn into an important platform for learning and exchange. Twenty-two countries from the Global South and North reported in 2016, forty-four countries reported in 2017, and in January 2018, forty-eight countries were listed for 2018. Regional meetings, often facilitated by the UN economic commissions, are additional platforms where countries can also engage in direct cooperation.

One implementation instrument explicitly mentioned in the 2030 Agenda are national strategies for sustainable development. After the Rio Summit on environment and development, many countries started to elaborate such strategies, especially within the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Developing countries received support by the UNDP for this purpose. Sustainable development strategies were expected to trigger strategic decision-making processes that “focus debate, build consensus, examine trade-offs and make choices” (Meadowcroft 2007, 157). In their analysis of integrated strategies in fifteen European countries, Casado-Asensio and Steurer (2014, 459) came to the conclusion that, in practice, integrated strategies “usually fail as integrative governance processes” and “prove to be comparatively weak administrative routines” that are “preoccupied with low-key communication rather than high-profile policy coordination”.

Sustainable development strategies often fail to trigger real change because they usually do not have the political strength or legitimacy to discipline single ministries, their decisions and actions with the help of overarching goals (Scholz 2017, Casado-Asensio and Steurer 2014). Institutional inertia and path dependency of ministerial bureaucracies pose further obstacles to strategic reorientation. And, integrated strategies are often advocated for by traditionally weak actors such as environment and development policymakers: The negative trends they try to address usually are caused by actors that are regulated by other ministries (such as economy or infrastructure) (Jordan and Lenschow 2008).

An alternative view is to understand change not as a hierarchical but as a co-evolutionary process (Norgaard 1994; Kemp et al. 2007; Loorbach 2010) where changes in semi-autonomous subsystems are able to trigger change in other related subsystems. Subsystems include technologies and institutions that interact and influence each other while maintaining functional autonomy. From the perspective of the 2030 Agenda, the main task is to identify subsystems that are linked to many other subsystems and can trigger positive feedback effects. The advance of renewable energy technologies can be seen as an example that illustrates such dynamics of change: it will reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve air quality, human health, and environmental quality.

Seen from this angle, sustainable development is a society-wide systemic process of change that requires, first, a government with a coherent long-term vision and effective coordination processes that balance competing interests, second, contributions by the private sector and sub-national entities, and, third, changes in attitudes and behaviour on the level of households and individuals. Thus, policy coordination is needed as much between specific policies across sectors as between their respective stakeholders and administrative levels. Moreover, since transformative change as required by the 2030 Agenda is more than technological change, and it

cannot be executed by political and economic elites alone. In fact, transformative change of this sort requires societal dialogue and initiatives from the bottom up. At the same time, governments and transnational actors need to shape and apply global framework conditions, rules, and standards in a way that is coherent with this understanding of sustainable global prosperity. The 2030 Agenda, therefore, requires strong and flexible procedures and debates that are rooted in local society and that at the same time take into account interests that are not voiced directly – interests of other societies, future generations, and of global commons that have no voice at all, such as oceans and the climate (Sand 2004; Weidner 2005; WBGU 2011).

This poses procedural problems of legitimacy and the question of how to define the adequate or fair share of each society in contributing to the provision of common goods. In the case of climate policy, options for calculating fair shares have been elaborated, among others, by the WBGU (2009). The political process led to many debates, under the UNFCCC and beyond, without adopting any of the proposed models. Instead, with the Paris Agreement in 2015, countries adopted a bottom up process with voluntary “nationally determined contributions” (NDCs) and the perspective of establishing clear criteria for making them more stringent over the next years. Yet, for other policy fields, such debates are either incipient or even non-existent. Formulas for fair contributions often are hard to develop and the knowledge base is often deficient. These gaps need to be filled.

In this context, sustainable development strategies can play a significant role, together with the national and global procedures connected with their elaboration, monitoring, and review. They can be an instrument of information and communication on the long-term direction of change that allows for “flexible strategy processes, accompanied by a transition from clear-cut sectoral authorities to cross-cutting competencies, from pure hierarchies to an amalgamation of hierarchies and networks, from top-down control to process and policy assessments, and from knowing to learning” (see European Sustainable Development Network on its website <http://www.sd-network.eu/?k=basics%20of%20SD%20strategies>).

Promoting the 2030 Agenda – the role of the G20

As a forum that concentrates at least on reforming global economic governance and coordination, the G20 has specific responsibilities as well as opportunities and levers to promote the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in an integrated and balanced manner. The power of G20 countries to shape global cooperation and their already enormous and continuously growing economic weight not only constitute a comparative advantage of the G20 to act. The G20 is also able to increase the possibilities for G20 countries to address their responsibility for protecting the global environment. In the past, questions of environmental sustainability, including climate change, have not been on the agenda, and it was an important achievement of the Chinese presidency in 2016 to change this by introducing work on green finance (together with UN Environment) and on the 2030 Agenda. In this way, the G20 members can contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and to the promotion of global cooperation. Moreover, putting the spotlight on development can help the G20 to address legitimacy challenges:

if the G20 is also to be accepted by the remaining 172 countries, the large majority of which are developing countries, the G20 will also have to cater to their interests. In addition, the G20 is in a unique position to promote peer pressure among the world's major economies by putting the focus on the 2030 Agenda in the G20. The G20 can establish fruitful learning processes and help to keep up the momentum for transformative change and achieving the SDGs (Scholz and Brandi 2017b).

Building on the previous section, we can derive three main challenges to implementation in the context of the 2030 Agenda in which the G20 needs to make relevant contributions with regard to individual and collective action at domestic and international levels:

1. How can the G20 achieve policy coherence for sustainable development, i.e. how to avoid that policies in one sector cause harm in another (horizontal coordination, designing integrated policies across sectors)? This includes engaging more strongly with domestic implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and using peer learning formats within and beyond the G20 for this purpose.
2. How can the G20 shape global framework conditions and national policies in order to foster sustainable development and ensure that economic and environmental policies do not enhance inequalities, but rather contribute to shared prosperity?
3. How can the G20 reform international cooperation (North-South, South-South, North-North) in ways that knowledge and technologies are shared and created jointly; funding needs are adequately addressed; and multilateral cooperation is made more effective and efficient?

Policy coherence for sustainable development

Against the background of the 2030 Agenda, it has become more pertinent than ever to focus on policy coherence for sustainable development (PCSD) (OECD 2016), with regard to domestic implementation as well as international cooperation. In light of diverse cross-sectoral and transnational interlinkages of various G20 objectives and G20 members' policies, the G20 plays a key role in this endeavour. While the G20 does recognize the significance of coherence, there is still great potential for the G20 to promote PCSD. Ideally, there should be coherence in three ways: first, between policies (e.g. between trade policy and development policy); second, regarding the effects of pertinent policies on different SDGs (e.g. the effects of infrastructure investment on growth and on long-term possibilities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions); and third, regarding the domestic and international implications of policies and their spill over effects (e.g. the impact of trade policies on growth and employment at home as well as abroad) (Lay et al. 2017). Policy coherence thus necessitates the acknowledgement of interlinkages between policies and between SDGs, including those with crosscutting targets, in order to foster synergies and minimise or at least manage trade-offs (ICSU 2017).

Shaping global economic governance

Against the background of their unique position of leading the world's major economies, the G20 leaders should put a special spotlight on reforming

global economic governance and promoting its coherence with the 2030 Agenda (Berensmann, Berger and Brandi 2015; Berger and Brandi 2016; Chen et al. 2017; Scholz et al. 2017). In order to achieve this aim, the G20 countries should find agreement on collective and individual actions that foster the implementation of SDG 17 (“Revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development”) and other SDGs that are pertinent for global economic governance.

In the context of SDG 17 and the other relevant SDGs, the DWG should include in its work programme a five-year process in order to engage in its own work and in discussion with other work streams with a view to fill the following gaps left by existing G20 frameworks and initiatives (Scholz et al. 2017). With regard to finance, the DWG should engage in a process to clarify the role of Official Development Assistance and of other public financial flows in funding investment and activities towards sustainable development (SDGs 17.2, 17.14) (Mackie et al 2013; Janus et al. 2014; UN Secretary General 2016).

There should be more support for the least developed countries (LDC) by the G20 to promote investment (SDGs 17.5, 10.1) and increase their shares in global exports (SDG 17.11) (ITC, WTO and UNCTAD 2015). Improving coherence between the 2030 Agenda and trade and investment policies would also require the G20 to formulate new trade agreements in ways that are aligned with the 2030 Agenda. These agreements, for instance, could facilitate the integration of LDCs into global value chains and safeguard that trade rules and behind-the-border measures do not hinder this integration. More generally, in the context of international trade, G20 leaders should renew their commitment to keep supporting the multilateral trade system and underscore the importance of sustainable development as a key frame of reference for international trade and investment policies (Berger and Brandi 2016; Lay et al. 2017). The G20 leaders could ensure progress, for example, by supporting a WTO General Council interpretive statement that calls on WTO practice to interpret and promote trade rules, such that they are in line with the 2030 Agenda (see also Esty 2016). Last, but not least, in order to foster long-term debt sustainability, the G20 should work on establishing a comprehensive global debt governance framework. This framework could include instruments to prevent and resolve debt crisis, such as principles for responsible lending and borrowing or an insolvency procedure for sovereign states (17.4) (Stiglitz, Ocampo and Guzman 2016).

Reforming international cooperation

The G20 should take concrete steps to reform international cooperation. Such cooperation could foster the implementation of the 2030 Agenda by initiating and diffusing innovative approaches in all cooperation forums and platforms that G20 countries are members of. What is required is going beyond one-way development cooperation approaches and instead moving more strongly towards reciprocity and joint knowledge creation (Chen et al. 2017). The G20 should underline its commitment to the UN, emphasizing the essential role of the UN for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. More particularly, a strengthened United Nations Development System (UNDS) would improve the integration between economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, thereby taking better account of interlinkages and limiting fragmentation (Chen et al. 2017).

A reform of the UNDS would call for modifying the governance procedures in order to improve the alignment of the intergovernmental and executive lines of authority. Moreover, there is a need for a considerable amount of core funding in order to support the delivery of the 2030 Agenda.

Going beyond the UN, the G20 countries should seek to mainstream the 2030 Agenda in all national and international forums in which they participate, for example, in the EU, the African Union, APEC, ASEAN, BRICS, and G7 summits and International Financial Institutions (IFIs). In light of the significance of multilateral development banks (MDB), including those set up only recently, and national development banks in the field of financing sustainable development, the G20 should initiate a dialogue on the potential adoption of SDG-related standards and policies by these financial institutions. As MDBs are underlining the importance of strengthening national systems to cope with socio-environmental standards, the G20 should establish an agenda for the reform of national financial systems into SDG enablers. Last, but not least, the G20 members should promote interconnected mechanisms across these respective forums of international cooperation to make sure that their synergies can be put to use to tackle gaps in terms of financing, technical capabilities, and capacity-building within the context of the 2030 Agenda.

Achievements of the 2016 Hangzhou Summit

The G20 had put development on the agenda at the Seoul Summit in 2010, establishing the DWG in the run-up to the Summit and agreeing on a comprehensive development agenda in Seoul. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda and the leadership of the Chinese G20 Presidency in 2016 injected new dynamism into development as a relatively new field of G20 activity. After the adoption of the 2030 Agenda by all UN members in 2015, the Chinese G20 Presidency took an ambitious stance by trying to convince the other G20 members to actively support it.

The Chinese G20 Presidency successfully adopted the G20 Action Plan on the 2030 Agenda (G20 2016) and turned it into an official document of the Hangzhou Summit in 2016. With that, G20 members committed to contributing to 2030 Agenda implementation through “collective and individual efforts, at home and abroad.” The Action Plan provided a “focus on sectors and themes of the Agenda where the G20 has comparative advantage and could add value as a global forum for economic cooperation” (G20 2016). Furthermore, the G20 Action Plan stated that countries will “integrate sustainable development in domestic policies and plans and international development efforts” (G20 2016).

Moreover, the Action Plan also assigns specific functions to the DWG, which offers a sound basis for G20 activities to facilitate policy learning and reforming as well as enhancing international cooperation. The Action Plan underlines that the DWG will “continue to report directly to, and be strategically guided by, G20 Sherpas to undertake the following functions:

1. Strengthening the role of the G20 in advancing global sustainable development over the long run, ...;
2. Supporting development cooperation, policy and financing actions including the Means of Implementation ... through discussion with the relevant work streams;

3. Supporting Sherpas to enhance policy coordination and coherence for sustainable development across relevant G20 tracks and work streams . . . and reporting to G20 Sherpas on a regular basis;
4. Acting . . . as a forum for sustainable development dialogue between G20 members, low income and developing countries, development stakeholders and the G20 engagement groups, . . . ;
5. Facilitating mutual learning and exchange of experiences and good practices among G20 members on their respective national actions for sustainable development; and
6. Assisting in the delivery of 2030 Agenda-related activities, working closely with other G20 work streams in the Sherpa and Finance tracks, . . .” (G20 2016, 17).

This mandate, assigned to the DWG in 2016, clearly shows that, at the Hangzhou Summit, leaders ascribed a new elevated and overarching function to the DWG that is underpinned by both a strategic commitment to and the leadership of Sherpas, and that allows it to support the endeavours of G20 countries with specific steps.

In light of the need to promote policy coherence, it is a positive sign that the 2016 G20 Action Plan on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted at the 2017 Hangzhou Summit refers to several SDGs under each of the 15 SDS which the Action Plan defines. It is also an achievement that the G20 members have recognized the significance of adopting “whole-of-government” approaches to go beyond both “policy silos” and “silos in government.” The G20 leaders have initiated, for example, the Multi-Year Framework for Policy Coherence and Coordination on Human Resource Development between the G20 Development and Employment Working Groups, and the G20 Action Plan on the 2030 Agenda. This action underlines the importance of moving towards whole-of-government approaches.

At the same time, more can be achieved in terms of stepping up G20 efforts to promote policy coherence for sustainable development. For instance, the DWG could play an important role in advancing a shared definition of PCSD across G20 members and G20 work streams, based on the respective national approaches to the operationalization of the 2030 Agenda in the domestic context (Scholz et al. 2017). Moreover, G20 leaders could make use of their comparative advantage in addressing overarching challenges: for instance, the shaping of global economic governance. Furthermore, the G20 should invest in describing the mechanisms by which the SDSs will contribute to the SDGs that each SDS targets, thereby also explaining how negative effects on other SDGs will be avoided, in order to foster policy coherence.

The Way Forward?

In light of the three challenges outlined above, the comparative advantage of the G20 to act and its responsibility, it is vital for the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda that future G20 presidencies build on the initial steps made by the Chinese and German presidencies. This reflection and view were shared by a group of think tanks from nearly all G20 countries that gathered in the Think20 engagement group during the German presidency under the lead of the German Development Institute/Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE) and the Kiel Institute of World Economy (IfW). There was a strong interest by the think tanks to engage in a joint analysis of the role of the G20 with regard to the 2030 Agenda, and to

formulate policy recommendations for the G20. These think tanks hoped to ensure ambitious collective and individual action (Chen et al. 2017); to advance policy coherence (Lay et al. 2017); and to reform international cooperation so as to facilitate transformative change (Scholz et al. 2017)²:

The G20 needs to continue to demonstrate a strong commitment to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Based on their first outlines of national actions in the G20 Action Plan, all G20 members should clarify their individual timetables on working out their respective national action plans. G20 members should commit to updating these outlines by the 2018 G20 Summit (Scholz and Brandi 2017a). Moreover, the G20 should agree that all members report to the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) in 2018 at the latest in order to reaffirm their commitment to the 2030 Agenda and to inject energy into the implementation process around the world.

Next, the G20 should call on its members to ensure the evaluation of all SDG-related policies and major programmes when designing and formulating national interventions and the evaluation of the Action Plan's performance and of the impact of national policies towards SDGs (Scholz and Brandi 2017a). This will allow the sharing of lessons learned among countries and across sectors, and seed the global development community with fresh findings and knowledge. Positive experiences with implementing the SDGs should be shared among G20 members, especially with a view to monitoring and evaluation.

Then, the DWG should work on a review system for the collective implementation of the 2030 Agenda by the G20, which could help to increase coordination between the DWG and other G20 working groups regarding mainstreaming development issues and could contribute to pertinent accountability reports (Scholz and Brandi 2017a). The review system could also establish a process for identifying specific successful policies, programmes or projects at the national level that are innovative, sustainable, and replicable. These policies, programmes, and projects could be documented and shared as SDG Solutions within a DWG knowledge platform, and thus enable knowledge sharing within and beyond the G20.

Following the multi-stakeholder approach of the 2030 Agenda, building on innovative activities undertaken by the German G20 Presidency, the DWG should establish regular dialogue events with the G20 Engagement Groups with a focus on implementation (Scholz and Brandi 2017a). In addition, regular consultations with other line ministries beyond those responsible for development policy and cooperation should be held. Regarding the composition of the DWG delegations, it is essential that they include those national-level institutions responsible for 2030 Agenda implementation.

Finally, the G20 should elaborate tangible steps to reform international cooperation for the effective delivery of the 2030 Agenda while taking into consideration existing commitments and differences in resources and capabilities between countries (Scholz and Brandi 2017a). In the context of partnerships, international cooperation will have to change its one-way approach from developed to developing countries, moving towards reciprocity and joint knowledge creation. Reforms by the G20 should put a specific focus on global economic governance and coordination, as suggested in SDGs 10 and 17.

²The remainder of this section is based on the summary of the T20 recommendations outlined in Scholz and Brandi (2017a).

The G20's confirmation of the UN as the most important international body for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda indicates that the G20 does not seek to generate a parallel process that could undercut the UN. The G20 should encourage its members to tap into the UN Development System (UNDS) when formulating their national action plans, acknowledging the UNDS' indispensable role for implementation (Scholz and Brandi 2017a). More specifically, the G20 should promote a dialogue among its members in order to develop a common agenda for reforming and strengthening the UNDS. This agenda should be used to adjust the institution to the challenges posed by the 2030 Agenda and to enable the integration between the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, thereby addressing systemic interlinkages, reducing fragmentation and fostering developmental partnerships.

The German G20 Presidency and the 2030 Agenda

To what extent has the German G20 Presidency lived up to the recommendations outlined in the last section?³ The negotiation process with regard to the 2030 Agenda was carried forward by the DWG, and the overall atmosphere of the talks was considered to be constructive and guided by the interest in finding common ground. This was facilitated by the cautiously positive approach of the new U.S. administration towards the 2030 Agenda.⁴ In this way, the DWG was able to avoid a fall back. Ambitious steps forward, however, were not possible either. Overall, therefore, the outcome of the 2017 Hamburg Summit cannot be considered to be a breakthrough for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, but it does provide several entry points for tangible advancement.

In the outcome document of the 2017 Hamburg Summit, the "G20 Leaders' Declaration: Shaping an interconnected world", the G20 "commit to further align our actions with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its integral part, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development, domestically and internationally, including in support of developing countries and the provision of public goods" (G20 2017a).

This is an important achievement: in light of President Trump's "America First" approach, the renewal of the G20 commitment to the 2030 Agenda in the official Summit communiqué can be regarded as singular success. Moreover, it is a success that the G20 managed to find consensus on supplementary steps to push the implementation of the 2030 Agenda (Scholz and Brandi 2017b). At the 2017 G20 Summit, building on the Hangzhou Action Plan, the G20 leaders agreed on the so-called "Hamburg Update: Taking forward the G20 Action Plan on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," which is one of the official outcome documents of the Summit and on which future G20 presidencies ought to build. The Hamburg Update contains three new commitments that were elaborated by

³The following assessment of the outcome of the 2017 Hamburg Summit from the perspective of the 2030 Agenda builds on Scholz and Brandi (2017b).

⁴The U.S. State Department engaged in a partnership which frames the SDGs as unreasonable but noteworthy goals and which consists of "governments, multinationals, and with the singular focus of accelerating our ability to achieve these noteworthy goals by leveraging market forces" (see <https://unreasonable-goals.com/>).

the DWG (G20 2017a, 2–3). In addition, a list of collective actions relevant to the 2030 Agenda was worked out under the German Presidency by the other work streams (3–6). All preceding pertinent G20 commitments that are relevant for promoting the 2030 Agenda were included (G20 2017a, 6–18).

What are the major achievements of the 2017 Hamburg Summit against the background of the key T20 recommendation outlined above? Two key T20 recommendations for the G20 were agreed upon during the German G20 presidency. First, as mentioned above, there was a repeat of the G20's commitment to implementing the 2030 Agenda. Secondly, the G20 agreed to provide an update of the Hangzhou Action Plan. It is also an achievement that the list of collective actions included in the Hamburg Update covers all 17 SDGs, and it will constitute an important success regarding domestic implementation of the 2030 Agenda if all are made progress on.

Another important recommendation by the T20 Task Force on the 2030 Agenda was for the G20 members to commit to voluntary reporting to the UN HLPF by 2019 (Scholz and Brandi 2017a). The Leaders' Declaration of the Hamburg Summit does recognize the important role of the multilateral UN process in attaining the SDGs and expresses support for the HLPF. Moreover, the Hamburg Update clarifies that the reports should be "expedited, high quality and regular" (G20 2017a). At the same time, no consensus could be reached about when G20 members will have to hand in their first reports (Scholz and Brandi 2017b).

As outlined above, the T20 also recommended to review collective G20 implementation efforts regarding the 2030 agenda and to generate a framework for monitoring and evaluating national policies (Scholz and Brandi 2017a). The DWG published its 2017 Annual Progress Report (APR), which tracks advancements on all active G20 development commitments, and analysed a few 2030-Agenda-related commitments outside the DWG's remit (G20 2017c). In the future, as agreed, the APR will have to include a review of the entire list of collective actions and commitments contained in the Hamburg Update (G20 2017a, 3–18). This progress review is a formal exercise that can contribute to raising awareness and increasing transparency. However, realizing the transformative change required to implement the 2030 Agenda demands more substantial learning and evaluation processes (Scholz and Brandi 2017b).

Two additional commitments contained in the Hamburg Update offer more potential in this context (Scholz and Brandi 2017b). First of all, the document envisages voluntary peer learning regarding the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including in low-income countries. Secondly, the Hamburg Update indicates that the G20 committed to "having a regular knowledge exchange with G20 engagement groups hosted by the G20 presidency, focusing on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including the promotion of multi-stakeholder approaches" (G20 2017a, 3). Following the Hamburg Update, the G20 DWG is expected to promote the active participation of the Engagements Groups and facilitate "a structured, continuous and timely dialogue and knowledge exchange with all engagement groups" (G20 2017a, 3). In the run-up to the Hamburg Summit, the German presidency organized a morning-long workshop in Bonn in which delegates, academics, and representatives from business and civil society engaged in open and structured dialogue on new topics such as urbanization. Moreover, in the aftermath of the 2017 Hamburg Summit, the Germany G20 presidency, together with the United Nations Development Programme

(UNDP) and the OECD, organized a workshop with the Engagements Groups and focused on sustainable development and inclusive globalization. It remains an open question whether future presidencies, Argentina (2018), Japan (2019), and Saudi Arabia (2020), will continue to facilitate, or even broaden, this innovative dialogue and outreach format.

Last but not least, there are several relevant outcomes of the German G20 presidency that were attained outside the DWG. For example, the G20 committed to: “fostering the implementation of labour, social and environmental standards and human rights” in global supply chains. In addition, it was agreed to provide “national action plans on business and human rights” and “to eliminate child labour by 2025, forced labour, human trafficking and all forms of modern slavery” (G20 2017b, 4–5). Moreover, the 2017 Hamburg Leader’s Declaration includes a statement of all G20 members but the United States that “the Paris Agreement is irreversible” and members will go on “swiftly towards its full implementation” (G20 2017b, 10). Whereas the protection of soils and biodiversity is not explicitly referred to, the outcome document contains two remarkable commitments by the G20. First, the G20 committed to improved food security through increased agricultural productivity but also committed that such productivity not undermine sustainable management and protection of water and water-related ecosystems. In addition, a Marine Litter Action Plan was agreed to that seeks to prevent and reduce marine litter (G20 2017b, 12). These commitments will help to implement SDG 2 (“End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture”), SDG 6 (“ensure access to water and sanitation for all”), SDG 14 (“conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources”), and SDG 12 (“Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns”). It should also be noted that the 2017 G20 Leader’s Declaration contains a commitment to safeguard against health crises and strengthen health systems (G20 2017b, 8), which can contribute to fulfilling SDG 3 (“Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages”) (United Nations 2015). Finally, the Leader’s Declaration includes a commitment for a rules-based global trading system (G20 2017b, 3), which, as discussed above, is key for fostering the 2030 Agenda, above all SDG 17 (“Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development”) (United Nations 2015).

Overall, while there have been a number of achievements in the context of the German G20 presidency, there are still weaknesses in terms of the G20 promoting the 2030 Agenda (Scholz and Brandi 2017b). For instance, while there is a list of concrete collective actions in the Hamburg Update that address all 17 SDGs, the U.S. administration has not endorsed this section of the Hamburg Update as it is “still reviewing the collective actions that were supported by previous leadership” (G20 2017a, 1).

Another shortcoming of the outcome of the 2017 Hamburg Summit is that synergies and trade-offs between the collective actions of the G20 were not addressed (Scholz and Brandi 2017b). Moreover, no gap analysis of relevant actions was undertaken or committed to by the G20. In order to reduce “economic, social, ecological and political risks” (G20 2017a, 5), it would have been important to work out mechanisms by which the SDS included in the Hangzhou Action Plan and echoed by the Hamburg Update will help to attain the SDGs and promote policy coherence and coordination. The potential of such mechanisms remain, for the moment, unfulfilled.

It is also worth mentioning the role of the development finance institutions in the context of the German G20 Presidency and its efforts to foster

the 2030 Agenda (Scholz and Brandi 2017b). As stated by the Annual Progress Report of the DWG, the multilateral financial institutions working group on environmental and social standards, led by the World Bank, has been joined by all co-hosts of the Global Infrastructure Forum, including the regional development banks, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) and the New Development Bank (NDB), among others. This represents a step forward in terms of adhering to such standards. However, the Joint Principles and Ambitions on Crowding-In Private Finance (“Hamburg Principles and Ambitions”) of the Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) do not contain any significant reference to the 2030 Agenda. This key opportunity to define sustainability criteria for private and public investment thus remained untapped.

Conclusion

Collective action to promote the 2030 Agenda is more urgent than ever. The Earth’s ecosystems face multiple tipping points that threaten the future of human development. Avoiding these tipping points is dependent on switching energy generation, transport, and heat to renewable energy technologies, and reducing the heavy burden on soils, biodiversity, oceans, watersheds, and climate associated with resource and energy-intensive production and consumption patterns and practices in agriculture and forestry. An increasing concentration of incomes, economic power, and knowledge as well as command over technologies will reduce the transformative capacity of societies within and outside the G20.

In light of their economic weight and their impact on global environmental change, all G20 members should do their share to respect the global consensus to achieve the 2030 Agenda and to promote global cooperation. In order to step up efforts to promote the 2030 Agenda, G20 leaders should make use of their unique position and comparative advantage to tackle issues of overarching importance for achieving this objective, above all by promoting policy coherence for sustainable development, shaping global economic governance, and reforming international cooperation.

As argued above, the G20 has specific responsibilities as well as opportunities and levers to foster the implementation of the Agenda. Yet, during the German G20 Presidency, reforms of the global economic governance framework and the role of international financial institutions in the provision of global public goods were out of reach. In light of challenging geopolitical situations facing Leaders during the German G20 presidency, the Hamburg Summit generated many positive results. The G20 managed to stick to previous commitments, such as speaking out in favour of a multilateral and rules-based trade system and phasing out of fossil fuel subsidies, albeit still without a clear timeline.

Summing up, some progress has been achieved but a number of challenges still need to be tackled. First, the Hamburg Action Plan refers to “achieving strong, sustainable, balanced and inclusive growth” but neither includes a reference to the 2030 Agenda nor a definition of “sustainable.” Therefore, an important question is when the economic and financial dimensions of the G20 agenda will include the protection of the environment and climate change mitigation as major objectives. Moreover, it is still an open question whether the G20 will also put to use the principles and

collective action listed in the Hamburg Update to Global South and indeed Global North cooperation.

Today's global challenges cannot be solved without G20 countries. It is thus laudable that the G20 is committed to the 2030 Agenda. Yet, it is still an open question whether the G20's commitment to promote the implementation of the 2030 Agenda will result in any concrete improvement. Following Germany, the G20 presidency has been taken by Argentina. The G20 should do all it can to build on the progress achieved so far, to fulfil the commitments made in 2017 and to address the major shortcomings that remain to be tackled in order to leverage the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and foster sustainable development for all.

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