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**SWEDISH RESPONSIBILITY AND THE UNITED NATIONS  
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS**

Magdalena Bexell, Kristina Jönsson



# Swedish Responsibility and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

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# Preface

The UN general assembly has adopted an agenda with 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) to be achieved by 2030, the so called Agenda 2030. The aim of this agenda is to end all forms of poverty, fighting inequalities and tackling climate change – no one should be left behind. Agenda 2030 is global in nature and universally applicable. All countries should contribute to the achievement of the SDGs and should adjust their political priorities accordingly. The Swedish government is determined to take global lead in the work to implement the Agenda and the SDGs at national level, as well as to contribute to its realisation at the international level not least through Swedish development cooperation policy. However, the work of implementing the Agenda will necessarily have to involve multiple actors, including the Riksdag, the Swedish Government, the public agencies, the civil society organisations, the municipalities and the business sphere. For it to be successful, a clear division of responsibility which allows holding different parties accountable for their work is desirable.

This report studies the ongoing process of shaping the institutional context and formalising the division of responsibility among the stakeholders in Sweden. The authors, Kristina Jönsson and Magdalena Bexell, seek to identify key concerns on how the work on the SDG's is being organised and on the accountability challenges that emerge. Based on a conceptual framework and interviews with key actors involved in the ongoing SDG policy work, including members of parliament, CSO representatives, state-secretaries and other officials, they identify five tensions that need to be addressed for the Swedish implementation of the Agenda to be successful. These tensions are not new, or unique for this process. Thus they are relevant to consider also in relation to other policy areas such as the Swedish policy for global development (PGD).

This report strives to widen the discussion on the SDGs, setting focus on the issue of responsibility. By structuring the analysis according to a past, present and future order the reader gets a good understanding of the policy process of the SDGs up until today. We believe that the report could be of interest for everyone that would like to learn about the background to the Agenda and how the work in Sweden with implementation has evolved. The report can also be of

interest to those who are involved in the process, not least politicians who need to think about how to mobilise the interest of other actors, i.e. businesses and civil society, to engage in the implementation. To advance the understanding, the authors present three scenarios for the future that build on the outcomes of how the tensions can be tackled. The scenarios suggest possible consequences of how responsibility is distributed, shared and taken and consequently also on how it affects accountability in the process.

The analysis highlights questions about the capacity of different actors to take responsibility, of their mandate and of their willingness to do so. With the Government's high ambition to become a global leader in the realisation work at the global level together with the broad involvement of many different stakeholders within and outside the government, follows high expectations on delivery from the national and the international community. We hope that this report will contribute to the present debate on shaping the work on the Agenda.

The work on this report has benefitted from a dialogue with a reference group chaired by Malin Mobjörk, member of the EBA. The responsibility for analysis and conclusions expressed in the report rests solely with the authors.



Lars Heikensten

# Sammanfattning

I september 2015 beslutade FN:s generalförsamling att anta nya globala mål för hållbar utveckling som ska uppfyllas senast år 2030. Nu står förverkligandet av målen på nationell nivå i centrum för länder världen över. Vi utgår i denna rapport från att en tydlig ansvarsfördelning är en förutsättning för att de omfattande målen ska kunna nås. Utifrån en begreppslik diskussion av ansvar och ansvarsutkrävande identifierar rapporten på basis av intervjuer och policymaterial viktiga utmaningar som kan uppstå i det svenska arbetet med målen.

En första utmaning är att ta ett steg vidare från nuvarande fokus på regeringens politiska institutionella ansvar mot att även ringa in andra aktörers ansvar. Den svenska regeringen har organiserat arbetet med de nya hållbarhetsmålen genom att ge särskilt ansvar till ett urval ministrar och deras respektive departement samt genom att utse en nationell delegation som ska främja målens genomförande. Därtill har civilsamhälle, företag, regioner, kommuner och forskarvärlden uttryckt ambitioner att ta ansvar för målen – om än mer trevande. I rapporten betonar vi att även enskilda individer är viktiga i två avseenden: deras livsstil påverkar möjligheterna att nå hållbarhetsmålen i Sverige och andra länder; och de kan genom att rösta i val hålla politiker ansvariga för hur arbetet mot målen framskrider nationellt och internationellt. En annan utmaning är hur intresset för målen ska upprätthållas långsiktigt när mer kortsiktiga kriser kräver uppmärksamhet och resurser. Rapporten framhåller att ett sätt att hålla liv i de satsningar som nu görs oavsett framtida politiska majoritetsförhållanden är att involvera riksdagen i större utsträckning än hittills. Ett annat sätt är att svenska myndigheter får tydliga mandat och tillräckligt med resurser för att arbeta med Agenda 2030 i Sverige såväl som utomlands.

Ytterligare utmaningar som formar förutsättningarna för ansvarstagande härrör från fem spänningar som rapporten identifierar i den svenska kontexten: (1) mellan att skapa nya strukturer och att arbeta inom de existerande; (2) mellan att arbeta med målen som ett helhetspaket och att fördela ansvaret för olika mål på olika instanser; (3) mellan hållbarhetsmålen och andra politiska prioriteringar; (4) mellan regeringens formella ansvar för politisk styrning och frivilligt ansvarstagande av ickestatliga aktörer; samt (5) mellan egna svenska

internationella satsningar och prioritering av multilateralt samarbete. Hur dessa spänningar hanteras under de kommande åren påverkar möjligheterna att nå målen på lång sikt. Mållkonflikter kommer att uppstå under resans gång och de personer vi intervjuat betonar att ansvaret för att hantera dessa ligger hos det politiska ledarskapet. Rapporten understryker att de nya hållbarhetsmålen överlappar med och påverkar andra politiska mål hos regering och riksdag, till exempel Sveriges Politik för global utveckling och de 16 svenska miljömål som riksdagen beslutat. Att tydliggöra hur dessa olika måluppsättningar relaterar till de nya hållbarhetsmålen är en politisk utmaning, liksom risken för urvattning av styrkraften hos policier för hållbar utveckling.

Rapporten identifierar vidare ett antal utmaningar vad gäller ansvarsutkrävande. De nya hållbarhetsmålen kom till genom en ovanligt öppen global process. Samtidigt leder bredare deltagande till frågor om vem som får delta, samt hur de sedan hålls ansvariga för sitt inflytande på beslutens utformning. Sådana frågor är även relevanta i en svensk kontext där ett antal organisationer från civilsamhället blivit inbjudna till dialog med beslutsfattare och deltagit i officiella delegationer vid internationella förhandlingar om hållbarhetsmålen. Kan dessa organisationer upprätthålla sin fristående roll som granskare även när de påverkat regeringens position i olika frågor? Också vad gäller ansvarsutkrävande framhåller vi att bristen på ägandeskap bland riksdagsledamöter i fråga om hållbarhetsmålen är en utmaning i relationen mellan väljare, riksdag och regering. Fler riksdagsutskott än utrikesutskottet bör involveras för att öka riksdagens engagemang.

Genomförandet av hållbarhetsmålen till 2030 vilar till stor del på frivillighet eftersom de har sin grund i en global politisk överenskommelse, vilket kan försvåra ansvarsutkrävandet om politisk vilja saknas. Uppfyllandet av målen kommer kontinuerligt att utvärderas och mätas med utgångspunkt i 230 indikatorer som tagits fram i FN. Kvantitativa indikatorer är ett sätt att samla in information som ligger till grund för ansvarsutkrävande. Samtidigt pekar rapporten på att för mycket fokus på kvantitativ utvärdering kan leda till att bredare ambitioner i Agenda 2030 kommer i skymundan. Det gäller till exempel mänskliga rättigheter som betonas i inledningen till FN:s generalförsamlings överenskommelse om hållbarhetsmålen. Även om FN-ledda utvärderingar av länders arbete med målen kan ge upphov till gruppträck bland regeringar, kommer ansvarsutkrävandet framför allt ske på nationell och lokal nivå genom nationella politiska institutioner. Därmed blir det upp till enskilda medborgares

engagemang om hållbarhetsmålen blir föremål för formellt politiskt ansvarsutkrävande eller inte.

Sammantaget visar vi i rapporten att en tydlig ansvarsfördelning är en förutsättning för effektivt ansvarsutkrävande. Begreppen ansvar och ansvarsutkrävande utgör en fruktbar grund för vidare debatt om de nya målens förverkligande, inte minst vad gäller vilken roll civilsamhälle, näringsliv och forskarvärlden kan och bör spela framöver. Rapporten avslutas med förslag på frågor som kan inspirera till ytterligare debatt och framtida forskning.

# Summary

In September 2015, the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted by all UN Member States. Attention now turns to realisation of the goals at national level. In light of their broad scope, a clear allocation of responsibilities is a prerequisite for achieving the SDGs by the end date, 2030. Based on a conceptual framework, policy material and a set of interviews with policy-makers, this report identifies key responsibility concerns and accountability challenges in the Swedish context.

A key concern is to move forward from the current emphasis on the organisation of political-institutional responsibility in order to also identify other actors' responsibility. The Swedish Government has organised SDG work by assigning special responsibilities to a select set of ministers, and by appointing a national SDG delegation. Beyond government responsibility at national level, actors at other political levels (regional, municipal) and sectors (civil society, business, academia) express SDG ambitions, albeit more tentatively. We also emphasise that individual citizens have a pivotal role in two main respects: firstly, individuals' everyday lifestyle decisions will impact the achievement of the SDGs in Sweden and abroad; and secondly, voters must hold current and future politicians accountable for their SDG work. We find that another concern is how to maintain momentum when events in the outside world compete with the SDGs for attention and resources. This report suggests that one way to keep SDG processes going, regardless of Swedish political majority shifts, is through better parliamentary involvement than has been the case so far. Another way is by providing government agencies with mandates and resources strong enough to work with the extensive 2030 Agenda at home and abroad.

The report identifies five tensions that are likely to impact the realisation of responsibility in the Swedish context: (1) a point of tension between creating new and working with existing structures; (2) a point of tension between a holistic approach and a clear division of responsibilities; (3) a point of tension between the SDGs and other political interests; (4) a point of tension between mandatory and voluntary-based responsibility; and (5) point of tension between acting unilaterally and multilaterally in the international setting. The way these tensions are tackled in these formative years will affect

future SDG prospects. Goal conflicts will emerge as SDG work continues, and responsibility for resolving them lies with political leadership. The report highlights that the SDGs have a bearing on several overarching Swedish Government policy objectives and that the relationship between those objectives and the SDGs is far from clear. This lack of clarity risks weakening the steering power of ambitious policy objectives and overburdening those responsible for their implementation.

The report identifies several accountability challenges. More open global policy-making increases participation, but invites questions on who gets to participate and how those persons or organisations are held accountable for their influence on substantive policy outcomes. These questions are also relevant at the national level in Sweden, where a set of civil society organisations has been repeatedly invited to dialogue with policy-makers and has participated in official delegations. Can civil society organisations maintain their important critical watchdog role after having provided direct input to government positions? The low degree of parliamentary ownership of SDG processes is also a challenge for securing long-term accountability relationships between voters, parliament and government. Parliamentary committees on areas other than development cooperation must become involved.

The voluntary-based nature of the SDGs also leads to accountability challenges, as hard enforcement measures are lacking. Progress toward achieving the goals will be evaluated based on a set of 230 indicators. Quantitative indicators can be a way to collect information that facilitates demands for accountability. Yet the report points out that overconfidence in quantitative data collection risks broader ambitions within which indicators are embedded becoming secondary. Even if UN-based review promotes peer pressure among governments, national and local levels remain the primary locations for broader systematic accountability relationships between citizens and governments. A challenge is to make governments' SDG responsibilities – still remote to many citizens' concerns – part of those relationships.

Overall, we find a need for more joint debate on the extent and substance of SDG responsibilities at different political levels and the responsibilities of non-state actors. Clear responsibilities are a prerequisite for effective accountability. The report concludes with suggestions for questions for further debate and research.

# Introduction

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were formally adopted by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in September 2015, following broad consultations around the world and intensive intergovernmental negotiations. While their predecessor – the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – put poverty reduction in low-income countries on the global agenda, the SDGs address both rich and poor countries and have a broader substantive scope. They aim, for instance, to end poverty in all its forms everywhere, to end hunger and ensure healthy lives, to achieve gender equality and inclusive economic growth, to combat climate change, and to promote peaceful societies (see Appendix A of all 17 goals). Their end date is 2030, and quantitative goal indicators are under elaboration by the UN. In addition to the UN Sustainable Development Summit in September, 2015 also saw the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction in March, the Conference on Financing for Development in Addis Ababa in July and the Climate Change Conference (COP21) in Paris in December, during which the Paris Agreement was negotiated. That year is therefore referred to as the ‘super year for development’, and these global agreements will set the stage for international and domestic sustainability work for many years to come. In the face of competing urgent issues, realising the SDGs will be a daunting task for the international community, individual countries and local stakeholders.

In light of the broad scope of the SDGs and the indeterminate language of UN summit documents, a clear allocation of responsibilities will be a precondition for goal attainment. Views on responsibility will gradually develop through policy-making and broader sustainability debates within and between countries, in civil society, the business sector, academia and other sectors. The formal adoption of the SDGs triggers a new phase, where national policy-making and implementation take centre stage. Attention successively turns to the national and local levels. This phase will look very different depending on national circumstances related to state capacity, resources, political system, degree of conflict, and not least, political will. In Sweden’s case, the SDGs have entered into policy-making at national level in several domains. This is a formative phase



for the allocation of responsibility that sets the stage for future Swedish work towards the goals.

This report analyses how SDG responsibility and accountability develop from a Swedish perspective. By ‘responsibility’ we mean forward-looking obligations attached to actor roles, whereas we use ‘accountability’ in a retrospective sense, in which actors must answer for the extent to which they fulfil their responsibilities. We are interested in how and why responsibilities are adopted by or assigned to different actors. More specifically, we ask two main questions: (1) What key concerns stem from how Swedish responsibility is organised? and (2) What challenges to accountability emerge? By studying the SDG process from its inception in global consultations to possible future scenarios in the Swedish context we identify key points of tension and challenges related to responsibility and accountability. The ways in which these are tackled set the stage for future work towards realising the goals. However, notions about responsibility are often implicit, path-dependent or taken for granted. The report therefore aims to provide a systematic and conceptually-based discussion of responsibility throughout different phases of the policy process. Thereby, the report contributes to an emerging field of study centred on SDG realisation that is of interest to a wide readership. National, regional and local level policy-makers, civil society associations in various fields, researchers, teachers, and others with a broad interest in sustainable development and governance issues might be part of this readership.

The SDG agreement is not a legally binding treaty; its realisation has to rely on political commitment underpinned by financial and institutional capacities. Due to high ambitions, repeatedly expressed by ministers, members of the Riksdag (parliament), government officials, and civil society representatives, Sweden is a particularly illustrative case study on how countries translate the SDGs into national level policies and organisation. The report does not provide a holistic picture of the SDG process from its inception to the present, or a detailed analysis of the substance of individual goals. Rather, the report studies the overall organisation of responsibility for the set of goals as a whole and in relation to accountability in the Swedish case. We do not employ a clear-cut distinction between domestic and international SDG responsibility, as the policy-making processes in focus entail both. SDG processes were initially located in the realm of international development cooperation

but have increasingly been taken up in other policy domains, which bridge the national-international divide. Already in 2003 the Swedish Parliament adopted a Policy for Global Development (PGD) with the aim of creating coherence between aid policy and other policy realms such as trade and environment. The SDGs provide a similar holistic ambition. This report does not, however, examine the PGD itself (see instead Fellesson and Román, forthcoming, and see Weitz et al., 2015 for a report on the SDGs in the domestic Swedish setting).

Writing a report on SDG responsibility means studying rapidly changing and overlapping policy processes, where deadlines are often unclear, and our interviews confirm that many unresolved issues remain with regard to SDG planning. The report must therefore only be viewed as a snapshot of the initial stage of a 15-year process. Our interpretations provide an outside perspective that may differ from inside perspectives. However, we hope that the report nurtures forward-looking discussion on what we regard as key issues for the SDGs.

The report builds on empirical material that we analysed using a political-theory based framework (Ch. 2). Informed by a process-tracing method (Collier, 2011) to follow policy developments in arenas where the global SDG agreement becomes part of Swedish policy-making, we draw on three different kinds of material, namely interviews, policy documents and academic research.

Firstly, from December 2015 until March 2016, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 19 actors involved in SDG policy work: four members of the Riksdag belonging to the Committee on Foreign Affairs, two politically-appointed state secretaries, six government officials at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Ministry of the Environment and Energy, six representatives from civil society organisations and one official at the Swedish Development Cooperation Development Agency (Sida) (Appendix B). The questions concerned how they view their and others' responsibility and the main challenges and opportunities involved in working with the SDGs. Our focus lies on participants in the first stage of national level policy-making. For this reason, we chose not to include municipal or regional political representatives or the private business sector, as their respective SDG obligations merit full reports on their own. In addition, we have not focused on government agencies, because at the time of our interviews they had not yet received substantive instructions concerning their SDG responsibilities. One

exception is an interview with a Sida representative, as we wished to ask about lessons from the MDGs for Swedish development cooperation. When selecting members of parliament we approached all opposition parties' spokesperson on development cooperation policy in order to balance the views of the government reflected at government-initiated events and in interviews with state secretaries and government officials. Some of those who were approached were, however, unavailable for an interview. We partially anonymised our interviewees in this report, as our interest lies primarily in the perspectives of the organisations they represent. For this reason, we refer to state secretaries, government officials, members of the Riksdag and civil society organisation representatives.

Secondly, we draw upon a selection of the vast policy material from the UN consultation process held between 2012–2015, including the outcome documents from the New York and Addis Ababa summits. Yet, this report does not set out to account for the extensive political negotiations behind the outcome documents. In addition, we use Swedish policy decisions and statements on the SDGs collected from ministries, government agencies and civil society organisations such as CONCORD Sweden, and as reported in Swedish daily newspapers or on the Government's website in order to find the most current information. We strived to balance the selection of policy statements and reports. However, as the present stage of policy-making is government-driven, there is a bias in the amount of material towards the Swedish Government's documents.

Thirdly, we draw on academic research, which consists of political-theoretical works on responsibility. Those assist us in developing conceptual distinctions according to which responsibility and accountability can be systematically studied. To some extent, we also use academic literature on implementation challenges of the MDGs (e.g. Fehling et al., 2013; Fukuda-Parr et al., 2014; Unterhalter, 2014) and of Agenda 21 (e.g. Feichtinger and Pregernig, 2005; Forsberg, 2002). This provides a basis for drawing upon lessons learnt from SDG predecessors. Finally, we use the burgeoning literature on the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs (e.g. Fukuda-Parr and McNeill, 2015; Pogge and Sengupta, 2015; Vandemoortele 2014).

The next section outlines the key concepts of responsibility and accountability, and the phases of the policy process that guide our analysis in subsequent chapters. Next, the report is structured according to the three main stages of past, present and future. Chapter

three deals with the past, where we present a consultation phase and a decision phase stretching from 2012 to 2015. Chapter four, on the present stage, examines the national policy formulation phase and the deliberation phase, while Chapter five is devoted to the future, where we present an implementation phase and an evaluation phase. Chapter five also summarises challenges and opportunities for SDG responsibility in terms of three scenarios. In the conclusion we discuss our major findings and provide ideas on continued research.

# RESPONSIBILITY, ACCOUNTABILITY AND THE POLICY PROCESS

This chapter introduces our key concepts and related distinctions that guide the analysis in subsequent chapters. We use a process-oriented perspective to study how responsibility and accountability develop and therefore also identify the main phases of the policy process, underscoring issues related to participation in the different phases.

## Responsibility

For an individual or an organisation to be responsible means being required to undertake specific tasks with a forward-looking perspective. To bear such prospective responsibility is to have a duty or obligation, in virtue of a role that one plays, to ensure that something happens (Zimmerman, 1992:1089). Concepts such as obligations, duties, roles and tasks belong to this forward-looking meaning of responsibility and we use them interchangeably in this report (Cane, 2002:31). A key distinction is between individual and institutional responsibility. Individuals exercise responsibility by carrying out the expectations and obligations of several more or less well-defined roles such as employee, parent or citizen. In the political-institutional setting of sustainable development governance, responsibility is primarily exercised through the collective action of institutional agency rather than individual agency. Organisations have greater capacity for deliberation and action than individuals (Erskine, 2003:26). In political-institutional arenas, setting goals must involve the identification of agents who are responsible for their fulfilment and who control the means to realise goals (Pogge and Sengupta, 2015). In the ideal case, the relationship between political-institutional and individuals' responsibility for sustainable development is one of mutual reinforcement.

The allocation of role responsibility can be based on different sources and limits, though they are not always explicitly defined. Key sources of responsibility consist of legal, moral, political and social custom sources (Miller, 2001; Lucas, 1993:54-55). In addition, a recurrent theme is the extent to which past activities causing a

particular problem is a source of present responsibilities, for instance with regard to global environmental problems or former colonial relations. Limits of responsibility arise both on ideological grounds and due to material circumstances. Political ideologies hold different views on public and private responsibility, mirroring deeper conflicts on the role of states and markets in, for example, sustainability affairs. Material and institutional limits arise from a lack of capacity due to resource scarcity, insufficient know-how and weak mandates, to name a few. A prerequisite for an agent of responsibility to exercise its obligations is the capacity to do so, financially, politically, technically or otherwise. In other words, the agent who is assigned obligations needs to have ‘response-ability’ (Fukuda-Parr and McNeill, 2015).

## Accountability

‘Accountability’ refers to someone having to answer for the way in which that person or organisation carries out its obligations. Such retrospective judgement implies bearing responsibility for events in the past, whether it refers to a failure to fulfil a duty or something praiseworthy. Concepts such as accountability and answerability deal with this backwards-looking sense. Effective accountability requires channels for exchanging reliable information between decision-makers and those affected by decisions, as well as monitoring and sanctioning instruments (Fearon, 1999; Lucas, 1993:184). In the case of quantitative goal-setting, accountability is steered in the direction of that which can be measured, which can distort original policy intentions. Even so, ‘count-ability’ often shapes forms of accountability in sustainable development governance (Fukuda-Parr and McNeill, 2015; Hansen and Muhlen-Schulte, 2012). Today, a broad set of actors is involved in such governance. Those actors face quite different formal accountability relationships. Elected politicians are accountable to their electorate, chief executive officers are accountable to their boards and boards are accountable to shareholders (Fearon, 1999). Civil society organisations face possible accountability relationships with a variety of stakeholders, such as boards, donors, beneficiaries and members.

Global policy-making raises challenges for accountability, as those who are affected often have, at best, very indirect means of holding decision-makers in government, business or civil society sectors accountable. In the international setting of sustainable

development governance, effective enforcement and vertical accountability is absent and most commitments made by governments are non-binding (Ocampo and Gómez-Arteaga, 2016). Many governments, particularly in states lacking rule of law, do not function as a key link in accountability chains between citizens and companies that operate transnationally. Researchers have raised challenging issues related to representation and accountability of civil society, particularly in the case of transnational policy-making (e.g. Brown and Moore, 2001; Pallas, 2010). When such organisations speak on behalf of groups that are otherwise without political influence, these groups, in turn, have few means to hold civil society accountable. At the same time, a key function of civil society is to demand accountability from other power-wielders, within and beyond individual states.

## The policy process: from consultation to evaluation

The allocation of responsibilities takes place through policy processes at different political levels. In the case of the SDGs, these range from the global to the local level. Theories of policy-making underscore how different interests of participating actors shape policy processes (Sabatier and Weible, 2014). The division of the policy process into phases – according to which the report is structured – serves an analytical purpose enabling us to study how participation changes across the phases. This helps us distinguish how views on responsibility develop through interlinked policy processes at national and global level (Buse et al., 2012; Innes and Booher, 2003). During the consultation phase, or the agenda-setting phase, debate on the responsibilities of different actors is key, including how historical trajectories should influence current obligations. Research on agenda-setting highlights the importance of political momentum for policy change (Kingdon, 2002). The decision phase steers responsibility discussion in a more formal direction. Research on participation in international relations shows that the most open phases of the policy process are policy formulation and implementation while decision-making is much less open. Non-state actors thus enjoy least access to the politically most important phase of international cooperation (Tallberg et al., 2013:260; Pallas, 2010).

During national policy formation and deliberation phases, institutional adaptation in order to take on new obligations takes place, as well as broader legitimisation efforts outside elite policy-

making circles. In our case, policy-making also shifts from the global to the national Swedish level. Political science research shows that the Swedish policy-making process stands out in comparison with other countries due to its strong emphasis on the preparatory phases of fact investigation and deliberations where broad agreements and participation are highly valued (Petersson, 2016). During these phases, policy debate on obligations and organisation of responsibility reveals expectations and ambitions among actors in the Swedish context. Here, the conceptual framework allows us to distinguish between individual and institutional responsibility as well as between different sources of responsibility. We also raise questions on who participates in policy formation and how they are held accountable.

During the implementation phase, decisions must be turned into policy and practice by a wide range of actors, which, in light of the encompassing character of the SDGs, involves several overlapping policy sectors (cf. Hill and Hupe, 2009; Sabatier and Weibel, 2014). During the evaluation phase, which in the case of the SDGs will overlap with implementation, accountability becomes central. The report's forward-looking section allows us to elaborate on the role of quantitative goal-setting for accountability in sustainable development governance (Fukuda-Parr et al., 2014; Unterhalter, 2014; Hickel, 2016).

Following the policy process enables us to see how responsibility and accountability build on each other, and how accountability presupposes that responsibilities are clearly identified in advance. Yet, due to the political nature of policy processes, we know that negotiations often result in vague agreements where much interpretation of the reach of responsibility is put in the hands of those charged with implementation (Hill and Hupe, 2009). Studying the policy process over time helps us identify points of tension (section 5.1) that arise as responsibility commitments made during early stages are to be realised and evaluated. A process perspective also facilitates discussion about the relationship between participation and responsibility.



# PAST

This chapter sets the stage for our analysis of the Swedish case by briefly examining how the SDGs evolved between 2012 and 2015. After three years of consultations with global reach, the 8 MDGs were replaced by 17 SDGs. Although this process created a feeling of great achievement, it also causes concerns on how to achieve such an ambitious agenda (see chapters 4 and 5). Below, we discuss participation in the consultation processes in relation to accountability and future responsibility, including how key UN summit outcome documents allocate responsibility.

## Consultation phase

The consultation processes leading up to the formal adoption of the SDGs were unprecedented in scope. The MDGs had been criticised for being selected in a non-transparent manner (Darrow, 2012), and another approach was sought in order to legitimise the new goals. At the Rio+20 summit in June 2012, governments agreed to adopt global goals for the period 2016–2030 by merging the development and sustainability agendas. Post-2015 consultations were conducted through a number of parallel processes, including different groups of stakeholders around the world. The then Swedish Minister for International Development Cooperation, Gunilla Carlsson, was a member of the High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, which was established in July 2012.

Moreover, UN agencies and governments co-organised 6 regional and 11 global thematic consultations in addition to national consultations in 88 low- and middle-income countries. The thematic consultation on health, for example, was co-led by WHO and UNICEF, in collaboration with the Governments of Sweden and Botswana. In January 2013, the UN Intergovernmental Open Working Group on the SDGs, clustering 70 countries from different regions to fill 30 seats (not Sweden, however), was created to provide recommendations to the UN General Assembly. The Open Working Group engaged with stakeholders through the UN ‘Major Groups’ system. Based on Open Working Group recommendations, a list of SDGs was presented in September 2014 and negotiated by

governments in the UN General Assembly during 2014–2015 (see Chasek et al., 2016).

Opening up global policy-making provides a broader basis for decision-making, yet invites questions on who gets to participate and how they are held accountable. Early on, civil society organisations pushed the UN to create inclusive processes for Post-2015 goal-setting. In 2010, a civil society network devoted to Post-2015 campaigning called Beyond 2015 was created, and eventually organised national civil society deliberations in 29 countries of the South. The network also provided position papers for all 11 UN thematic consultations and engaged with the Post-2015 High-level Panel and the Open Working Group. For their part, business representatives and business associations were also included in several Post-2015 deliberations.

The above-mentioned High-level Panel included two chief executive officers among its 27 participants, equal to the number of civil society representatives on the panel. Much input from businesses to the UN was channelled through the Global Compact, the UN's voluntary-based corporate social responsibility (CSR) platform (UN Global Compact, 2016). This promoted the representation of large businesses, certain key companies and individuals, often based in Europe or North America. A recent study (Pingeot, 2014) showed that certain industry sectors (e.g. resource extraction, technology, pharmaceutical and food) and individual companies (e.g. Unilever, Siemens and AngloGold Ashanti) were overrepresented in the overlapping processes that allowed for business input. This Northern bias in the global consultations is also found in the post-2015 proposals submitted in the World We Want consultations, wherein the largest proportion came from global collaboration constellations or from actors based in high-income countries (Bergh and Couturier, 2013).

Another study of the UN consultation process shows that despite broad participation, the perspectives and priorities of some groups (e.g. indigenous people) were downplayed in order to generate findings comparable at a global level. This signals political instrumentality at the cost of inclusive processes (Enns et al., 2014). Moreover, it is hard for the general public in UN Member States to get a sense of who has influenced the new global development agenda and what accountability relationships influential actors face.

Similar questions are applicable in the Swedish case where, in contrast to the global level, they should be understood in the context of a democratic political system. The Swedish Government invited a variety of stakeholder groups to a dozen short consultation sessions. In addition, the Swedish official delegations to the UN SDG meetings in New York and in Addis Ababa were among the very few that included civil society organisations representatives as official national delegates. The inclusion of civil society representatives created tensions with other countries' delegations that did not support their presence during negotiations (according to an interview with a government official). Even so, the value of collaboration with civil society organisations was highlighted in all our interviews. For instance, one government official highlighted the benefits of civil society organisations putting clear demands and having high expectations of the Swedish Government. On the one hand, this allowed for broader input to and domestic backing of the official negotiations. On the other hand, it invited questions on who is selected and how they are held accountable for their influence on Swedish positions.

Civil society organisations were coordinated by CONCORD Sweden, a platform organisation including 50 small and large Swedish organisations working with development-related issues. A CONCORD working group drafted joint statements and enabled information-sharing among non-government organisations (NGOs). One civil society representative pointed out that their inclusion in the Swedish delegation created a tension between internal participation and the external advocacy and watchdog roles of civil society. For example, the call for a UN tax agency combatting tax evasion was supported by low-income country partner organisations to Swedish civil society organisations, but not by the Swedish Government. Nonetheless, all civil society interviewees agreed that the positive aspects outweighed this dilemma, not least due to the fact that civil society organisations and the Government largely agreed on Swedish positions. The latter is likely to be a key explanation for the inclusion of Swedish civil society. The agenda of the civil society organisations in question was relatively mainstream in the Swedish international development cooperation context. This view is supported by research showing that civil society organisations with a moderate reformist agenda are more likely to find state allies than those with radical transformational agendas. This research also shows that civil society

organisations with the most government contacts are the experienced, professional and comparatively resource-rich organisations located a country's capital (Pallas and Uhlin, 2014). This is confirmed in the Swedish case.

While civil society organisations are not directly accountable to the Swedish public with regard to their influence on official positions, the Swedish Riksdag is accountable to the electorate. The members of the Riksdag we spoke to felt they had been well informed by the Government but not involved enough in the consultation process as such. They had been invited to consultation events, but, as one member of the Riksdag put it 'one person can only do so much'. Work at the Riksdag was described as relatively lonely, especially for members of smaller parties who work with a wide range of issues. Tellingly, members of the Riksdag were invited to dialogues together with a range of other stakeholders as 'a member of your organisation' rather than in their specific capacity. Yet, all members of the Riksdag we spoke to emphasised that there was little disagreement among political parties on the final SDG outcome. Only sexual and reproductive health rights created some discussions, where one party (the Sweden Democrats) had a diverging position on how far to go on these issues. One member of the Riksdag also spoke about challenges of diverging views within the EU when issues were negotiated in New York by the EU jointly rather than just by Sweden.

Overall, members of the Riksdag agreed that there was relatively little discussion about the SDGs in the Riksdag and that most members still have limited knowledge about the goals. Once the SDGs are to be implemented, we expect more debate, if not earlier (see chapter 5). Yet, all interviewees agreed that long-term political responsibility for sustainable development requires parliamentary foundation. And it should be noted that some of the members of the Riksdag were self-critical with regard to not initiating more activity on the SDGs.

Finally, business representatives also participated in some of the discussions in the Swedish consultation setting. In 2013, Sida was involved in the creation of a network of large Swedish companies called the Swedish Leadership for Sustainable Development. The network is coordinated by Sida, but based on companies' own initiatives on sustainable development. After the adoption of the SDGs, the network pledged to make sustainable development an integral part of their businesses' core operations (Sida, 2016). Our

interviewees had partially diverging descriptions on the participation of the business sector, probably due to insight into different parts of the consultations. While one member of the Riksdag felt that the business sector had been involved in a positive way, a government official expressed that only few companies had shown interest in the process. With regard to influence on policy positions, questions on public accountability are equally pertinent for businesses as for civil society.

To sum up, more open global policy-making increases participation but invites questions on who gets to participate and how they are held accountable for their influence. Those questions are also relevant at the national Swedish level, albeit in the context of a democratic political system. The consultation process also calls attention to the relationship between participation and responsibility. Can those who had a say in consultations be expected to take on more responsibility for the goals? Can civil society organisations maintain a critical watchdog role after participating in official delegations? Moreover, the limited role of the Swedish Riksdag in consultations is likely to contrast with future demands on political responsibility and eventual accountability towards the electorate.

## Decision phase

While the consultations encouraged broad participation, decision-making was limited to governments of UN Member States. The UN General Assembly outcome document *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (United Nations, 2015a) was formally adopted by the UN General Assembly in September 2015, comprising a preamble and a political declaration, 17 SDGs with 169 targets, and sections on implementation, follow-up and review. Despite being non-binding, the text is decidedly ambitious due to its scope. The Addis Ababa Action Agenda of July 2015 (United Nations, 2015b) supports the SDGs by identifying financial means of implementation. The agreement points to a decline in official development assistance in relation to other types of financial flows, and to the growing importance of private sector and domestic resource mobilisation, including taxation. The financial obligations of different kinds of countries were a matter of negotiation, relating to the role of ‘common but differentiated responsibilities’, much debated in the environmental sphere. Low-income countries feared that they

would be disadvantaged without the principle (Chasek et al., 2016; Fejerskov, 2016:12). The Addis Ababa agreement entails separate commitments for those who provide official development assistance and those who engage in South-South cooperation (Berensmann et al., 2015:101; see also Engberg-Pedersen, 2016). Assigning different responsibilities depending on capability mirrors the idea of ‘responsibility’ (see 2.2). One civil society interviewee pointed out that, high-income countries in the EU, including Sweden, contributed to making the financial commitments of the Addis Ababa agreement weaker than they could have been.

The two outcome documents are key for shaping expectations on responsibility. While the documents establish that the main responsibility lies with states on the basis of their consent and political agreement, the sources of responsibility assigned to a broad range of non-state actors are less obvious and responsibility is not formally adopted by those actors. However, they are assigned a range of functions in relation to follow-up and review and in realising the goals. For instance, businesses are asked to apply creativity and innovation to solve sustainable development challenges. Civil society is encouraged to contribute to reviews of progress at national level and to participate in public-private partnerships. Both outcome documents are underpinned by notions of political institutional responsibility rather than individual responsibility. While the Addis Ababa Action Agenda primarily concerns institutional and financial responsibility, the 2030 Agenda document is also informed by notions of moral responsibility through the broader obligation of ‘leaving no one behind’. Despite this obligation, the key 2030 Agenda outcome documents provide great scope for state sovereignty and concerns for national circumstances.

All our interviewees expressed overall satisfaction with the final outcome, considering the politics of global negotiations and the politically sensitive issues of the Agenda. Most interviewees would, however, have preferred stronger wording on democracy and human rights (Goal 16), equality and to some extent on sexual and reproductive health and rights – key issues in Swedish development cooperation policy. Both government officials and civil society representatives pointed out that these issues were difficult for many countries to accept. Sweden had to work hard to ensure that the issues were kept on the Agenda. External resistance to these issues prompted interviewees in all categories to stress that Sweden wants to go further

on several topics on the Agenda, in line with Swedish foreign and development cooperation policy. A common theme in the interviews was that the broad scope of the Agenda is both its strength and its weakness. One government official commented that the Agenda's holistic approach appropriately reflects the real world. Another government official had initially been hesitant about such a comprehensive agenda standing a chance of being adopted. However, as the deadline approached, those involved in the process became reluctant to question separate goals, as this risked opening up for the deletion of more important goals. The willingness to compromise was relatively high, as many wanted to reach a decision. According to the government official 'it could have ended up much worse'. The official also found there to be too much current focus on the goals at the expense of the broader political declaration of the outcome document, explaining that '[w]ithout the political declaration, the goals are not worth anything'.

In summary, as a globally agreed political outcome, the language of the outcome documents is at times indeterminate and unprecise. Role obligations are expressed in a very general manner open to quite contradictory interpretation. The main responsibility for goal realisation is assigned to governments who have formally adopted the goals. At the same time, the documents outline a collective international responsibility to support governments in this endeavour as well as non-state actor responsibilities. Contentious issues with regard to measurement were postponed and will influence future accountability discussion. The intergovernmental decision-making process stands in contrast to the preceding broader consultations. Yet both have left an imprint on SDG work in the Swedish context, which is the focus of subsequent chapters.

# PRESENT

National level uptake of globally agreed goals is key for their realisation and for effective accountability relationships. Responsibilities are adapted to fit country contexts through national level policy processes, which is the focus of this chapter. We first analyse official government-led SDG organisation in the Swedish case, with the caveat that this is a rapidly changing process still in the making. We then discuss critical issues pertaining to participation in policy deliberations on the SDGs.

## Government policy formulation phase

Our material shows that expectations on Swedish responsibility for promoting the SDGs are very high among all our interviewees as well as in declaratory statements and written comments. High expectations stem from Sweden's historical legacy of active development cooperation and UN engagement (see e.g. Bergman Rosamond, 2016) and from the recent launch of specific SDG initiatives. Examples of the latter are a group of nine heads of state (Sweden, Brazil, Colombia, Liberia, South Africa, Tanzania, Germany, Tunisia and East Timor) established by the Swedish Government in conjunction with the adoption of the goals in September 2015. The group is to promote the realisation of the SDGs by driving commitments and sharing best practices among countries and societal sectors (Svenska regeringen startar högnivågrupp, 2015).

Other initiatives are in the making, but not yet formally launched. In addition, several pre-existing initiatives are being used to promote SDGs, for example the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding and Swedish contributions to woman's and children's health globally. Rhetorically, the word 'leadership' is frequently used to describe both Swedish official ambitions and to characterise other actors' expectations on Sweden (Rosén, 2016; Sverige tar ansvar, 2015). For instance, Prime Minister Stefan Löfvén said in his opening speech at the national kick-off event for the SDGs in January 2016 that his ambition is for Sweden to be a forerunner in working with the SDGs: 'we have a responsibility for more than ourselves here and now. We have a responsibility for people



all over the world, but also for future generations' (Löfvén, 2016, our translation). This, he meant, is both morally right and economically smart.

While responsibility for the MDGs 2000–2015 belonged to the realm of foreign policy and development cooperation, the SDGs entail much broader demands on both international and domestic action on many fronts. This entails greater challenges on the organisation of responsibility.

At national level, the Swedish Government and the Prime Minister have the main overarching formal responsibility for realising the SDGs. Beyond that, responsibility for the SDGs was initially assigned to three ministers in equal part. The Minister for Strategic Development and Nordic Cooperation (Kristina Persson, Social Democrat), placed at the Prime Minister's Office, was made responsible for long-term visionary strategic thinking on SDG implementation nationally and internationally, including safeguarding cross-sectoral approaches and the need for special initiatives. The Minister for Public Administration (Ardalan Shekarabi, Social Democrat), placed at the Ministry of Finance, was assigned responsibility for guiding regional and municipal SDG work. The Minister for International Development Cooperation (Isabella Lövin, Green Party), placed at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, was given responsibility for the SDGs in the context of Swedish development cooperation and in Sweden's Policy for Global Development (PGD). This three-fold ministerial structure created expectations of a holistic approach to SDG responsibility, yet raises new demands on coordination between ministries. Sharing responsibility for interconnected goals comes with certain risk. For example, issues may fall between chairs and leadership risks being unclear without a single coordinating minister. The organisational absence of the Minister for Climate and the Environment (Åsa Romson, Green Party) was interesting to note in light of the 2030 Agenda's focus on issues that belonged to her portfolio. In May 2016 there was a reorganisation of certain ministerial positions making Isabella Lövin Minister for International Development Cooperation and Climate as well as Deputy Prime Minister. As a result, the SDGs, the PGD and climate change became more organisationally intertwined. While the Prime Minister removed the position of Minister of Strategic Development and Nordic Cooperation from government, the Minister for Public Administration keeps responsibility for the domestic implementation

of the SDGs. The sudden change of ministerial portfolios shows how the organisation of responsibility is vulnerable to political considerations arising in other realms.

Government efforts to organise responsibilities are not set up in a vacuum. As underlined earlier, high expectations face their first reality check when integrated into ongoing deliberative Swedish policy-making processes (section 2.3). The interviews reveal that during such processes, pre-existing organisational interests, mandates and resources contribute to delimiting what obligations are established and what accountability channels are proposed. Without aiming to detail these processes as such, we notice that the SDGs add yet another challenging layer to Swedish domestic and international policies on sustainable development. Relevant policy processes are a relaunch of the Policy for Global Development, in which the SDGs hold centre stage, a new written communication on the Government's aid policy platform to the Riksdag and a new written communication on human rights from the Government to the Riksdag. A rights-based and poverty-focused perspective on development is to guide how Sida engages in development cooperation (Regeringen, 2015) and a feminist perspective is to inform foreign policy-making (Statement of Government Policy on Foreign Affairs, 2016). Moreover, the relationship between the SDGs and the Swedish environmental objectives (a long-standing goal system for Swedish environmental policy) remains to be clarified. Policy coherence and a clear allocation of responsibilities will be a difficult task in light of the broad objectives of these policies, addressing both domestic and international spheres of action and relating in quite different ways to the SDGs.

Among our interviewees, there was broad agreement that the SDGs should be given a prominent role in Swedish policy-making, not only in relation to development, as was the case for the MDGs. In the relaunch of the PGD, ownership among ministries other than the Ministry for Foreign Affairs is considered to be key. The lack of ownership has been a major weakness of the PGD so far (Swedish Agency for Public Management, 2014) Consequently, all ministries have been tasked with producing PGD action plans, including ideas on how to integrate the SDGs in the PGD (Fellsson and Román, 2016). The Ministry for Foreign Affairs interviewees underlined that the revised PGD will be used to promote realisation of the SDGs. Civil society organisation interviewees and members of the Riksdag agreed

that the SDGs should be central in Swedish development cooperation policies and in broader foreign policy. Government officials consider civil society participation in these processes to be important. Tellingly, one civil society representative explained that she found it necessary to repeatedly emphasise a rights-based approach to development and a poverty-focused perspective when meeting with government officials in charge of policy revision. One civil society organisation had even held a brief training session for government officials on these two perspectives. This, again, raises questions on civil society mandates and their public accountability, discussed above in the case of UN consultation processes.

To sum up, the Swedish Government has organised its political institutional responsibility along a holistic approach to the SDGs, which entails challenges of coordination and leadership. The Government is also faced with the task of sorting out the relationship between several overarching policy objectives and related responsibilities that partly overlap with and impact on its SDG responsibility.

## Deliberation phase

Once action plans, strategies or other proposals are launched, a deliberation phase follows, where political initiatives and policies are debated more broadly. The Swedish policy-making process has an emphasis on the preparatory phases of fact investigation and deliberations where broad agreements are highly valued (Petersson, 2016). We therefore focus in this section on parliamentary and citizen involvement. We also discuss the composition of the national delegation on the SDGs that the Government has appointed, in line with the Swedish committee of inquiry tradition.

A first key observation based on our material is that the Swedish Riksdag has been relatively little involved, thus far, in SDG-related policy work. Our interviews with opposition party members of the Riksdag show that they await concrete policy proposals from the Government and will react to those once they are provided. Members of the Riksdag expressed a wish for more clarity from the Government on plans for the SDGs, including how it intends to involve the Riksdag. Representatives from three of the four political parties interviewed claimed it would be a challenge to integrate SDG

ambitions into the Riksdag's issue-bound committee structure. In their opinion, cross-sectoral work is easier for the Government to conduct. Climate issues and development issues, for instance, are much broader than the the Riksdag's structure for addressing these issues. Moreover, we noted the absence of parliamentarians and opposition party representatives on stage at the national kick-off event held in Stockholm on 18 January 2016, with an audience of 500 people from all sectors of society. This is an example of how representation and participation influence how expectations on responsibility are formed.

A way to facilitate the continuation of SDG processes regardless of Swedish political majority shifts and political deadlocks in the short term is through Riksdag involvement. This would create an institutional memory to nurture long-term parliamentary attention on the SDGs. Importantly, it paves the way for the Riksdag to hold the Government accountable during later phases. There is a high degree of consensus among Swedish political parties on the 2030 Agenda, and this is one of the least controversial aspects as concerns political debates on the UN. Interviewed members of the Riksdag even suggested that the adoption of the SDGs is among the rare positive matters about the UN recently. One member of the Riksdag speculated that the lack of political conflict might depend on the high level of abstraction of goals so far, as it takes time for them to become 'hands-on' Swedish policy. It is likely that parliamentary involvement in SDG deliberations will increase through future debate on the relaunched Swedish Policy for Global Development (Autumn 2016), in which the SDGs provide a cornerstone. Another member of the Riksdag said it is essential that we are able to demonstrate concrete effects at an early stage, creating a positive spiral, or the SDGs might run out of steam. Another member suggested educational campaigns at schools similar to a previous one about the Holocaust (initiated by then Prime Minister Göran Persson). After our interviews were conducted, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs has launched a campaign called #FirstGeneration, aiming to spread knowledge about the SDGs among young people and educators (see <http://www.swemfa.se/campaigns/first-generation/>). SDG knowledge among members of the Riksdag and the electorate serves as a foundation for accountability that is the subject of a later section of this report.

Another observation is that the SDGs are still far from the general Swedish public's awareness. Our interviewees shared this view. Our conceptual framework distinguishes between institutional and individual responsibility. We clearly find the former to be the focus of SDG debate so far. However, individual citizens are pivotal in two main capacities. Firstly, taking responsibility in their everyday lifestyle decisions, and, secondly, being voters that can hold current and future politicians at all levels accountable for their SDG work. Interviewees in all categories stressed the importance of early communication drives directed towards the general public, a lesson learned from the MDGs on the part of Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Sida. In order to build support and knowledge about SDG policies among the general public, it is necessary to undertake broad information and communication efforts. Interestingly, only governmental officials pointed out that lifestyle issues related to production and consumption are among the most difficult goals for Sweden to achieve domestically. The exercise of individual role responsibility can be facilitated by political decisions enabling steering instruments related to public transport, recycling practices, taxation and others (see e.g. Kroll, 2015). This shows the close connections between individual and institutional responsibilities.

Finally, in March 2016 the Swedish Government appointed a committee in the form of a national delegation for the realisation of the 2030 Agenda. The delegation is to work between 2016 and 2019 and is instructed to produce an action plan for the Swedish realisation of the Agenda and to highlight best practices for social, economic and environmental sustainability (Terms of reference, 2016). A small secretariat as well as reference groups from business, civil society and other sectors are to provide support to the delegation. In addition, about 80 government agencies have been tasked with identifying aspects of their work that are relevant to SDG implementation and how they view their SDG obligations (according to an interview with a state secretary). This will feed into the work of the national 2030 Agenda delegation. The delegation comprises seven Swedish individuals with broad experience from all sectors of society. Several of our interviewees had commented on the importance of a careful selection of delegation members (note that the interviews were conducted before the delegation was appointed). Again, and similar to the consultation phase, issues of participation are influential in shaping expectations on responsibility.

In the delegation, we see a bias towards environmental issues (Pettersson, Rockström, Sandahl, Klum) and research and think tanks (Pettersson, Rockström, Hassel), at the expense of, for instance, municipal representatives, government agencies and experts in other areas. Compared with the consultation phase, civil society participation is less pronounced. Having a CSR expert chairing the delegation (Parul Sharma) draws attention to business responsibility for sustainable development. Participation in the Swedish referral system of policy deliberation used to be quite predictable and based on a few major society interests. Today, the system is more open-ended with regard to who is selected for participation in committees (Pettersson, 2016). This is also the case with regard to the 2030 Agenda delegation, and it was commented upon by the civil society organisation CONCORD, which argued that the delegation lacks balance if Sweden is to be a leader on issues related to conflict resolution, gender equality and human rights (Halkjaer, 2016). Nevertheless, future action plans produced by the delegation will provide grounds within and beyond the formal referral system for continued deliberation on SDG responsibilities.

In conclusion, on the one hand, deliberation within and beyond the Swedish referral system can contribute to consolidating SDG work among a broad set of actors, creating a sense of ownership and responsibility. On the other hand, in several of our interviews we discerned impatience with the focus on organising, debating and planning responsibility. Instead, interviewees highlight the need to profit from political momentum and move ahead more rapidly.

# FUTURE

This chapter is forward-looking. Based on our discussion so far, we identify five points of tension that we believe will impact the realisation of responsibility. The way these points of tension are tackled during these current formative years will affect future SDG prospects. The implementation phase will overlap with evaluation, but we separate those for analytical clarity. We discuss the role of quantitative indicators in relation to broader accountability aspects during the evaluation phase. Finally, we outline three scenarios that demonstrate ways in which SDG responsibility might evolve depending on how the points of tension are tackled.

## Implementation phase

Considering the broad scope and range of actors that the SDGs encompass, we do not set out to cover all responsibility aspects of implementation. Instead, this section discusses five points of tension we identified in our material that we believe will be critical for Swedish domestic and international SDG responsibility. During implementation, the role obligations carved out during the policy-making phase are supposed to be realised. However, due to the political nature of implementation, policies are not straightforwardly realised as intended. Prior institutional mandates and resources, competing interests and controversial political priorities make implementation highly political (Buse et al., 2009; Sabatier and Weibel, 2014). A recent report ranking countries' preparedness for realising the SDGs by the German Bertelsmann Stiftung (Kroll, 2015) puts Sweden in first place among OECD countries. However, a recent Stockholm Environment Institute report shows that the country's domestic 2030 Agenda will require far-reaching changes in domestic policy and action, significant resources and a cross-sectoral implementation approach (Weitz et al., 2015). In line with this, one of the state secretaries said in our interview that 'even if Sweden is ranked number one we should not relax, far from it'.

A first point of tension is between creating new institutional structures for SDG work and aligning SDG responsibility with existing structures. The Swedish Government has settled for the latter. The Government Offices decided to work with existing structures rather than create a permanent SDG secretariat, which would have risked becoming its own island in relation to already ongoing processes, according to one state secretary. Even though ministers have specific responsibilities, as described above, state secretaries emphasise that the SDGs are the responsibility of the entire Government. The State Secretaries of the Ministers for Public Administration, Foreign Affairs, International Development Cooperation and Climate and of the Environment have created an interministry group working with the SDGs. There is also an interministry SDG working group at the level of government officials. Feeding SDG responsibility into existing structures is considered to be the best way to spread responsibility throughout the Government Offices (interview with state secretary). A recent reorganisation of the main functional units at Sweden's Ministry for Foreign Affairs demonstrates that UN affairs and the 2030 Agenda are among the priorities of its current political leadership. One of the new units is the Global Agenda Department, responsible for overall coordination of the 2030 Agenda as well as for the Government Offices' Policy for Global Development. In addition, out of the ten functional units, the UN Policy Department and the International Development Cooperation Department are also closely related to SDG work.

The tension between creating new structures and working with existing ones will also be faced by Swedish government agencies. Key for actual implementation is the extent to which they are provided with strong mandates and resources. This, however, will have to be the topic of reports a few years from now as government agencies are only beginning to approach the SDGs. In its appropriation direction for 2016, Sida is instructed to prioritise expert support to the Government's work on the 2030 Agenda, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the result of COP21. Another obligation is to inform the public and other actors in Sweden about the implementation of the 2030 Agenda (Sida Appropriation direction for 2016). Several of our interviewees recalled that it took a few years for the MDGs to gain traction in development cooperation work in practice. At least five years passed before work began more broadly. The Ministry for the Environment and Energy has tasked its



government agencies with analysing how the SDGs relate to existing responsibilities. Here the SDGs encounter an institutionalised structure of responsibility for the Swedish environmental objectives, developed through several parliamentary decisions. These objectives are supported by an organisational structure involving 26 government agencies, all levels of public authority, and business and civil society. In our interview, one government official remarked that through this established division of responsibilities, the ground for SDG work is well prepared in the environmental domain. In summary, political SDG responsibility is mainly organised along existing structures. Key for implementation, however, is the extent to which government agencies will be provided with mandates and resources strong enough to drive SDG implementation.

Our material demonstrates that a second point of tension during the implementation phase exists between the holistic approach advocated in SDG rhetoric and a division of responsibility. This was highlighted in the majority of our interviews, stressing the need to work with a holistic approach, however challenging. Government officials underscored the importance of refraining from a 'pick and choose' approach. How to avoid this in practice was less clear at this early stage. In our interviews, government officials hinted at unclear organisational mandates, lack of manpower and frequently changing job descriptions, which in turn affect coordination within the Government Offices and long-term planning. Government officials and civil society representatives alike draw attention to the boundaries of their capacity to work with such a broad agenda, their 'responsibility'. One government official mentioned the need to identify synergy effects between goals that contribute the most to the whole 2030 Agenda. One civil society organisation representative pointed out that in order to have an impact, one must pick certain issues on which to focus efforts and resources. Challenges of working holistically were also brought up by members of the Riksdag. An interviewee from the Riksdag conveyed that environmental and development policy work is still pursued along two separate parliamentary tracks. Similar worries have been expressed with regard to the EU in a recent policy brief from the European Think Tanks Group (Gavas et al., 2016), arguing that the institutional architecture of the EU is not designed for implementation of the 2030 Agenda. This will impact Swedish implementation as well, not least because

parts of Swedish development cooperation funds are channelled through the EU.

One interviewee pointed out that Sida has worked with holistic perspectives since the 1990s, for instance its rights-based approach to development. However, when holistic ambitions are to be translated into organisational practice, difficulties of coherence, organisational mandates and resources may arise. A critical evaluation of the first 10 years of the Swedish Policy for Global Development (PGD) shows that one reason for its lack of impact was an unclear division of responsibilities (Swedish Agency for Public Management, 2014). Another evaluation shows that Sida mainstreaming efforts in the fields of gender, HIV/AIDS and environment confirm the challenges of realising holistic approaches. The problems with these efforts related to unclear responsibilities, the high level of ambition and the large number of other policies and priorities competing for attention. The evaluation describes implementation as 'erratic, frequently disregarded, and often subject to the interest and commitment of individual staff members' despite general support for the approaches (Uggla, 2007). Moreover, conflicts between different SDGs, or the means to achieve them, are likely to pose a challenge to holism throughout the SDG period. In summary, tension between holistic ambitions and a pragmatic division of responsibility characterises implementation planning.

A third point of tension involves conflicts between the SDGs and other Swedish political interests. We have already emphasised the fact that the implementation phase has political dimensions and effects. As globally agreed goals are translated to the national setting and implemented in local settings, conflicts between goals can be expected. Moreover, political interests are not static but subject to adaptation in light of changes in the rest of the world. What is represented as 'Swedish' political interests also changes with political majority shifts in Sweden's Parliament. Our interviewees agreed that conflicts between goals will appear as work continues, but found it hard to predict what those conflicts might be. Possible areas mentioned of goal conflicts were tax evasion, aid and trade rules, weapons sales, agriculture and subsidies, migration issues, energy, and production and consumption patterns. A recent debate on the extent to which Sweden's development aid budget should be used to cover the costs of the reception of asylum seekers in Sweden is another example. Interviewees placed the responsibility for solving future

conflicts between goals with the political leadership. In fact, the view that political decisions and priorities will be decisive for SDG implementation permeated our interviews.

An interesting observation is that both the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs look at experiences from Agenda 21 when planning SDG work (interviews with state secretaries; also see Persson et al., 2016). Like the SDGs, Agenda 21 was globally agreed, adopted at the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development, and contained sustainability demands for all countries. In addition to substantive goals, Agenda 21 also called for greater local ownership of and participation in decision-making on sustainability matters. Research demonstrates that Sweden showed the earliest start among European countries and the highest proportion of local governments engaging in Agenda 21 activities. One study concludes that in four Swedish municipalities local Agenda 21 work raised the profile of environmental concerns in a number of ways. However, when conflicts arose between environmental concerns and economic growth projects, the latter tended to be prioritised. This was particularly the case for transport and traffic issues (Forsberg, 2002). Another study shows that the local Agenda 21 policy in Helsingborg Municipality was primarily focused on environmental issues at the expense of social and economic issues, in line with broader Swedish policy at the time. In this case, experts and substance goals predominated over procedural goals related to public participation (Feichtinger and Pregernig, 2005). In summary, we believe that the relatively high degree of SDG consensus that our interviews demonstrate thus far is likely to turn into increased contestation as goals are to be implemented.

Fourthly, we find a point of tension between mandatory and voluntary responsibility. Our interviews show that the range of actors expected to partake in the SDG implementation is broad. While SDG responsibility of public authorities (international, national, regional, local) is mandatory, it is voluntary-based for non-state actors such as civil society organisations, business organisations and companies, as well as individual citizens. Among non-state actors, civil society was the one most frequently mentioned in our interviews. Business was mentioned less, and very few commented on the responsibilities of individual citizens. Practically all representatives of the Government and the Riksdag voiced high expectations of civil society responsibility, both with regard to implementation and monitoring.

Thus far, Swedish civil society organisations active in an international or transnational arena have been the most visible in SDG debate. The extent to which locally based Swedish civil society organisations will consider the SDGs important to their work remains to be seen. Interviewed representatives from development-oriented civil society highlighted their organisations' high degree of local presence in low-income countries. Recently, however, budgetary support to civil society-run projects channelled through Sida has been reduced (Sida Appropriation direction, 2016). In addition, a shrinking space for civil society organisations in many other countries was viewed as a threat to successful implementation of the SDGs.

Most interviewees hinted that they foresee a very important role for the business sector during implementation of the SDGs, but did not further specify how they envisioned such responsibility. One civil society interviewee worried about a possible transfer of responsibility away from public sector development actors towards both civil society and business. Regulating business responsibility through mandatory rules is politically sensitive and the issue taps into a much broader debate on CSR. Illustratively, one government official called the issue 'a tough nut to crack', saying that 'we cannot control the business sector but without them we cannot manage'. The interviews show that public authorities expect business to take on SDG responsibility, but that it is up to the business sector to define its precise role in SDG implementation. Public authorities are willing to facilitate business involvement (e.g. the Swedish Leadership for Sustainable Development) and to cooperate through public-private partnerships, but they consider companies to be the driving force of such involvement. The Swedish national SDG delegation, chaired by a CSR expert, is likely to be important for furthering thinking on business SDG responsibility. In summary, points of tension between mandatory and voluntary SDG responsibility will be persistent as they originate in deeper disagreements on the role of states and markets in sustainability affairs.

A fifth and final point of tension we find in our material is between acting unilaterally in the international context and supporting multilateralism. Many interviewees raised concerns that the vulnerability of the current multilateral development system centred around the UN. Moreover, they also thought that Sweden should go further on certain issues such as reproductive health and democracy, than is politically possible in a multilateral context. Even if the 2030

Agenda outcome document stresses that implementation strategies should be nationally owned and supported by national financing frameworks (Paragraph 63), the multilateral system is supposed to support individual countries' implementation efforts. The main problem was described in interviews as a 'bilateralisation' of the multilateral system. This refers to the fact that the UN is increasingly financed by project-specific earmarked contributions from individual wealthy states rather than by long-term core UN budget support from all states (Browne and Weiss, 2014). The allocation of resources thereby takes place through decisions outside of the multilateral system. The rise of emerging economies as donors further complicates the coherence of multilateral funding. Therefore, the main function of the UN risks being limited to supporting monitoring and reporting on SDG work (see the next section). If traditional core supporters of multilateralism such as the Nordic countries step down in levels of commitment, what can we demand of other countries, one interviewee rhetorically asked. Are limited resources worth spending on the multilateral system or should Sweden prioritise funding where it keeps control over SDG projects?

A related worry is the overall reduction in bilateral development cooperation aid by other Nordic countries. The Director General of Sida, Charlotte Petri Gornitzka, warns that Sweden's leading position may change if the development cooperation budget shrinks (Halkjaer, 2015). Sweden and other Nordic countries have traditionally had comparatively generous development policies (Bergman Rosamund, 2016:462; Elgström and Delputte, 2015). The Swedish Government maintains its goal of 1 per cent of Swedish GNI devoted to development cooperation (Budget Bill, 2016 section 2.1) and has put a limit of a maximum of 30 per cent for the part of the development cooperation budget that goes to the country's refugee reception. In summary, in light of limited resources, a political choice has to be made with regard to the extent to which international dimensions of Swedish SDG responsibility should be realised through multilateral cooperation or unilateral action. This choice is likely to look different among future Swedish governments, depending not only on political preferences but also on how the multilateral system develops in light of changing global power relations.

This section has identified five points of tension likely to influence implementation of the SDGs. The ways in which these points of tension will affect the 15-year implementation period remain

for future studies to establish. At this stage, we emphasise that many political priorities will need to be made during implementation. In the section on scenarios we discuss how a number of political choices related to these points of tension might play out, but before that we focus on the evaluation phase of the policy process.

## Evaluation phase

The monitoring and evaluation phase will overlap with implementation due to the long-term nature of the SDGs. Evaluation provides grounds to hold power-wielders accountable for how their responsibilities have been fulfilled. Therefore, effective accountability presupposes that responsibilities are clearly identified beforehand (see chapter 2). During Post-2015 consultations and intergovernmental negotiations, follow-up and review were important topics of debate. UN summit outcome documents establish that the review framework is voluntary-based and country-led and expected by the UN General Assembly (2016) to promote accountability to citizens. However, the voluntary-based nature of the SDGs leads to accountability challenges as hard enforcement measures are lacking. The High-level Political Forum is the central UN platform for overseeing review processes. Its first round of national reviews is scheduled for July 2016 and some 20 countries have volunteered to be reviewed during this round. The forum will adopt a ministerial declaration with guidance and recommendations on goal implementation. The July 2016 review will provide a first opportunity to study accountability challenges through UN-based ‘peer-review’, where countries assess each other’s performance. Ideally, such a review can promote peer learning based on best practices, as well as peer pressure based on public ‘naming and shaming’ (Elgin-Cossart and Chandran, 2016). However, the national and local levels remain the primary location of broader systematic accountability relationships between citizens and governments. A challenge remains to make governments’ SDG responsibilities, which still seem remote to many citizens, part of those accountability relationships.

Quantitative indicators will shape evaluation. We found high expectations among our interviewees for the UN to come up with sound SDG indicators. Sweden, represented by Sweden Statistics (SCB), is among the 28 members of the UN Statistical Commission’s Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal

Indicators. In March 2016, the group agreed on 230 indicators to monitor the 169 targets of the 17 SDGs. This set of indicators will continue to be developed over time. One civil society interviewee pointed out that the development of indicators should be thought of not only as a technical process but as a political one, adding that ‘[i]f future work on SDGs becomes reduced to work on indicators only, we have come nowhere’. Measurement involves trade-offs between, on the one hand, weak statistical data availability in many low-income countries, and on the other hand, pinpointing urgent needs. Sweden will contribute to statistical capacity building in its development cooperation partner countries (Rosander, 2016). Also for high-income countries, data collection will be challenging (Weitz, 2015). Neglected groups and issues might disappear in national averages if data is not disaggregated, which for all countries raises an accountability challenge in terms of ‘leaving no one behind’.

Evaluation based on the indicators is likely to be the focus of future accountability demands. When ‘count-ability’ becomes a guiding principle, the ‘power of numbers’ is reinforced in development governance (Fukuda-Parr and McNeill, 2015; Hansen and Muhlen-Schulte, 2012). Research on the broader effects of MDG indicators posits that, once set, numerical targets increasingly become seen as value neutral (Fukuda-Parr et al., 2014; Hickel, 2016). Research shows that a key strength of MDG indicators (60 in number) was to put the spotlight on important objectives by identifying measurable outcomes (cf. Persson et al., 2016:66). For instance, the targets for water, child survival, sanitation and maternal health succeeded in drawing attention to and increasing donor funding for long-neglected issues. However, measurability also proved to be a source of unintended distortion. This concerned redefining the objectives that indicators intended to measure, creating inappropriate incentives and diverting attention from other objectives (Fukuda-Parr et al., 2014).

For example, despite an increase in primary school enrolment, issues of quality and equity were not included in measurements and therefore undermined the desired impact of the MDG goal on education (Unterhalter, 2014). In the case of MDG4 to reduce child mortality, the effect of indicator selection was to shrink the child health agenda and reduce attention to the human rights dimensions of child health (Diaz-Martinez and Gibbons, 2014). Arguably, the lesson to be drawn from this is not to lose sight of the broader ambitions within which indicators are embedded. For instance, *Transforming our*

*World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* contains many references to the international human rights framework, which we note is strikingly absent in Swedish SDG rhetoric and organisation. A challenge is therefore to consider whether and how the SDGs tap into existing mechanisms of human rights accountability. Could, for instance, numerical SDG indicators be concrete stepping stones towards the gradual realisation of certain human rights (Vandemoortele, 2014)?

In the Swedish context, our interviews brought to the fore two main future arenas of accountability demands: civil society and the Riskdag. There was broad agreement among civil society interviewees that monitoring is a key future task for them, in Sweden and in other countries. They suggested that civil society organisations could provide evaluation reports as alternative versions to the official ones ('shadow reports'), inspired by how this is done in other fields such as human rights. At the same time, some civil society representatives acknowledged a tension between, on the one hand, wanting to cooperate with government agencies and, on the other hand, holding them accountable. The four members of the Riksdag, regardless of political colour, also agreed on their watchdog role in overseeing SDG promotion by present and future governments. They considered the Riksdag's supervisory role to be increasingly important as the 2030 deadline approaches. In light of our above-mentioned discussion of the consolidation phase, such a role presupposes that parliament gains a higher sense of ownership of SDG policies and decisions than has so far been the case (cf. Ocampo and Gómez-Arteaga, 2016). This is a challenge for securing long-term accountability relations between voters, parliament and government. Future political debates on the Swedish aid policy platform, to be revised during spring 2016, will contribute to broader involvement of parliament in the case of the SDGs related to development cooperation. A key challenge for accountability remains, however, to involve parliamentary committees on other areas, where, compared with development cooperation, the SDGs have so far been given less attention.

To sum up, this section has shown that quantitative indicators have strong steering effects beyond the evaluation phase, and that accountability challenges arise on several levels as SDG follow-up and review increasingly take centre stage.



## Future scenarios

On the basis of the above analysis of the past, present and future, this section presents three brief stylised scenarios for how Swedish SDG responsibilities might evolve over time. The main building blocks of the scenarios are different outcomes of the points of tension concerning implementation identified in the first section of the chapter, which are between: (1) new or existing structures; (2) holism or division of responsibility; (3) SDGs or other political interests; (4) mandatory or voluntary responsibility; and (5) acting unilaterally or multilaterally. The scenarios aim to show that how those points of tension play out is dependent both on active choices made along the way, and on broader economic, political and security-related circumstances in the rest of the world.

### **Scenario I: Business as usual**

This scenario sees high expectations and initial enthusiasm around the SDGs, with national political leadership centred on the new ministerial structure and the national SDG delegation. Actors from the Swedish Government, the Riksdag, municipalities, civil society, business and others declare their commitment to the SDGs and create new initiatives, including on the basis of propositions from the national SDG delegation (cf. point of tension 1). Select SDGs are integrated into existing policies on sustainable development with an emphasis on how the goals are relevant to ongoing work. The SDGs do not become a holistic policy framework in their own right but are aligned with other national and municipal policies related to sustainable development (cf. point of tension 2). Silo thinking and issue-specific organisation remain firm due to deeply institutionalised routines and departmentalisation of responsibilities. After a few years, the SDGs are actively pursued within development cooperation and the environmental sphere, domestically and internationally. Those who were involved in the consultation, decision and strategic policy phases continue to take responsibility for realising the goals, but engagement beyond that will be limited as conflicts between goals and competing interests eventually prevail (cf. point of tension 3). Most municipalities find the SDGs too remote to shape obligations in their everyday sustainability work. For the Swedish public, the SDGs remain distant and will not acquire a bottom-up quality that promotes individual responsibility. A set of large companies that are already

highly profiled in CSR keep developing their sustainability work, with the SDGs being one of many frameworks (cf. point of tension 4). In other words, in the long run, the SDGs in practice mean business as usual though within a global reference frame. Business as usual can lead to progress on certain sustainable development issues, but the SDGs per se are not a catalyst for such progress.

## **Scenario II: Islands of responsibility**

In a second scenario, SDG work in the Swedish context becomes increasingly centred on public responsibility and a set of politically prioritised SDG indicators (cf. point of tension 2), for which improvement (but not full goal realisation) is achieved by 2030. The Government and the Riksdag keep political attention on the SDGs beyond the stage of initial enthusiasm through active involvement of several parliamentary committees and broad party political consensus on Swedish priorities between SDGs. Despite political majority shifts, SDG work therefore continues along similar priorities (cf. point of tension 1). In the priority areas, Sweden becomes a role model internationally by initiating and financially supporting SDG initiatives in fields such as climate change, reproductive health and building institutions in conflict-ridden societies. These initiatives are directed towards Sweden's development cooperation partner countries rather than the UN system. Sweden takes its reporting duties to the UN High-level Political Forum seriously, yet the Forum becomes weak as it lacks effective means to hold reluctant states accountable for SDG realisation (cf. point of tension 5). Private voluntary-based responsibility on the part of business and civil society does not live up to initial pledges due to limiting external conditions. Throughout the world, civil society experiences shrinking scope in many countries, reducing opportunities for long-term systematic SDG responsibility on the part of Swedish development organisations. In addition, official Swedish budget support to civil society domestically and internationally is reduced. Due to looming global economic recession, business willingness to support SDG initiatives decreases. The result is quite unsystematic and short-sighted SDG work by non-state actors (cf. point of tension 4). In summary, early and continuing political decisions to prioritise a selection of SDG indicators allow the Government to report results that are primarily the effect of public contributions.

### **Scenario III: Joint synergetic responsibility**

In the third scenario, responsibility is shared between societal sectors and across levels of political authority (global, national, regional, municipal). The initial political momentum is turned into concrete SDG action in all sectors of society. The Government launches policies on government agency obligations. The Riksdag ensures accountability and debates conflicts between goals. Municipalities activate relevant SDG work at the local level and through partnerships with local communities in low-income countries. Active municipal SDG ownership stimulates greater individual responsibility among the Swedish public for SDGs impacted by lifestyle and consumption issues (cf. point of tension 4). Civil society acts as a watchdog, pushing for more ambitious change. Long-term public-private partnerships are formed between Swedish companies, development-oriented NGOs and government agencies in order to support select SDGs in low-income countries. There are temporary setbacks in several areas due to conflicts between goals and challenging geopolitical circumstances where resources for SDG promotion are reduced (cf. point of tension 3). Despite this, the SDGs remain a steering instrument in their own right over the 15-year period. A new forum created for the purpose of compiling the national review report that Sweden is to submit annually to the UN High-level Political Forum becomes an institutionalised node for coordinating and energising SDG work. The Forum consists of representatives of all societal sectors and levels of public authorities and is supported by a permanent secretariat. The representatives base their input on broad material systematically collected within their respective sectors. With regard to reporting and accountability, Sweden thereby lives up to expectations of being a role model and is able to exercise peer pressure on other countries to engage constructively with the UN (cf. point of tension 5). In comparison with the previous scenario, this one sees Swedish work on a broader range of goals. Taken together, this amounts to a more holistic approach (cf. point of tension 2). However, as resources are spread more thinly, the actual impact on goal attainment becomes more diffuse than in the previous one.

To sum up, scenarios suggest possible consequences of political decisions and broader circumstances that impact how responsibility and accountability develop in the Swedish context. For example, the choice already made by the Government to align the

SDGs with existing structures and agencies can facilitate broad responsibility, yet risks the SDGs becoming subsumed by pre-existent obligations and conflicts between goals. This might lead to scenario I. In a second example, political choices to cut budget support to civil society reduce the capacity for voluntary-based responsibility, pointing towards scenario II. A third example concerns individual responsibility. Future political choices to support teaching about sustainable development in the Swedish basic education system might enable long-term individual responsibility for lifestyle issues, facilitating scenario III. More SDG engagement on the part of individual voters would also provide a basis for holding politicians at all levels accountable for their SDG obligations up to 2030. These are a few tentative examples of decisions that could impact how responsibility and accountability take shape.

# CONCLUSIONS

When UN Post-2015 consultations were initiated in 2012, few predicted the encompassing outcome that would replace the MDGs as they reached their end date. The globally agreed SDGs for 2030 now require national level implementation and governments will have to prove whether commitments made at the UN summit in September 2015 were serious in intent. Our analysis shows that there is currently political momentum in Sweden for translating global ambitions into national policies and practice. However, there are also a number of concerns related to responsibility that we argue will affect the long-term advancement of the SDGs. Below, we summarise these concerns and emerging accountability challenges.

A key concern is how the present emphasis on the organisation of political institutional responsibility relates to others' responsibility. The main responsibility for the SDGs is firmly placed with Sweden's Government. It has organised SDG work by assigning special responsibilities to a select set of ministers, by appointing a national delegation and by creating interdepartmental working groups at different levels and one ministry unit devoted to the 2030 Agenda. Beyond governmental responsibility, other political levels (regional, municipal) and non-governmental actors (civil society, business, academia) are approaching the SDGs, albeit more hesitantly. Our interviews indicate a broad willingness to take on responsibility, but the voluntary-based non-state actor responsibilities outlined in the 2030 Agenda outcome documents are yet to be translated to the Swedish context. We think it is crucial to maintain this willingness, including through initiatives from non-state actors themselves. We find a need for more joint debate on the extent and substance of SDG responsibilities of different political levels and of non-state actors. For instance, to what extent can responsibilities be shared? What are the appropriate limits of responsibility of civil society and business?

Another concern is how to uphold enthusiasm in the transition from policy ambition to organisational practice, particularly in light of the impatience we found among civil society organisations and parliamentarians. If maintained, the current political momentum

can create broader and long-term SDG engagement in all societal sectors. The newly appointed 2030 Agenda delegation is an attempt to maintain this momentum and suggest ways for all societal sectors to contribute towards the SDGs. Another way to keep SDG processes going regardless of Swedish political majority shifts and deadlocks in the short term is through better parliamentary involvement. For the future, we also emphasise that responsibility should be understood not only in the political-institutional sense. Individual citizens are pivotal in two main responsibility capacities: firstly, individuals' everyday lifestyle decisions will impact the SDGs in Sweden and abroad; and, secondly, voters need to hold current and future politicians accountable for their SDG work. Ideally, politically institutionally organised responsibility can provide a supportive framework for individual responsibility for sustainable development.

Further, the broad way in which Swedish responsibility is being organised raises coordination and leadership challenges. As discussed throughout the report, the SDGs have a bearing on several other overarching policy objectives of the Swedish Government and the relationship between those and the SDGs is far from clear. Subsequently, there is a risk of weakening the steering power of ambitious policy objectives and of overburdening those assigned responsibility for their realisation. Conflicts between goals will appear as work continues and political leadership will be key in tackling such conflicts. Key for SDG implementation is also the extent to which government agencies are provided with mandates and resources strong enough to work on this extensive agenda at home and abroad. Notably, we found that responsibility concerns for the future differed between groups of interviewees. Government officials highlighted interorganisational issues and the challenge of dividing responsibilities, probably due to their current involvement in SDG planning. Members of the Riksdag were primarily concerned with securing opportunities to influence future priorities. Civil society representatives shared concerns related to future influence and participation, but focused primarily on safeguarding the content of the SDGs.

Our analysis also identified several accountability challenges. More open global policy-making increases participation but invites questions on who gets to participate and how they are held accountable for their influence on policy outcomes. Those questions are also relevant at the Swedish level, where a set of civil society organisations has been repeatedly invited to dialogues with policy-

makers. Expectations related to holding the Government accountable reside with the Swedish Riksdag and with civil society, but can civil society organisations maintain their critical watchdog role after providing direct input to official policies? The low degree of parliamentary ownership of SDG processes is also a challenge for securing long-term accountability relationships between voters, the Riksdag and Government. Parliamentary committees of areas other than development cooperation must be involved for such accountability to be encompassing.

The voluntary-based nature of the SDGs leads to accountability challenges as hard enforcement measures are lacking. Even if UN-based review can promote peer pressure among governments, the national and local levels remain the primary location of broader systematic accountability relationships between citizens and governments. A challenge remains to make governments' SDG responsibilities, which still seem remote to many citizens, part of those accountability relationships. We have also put forth that accountability through quantitative indicators involves trade-offs between, on the one hand, weak statistical data availability in many low-income countries, and on the other hand, pinpointing urgent needs. One risk of an over-reliance on quantitative data collection is that the broader ambitions within which indicators are embedded become secondary, as they are more difficult to measure. We have, for instance, pointed to the many references to human rights in key UN SDG documents. A challenge remains for policy-makers to consider whether and how the SDGs tap into existing mechanisms of human rights accountability.

By employing a conceptual framework based on political theory and political science research, we have highlighted that the current national-level political organisation of responsibility shapes views on where long-term SDG obligations reside. Studying the political context also leads us to emphasise that such organisation can change depending on the political preferences of future governments. We hope the report will trigger discussions about how Swedish responsibility can be promoted, domestically and internationally. For example, there is great variation in the capacity to take responsibility for the SDGs between stakeholder groups and between countries. What can realistically be done and by whom? How do political leaders handle future goal conflicts and vested interests? To what extent should new accountability mechanisms be created specifically for the

SDGs? Future studies should ask those and other critical questions when exploring continued efforts to realise the SDGs on the part of the broad range of actors whose responsibility is key to sustainable development.



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## Appendix 1 Sustainable Development Goals

Goal 1	End poverty in all its forms everywhere.
Goal 2	End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.
Goal 3	Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.
Goal 4	Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.
Goal 5	Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.
Goal 6	Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
Goal 7	Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.
Goal 8	Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.
Goal 9	Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation.
Goal 10	Reduce inequality within and among countries.
Goal 11	Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
Goal 12	Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.
Goal 13	Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts*.
Goal 14	Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
Goal 15	Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.
Goal 16	Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.
Goal 17	Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.

\* Acknowledging that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is the primary international, intergovernmental forum for negotiating the global response to climate change.



## Appendix 2 List of interviewees

### **Swedish Government Offices**

Kajsa B Olofsgård, 2030 Agenda Ambassador, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 14 December 2015

Michael Hjelmåker, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 14 December 2015

Sofia Östmark, Strategic Development and Nordic Cooperation, Prime Minister's Office, 18 January 2016

Ulrika Modéer, State Secretary of Minister for International Development Cooperation, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 19 January 2016

Ulrika Grandin, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 19 January 2016

Stefan Isaksson, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 19 January 2016

Petter Dahlin, Ministry of the Environment and Energy, 5 February 2016

Annelie Roswall Ljunggren, State Secretary of Minister for Public Administration, Ministry of Finance, 8 March 2016

### **Government Agency**

Ulf Källstig, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), General-Director's Office, 19 January 2016

### **Civil Society Organisations**

Linda Nordin, UN Association Sweden (Svenska FN-förbundet), 15 December 2015

Emelie Aho, Forum Syd, 17 December 2015

Hanna Hansson, CONCORD Sweden, 18 January 2016

Lovisa Hagberg, World Wildlife Fund WWF (Världsnaturfonden), 19 January 2016

Sara Lindblom, Save the Children (Rädda Barnen), 19 January 2016

Karin Nilsson, The Swedish Association for Sexuality Education (Riksförbundet för Sexuell Upplysning, RFSU), 5 February 2016

**Members of the Riksdag/ Members of Committee on Foreign Affairs**

Hans Linde, Left Party (Vänsterpartiet), 14 December 2015

Sofia Arkelsten, Moderate Party (Moderaterna), 15 December 2015

Sofia Damm, Christian Democrats (Kristdemokraterna), 19 January 2015

Julia Kronlid, Sweden Democrats (Sverigedemokraterna), 3 February 2016

## Previous EBA-reports

2016:03 *Capturing complexity and context: evaluating aid to education*  
Joel Samoff, Jane Leer, Michelle Reddy

2016:02 *What Education Policies and Programmes Affect Learning and Time in School in Developing Countries?* Amy Damon, Paul Glewwe, Suzanne Wisniewski, Bixuan Sun

2016:01 *Support to regional cooperation and integration in Africa - what works and why?* Fredrik Söderbaum and Therese Brolin

2015:09 *In search of double dividens from climate change intervention evidence from forest conservation and household energy transition.* Gunnar Köhlin, Subhrendu K Pattanyak, Erin Sills, Eskil Mattson, Madelene Ostwald, Ariana Salas, Daniel Ternald

2015:08 *Business and Human Rights in development cooperation – has Sweden incorporated the UN guiding principles?* Rasmus Kløcker Larsen and Sandra Atler

2015:07, *Making development work: the quality of government approach,* Bo Rothstein and Marcus Tannenberg

2015:06, *Now open for business: joint development initiatives between the private and public sectors in development cooperation,* Sara Johansson de Silva, Ari Kokko and Hanna Norberg

2015:05, *Has Sweden injected realism into public financial management reforms in partner countries?* Matt Andrews

2015:04, *Youth, entrepreneurship and development,* Kjetil Bjorvatn

2015:03, *Concentration difficulties? An analysis of Swedish aid proliferation,* Rune Jansen Hagen

2015:02, *Utvärdering av svenskt bistånd – en kartläggning,* Expertgruppen för biståndsanalys

2015:01, *Rethinking Civil Society and Support for Democracy,* Richard Youngs

2014:05, *Svenskt statligt internationellt bistånd i Sverige: en översikt,* Expertgruppen för biståndsanalys

2014:04, *The African Development Bank: ready to face the challenges of a changing Africa?* Christopher Humphrey

2014:03, *International party assistance – what do we know about the effects?* Lars Svåsand

2014:02, *Sweden´s development assistance for health – policy options to support the global health 2035 goals*, Gavin Yamey, Helen Saxenian, Robert Hecht, Jesper Sundewall and Dean Jamison

2014:01, *Randomized controlled trials: strengths, weaknesses and policy relevance*, Anders Olofsgård.