

# Sustainable development goals and inclusive development

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**Abstract** Achieving sustainable development has been hampered by trade-offs in favour of economic growth over social well-being and ecological viability, which may also affect the sustainable development goals (SDGs) adopted by the member states of the United Nations. In contrast, the concept of inclusive development emphasizes the social, ecological and political dimensions of development. In this context, this paper addresses the question: What does inclusive development mean and to what extent is it taken into account in the framing of the SDGs? It presents inclusive development as having three key dimensions (social, ecological, and relational inclusiveness) with five principles each. This is applied to the 17 SDGs and their targets. The paper concludes that while the text on the SDGs fares quite well on social inclusiveness, it fares less well in respect to ecological and relational inclusiveness. This implies that there is a risk that implementation processes also focus more on social inclusiveness rather than on ecological and relational inclusiveness. Moreover, in order to de facto achieve social inclusiveness in the Anthropocene, it is critical that the latter two are given equal weight in the actual implementation process.

**Keywords** Sustainable development goals · Inclusive development · Anthropocene · Growth

## Abbreviations

MDGs Millennium development goals  
SDGs Sustainable development goals

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UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
DDT	Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development
WHO	World Health Organization
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly

## 1 Introduction

The literature on, and politics of, sustainable development shows that achieving *strong* sustainability, which implies no trade-offs between the economic, social and ecological goals, is rare; politics tend to make trade-offs in favour of the economy at the cost of social and ecological issues (Lorek and Spangenberg 2014). Furthermore, autonomous processes of globalization allocate resources through a poorly regulated market, resulting in a ‘one dollar one vote’ approach, rather than a ‘one person one vote’ system at the national level, or a ‘one country one vote’ system at the global level (Karabarbounis 2011; Stiglitz 2015; Piketty 2014). Without strong countervailing power, this might concentrate resources in the hands of the few, as is already happening (Oxfam 2014, 2015).

The millennium development goals (MDGs) of 2000 aimed to compensate for this autonomous concentration of wealth by focusing on ensuring dignity for the very poorest people. It mobilized people in different parts of the world and in different capacities to implement the MDGs, even though the end results have been uneven. Negotiations on the follow-up to the now expired MDGs have expanded the scope of discussion to include ecological issues. They have led to the adoption of a document entitled ‘Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’ which includes the sustainable development goals (UNGA 2014) under the auspices of the United Nations General Assembly (for background see Chasek and Wagner and Gellers in this issue). The sustainable development goals (SDGs) set goals to ensure a ‘social floor’ á la Raworth (2012), and ‘planetary boundaries’ á la Rockström et al. (2009) and suggest some of the means that should help in achieving these goals.

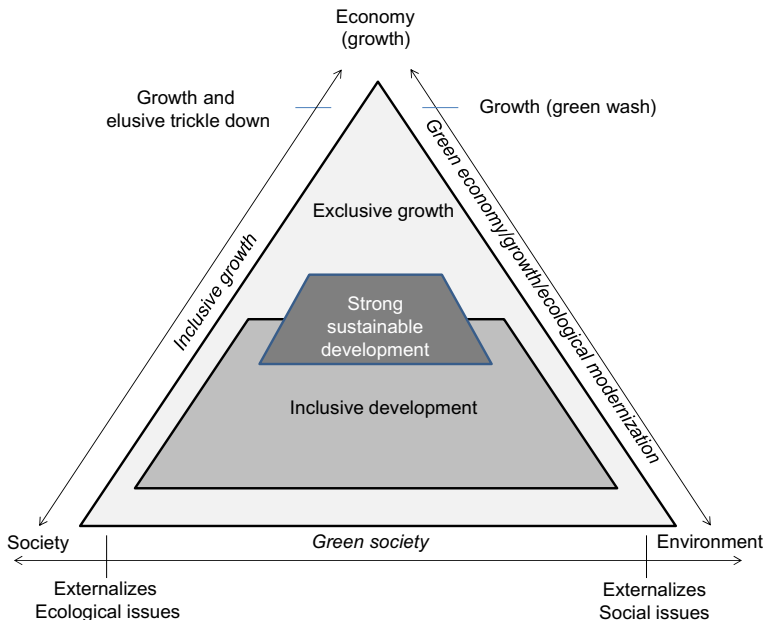
This paper analyses whether the SDG text prioritizes the poor and (their) ecological concerns or whether the SDG agenda runs the risk of being hijacked by the ecological and developmental interests of the rich and focus on economic growth at the cost of the other aspects. It does so by exploring the concept of inclusive development (Sect. 2) and applying it to the SDGs (Sect. 3) in order to highlight likely problems in the successful interpretation and operationalization of the SDGs. Its key question is: What does inclusive development mean and to what extent is it taken into account in the framing of the SDGs? Its central argument is that without a deep commitment to inclusive development, the SDGs run the risk of not directing the substantive transformation needed to achieve strong sustainable development. Its key motivation rests in the spirit of optimists like Jeffrey Sachs and realists like Fukuda-Parr who hope that the SDGs will help bring change at multiple levels of governance; it is less in line with sceptics like Clemens and Easterly, or critics like Saith and Pogge, who see the SDGs as poorly defined and a red herring (Hulme 2009).

## 2 Inclusive development

### 2.1 Introduction

While sustainable development has ecological, social and economic aspects, the difficulties in optimizing all three aspects for present and future generations has led to the rise of concepts that embody dualities of this trinity—green economy/growth (which combines the environment with the economy, UNEP 2011; World Bank 2012), green society (which combines the environment with social goals), inclusive growth (which combines growth with social aspects) and inclusive development (which focuses on social and ecological aspects) (Gupta and Baud 2015). Green growth and inclusive growth are the two most dominant dualities and both have neo-liberal roots but take on an additional dimension—either environmental issues or the need to share economic growth with the poorest. As Fig. 1 shows, interpretation of these dualities can take place anywhere along the spectrum and at the extremes it highlights one aspect more than the other. In contrast, inclusive development questions the need for continuous economic growth in a business-as-usual paradigm (Sect. 2.2). If the global community is willing to develop legally binding rules within which such growth is achieved, then the growth paradigm may also contribute to sustainable development. Until this happens, however, an inclusive development approach is necessary to balance the dominance of the growth approach, especially in the context of global recession.

This section draws on the theoretical work on inclusive development which builds on the following intellectual roots (Gupta et al. 2015a, b, c): social roots which lead to the articulation of social inclusiveness (Sect. 2.2); ecological roots which leads to the articulation of ecological inclusiveness (Sect. 2.3); and political geography roots which argue



**Fig. 1** The relationship between inclusive development and sustainable development

that power politics need to be addressed to protect social and ecological goals (e.g. Mosse 2010), which leads to the articulation of relational inclusiveness (Sect. 2.4). After explaining these aspects of inclusiveness, we derive five principles for each (see Table 1).

## 2.2 Social inclusiveness

Social inclusiveness has its roots in human rights, inequality, redistribution, rural development, entitlements and capabilities concepts (cf. Meier 2001; Thorbecke 2006; Easterly 2007; Sen 1999; Gupta and Thomson 2010) and has been expressed in the Millennium Development Goals (Collier 2007). Social inclusiveness is a multi-level challenge: at the global level, it implies accounting for the least developed and developing countries and post-conflict societies (see e.g. Third World Approaches to International Law (TWAIL) papers such as Okafor 2008). This can be done by encouraging meaningful participation in UN processes, adopting equity principles, capacity building, technology transfer, and financial support. At the regional level, it implies taking the issues of the more vulnerable countries into account and equitable sharing of transboundary resources. At the national level, it implies taking account of marginalized sectors, places, and communities. At the local level, it would imply accounting for specific individuals and groups.

There are seven reasons that justify social inclusiveness (cf. Gupta 2014): humanitarian and normative concerns for the most vulnerable (Sachs 2004a); legal reasons call for the protection of the dignity and human rights of people; economic reasons aim to promote social well-being and participation of the poor in labour and consumption markets (Pouw and McGregor 2014); national security reasons justify meeting the needs of humans (e.g. UNDP 1994); democratic and communist discourses require sharing the results of prosperity with all; public health reasons require investing in the conditions in which the poor live to prevent the spread of poverty related diseases such as cholera, typhoid and others; and international reasons to ensure sustainable societies both within and across borders (where investing in crises affected countries, not only ensures sustainable societies in situ, but can also pre-empt the mass exodus of refugees for ex situ rehabilitation).

Social inclusiveness aims at empowering the poorest through investing in human capital and enhancing the opportunities for participation. It is non-discriminatory and is age, gender, caste, sect and creed sensitive in terms of income, assets and the opportunities for employment (Huang and Quibria 2013). It aims to reduce the exposure to risks such as natural disasters and civil conflict that exacerbate vulnerability (Rauniyar and Kanbur 2010). In doing so, inclusive development policies focus attention on the places (e.g. rural, peri-urban), sectors (e.g. small-scale farming, fishing and community forestry), and arenas (home-based activities, street vendors) of high vulnerability to enhance well-being, including material (i.e. living conditions through access to infrastructure and amenities such as drinking water and sanitation services, education and transport services), social-relational (i.e. in terms of human relations), and cognitive well-being (i.e. taking people's knowledge, experiences and aspirations into account) (Gough and McGregor 2007; Fritz et al. 2009; Narayan et al. 2009; Borel-Saladin and Turok 2013; Arthurson 2002; Mansuri and Rao 2004). These policy processes need to be contextually sensitive (Fritz et al. 2009; Borel-Saladin and Turok 2013), and encourage participatory governance and capacity building to enhance such participation (Sachs 2004a, b; Lawson 2010).

Drawing on the above, this paper suggests that social inclusiveness implies applying five principles (Gupta et al. 2014). These are (a) adopting equity principles to share in development opportunities and benefits; (b) including the knowledge of the marginalized in defining development processes and goals; (c) ensuring a social minimum through a higher

**Table 1** The proposed SDGs and inclusive development

Principles	Which goals	Achievements and limitations
<i>Social inclusiveness</i>		
<p>Ensure equity principles to share the opportunities for development;</p> <p>Include the knowledge of all;</p> <p>Build targeted capacity building to enable effective participation;</p> <p>Enhance protection for the poorest;</p> <p>Engage all in the politics of development</p>	<p>Goal 1: end poverty everywhere;</p> <p>Goal 2: end hunger/malnutrition;</p> <p>Goal 3: enhance well-being and healthy lives;</p> <p>Goal 4: inclusive and equitable education;</p> <p>Goal 5: end inequality between sexes;</p> <p>Goal 6: universal access to water and sanitation;</p> <p>Goal 7: universal access to energy;</p> <p>Goal 8: employment for all;</p> <p>Goal 9: inclusive industrialization;</p> <p>Goal 10: reduce inequalities;</p> <p>Goal 11: inclusive cities;</p> <p>Goal 15: sustainable livelihoods;</p> <p>Goal 16: inclusive institutions</p>	<p>These goals (a) enhance the level of protection for the poor and the small-scale sector, and (b) to a limited extent include all in the opportunities for development. However, there is little on including the knowledge of all, engaging all in the politics of development, or effective capacity building to enable better participation</p>
<i>Ecological inclusiveness</i>		
<p>Adopt ecocentric limits from local to global level;</p> <p>Equitably share rights, responsibilities and risks;</p> <p>Build resilience and adaptive capacity;</p> <p>'Green' international cooperative instruments;</p> <p>Involve all stakeholders</p>	<p>Goal 1: Resilience to disasters and land ownership;</p> <p>Goal 2: Sustainable agriculture;</p> <p>Goal 6: Sustainable water management;</p> <p>Goal 7: Sustainable energy;</p> <p>Goal 8: Enhance resource efficiency, decouple growth from degradation;</p> <p>Goal 9: Sustainable industrialization;</p> <p>Goal 11: sustainable cities;</p> <p>Goal 12: Sustainable consumption and production patterns;</p> <p>Goal 13: Combat climate change;</p> <p>Goal 14: Sustainably use marine resources;</p> <p>Goal 15: Promote sustainable ecosystems and halt land degradation</p>	<p>Some goals (a) establish some ecocentric targets; (b) focus on building resilience and adaptive capacity; and (c) regulating financial institutions. However, there are no measures for how rights, responsibilities and risks are to be shared between different groups; international cooperation is mentioned but not in how it needs to be reformed; and there is not enough guarantee of the participation of all stakeholders</p>
<i>Relational inclusiveness</i>		
<p>Ensure that public goods and merit goods do not become privatized or securitized;</p> <p>Address all drivers and actors; and combat offshoring, tax havens, and other instruments that lead to concentration of wealth and ecospace;</p> <p>Address discourses that concentrate wealth to ensure that markets and growth takes place within inclusive development paradigm;</p> <p>Test instruments for inclusiveness and ensure downward accountability;</p> <p>Ensure global rule of law and constitutionalism</p>	<p>Goal 3: refers to Tobacco Convention—with strong relational approach;</p> <p>Goal 4: gender equality;</p> <p>Goal 10: reduce inequality;</p> <p>Goal 11: urban rural interface;</p> <p>Goal 12: control private ownership;</p> <p>Goals 13 and 14: encourages developed countries to take responsibilities on climate change and biodiversity;</p> <p>Goal 16: promote peaceful and inclusive societies, access to justice;</p> <p>Goal 17: Revitalize global partnership</p>	<p>These goals aim to (a) promote rule of law and equality of access; (b) address issues of bribery and corruption, illicit financial flows; (c) end inequality in terms of enhancing voice. However, they do not address the logic of market-based economic growth, safeguard public goods from privatization and securitization, or ensure downward accountability</p>

level of protection for the most marginalized; (d) targeted capacity building to help the poor benefit from opportunities since they may not be able to otherwise use such opportunities; and (e) engaging the marginalized in the politics of development governance.

### 2.3 Environmental inclusiveness

Historically, environmental issues focused on single issues like the protection of endangered species. Over time, ecological issues were seen less as single one-off incidents and more as interlocked with development issues (WCED 1987). The knowledge that resource exploitation has experienced ‘the great acceleration’ (Steffen et al. 2007) such that we are living beyond our ecological means (WWF 2012), confirms that the Earth has entered the geological era of the Anthropocene (Crutzen 2006; see also Boas et al. in this issue).

In scalar terms, ecological inclusiveness at the local level focuses on protecting local access to and ownership of resources as well as protecting local ecosystems. At the national level, it requires that resources are well managed and the sustainability of ecosystem services are ensured. At the transboundary and global level, it implies not causing harm to other countries and using common but differentiated responsibilities for dealing with global problems.

Environmental inclusiveness, or the relation between environmental issues and the marginalized, emerges from three different strands. First, the livelihoods argument has been that the poor depend on their local ecosystem for their survival (e.g. Chambers and Conway 1991). Second, the vulnerability argument focuses on how the vulnerability of the poor may be exacerbated by the effects of climate change (Paavola and Adger 2006) and thus calls for enhancing adaptive capacity and resilience (Nelson et al. 2007). Third, the Anthropocene argument is that the great acceleration in the demand for limited land, water, and other resources and sinks may lead to ecospace grabbing or the large-scale transfer of these resources from local communities to governments, large corporations and the private sector by changing the rules of access to these resources (cf. Zoomers 2010; Fairhead et al. 2012; Leach et al. 2012) which may further exacerbate the vulnerability of the poor (Gupta 2014). Limited sinks refers to the amount of greenhouse gases that we may emit into the atmosphere if we wish to address the problem of climate change; or the carrying capacity of our ecosystems if we wish them to continue to provide us the supporting (e.g. nutrient cycling), regulating (e.g. climate regulation), provisioning (e.g. fish), and cultural services they have always provided us (Chopra et al. 2005). Living and progressing within these limits requires a different vision regarding prosperity and well-being. It challenges the need for continuous growth (Lorek and Spangenberg 2014) with its perverse incentives for a throwaway materialistic society. It calls for equitably allocating rights (i.e. who has the right to access these resources and when can these rights be curtailed), responsibilities (i.e. who has relevant responsibilities and how can such responsibilities be monitored and implemented) and risks (i.e. who faces the risks caused by abuse of the rights and responsibilities and who compensates for these risks) associated with such ecocentric limits for all peoples and countries (Gupta and Lebel 2010). It also calls for greening the financial, aid and trade institutions (e.g. Hicks et al. 2008).

This translates into five principles. These include (a) the adoption of multiple sets of internally consistent, contextually relevant, but not necessarily identical ecocentric limits from the local to the global level to maintain ecosystem capital and services (e.g. the 2 degree target for climate change); (b) developing equitably shared rights, responsibilities and risks; (c) ensuring adequate legal protection and building the adaptive capacity of the most vulnerable to cope with resource conflicts and the impacts of climate change; (d) greening

existing international instruments on trade, investment and development assistance; and (e) engaging relevant stakeholders in defining and implementing the above instruments.

## 2.4 Relational inclusiveness

Relational inclusiveness recognizes that poverty and ecological degradation are often the result of actions taken by others (Harriss-White 2006; Mosse 2010) because of increasing inequality in society (Piketty 2014; Stiglitz 2015) and the substance and process of politics (e.g. Okafor 2008). A scalar perspective requires understanding and addressing the multi-level drivers of inequality, exclusion and vulnerability (see e.g. Laven 2010; Ros-Tonen et al. 2015).

Social inequality refers to the difference in income, wealth, opportunity and access between the rich and the poor. Currently, an astounding 85 individuals possess more wealth than the bottom half of the global population (Oxfam 2014). By 2016, the richest 1 % is expected to own more than the remaining 99 %, rising from 44 % in 2009 (Oxfam 2015). Although historical inequalities were reduced in the twentieth century, the trend is towards rising inequality today (Piketty 2014; Stiglitz 2015; Ortiz and Cummins 2011; Milanovic 2011). The rich have become richer through the historical accumulation of wealth that is unevenly taxed, exploitation of capital markets (which may or may not create bubbles such as the housing bubble—where investors were bailed out by tax-payers at the cost of homeowners), and the development of intellectual property rights that protect medical patents, among others.

Given the importance of natural resources and sinks for economic growth, the rich invest heavily in these resources (land rights, water rights, minerals and metals, the electromagnetic spectrum) and sinks (e.g. by purchasing emission rights) leading also to ecological inequality. By not accepting their responsibility for environmental pollution (e.g. the USA has not ratified the Law of the Seas, the Kyoto Protocol, the Biodiversity Convention), the rich can also avoid their responsibility with impunity by influencing the rules of governance at the national and international level.

Thus, the concentration of wealth leads to inequality through direct and indirect resource expropriation. It also increases the ability of the rich to lobby for a certain kind of politics such as calling for small government and deregulation. Countering the cause and effect of structural inequalities caused by the political relations that keep them intact requires both scholarly engagements on inclusive development through multi-scalar, geographically and sectorally diverse analyses, and social movements to bring attention to them (Townsend 1993; Hickey et al. 2015; Hickey 2005).

A relational approach first requires a rethinking of how merit and public goods are managed (Kaul et al. 2003) and whether the privatization and securitization of these by state entities compromises human security or not. Second, the direct and indirect drivers of poverty, exclusion, and environmental degradation operate from the local to the global level, involving marginal to extremely powerful actors. This calls for policies that deal with all actors as opposed to policies that only deal with empowering the poorest (cf. Harriss-White 2006; Mosse 2010). This would counter the tendency to offshore economic activities and offload governance activities (deregulation) as a way to bypass rules. Third, it recognizes that the roots of the direct and indirect drivers of inequality may lie in the ideological foundations of society calling for the questioning of dominant discourses and vested interests. Fourth, it sees the normative, legal, and instrumental interventions (Cook 2006; Rappaport 1987: 122) as not value-neutral. For example, when states make trade-offs between economic growth for all (i.e. collective well-being) and individual well-being, this

can lead to marginalization of the latter (Pouw and McGregor 2014) and adverse inclusion. This calls for the downward accountability of institutions (Narayan 2002). Finally, an inclusive relational approach calls for global constitutionalism and rule of law to ensure that powerful actors like governments, entities, banks, and tax havens are subject to common rules (cf. Koskeniemi 2009; Gupta 2014).

This translates into the following principles: (a) develop specific rules on public and merit goods and ensure that these do not become privatized or securitized directly or indirectly; (b) address all drivers at all levels, and combat ‘offshoring’ and ‘virtualization’ of the economy by large corporations and the wealthy to bypass tax and other rules; tax the accumulation of wealth and check when deregulation affects the rights of the poorest; (c) question the discourses that lead to exclusive growth and ensure that markets function within the constraints of inclusive development rules and that these rules are made legally binding; (d) test instruments for inclusiveness and ensure downward accountability; and (e) promote the rule of law and constitutionalism at the global and national levels as a way to combat power politics at both the global and national level to ensure that no country or powerful entity is above the law.

### 3 Applying ID to the SDGs

#### 3.1 Introduction

The UN document, ‘Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’ includes a declaration of the 17 SDGs and their respective targets along with follow-up and review measures (for other approaches to these 17 Goals, see Chasek and Wagner and Boas et al. in this issue). The document has a rhetorical commitment to ‘sustainable development’ (mentioning it 85 times). It does not mention ‘inclusive development’. It has 41 references to the term ‘inclusive’ including six references to ‘inclusive societies’ and ‘inclusive and sustainable economic growth’ respectively and one to ‘inclusive growth’. It focuses strongly on ‘growth’ which is repeated 16 times (which is occasionally qualified by adjectives such as inclusive or sustainable). Target 8.4 aims at decoupling growth from environmental degradation. However, this does not reflect that a true decoupling will require drastic redefinition of what constitutes growth. Theoretically, sustainable growth implies growth that takes social, economic and ecological aspects into account, but ‘sustained growth’—the term used nine times in the document, often in relation to inclusiveness and sustainability—has a different meaning. This reflects the view of some development economists that growth is needed to reduce inequality, a vision we contest. In Goal 9, ‘sustainable industrialization’ and increased resource use efficiency recognize the concept of limited ecospace by encouraging sustainable use of resources for economic growth. Even so, the emphasis on economic growth reflects the type of dualities mentioned above and undermines more ecocentric goals.

This confirms our fear that there is a risk that the SDGs will go the way of the sustainable development discourse and make trade-offs in favour of growth over social and ecological issues. Business-as-usual growth is justified as necessary for reducing social inequalities and for addressing ecological issues instead of making clear commitments to redefine the development process. This would be to live within ecological constraints for the well-being of society, even if it is at the cost of sustained growth. Beyond the use of terms, we now assess whether the SDG document is truly transformative by assessing it in relation to our inclusive development principles (see Table 1).



### 3.2 SDGs and social inclusiveness

Of the 17 Goals, 13 focus on social inclusiveness, but also take some ecological or relational aspects into account. Goal 1 aims to end all forms of poverty everywhere, recognizes that poverty is not simply measured in income per capita and that it is also not exclusively located in poor countries. It specifies targets for eradicating extreme poverty, ensuring social protection systems including floors, and ensuring access to basic resources. These social floors are further elaborated in Goal 2 which aims to end hunger and malnutrition by 2030, while doubling the productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers; and in Goal 3 which aims at enhancing well-being and healthy lives through targets on reducing maternal mortality, preventable deaths of children, and major epidemics, managing substance abuse and traffic related deaths, and universal access to sexual and reproductive health care services and health coverage by 2030. Social floors also include Goal 4's focus on inclusive and equitable education through universal completion of primary and secondary education, access to pre-primary education, and opportunities to enhance vocational and lifelong learning by 2030. Similarly, Goal 6 aims to ensure universal access to water and sanitation. Goal 7 ensures universal access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy, while Goal 8 promotes universal employment opportunities. Goal 9 focuses on resilient and sustainable infrastructure with affordable and equitable access for all and inclusive and sustainable industrialization. It aims to integrate small-scale enterprises into value chains.

Goal 5 focuses on gender equality by eliminating discrimination, violence, harmful social practices, recognizing the value of unpaid care, promoting participation, and promoting access to sexual and reproductive health rights. Goal 10 aims at reducing inequalities within and among countries to achieve social, economic and political inclusion. Goal 11 is likewise defined by inclusive aspirations in cities and human settlements to make them safe and resilient. It guarantees access to housing, basic services, and transportation, but with special attention for women, children, people with disabilities and older persons. Goal 15 refers also to sustainable livelihoods for local communities so that they can avoid relying on poaching and trafficking of protected species for income. Finally, Goal 16 promotes inclusive societies and institutions aiming to reduce violence and death, abuse, trafficking and torture of children, provide legal identity and birth certificates to all, ensure participatory decision-making, guarantee access to information, and protect fundamental freedoms.

Most targets are national-level targets with primarily national-level responsibilities. Goal 10 has very specific global (target 10.5, 10.6, 10.a, 10.b), transnational or non-territorial (target 10.7, 10.c), and national (10.1, 10.2, 10.3, 10.4) aspects while also incorporating global (migrant) and national populations.

While these goals clearly meet two of the five principles—namely that of (a) enhancing the level of protection for the poor/marginalized and small-scale sector; and (b) enhancing development opportunities for all to a limited extent—there is little emphasis on including the knowledge of all, or engaging all, or promoting effective capacity building to enable better participation.

### 3.3 SDGs and ecological inclusiveness

Eleven goals focus on ecological inclusiveness, marking a shift away from the MDG targets and towards recognizing the interrelationships between exclusion, marginalization and an overburdened environment. They set targets on production and consumption patterns (Goal 12) including sustainable and resilient agricultural practices, maintaining

ecosystem services and adaptation to climate change, genetic diversity and securing seed and plant banks (Goal 2), demand side management through energy efficiency and supply side management through promoting renewable energy (Goal 7), resource efficiency, decoupling growth from pollution (Goal 8) and sustainable industrialization (Goal 9); and on enhancing the quality of life by providing access to open and green spaces for all, sustainable transport systems, sustainable urbanization, sustainable human settlement planning, and improving air quality and waste management within sustainable and resilient cities (Goal 11). These targets also focus on sustainable water management from local to global levels (Goal 6 and 14), mitigating climate change (Goal 13), and protecting ecosystems and forests (Goal 15). Perhaps most significant for the prospects of ensuring ecological inclusiveness is target 15.9 which calls for mainstreaming the principle of ecosystem protection into international, national, and local development agendas. In terms of building resilience, Goals 11 and 13 call to minimize exposure to disasters and enhance resilience and adaptive capacity, not least through emphasizing the importance of land and resource ownership of the poorest (Goal 1).

Different levels are addressed in the need to adopt sustainable practices including the state, the private sector, local economies depending on tourism, and populations. Key to these steps is also the effective mobilization of financial resources and the role of international law.

Thus some of these goals (a) establish ecocentric targets, if vague in qualitative and quantitative terms; (b) focus on building resilience and adaptive capacity; and (c) regulate financial institutions. However, few if any deal with the other principles of allocating rights, responsibilities and risks between countries, or how to 'green' international cooperation institutions. There is also not enough guarantee of the participation of all stakeholders.

### 3.4 SDGs and relational inclusiveness

Three of the 17 SDGs take an explicitly relational approach (Goals 10, 16 and 17), while others are more implicit. It is remarkable, relative to the MDGs, that the proposed SDGs made a clear relational goal on reducing inequality within and among countries. Goal 10 provides guards against exclusion at different levels and recognizes the overlap between multiple forms of exclusion and marginalization. Inclusion refers to closing the income gap between the rich and poor, eliminating discriminatory laws and implementing social protection to enhance equality. This goes beyond social protection purely to prevent people from falling below the absolute poverty line. Furthermore, inclusion is facilitated by monitoring global financial markets, and by enhancing representation and conditions for developing countries in global decision-making fora. It tries to tackle structural inequality through changing decision-making processes, aid, investment, and trade agreements.

Goal 16 goes a step further to call for the rule of law and equal access to justice for all, which is critical for addressing structural issues. It also focuses on reducing illicit financial and arms flows, reducing corruption and bribery and ensuring responsive participatory institutions. Goal 17 addresses structural issues by focusing on enhancing tax imposition on the rich, reiterating the 0.7 % official development assistance commitment of rich countries and addressing structural international debt issues. It includes the usual clauses on technology transfer and capacity building, the promotion of policy coherence, multi-stakeholder partnerships and monitoring and accountability.

Additional targets embracing relational aspects focus on enhancing opportunities for the poor and managing migration possibilities, as well as progressive taxation, monitoring of global institutions and financial markets, and giving more voice to developing countries in

global financial and economic policy. Goal 3 includes a reference to WHO's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, an instrument with a relational approach since it not only focuses on rules to reduce demand, but also on rules to control supply by producers. It also recommends that there should be access to medicines in developing countries using the flexibilities of intellectual property rights laws in order to promote public health. Goal 4 on gender equality tries to address the complex issue of ownership rights, but otherwise is not really dramatic in its relational approach.

Goal 11 encourages positive links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas to promote mutually inclusive instead of exclusive development. Goal 12 includes targets which address the threat of private ownership of resources and aims to regulate private actors and their reporting practices. Goal 13 emphasizes the need for national ratification of climate change measures, and the responsibility that developed countries have to developing countries to help them act in accordance with them. Goal 15 reiterates the need for developed countries to raise financial resources to protect biodiversity and other ecological goals.

The SDGs (a) promote the rule of law and equality of access to justice; (b) attempt at addressing issues of bribery, corruption, illicit financial flows, tax evasion, unfair subsidies, and debt forgiveness; and (c) deal with ending inequality by enhancing fair participation within domestic and international institutions. However, they do not address the logic of market-based economic growth, safeguard public goods from privatization and securitization, nor ensure downward accountability. Furthermore, the lack of clear quantitatively defined targets and timetables for some of these issues may run the risk that they pacify critics without actually delivering on the goals.

### 3.5 SDGs and implementation

This section explores what the document says about SDG implementation. While Goal 17 on implementation highlights the importance of finance, technology, capacity building, trade, and systemic issues, other goals also include some aspects of implementation. On social inclusiveness, Goals 1 and 17 seek better domestic financial resource mobilization; Goals 9 and 17 promote cooperation on science, technology, innovation and ICT; Goals 4 and 8 promote capacity building of teachers, scholarships for higher education in other countries, and a global strategy for youth employment.

On ecological inclusiveness, Goals 7, 11, 14, and 17 emphasize raising financial resources and cooperating on environmentally sound technologies between states and recommend multilateral negotiations within the UN calling, *inter alia*, for the full implementation of international law on climate change and water (Goals 6, 17).

Relational inclusiveness is more complex as it challenges the existing status quo and is expressly developed in Goal 10. It calls on the powerful countries to meet their ODA commitments, debt restructuring to help developing countries, and to deal with tax evasion. Goal 17 calls on powerful institutions such as the trading regime to promote more balanced trading and to implement the principle of special and differential treatments for developing countries, in accordance with long-standing WTO agreements. Beyond this, implementation also means doubling the share of global exports of LDCs by 2020 and using international forums to give special attention to rural infrastructure and agricultural research and to managing food price volatility. Goal 8, which focuses on aid for trade, may counter the relational approach if carried to its logical conclusion.

Some goals call on all countries to enhance tax collection capacities to generate revenue which may also force multinational corporations to reduce their own tax avoidance practices. There is also a focus on reducing unfair subsidies. Technology transfer to

developing countries is required to take place on terms favourable to them, including concessional and preferential terms. Importantly, in Goal 17, capacity building is meant to come from support from developed countries. In terms of social aspects, pro-poor and gender-sensitive policies are to be included from the national to the international level.

The targets in Goal 17 addressing policy coherence are implicitly relational in nature. Aiming for macroeconomic stability without undermining the national integrity of developing countries implicitly restricts developed countries from being too invasive and setting their economic conditions. Likewise, the target to enhance global access to data and information means that—with equal understanding and knowledge about any issue area—there will be a more level playing field between developed and developing countries in negotiating all forms of development interventions.

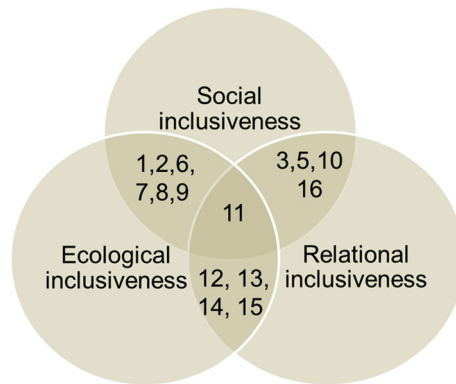
Thus these targets reflect relational criteria by putting pressure on developed countries to take their responsibilities seriously and to work through multilateral institutions. More radically (though extremely limited), they hint at reducing the opportunities for tax breaks and evasion by multinationals. Nonetheless, they do not collectively represent a powerful enough relational text that challenges status quo politics and existing power relations to create more conducive conditions for enhancing inclusive development.

## 4 Conclusion

This paper argues that an inclusive development analysis of the SDGs may help to assess whether the textual design truly aims at ensuring that development focuses both on social and ecological issues, as well as on the political tools for achieving the transformation to which it aims. Recognizing the risk that the SDG agenda may go the same route as the sustainable development discourse—that priority will go to economic growth over social and economic goals—this paper has surveyed the 17 SDGs to assess how well they represent inclusive development. We conclude first that the SDG document continues to emphasize the growth component in its interpretation of sustainable development. Second, the SDG text scores well on the articulation of social inclusiveness—as 11 of the 17 goals focus on issues concerning the most marginalized. Third, its commitment to addressing ecological inclusiveness is significantly lower. Although eleven goals deal with ecological issues, the actual quantitative and qualitative commitment is lower. They are largely focused on technology transfer and scientific solutions and not enough on the need to redefine the growth concept based on the availability of limited ecospace and the need to enhance human welfare. Fourth, while relational politics generally received low attention, the SDGs do groundbreaking work by at least mentioning global inequalities, and the need to tax the rich and reform global institutions to create a level playing field. However, in contrast to the other two aspects of inclusive development, relational politics has received the least amount of attention, though the unexpected mention of private sector responsibility and focus on multi-scalar decision-making bodies represents the potential for important changes.

Fifth, what is however remarkable is that there are few goals that either only focus on social issues or only focus on ecological or relational issues. All focus quite substantively on the nexus between two of three criteria, except SDG 11 which straddles all three elements, and SDG 17 which takes relational issues to an operational level (see Fig. 2).

The foregoing content analysis leads us to some points for reflection. First, from the perspective of inclusive development, successful implementation of the SDGs would not only mean that poverty and marginalization are reduced, ecological sustainability is enhanced, and the gap between the powerful and less powerful is minimized. Rather, it also



**Fig. 2** Applying the inclusive development concept to the SDGs

means recognizing a powerful ends-means connection between the goals and the ways in which they are integrated into global society. This requires conceptual coherence between the SDGs themselves and how they are applied. Thus, the methods for implementation would need to embrace the principles of inclusive development in themselves to overcome unequal power relations in order to genuinely address the goals.

Second, the implementation of the SDGs would need to challenge the business-as-usual approach to growth. Seeking to promote the rule of law at the national and international levels, upward and downward accountability in institutions, enhanced participation, freedoms and capabilities at all levels, the SDGs clearly aim to bring up the baseline for developing countries and poorer global populations. The articulation of these goals focuses a good deal on what the developed world should do to help achieve them. While this is a crucial component, this may problematically assume a full commitment to equality, sustainable development, and ecological protection on the part of the developed countries as well as large corporations. The scholarly community and NGOs will need to monitor this commitment. The risk of undermining the relational approach can only be avoided by setting the terms for truly equal and participatory interactions between developed and developing countries.

Third, as a corollary to this, the inclusive approach to the SDGs requires developed countries to give something up. This might be done by establishing implementation goals for enhanced democratic and multi-scalar decision-making frameworks which include clear stipulations for how richer participants must change their own behaviour and adjust their own interests as well as ensure that there are resources for financing the implementation of the goals. Additionally, social movements may need to put more pressure on the political or economic powers-that-be to level out the playing field by their own volition, beyond providing required financing or creating conditions for more participation (for example through crowdsourcing as highlighted in Gellers this issue). This might mean that the content of the SDGs would have been stronger with a mention of the UN Global Compact with corporations given that several other frameworks are mentioned to enhance policy coherence. In short, goals to bring up the ‘bottom’ should be complemented by lowering the ‘top’.

There is potential for the SDGs to mobilize scholarly communities, communities of practice and social movements around them to demand relational change and accountability by those implementing the SDGs. This effort can be enhanced with a commitment to the principles of inclusive development by all stakeholders. Even where the current SDG

text falls short in this regard, it has provided a more comprehensive and holistic context in which such a commitment has room to flourish.

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