Global Governance through Goals: Assessing and Explaining the Origins behind Sustainable Development Goal 10, Including Its Targets and Indicators

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Summary

In response to growing political concerns about the rise in inequality within and between countries, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include what appears to be a groundbreaking goal to reduce inequality. This study aims to discover why member states included SDG10 in its current form by analyzing the negotiation process on goal, targets, and indicators. The analysis was performed through desk research, using existing literature such as position papers, meeting statements, and theoretical literature.

The results show that during the preliminary negotiations on a framework to succeed the Millennium Development Goals, reducing inequality emerged as a potential new global norm. However, the UN Open Working Group on SDGs could not agree about what, exactly, the norm should be. Civil society organizations, led by Oxfam and Professor Stiglitz as norm entrepreneurs, demanded a global norm on reducing vertical economic inequality as part of a stand-alone goal. On the other hand, states framed inequality as social inclusion, to be addressed throughout the framework, which was less politically sensitive. A breakthrough happened when developing countries, unsatisfied with the lack of between-country inequality targets, also started demanding a stand-alone goal. This resulted in goal 10 on inequality and ten accompanying targets.

At face value, the goal conveys a transformative global norm, but this is misleading as civil society organizations were unable to gather enough support from states for a target to reduce the gap between the top and bottom incomes. In combination with watered down targets and indicators, this led to a misalignment between the title of the goal and its content.

This shows that despite the open nature of the OWG, member states remained by far the most influential decision-makers and successfully used an “ignore-and-reframe” strategy to keep politically sensitive proposals out of SDG10. Also, although civil society organizations had limited influence, when coupled with developing countries they were able to push for the stand-alone goal despite strong resistance from developed member states. This would be an exciting avenue to explore further. To what extent can developing countries together with non-state actors push for global norms? Related, does the inclusion of SDG10 make a global norm on vertical economic inequality in the future more likely, and what would be needed to achieve this? Lastly, this study showed that future negotiations on global goals could benefit from more technical expertise early on in the process so that targets and indicators are less flawed.

Keywords: Inequality, SDG10, Agenda 2030, SDGs, SDG10, Within-country inequality, Between-country inequality, Open Working Group

Preface

This thesis has been written to fulfill the graduation requirements of the Sustainable Development Master at Utrecht University. The basis for this research stems from one of the first courses that we had to take as part of the Master. In *Foundations of Earth System Governance*, Dr. Biermann taught us among others about Planetary Justice. This combined my passion for sustainable development with my interest in the role that inequality plays in governance (which I got interested in during my Bachelor in Sociology). When I discovered that governments for the first time had decided to work together on a global scale to tackle inequality in the form of the SDGs, I wanted to study how they got to that point, and this Master's thesis was my chance.

I want to thank all members of the Global Goals Team for their feedback on the presentation I gave about my research up to that point. It helped me to zoom in on what was most important: not just the inclusion of the goal, but also the formulation of the corresponding targets and indicators. Furthermore, it was very valuable to sit in on some of the Global Goals Project meetings, to see first-hand how research at this high level comes about.

Of course I also want to thank my supervisor and second readers, Dr. Biermann and Dr. Vijge, for their valuable advice on my research proposal and – in the case of Dr. Biermann – on my subsequent drafts.

Last but not least, I would not be here without the support of my parents. They have always given me the opportunity to follow my interests, and I am very grateful for that.

I hope you enjoy your reading.

Anne Luijten

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Contents

Abbreviations

Agenda 2030	The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development *Transforming Our World*
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations, such as nongovernmental organizations, academics, activists, and think tanks. It excludes governments, intergovernmental organizations such as the UN and businesses.
EU	European Union
G77	Group of 77, including China
HLP	The UN's High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda
IGN	Intergovernmental Negotiations on the Post-2015 Development Agenda
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NGOs	Nongovernmental Organizations
OWG	UN General Assembly's Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals
Rio+20	2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
UNGA	UN General Assembly

1. Introduction

The topic of inequality has been receiving broad and current interest. Politicians, scholars, and citizens alike are growing increasingly concerned about the consequences of heightened inequality on society. Inequality of income and wealth has been on the rise since the 1980s, both within and between countries (Alvaredo, Chancel, Piketty, Saez, & Zucman, 2018). After 2000, inequality *between* countries has declined somewhat, mainly resulting from economic growth in Asia (particularly in China and India), but remains at high levels (Alvaredo et al., 2018).

Additionally, *within* most countries, both rich and poor, inequality continues to rise, as the wealthiest people get an increasingly large share of the total income at the expense of the rest (Alvaredo et al., 2018; UNDESA, 2013). This within-country rise in inequality has led to an increase in global wealth inequality. The World Inequality Lab calculated that in 2016, about 33 percent of global wealth was in the hands of the wealthiest 1 percent, up from 28 percent in 1980 (Alvaredo et al., 2018). Others estimate this percentage to be even higher (Oxfam, 2015).

In response to the rise in inequality, people everywhere have been filling the streets to demand action from politicians. Following the 2008 financial crisis and ensuing worldwide recession, what became known as the “Arab Spring” erupted in the Middle East in 2010, protesting, among others, the rise in inequality (Ansani & Daniele, 2012). Inspired by these protests, the “Occupy” movement (2011-2012) began in the United States and spread worldwide, using the slogan “the 99%” to show discontent with the large concentration of wealth (Stiglitz, 2012). Most recently, the “yellow vest” protest in France and other countries, which was sparked by rising fuel prices, brought to the surface the deeper issue of inequality (Henley, 2018).

In the meantime, several influential scholars have warned for rising inequality within and between countries by displaying its harmful consequences, and have offered potential solutions

(Atkinson, 2015; Piketty, 2014; Stiglitz, 2012; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). For instance, Piketty, a French economist who writes about wealth and income inequality, showed in his bestselling book *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* that inequality is a feature of capitalism that can be reversed only through policies and reforms by the state (Piketty, 2014). His book sparked a global conversation about inequality, capitalism, and tax policies.

In addition to social activists and academics, major international economic institutions and world leaders have also become aware of the adverse effects of inequality. A 2012 report of the World Economic Forum states that its stakeholders identified "severe income inequality as the most likely global risk to manifest in the next 10 years" (World Economic Forum, 2012, p. 19). Furthermore, in 2013 President Xi Jinping of China, Pope Francis, and President Obama of the United States all spoke on the need to reduce inequality (*Apostolic Exhortations*, 2013; Grammaticas, 2013; White House Office of the Press Secretary, 2013). In that same year, the World Bank developed a twin goal to end poverty and promote shared prosperity, which put inequality at the heart of its activities (World Bank, 2013b).

So how is it possible that despite protests from citizens all over the world and the warnings from scholars and scientists, which has resulted in increased awareness of and knowledge about the harmful effects of inequality, inequality continues to grow? The increase in inequality has to do more with political-institutional factors than economic ones (Palma, 2011) because countries lack appropriate redistribution policies (Chancel, Hough, & Voituriez, 2017; Stiglitz, 2012). Up until the inclusion of a goal to reduce inequality in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, politicians were hesitant to address it. Reducing inequality calls for redistribution of income and wealth, which is detrimental for the wealthy. They exert political pressure to avert such redistribution (Stiglitz, 2012). As a result, politicians often lack "the *conviction* and the *capability* to do what is obvious," namely to implement redistribution policies to reduce inequality (Palma, 2011, p. 122). Writing on the United States, Joseph Stiglitz describes these dynamics as follows:

> Politics have shaped the market, and shaped it in ways that advantage the top. . . . The economic elite have pushed for a framework that benefits them at the expense of the rest, but it is a system that is neither efficient nor fair. . . . Given a political system that is so sensitive to moneyed interest, growing economic inequality leads to a growing imbalance of political power, a vicious nexus between politics and economics. (2012, pp. l–li)

On top of the political power of the wealthy to keep inequality reduction policies off the table, countries differ in the level of inequality they find acceptable, which makes coordination among governments difficult. In some countries, such as the United States, government intervention is seen as unjust and unnecessary, especially if this takes the form of redistributive policies (Stiglitz, 2012). Since national governments disagree about what level of inequality is desirable and since there is no universally accepted norm on how much inequality within a society is deemed acceptable, it is difficult to unify national governments around measures to reduce it.

For these reasons, it seemed that it would be "politically difficult" to include a stand-alone goal on reducing inequality within and between countries in the SDGs (Melamed, 2012b, p. 7). And yet, somehow this is exactly what happened. In September 2015, after more than three years of negotiations and discussions, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly adopted the resolution *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (from here on: Agenda 2030), with the 17 SDGs at its core (UN, 2015b). The goals address social, economic, and environmental challenges through formulating actions and policies up until 2030 that must lead to global cooperation in sustainable development. Among them is SDG10, on reducing inequality within and between countries (UN, 2015b).

SDG10 has been called "one of the most striking and groundbreaking elements of the 2030 Agenda" (Saiz & Donald, 2017, p. 1029). Many of the 17 SDGs resonate with and build on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), but this is not the case for SDG10. The MDGs did not target inequality, as they were primarily concerned with reducing poverty (Freistein & Mahlert, 2016; Fukuda-Parr & McNeill, 2019; MacNaughton, 2017). Moreover, because they measured average progress, lumping together different groups in aggregates and averages, they masked inequality (Melamed, 2012a, 2012b). As a result, when the MDGs arrived at their 2015-deadline, progress had been uneven and significant disparities remained both between and within countries (UN, 2015a). The inclusion of a goal on inequality as part of the SDGs has the potential to address this.

The goal is vital in its own right, but also necessary to achieve many of the other SDGs. For instance, high inequality harms economic growth, is linked to lower social mobility (the poverty trap), and contributes to high delinquency rates, political instability, social unrest, and poor health. High inequality thus not only worsens the lives of individuals but also harms society as a whole (Melamed, 2012b; Melamed & Samman, 2013; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). Achieving SDG10 is, therefore, both a critical and foundational issue for sustainable development (MacNaughton, 2017; Oestreich, 2018).

So how and why was it decided to include this groundbreaking goal in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals in its current form? This paper gives a detailed account of the negotiations behind the inclusion of goal 10. It addresses the origins behind the norm on inequality, the intergovernmental negotiations of the goal, and the conflicts that emerged during these negotiations. Since the global norms conveyed by the SDGs take the form of quantitative targets and indicators (“governance by numbers”) (Fukuda-Parr & McNeill, 2019), the paper devotes special attention to the targets and indicators under SDG10. These will be used by governments to build policy towards greater equality in the years to come.

2. Theory

One of the reasons that the SDGs are so relevant to global governance is that they are instruments that have generated internationally agreed or global norms. A norm is a standard of behavior for actors of a given identity (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Katzenstein, 1996), while global norms are "accepted by states and intergovernmental organizations that can be applied to states, intergovernmental organizations, and/or nonstate actors of various kinds" (Khagram, Riker, & Sikkink, 2002, p. 14).

The SDG negotiations consisted of an intense competition to accept some of these global norms over others, and the discussions over the inequality goal were among the most contested of them all (Fukuda-Parr, 2019; Fukuda-Parr & McNeill, 2019). This study takes a constructivist perspective to analyze these negotiations and borrows heavily from concepts developed by Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink (1998). Based on their investigations into how new norms spread internationally, they developed an influential "norm life cycle" model, visible in Figure 1. This model serves as a useful framework not only to analyze the normative dynamics that led to the inclusion of the inequality goal but also to discover whether the goal signifies a shift in global norms.

Finnemore and Sikkink argued that the life cycle has three stages. During the first stage, called "norm emergence," norm entrepreneurs try to persuade "a critical mass of states (norm leaders) to embrace new norms" (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998, p. 895). Norm entrepreneurs are "agents having strong notions about appropriate or desirable behavior" (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998, p. 896). They can reinterpret or rename an issue - a process called "framing" - to make the norm resonate with the broader public. Per Finnemore and Sikkink (1998), the construction of appropriate frames is essential, since an emergent norm has to compete with alternative norms and frames.

When enough states accept the norm, it reaches a threshold or tipping point, which signifies the beginning of the second phase. It is not possible to know exactly how many states must accept a norm before this happens, but according to studies, it should be at least one-third of all states (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). Finnemore and Sikkink called this second phase, in which a norm becomes widely accepted, the “norm cascade.” The third and last stage, when norms are taken-for-granted, is called norm internalization (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). Importantly, many emergent norms never complete the life cycle because they never acquire a critical mass of support and thus fail to reach the tipping point (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998).

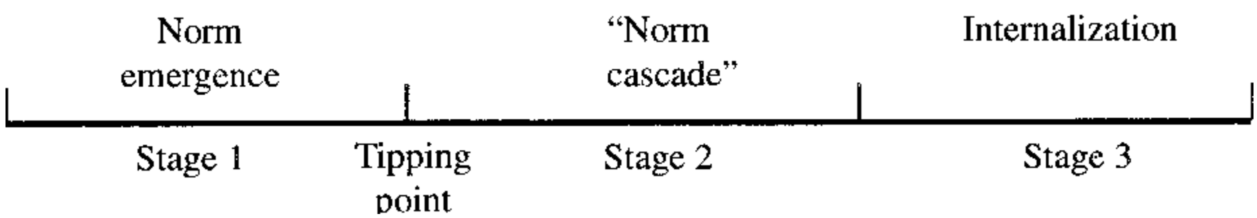

Figure 1. The norm “life cycle” (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998, p. 896)

Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) also state that “norms prompt justifications for action and leave an extensive trail of communication among actors that we can study” (p. 892). In order to make sense of the emergent global norm of reducing inequality within and between countries in the SDGs, the researcher studied this trail of communication, using Finnemore and Sikkink’s concept of the norm life cycle.

3. Methods

The research strategy used to answer the research question was desk research. Accordingly, the research project relied entirely on existing data such as position papers of national governments, UN agencies, and civil society, as well as meeting statements and summaries, and theoretical literature. The study consists of qualitative research through an analysis of the negotiation dynamics. Since very little was known about what led to the inclusion of the inequality-goal and its targets, the researcher took a primarily inductive and exploratory approach to answer the research question; the emphasis was on exploring the development of a new global norm, not on testing an existing theory.

The negotiation analysis spans the period between approximately 2011 to 2019; the negotiations of SDG 10 and its targets took place between 2011 and 2015, but some of the indicators are still discussed up until today, which is why the researcher also analyzed more recent documents.

Terminology

Before discussing the materials used to collect the data in more detail, some concepts need explaining. First, gender inequality is not studied as this received its own goal and did not fall under the scope of this analysis. Thus, when the text states that a certain actor does not refer to inequality or does not want a stand-alone goal on inequality, the researcher means that the actor did not address inequality *in the sense of SDG10* (inequality within and between countries).

Second, the negotiation analysis distinguishes two types of inequality. First, there is vertical economic inequality. Whenever this comes up, it refers to a concern with inequality of income or wealth between individuals or households (MacNaughton, 2017). Vertical economic inequality is distinct from the second type of inequality, which is horizontal inequality. Frances Stewart (2002) defines horizontal inequality as "severe inequalities between culturally defined groups” (p. 3). These inequalities can be based on, for instance, ethnicity, race, gender, age, or religion, and may be caused by discrimination, marginalization, or oppression (Stewart, 2002). When actors speak of redistribution or of being concerned with the concentration of income or wealth, they are showing concern with vertical economic inequality; when they speak of the need for inclusion of poor and marginalized groups, ending discrimination, or increasing access to opportunities, they are referring to horizontal inequality.

Materials

The researcher started the search for relevant literature by reading two books that examined the SDG negotiations, both written by key players in the negotiations (Dodds, Donoghu, & Roesch, 2017; Kamau, Chasek, & O’Connor, 2018). These books were used to find other primary sources on the negotiation process regarding SDG10: whenever they mentioned information relevant for this study, the researcher consulted the bibliography and retrieved the documents. Often, these sources in turn mentioned other relevant documents, which were also retrieved and read.

This process led to a great deal of useful information, but the researcher could not solely rely on the documents found in this manner, because of its retrospective character: each source was older than the previous one. Therefore, remaining documents were found online through the search engine *Google*, using search terms such as “Position Paper SDG 10”, “SDG 10 negotiations”, “role of inequality in SDGs”, et cetera. This search led to additional position papers of national governments, world regions, UN agencies, and Civil Society Organizations.

The researcher also looked for scientific literature through *Google Scholar*, using the search term “SDG 10 inequality negotiations”. The search was limited to the years 2011-now since that is the period of the negotiations on the SDGs and its targets and indicators, which left over 5000 results. Most of these results were not relevant because they either studied the overarching theme of the Agenda “leaving no one behind”; looked at the integration of and links between the SDGs; studied a specific country or region; or researched inequality in relation to the other goals (health, education, gender, et cetera). The researcher only selected the titles of articles that seemed to discuss the negotiations on SDG 10. Next, the abstracts of these articles were read. There were two criteria for choosing which articles to read in full based on their abstracts: they either had to discuss negotiations of SDG10 and its targets (information used for chapter 4.1 & 4.2); or the corresponding indicators (information used for chapter 4.3). If it was unclear to what extent this was the case, the researcher scanned through the article using the search term “equalit” (as this would catch all phrases including “equality,” “inequality,” and “inequalities”). This process of exclusion left only twelve relevant articles. This means that the vast majority of the documents used in this paper came from the first two search methods.

Furthermore, the summaries from the sessions of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals and of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators published in the Earth Negotiations Bulletin (ENB) were a significant source of information. These summaries gave a preliminary overview of which issues arose in which part of the process. The Earth Negotiations Bulletin, the flagship publication of the International Institute for Sustainable Development – Reporting Services Division (IISD), is generally considered to give an independent and unbiased overview of the discussions at intergovernmental meetings. Other useful online documents were the primary statements made at the OWG-sessions published on the Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform (https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/).

Limitations

For OWG 12 and 13, the last two meetings of the OWG-process, neither primary statements nor ENB-summaries of those statements were available because these meetings mainly consisted of informal sessions. Because of this, the ENB did not attribute statements to delegations (IISD, 2014d). This absence of primary statements is a significant limitation for the study, as member states did not decide on the inclusion of inequality as a stand-alone goal until the very end of the

OWG-process and these statements would have been constructive in studying what or who was the deciding factor to include it. Also, by comparing primary statements from the first 11 OWG-sessions with the ENB-summaries, it was clear that not *all* statements have been made available online. In these cases, the researcher had to rely on the OWG-summary of the statement instead of on the primary document.

Furthermore, some documents, such as the statements made at the OWG-meetings, were in Spanish or French. The researcher knew these languages well enough to translate them. However, it is possible that in terms of other primary documents (such as position papers), non-English speaking countries were not analyzed as well as they could have been. Searching for documents was primarily done using English search terms (although the researcher also used terms like “Objetivo de Desarrollo Sostenible” / “ODS” and “objectifs de développement durable” / “ODD”). Documents from countries with primary languages other than English, Spanish, French, Dutch, or German are very likely to be underrepresented.

4. Results

Tackling inequalities as part of a global agreement on SDGs was a long and delicate process. Decisions about whether to include inequality in the SDGs and which targets and indicators to embrace were based on careful deliberations between what was most important from the perspective of reducing inequality, and what was politically feasible. SDG10 emerged from two parallel processes. The consultations over the post-2015 development agenda were initiated first, in 2011. The UN Secretary-General, who had been requested by the UN General Assembly[1] to make recommendations for a successor agenda to the MDGs, led these consultations (UNGA, 2010). He established: (1) a UN System Task Team, tasked with developing a system-wide vision and road map on the post-2015 development agenda[2]; (2) multi-stakeholder consultations at national, regional, and global levels and online, taking place over 2012–13 (UNDG, 2013); (3) a UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network, launched in 2012 to mobilize global knowledge on the challenges of sustainable development (SDSN, 2014a); and (4), a High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the post-2015 development agenda (HLP), which used the findings of the consultations to make recommendations for a new framework (UNDESA, 2012).

The second process was the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro (from here on: Rio+20) held in June 2012, and the resulting outcome document that committed member states to develop a set of goals through the OWG (UN, 2015b).

The results of the negotiation analysis are discussed in three sections. Section I, called "The beginnings: inequality in early SDG-discussions (2011-2013)," summarizes the initial discussions among civil society, the UN, and governments on how to include inequality in the new framework. These discussions started in 2011 and increased in intensity when they moved

[1] The UNGA "is the main deliberative, policymaking and representative organ of the UN". It serves as a forum for all member states for intergovernmental discussion and negotiation on international issues, see https://www.un.org/en/ga/about/
[2] This technical task team brought together senior experts from over 60 UN agencies, entities and international organizations, see https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/development-beyond-2015.html

closer towards Rio+20. The section examines whether stakeholders wanted inequality addressed in the new framework at all; and if so, what form it should take (that of a crosscutting theme, with targets under other goals, or a stand-alone goal); and what it should cover (vertical economic inequality, horizontal inequality, or both).

Section II, called “Post-Rio: the negotiations for the SDGs (2012–2015),” studies the negotiations during the OWG on the selection of SDG10 and its targets, and the broader context in which these negotiations took place.

Finally, section III, called “From goals and targets to global indicators (2015-ongoing),” discusses the period post-OWG. At this point, goals and targets had been proposed but were not yet final. Also, the global indicators still had to be developed through a technical process.

4.1 The beginnings: inequality in early SDG-discussions (2011-2013)

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are the most recent step on a journey that began with the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro. During this conference, the international community, for the first time, developed an action plan for sustainable development in the form of Agenda 21 (UNCED, 1992). Another important event was the 2000 UN Millennium Summit. Here, world leaders adopted the Millennium Declaration and agreed to cooperate towards human progress and poverty eradication in the 21st century (UNGA, 2000). In order to achieve these aims, experts from the UN Development Program and other UN-departments, the OECD, and the World Bank created eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (UNGA, 2001). Since these goals were expiring in 2015, the international community had to negotiate a successor framework. During preliminary negotiations on this framework, the idea for SDGs began to take shape.

Paula Caballero, part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Colombia, was the first to propose the idea in early 2011. A few months later, Colombia formally presented its proposal at a UN event in Solo, Indonesia (Caballero, 2016). At first, the response from other governments was mixed. Support for the goals increased in the run-up to Rio+20, which took place 20 years after the original Rio Conference (Caballero, 2016; Dodds et al., 2017; Kamau et al., 2018). While some actors were waiting for Rio+20 to negotiate the goals, others already started discussing the content and number of the goals in 2011 and 2012 at a national and international level. The multi-stakeholder consultations on the post-2015 development agenda also took place in this period. Several questions arose during these years, about whether to include a norm on inequality and if so, what form it should take and what kinds of inequality should be covered.

Q1. Should inequality be included in the new framework in the first place?

Before the SDGs, the prevailing global norm as enshrined in the MDGs was to eradicate poverty. As reviewed in the introduction, inequality within and between countries had since then attracted increased political awareness. This general political concern with inequality was fueled by findings that showed that the MDGs had left inequalities largely unaddressed, and had failed to reach the poorest and most marginalized groups. As a result, reducing inequality emerged as a potential new global norm - stage 1 of the norm life cycle (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). National governments, UN agencies, and civil society involved in the preliminary negotiations for a new framework all recognized its importance (Lingán, Cornforth, & Pollard, 2012; Melamed, 2012b).

But because the stakeholders had diverging conceptualizations of inequality, they did not agree on what the emergent norm should cover. Inequality has several definitions: most stakeholders conceptualized it as inequality between social groups (horizontal inequality), others referred to the distribution of income and wealth among individuals (vertical economic inequality). Reducing each type of inequality requires different approaches. As will be discussed below, actors concerned with reducing horizontal inequalities promoted targets that were about increasing access to resources, lowering discrimination, and increasing social inclusion. Social inclusion is the process of improving the ability and opportunity for individuals and groups to take part in society (World Bank, 2013a). These type of targets address the equal opportunity component of equality. Actors disturbed with the increase in vertical economic inequality instead suggested targets that would measure the gap between the rich and the poor. The latter conceptualization of inequality, which improves equality of outcomes, is most radical. While internationally agreed standards on addressing horizontal inequality existed, there was no such agreed upon practice or rule on reducing inequality of income and wealth (MacNaughton, 2017).

CSOs

The prestigious thinktanks Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI) were the first to vocalize the need to include inequality in the post-2015 framework. Their 2011 & 2012 reports on the post-2015 agenda shared a concern with reducing horizontal inequality (non-discrimination, inclusion, improved access); they gave much less attention to vertical economic inequality (Bates-Eamer, Carin, Lee, & Lim, 2012; CIGI, 2011; Melamed, 2012a, 2012b). The ODI-reports and first CIGI-report suggested to incorporate inequality through disaggregation of targets by social groups, and targets that ask for everyone to be above a certain threshold (universal or "zero" targets), to reach the poor and marginalized (CIGI, 2011; Melamed, 2012b, 2012a). The ODI-reports, in particular, did not show a concern with the concentration of wealth among the elite, but only discussed inequality in terms of improving the conditions for people at the bottom end of the distribution (Melamed, 2012b, 2012a).

This approach to inequality, which was shared by many actors later on in the negotiations, will be called the "social exclusion approach." It is merely a reformulation and strengthening of the orthodox global norm on poverty. It extends this norm by not just covering absolute poverty, but also multidimensional poverty, relative poverty, and equality of opportunity. It does this by addressing factors beyond absolute income level as well as promoting the conditions for people to access what they need and participate in society. This approach also gives significant attention to group characteristics since these are frequently the basis for exclusion. It implicitly takes the position that action to reduce inequality only needs to happen at the bottom end and overlooks the crucial role that income and wealth accumulation at the top plays in the level of inequality of a country (Fukuda-Parr, 2019; Palma, 2011). As will be discussed later, the World Bank, the HLP, as well as the United Kingdom, the United States, and many other, mainly developed, countries, also promoted this narrow approach to inequality. The social exclusion approach would dominate the OWG-negotiations post-Rio+20.

The 2012-report published by a consortium of organizations led by CIGI and KDI[3] goes beyond inclusion by also addressing vertical economic inequality, if only in the context of equitable growth. Under a candidate goal of inclusive economic growth, the report asks for "Indicators that best address elements of income distribution" (Bates-Eamer et al., 2012, p. 10), and suggests comparing the ratio and growth rate of income/consumption of the top quintile to the bottom quintile (Bates-Eamer et al., 2012).

Similarly, Save the Children, the first Nongovernmental Organization (NGO) to vocalize the critical need to address inequality in the new framework, paid equal attention to horizontal and vertical economic inequality in their first reports (Save the Children, 2012a, 2012b). It suggested that "the post-2015 framework should include a target on reducing income inequality and other disparities in wealth within countries, under the broader goal of poverty eradication. The target and indicator could utilise the gap between the richest and poorest quintiles (the 20:20 gap) or, following recent research, the 10:40 gap between the top decile and the bottom two quintiles" (Save the Children, 2012a, p. 36). This latter target refers to the Palma ratio (Cobham & Sumner, 2013; Palma, 2011), which would later receive widespread support among CSOs as the target of choice to measure vertical economic inequality.

On the contrary, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung[4] published a paper all the way back in 2010 that argued that in order to combat inequality, a future framework should pay more attention to distributional issues and less to economic growth in order to overcome the "blindness of the existing MDGs towards distribution of wealth and income" (Martens, 2010, p. 16). This is an

[3] Based on the Bellagio-conference (CIGI, 2011) and regional consultations in the 18-month period between 2011-2012. This report was prepared for a presentation in November 2012 to the UN officials responsible for post-2015 goals proposals to succeed the MDGs and was also presented to the lead author of the Secretary- General's High Level Panel and others (Bates-Eamer et al., 2012).

[4] A German non-profit institution committed to the principles of social democracy, see https://www.fesdc.org/

example of a CSO that showed less concern with horizontal inequality and more with vertical economic inequality, particularly the interdependence between poverty and wealth. These examples show that inequality started to get addressed among CSOs in the 2011-2012 discussions over the new framework, but that conceptualizations differed widely.

United Nations

Similarly to CSOs, UN agencies put forward diverse conceptualizations of the inequality norm. In general, they promoted the inclusion of both horizontal and - to a lesser extent - vertical economic inequality in the new framework. Already in 2010, the UN Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) came out with an issue brief (which was re-issued in 2013 because of its continued relevance (UNRISD, 2013)) that showed that the orthodox strategy of "targeting the poor" was not effective in reducing poverty and inequality. Instead, "Equality and redistribution matter for poverty reduction" (UNRISD, 2010b, p. 1). UNRISD showed that redistributive policies could reduce both inequality and poverty and expanded upon this in its flagship report *Combating Poverty and Inequality* of later that year (UNRISD, 2010a).

UNRISD and five other UN agencies[5] - a subset of the UN Task Team - incorporated this approach in a thematic think piece on inequality that preceded the 2012 report *Realizing the Future We Want for All*. The think piece strongly suggested addressing the uneven income distribution within and between countries (UN, 2012a). In its report to the Secretary-General, the UN Task Team did recognize equality as a fundamental principle for the post-2015 framework but only discussed horizontal inequality (UN, 2012b).

Why would the final report only speak of discrimination, exclusion, and lack of access to resources when discussing inequality, while the thematic think piece also explicitly asked for taking in account the role of the wealthy in inequality? The UN Task Team did not just consist of

[5] Economic Commissions for Europe, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Europe, Un Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UNICEF, UN Women

the six UN agencies mentioned before, but of over 60 UN agencies and international organizations (UN, 2012b). Among them were the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. These two neoliberal institutions are dominated by the United States, which works to generalize policies that are in their benefit (Wade, 2011). These organizations successfully kept vertical economic inequality out of the final UN Task Team report.

The World Bank and the IMF were, until recently, negligent of inequality as an issue (Murawski, 2012; Rutting, 2014). They defended the Washington Consensus, which includes the idea that market-led economic growth can eliminate poverty and lower inequality because the wealth of the rich trickles down (Saad-Filho, 2010). For instance, in a highly influential but also highly criticized (Donaldson, 2008; UNRISD, 2010a) 2002 paper called *Growth is good for the poor*, two World Bank economists made the argument that economic growth generally reduces poverty. They did not see much merit in redistributive policies, because these would reduce the trickle-down effect. In critiquing the paper, UNRISD said that their argument “implies that . . . what matters most is the income level of the poor, rather than equality” (UNRISD, 2010a, p. 76).

Late in the 2000s, both organizations began to change their views, moving towards pro-poor or inclusive growth which, in the case of the World Bank, included the idea of equality of opportunity (Berg & Ostry, 2011; Saad-Filho, 2010; World Bank, 2006, 2009). Specifically, the World Bank wrote in its *World Development Report 2006*, on equity and development, that it recognized “the importance of equity (that is, equality of opportunity and the avoidance of absolute deprivation)” and that it would incorporate this in its existing development framework (World Bank, 2006, p. 226). The focus on equality of opportunity means a focus on improving processes so that everyone in society can compete on equal terms (such as increasing the ability to access services and resources). Following this line of thinking, national governments should intervene when people fall below an absolute poverty threshold (World Bank, 2005, 2006). This approach to inequality does, however, not include any serious consideration of wealth and income redistribution. For that, equality of outcomes also needs to be targeted (the final distribution of certain goods or outcomes). Indeed, Alfredo Saad-Filho shows in a DESA Working Paper analysis that the change in discourse from poverty to equity did not signify a shift in policy: "the World Bank has conceded nothing of substance either on the content of its preferred policies or on the primacy of growth (rather than distribution) to improve the lot of the poor—only lip service is paid to the significance of equity" (Saad-Filho, 2010, p. 14).

Member states played a significant role in the World Bank's framing of the emergent norm on inequality as inequality of opportunity. Economist Robert Wade shows that the executive directors of the governing board of the World Bank, who represent member governments, initially did not approve of inequality as a topic because "inequality was inherently a political subject that the bank, as an apolitical organization, should not be talking about" (Wade, 2011, p. 226). The topic was only approved when the Bank instead suggested the topic of equity, which was considered apolitical (Wade, 2011). In the next chapters, we will see that member states promoted a similar conceptualization of inequality as the World Bank.

Lastly, the public consultations performed by the UN, completed in 2013 and summarized in the report *A million voices: The world we want* (UNDG, 2013), also called for action to address the multiple forms of inequality – including income and wealth. The report stated that "Perhaps stronger than anything else, the consultations have called for an increased focus on inequality in the future agenda" (UNDG, 2013, p. 17), within and between countries

Nation States

Reports developed by the UN regional commissions in consultation with national governments show that practically all regions were concerned with both horizontal and vertical economic inequality to a greater or lesser extent in 2011-2013. The Latin American and Caribbean countries pushed hardest for its inclusion. All countries in this region agreed that equality within and between countries should become the ultimate goal of the new framework. They also mentioned vertical economic inequality in asking for redistributive policies such as progressive taxation (ECLAC, 2014). The Arab region, which had just experienced the Arab Spring, also used strong language on vertical economic inequality. *The Arab Millennium Development Goals Report*,[6] which not only reviewed MDG progress but also discussed steps for the new framework, promoted redistributive policies including progressive taxation and measures on inequality that capture the top rich, such as the ratio of income of the poorest to the richest (ESCWA, 2013, p. 67).

African member states were much less concerned with inequality in general and vertical economic inequality in particular. They mentioned it in consultations on the post-2015 framework but did not include it among their most pressing issues (UNECA, 2012; UNECA, AUC, AfDB, & UNDP, 2012)[7]. The *Africa Regional Report on the Sustainable Development Goals*, which included 12 goals adopted by the 2013 Africa Regional Consultative Meeting on the SDGs, did not discuss vertical economic inequality at all but did cover horizontal inequality as part of a goal on social inclusion (UNECA, 2015).

Member states in the remaining two regions did show a concern with inequality but only in terms of social exclusion. It appeared that Asian and Pacific countries also seemed concerned with vertical economic inequality, as many of the 300 delegates from 39 Asian and Pacific countries at a 2011 regional preparatory meeting for Rio+20 mentioned the need for "equitable income distribution" (ESCAP, 2011, p. 10). However, the official report of this region, the 2012/2013 *Asia-Pacific Regional MDGs Report,* does not reflect this. It states that equity should be among the guiding principles for a successor framework, but the way the report operationalizes it ("ensuring that indicators under the eventually selected goals track . . . progress

[6] Jointly prepared by the League of Arab States, the United Nations organizations members of the Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM) and the Regional United Nations Development Group for the Arab States, and coordinated by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA).

[7] Consultations consisted of a regional workshop and electronic survey and did not just include representatives from governments, but also CSOs, research institutions and academia)

at the lower end such as the bottom quartile" (ESCAP, ADB, & UNDP, 2013, p. 5)) keeps the focus on poverty, not inequality. There is also no significant mention of income and wealth distribution in the 2013 *European Report on Development* (European Report on Development, 2013).[8] The main message regarding inequality was that the new agenda should have a focus on reducing persistent inequalities by "address[ing] issues of relative poverty, which incorporate aspects of social inclusion and inequality" (European Report on Development, 2013, p. 202). These regions thus take a social exclusion approach to inequality, similar to the World Bank and ODI.

[8] This report was an important input for the position of the European Commission on the post-2015 framework and co-authored by ODI.

Q2. Should reducing inequality be a stand-alone goal or crosscutting?

Actors not only discussed what types of inequality to cover but also vocalized their preferences for how to address it in the new framework. Pre-Rio+20, the vast majority was in favor of addressing inequality as a cross-cutting issue. As will be discussed below, before the OWG-negotiations, a stand-alone goal was seen as too "politically difficult" (Melamed, 2012b, p. 2).

CSOs

In 2011 and 2012, there was not a single CSO that spoke out in favor of a stand-alone goal on inequality. Notably, at the 64th UN Department of Public Information/Non-Governmental Organizations Conference, participants from 300 NGOs from 85 countries proposed a list of draft-SDGs as input to the intergovernmental process which lacked an inequality goal[9] (UNDPI, 2011, pp. 83–88).

Similarly, the previously discussed reports by CIGI and Save the Children suggested an integrated approach to reducing inequality (Bates-Eamer et al., 2012; CIGI, 2011; Save the Children, 2012b, 2012a). The Beyond2015 coalition, a campaign of CSOs[10], also asked for inequality to cut across the framework (Beyond2015, 2012). Likewise, based on survey results of 410 respondents from a diversity of organizations (mainly NGOs), and other consultations, such as submissions of countries, NGOs, and intergovernmental organizations to the Rio+20 Zero Draft, the Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future identified equality as one of four critical cross-cutting issues (Lingán et al., 2012).

The reason for CSOs for promoting inequality as a crosscutting issue in 2011 and 2012 is related to the way they conceptualized inequality. The majority of them followed the previously discussed social exclusion approach, meaning the primary focus was on improving the situation

[9] This was a conference designed to enable stakeholders to provide input to intergovernmental processes, and the first meeting to come out with suggested SDGs and targets (Dodds et al., 2017).
[10] The campaign brings together more than 1000 CSOs over 130 countries – see https://www.eapn.eu/beyond-2015/.

of the worst off, while they largely ignored the distribution of income. When defining inequality in this way, it can be addressed by improving access for poor and marginalized people to education, healthcare, jobs, clean water, et cetera. This merely requires disaggregated targets and targets that demand that all people are above a certain threshold, which makes a stand-alone goal redundant (Fukuda-Parr, 2019).

United Nations

Contrary to CSOs, certain UN agencies already supported a stand-alone goal this early in the discussions. The thematic think piece on inequality that preceded the UN Task Team report is the first document that suggested that inequality could be a specific goal, in order to give “the issue more prominence,” and if so desired complemented by integrating it in other goals (UN, 2012a, p. 10).[11] ECOSOC’s Committee for Development Policy also suggested a stand-alone goal (ECOSOC, 2013, p. 8). Similarly, the conclusion from the global thematic consultation on inequalities was that “A self-standing global goal on inequalities should be included in the post-2015 development framework” (UNICEF & UNIFEM, 2013, p. 9). However, other parts of the consultations did not support this: for instance, a Leadership Meeting on Inequalities held in Copenhagen in February 2013, attended by ministers from 20 countries and leaders of several UN organizations, could not come to consensus on the need for a separate goal to reduce inequality (Engberg-Pedersen, 2013). Because of this lack of consensus, the report *A Million Voices: The World We Want, a sustainable future with dignity for all*, which put the outcomes of all the consultations together, did not suggest a stand-alone goal (UNDG, 2013, p. 145). This starts showing a common thread: whenever member states were involved (through the World Bank and IMF; in the Copenhagen meeting), the focus shifted from vertical economic to horizontal inequality and from supporting a stand-alone goal to a crosscutting approach.

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[11]The report *Realizing the Future We Want for All* did not discuss this option, as it did not yet include suggestions for goals or targets (UN, 2012b).

Nation States

Indeed, nation-states overwhelmingly favored a crosscutting approach, as shown by not including inequality in their proposed goals and through the usage of words like "enabler," "integration," or "cross-cutting." For instance, none of the five thematic areas proposed by the EU in their 2012 *Commission non-paper Rio+20 for the Informal Environment Council 19 April,* the priority areas suggested by Colombia, Peru and the United Arab Emirates, or the proposed goals of the Asia-Pacific and Arab region addressed inequality (Colombia, Peru, & UAE, 2012; ESCAP et al., 2013; ESCWA, 2013, 2014a; Lingán et al., 2012); France, in a position paper prepared with civil society, supported a "cross-cutting goal of combating inequality" (French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013, p. 8); and the African region selected inequality as an "enabler" for development, and only incorporated horizontal inequality in their suggested goals through a proposed goal on social inclusion (UNECA, 2015, p. 37).

However, the convergence of major regional/country reports around treating inequality as a cross-cutting issue does not mean that there was no debate about the possibility to include it as a stand-alone goal. To highlight one example, some Arab stakeholders disagreed with the choice of ESCWA to treat inequality as a cross-cutting issue, as shown by the discussions of the most recent ESCWA report (ESCWA, 2014c) at the Arab High-Level Forum on Sustainable Development in April 2014. A summary of the meeting states that "a number of participants were of the view that the revised version of the paper should have [inequality] as stand-alone goal" (ESCWA, 2014b, p. 13). Member state representatives of Tunisia and Egypt, participating in the OWG, were also present (10 OWG-meetings had convened at this point, see chapter 4.2). These countries both argued in favor of a stand-alone goal at the OWG (Egypt, 2014; Tunisia, 2014). It is possible that there were similar pushes for a stand-alone goal by actors in the other regions that the regional reports do not reflect.

Conclusion

The analysis of available documents since 2011 shows that inequality was part of the conversation from the start of the discussions about the new framework. All stakeholders involved in the informal discussions and the formal consultations on the post-2015 framework recognized that rising inequality was an emergent threat that the MDGs had not adequately addressed, and agreed that the SDGs could be used to generate a global norm on inequality. However, there was no consensus about what, exactly, the norm should be, in terms of *which type* of inequality to address and *which form* it should take in the new framework.

Regarding the former, few actors (Save the Children; UNRISD; the UN Task Team in their think piece on inequality; several regional reports) explicitly mentioned vertical economic inequality, and even fewer operationalized it in the form of targets that addressed the concentration of income and wealth at the top end of the distribution. Most actors stopped short at measures to address horizontal inequality (most CSOs; the UN Task Team report; most individual regional reports). By framing inequality as social exclusion, which focuses only on people at the bottom end of the distribution, these actors merely extended the orthodox norm on poverty. Also, most actors favored a crosscutting approach, which is explained by their narrow conceptualization of inequality: improving the situation of poor and marginalized people can be achieved by better access to resources, which merely requires disaggregated targets and universal targets, rather than a stand-alone goal.

The only actors suggesting the option of a stand-alone goal on inequality this early in the discussions were several UN agencies. Thus, before Rio+20, it seemed as though actors would integrate inequality across the SDGs and that the focus would be on horizontal inequality.

4.2 Post-Rio: the negotiations for the SDGs (2012–2015)

This chapter examines the intergovernmental process for a stand-alone goal on inequality. In the outcome document of Rio+20, *The Future We Want*, member states agreed to set up an Open Working Group (OWG) to develop a proposal for a set of SDGs to help drive the implementation of sustainable development. The proposal had to be submitted to the UNGA in September 2014 with broader intergovernmental negotiations to follow (UNGA, 2012).

The OWG, co-chaired by Macharia Kamau from Kenya and Csaba Kőrösi from Hungary, met over the length of 16 months and – in contrast with the top-down process to establish the MDGs - was deliberately participatory (IISD, 2014e). For the first time in the history of the UN, membership was based on a seat-sharing structure. The 30 available seats were shared by all 70 countries that had shown interest in joining (Kamau et al., 2018). The seats that were held by more than one country have been called "troikas" (IISD, 2013). Additionally, other stakeholders such as member states not part of the 30 seats, the 9 Major Groups[12], UN agencies, and NGOs, could also contribute to the debate at the meetings (Kamau et al., 2018).

The seat-sharing structure not only managed to include all interested countries in the negotiations, but it also broke up traditional blocs since it "forced countries that do not normally "belong" together to work together" (Kamau et al., 2018, p. 102). According to Dodds et al. (2017), during the OWG, "The EU and the G77 made general statements, but their role was not as prominent as it usually is. The north–south divide was less evident given that countries were less constrained to follow the script of the group to which they belonged" (p. 32). [13]

[12] The Major Groups were formalized in Agenda 21 in order to include all sectors of society in achieving sustainable development. For more, see https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/majorgroups/about.

[13] The Group of 77 is a coalition of developing nations designed to stand stronger in intergovernmental negotiations. Founded by 77 members in 1964, it has expanded to 134 members (including China). Since China participates in the G77 but does not consider itself to be a member, all official statements are issued in the name of The Group of 77 and China. For a full list, see http://www.g77.org/doc/members.html.

The meetings of the OWG had two phases. At the first eight meetings (March 2013-February 2014), the stocktaking sessions, delegates learned from experts about the key issues that were expected to form the foundation of the goals. The least complicated issues, such as those that had been part of the MDGs, were discussed first; the newer, more sensitive issues, such as inequality, were last. Delegates could also add to their understanding of the issues by attending several other events, both within and outside the UN (Kamau et al., 2018).

During the five negotiating sessions that followed (March-July 2014), the OWG agreed on the list of goals and the corresponding targets. In terms of drafting the goals, the co-chairs used "a single negotiating text where they would be the ones 'holding the pen', instead of a compilation document containing all amendments as had been the norm in previous sustainable development negotiations" (Kamau et al., 2018, pp. 146–147). In practice, the co-chairs would release a draft of the goals, listen to the feedback from member states and others, revise the draft, publish a new draft, discuss it, and so on.

The following pages continue the analysis started in section 3.1 on the question whether stakeholders during the period of the OWG-negotiations felt that inequality should be a stand-alone goal, or crosscutting; as well as which inequality targets they proposed.

Q1. Should reducing inequality be a stand-alone goal or crosscutting?

Despite the broad consensus on the importance of a global norm on tackling inequality, post-Rio+20 it was not clear how exactly this would be addressed in the goals. Chapter 4.1 showed that most actors favored an integrated approach that would address horizontal inequality, while a few had suggested that vertical economic inequality should also be addressed, possibly as a stand-alone goal. The OWG had to agree on these issues.

CSOs

Before Rio+20, not a single CSO had discussed a stand-alone goal on inequality. This changed with the inputs of the NGO Oxfam as well as former chief economist to the World Bank and Nobel Prize winner Joseph Stiglitz, who acted as norm entrepreneurs. First, about two months before the first session of the OWG, Oxfam communicated a clear notion of what the norm on inequality should involve by proposing "A goal to reduce vertical inequality of wealth and income, within countries and globally" in their initial contribution towards the new goals, called *Post-2015 Development Goals: Oxfam International Position* (Oxfam, 2013b, p. 5). Oxfam perceived inequality to be mostly the result of the growing concentration of income and wealth at the top of the distribution, and therefore suggested targets to reduce the income gap between the top and bottom 10% and to lower the share of income going to the top 10% (Oxfam, 2013b). This latter target, which singles out the accumulation of income at the top, was the most radical target towards reducing vertical economic inequality proposed up until this point. Oxfam's strong focus on vertical economic inequality signifies a radical shift in views compared to the earliest discussions, which had primarily focused on horizontal inequality.

Oxfam invested heavily in following the negotiations and used its expertise to provide information in the form of multiple analytical reports and policy briefs to persuade others of its proposed vertical economic inequality norm (Metz & Van der Lee, 2013; Oxfam, 2013a, 2014;

Slater & Hardoon, 2015; Taylor, 2014). Their main line of argumentation, which was quickly adopted by other NGOs, was that (1) poverty can only be reduced significantly if vertical economic inequality is reduced, and (2) high levels of inequality impede social stability and economic development/growth. They thus attempted to graft the vertical economic inequality norm onto the widely accepted norms "Poverty should be reduced" and "Economic growth should be supported." Their norm attracted support from scientists and other NGOs within months of the publication of the position paper (Engberg-Pedersen, 2013; Watkins, 2013a, 2013b). Later Beyond2015 also joined their advocacy (Beyond2015, 2014), as well as several Major Groups (NGO's, Women, Workers & Trade Unions, Indigenous Peoples, Children & Youth). The New Economic Foundation and The Center for Economic and Social Rights also added their voices to Oxfam's calls for a stand-alone goal on vertical economic inequality and would become significant advocates (Donald, 2016; Shaheen, 2014a, 2014b, 2016).

The second norm entrepreneur is Joseph Stiglitz. First, he co-authored an influential paper in which he supported a vertical economic inequality goal and suggested the Palma ratio (the ratio of the income share of the top 10% to that of the bottom 40% of the population) as target (Stiglitz & Doyle, 2014). Other scholars had already recommended this target (Engberg-Pedersen, 2013; Pickett et al., 2013), and after Stiglitz's publication, it received widespread support from CSOs as the target to measure vertical economic inequality (ACT Alliance, 2014; Civil Society, 2014b; Shaheen, 2014b; Taylor, 2014; UNDPI, 2014). Second, whereas Oxfam had primarily persuaded *other CSOs* of the importance of a vertical economic inequality goal, Stiglitz directly influenced *member states*. He had the keynote speech during a roundtable on growing inequalities to educate delegates before OWG-8 and ended his speech with a plea to include an SDG on reducing inequality (Stiglitz, 2014). Taking the example of the United States, he showed that not only developing countries but also developed countries suffer from inequality, which came as a surprise to many G77 member states (Kamau et al., 2018).

According to Kamau et al. (2018), this roundtable, particularly Stiglitz's speech, was very influential in shaping the way that member states thought about inequality. These and other developments in 2014, such as the publications from Oxfam discussed above, and Piketty's book *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, "broadened the OWG members' horizons and affected the overall debate, especially once the negotiations began" (Kamau et al., 2018, p. 96).

As a result of Oxfam's and Stiglitz's sustained advocacy, by 2014 practically all CSOs involved in the SDG-discussions had come to a shared understanding of the inequality norm as encompassing both vertical economic and horizontal inequality, which they wanted to see conveyed through a stand-alone goal in the OWG-proposal. As Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) have shown, acceptance of an emergent norm by a large enough group of states is a crucial step in order for the norm to reach a tipping point to where it cascades into a widely accepted norm. CSOs therefore repeatedly attempted to persuade member states of the emergent norm at the OWG-sessions. Their attempts grew stronger towards the end of the OWG (Beyond2015, NGOs, Women, & Indigenous Peoples, 2014, pp. 11-12; 24-25; Children & Youth & NGOs, 2014, pp. 22–23; Civil Society, 2014b; IBON International, 2014; Major Groups and other stakeholders, 2014a, pp. 1–3, 2014b, pp. 29–32)[14]. However, as will be discussed later in this chapter, member states kept ignoring their proposals.

Although the proposed norm by Oxfam and Dr. Stiglitz had diffused widely among CSOs, not *all* CSOs were favoring a stand-alone goal. The SDSN report *Indicators for sustainable development goals* included a target on relative poverty and suggested indicators that

[14]Full list of supporters: Women, NGOs, Workers & Trade Unions, Commons Cluster, Aging, Indigenous People, ATD Fourth World, World Society for Protection of Animals, Save the Children, Oxfam, Beyond 2015, Committee on Social Development and Wada Na Todo Abhiyan, Initiative for Equality (Field Hearings Network), ATD Fourth World, Christian Aid, Academics Stand Against Poverty, ClimateWorks Australia, CONGCOOP, SustainUS, UN Rep of Association of World Citizens, KOINONIA Presença Ecumênica e Serviço – Brazil, Association Nigérienne des Scouts del'Environnement (ANSEN), TEJO - World Esperanto Youth Organisation, Sub-Committee for the Elimination of Racism of the NGO Committee on Human Rights Women Environmental Programme – Nigeria

measure inequality at both bottom and top of the income distribution. However, as the indicator belonged to a goal called "Achieve Gender Equality, Social Inclusion, and Human Rights," it could quickly be sidelined (SDSN, 2014b). For example, in their report to the Secretary-General, addressing inequality in terms of income/wealth going to the top of the distribution was not mentioned at all (SDSN, 2014a). ODI also kept pushing for integrating inequality across targets (Melamed, 2012b, 2014; Melamed & Samman, 2013). Based on their publications, these organizations follow a line of thinking also adhered to by the HLP (see next section); that focusing on realistic solutions had a higher chance of success than attempting to include a politically tricky and potentially merely aspirational inequality goal.

United Nations

When a new norm emerges and gains a certain amount of support, norm protectors - those who adhere to the existing norm and thus oppose the newly presented norm - often challenge it (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). That also happened in the debate about whether or not to accept the emergent inequality norm. CSOs specifically made their demands for a vertical economic inequality goal known by the HLP, most notably through a letter from 90 leading economists and development experts to Executive Secretary and Lead Author of the report Homi Kharas, who was part of the US Brookings Institution think tank and a former World Bank economist. In the letter, the signatories asked for a "top-level goal to reduce inequalities" both within and between countries, with a particular focus on vertical economic inequality through the Palma ratio (Pickett et al., 2013, p. 1). Among the signatories were well-known inequality scholars such as Kate Pickett, Richard Wilkinson, Thomas Pogge, Gabriel Palma, Lars Engberg-Pedersen, and Kevin Watkins.

Chapter 4.1 showed that there was also support from certain UN agencies for a goal on inequality. However, in the 2013 report *A New Global Partnership* the HLP proposed that fighting multidimensional poverty, not inequality, should be at the center of the agenda (UN High-level Panel of Eminent Persons, 2013). Not only did the HLP omit a stand-alone goal on inequality in the report, but it also explicitly opposed to including vertical economic inequality as a target. The HLP justified the choice in the following way:

> We recognized that every country is wrestling with how to address income inequality, but felt that national policy in each country, not global goalsetting, must provide the answer. History also shows that countries tend to have cycles in their income inequality as conventionally measured; and countries differ widely both in their view of what levels of income inequality are acceptable and in the strategies they adopt to reduce it. (UN High-level Panel of Eminent Persons, 2013, p. 16)

This explanation shows that the HLP was very much aware of the emerging inequality norm; if not for the norm, there would be no need to mention, clarify, or defend the absence of inequality in the report (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). While CSOs had emphasized the advantages of supporting the emergent norm (less poverty, increased economic growth, increased social stability), the HLP underscored the disadvantages; it would go against countries' sovereignty and domestic inequality-cycles. Thus, their main objection was that including vertical economic equality is too political. Addressing multidimensional poverty was seen as more realistic and practical than an ambitious goal on inequality (Fukuda-Parr & McNeill, 2019).

In response to this "puzzling" omission of inequality (Ocampo, 2013, p. 3), 67 CSOs wrote a joint letter to the Secretary-General to show their discontent and to further promote the emergent norm (Civil Society, 2013, p. 3). Separately, norm entrepreneur Oxfam stated that "Calls for targeted action to narrow extreme inequality gaps have come from every corner of civil society, but it seems the Panel was not listening. Without a roadmap for closing extreme income inequality gaps within and between countries, the next set of global goals is almost certain to be unachievable" (Oxfam, 2013a).

The omission can be explained by the significant role of states in the HLP, mainly through Britain's prime minister and leader of the Conservative Party David Cameron. The majority of the HLP's 27 members, including all three chairs, were drawn from governments (some came from the private sector, and very few came from civil society) (Dodds et al., 2017). For states, addressing vertical economic inequality is complex because it asks for policies that receive pushback from the wealthy, such as progressive taxation. These, according to Fukuda-Parr (2019), "are politically contentious questions for domestic constituencies of HLP members" (p. 64), that they prefer to leave to national policymaking. As the next section will show, instead, states much preferred to keep adhering to the old norm, where international cooperation was merely focused on tackling poverty.

The role of one individual norm protector, David Cameron, was particularly crucial in the HLP's refusal to support an inequality goal. Cameron was one of the co-chairs of the HLP, along with the leaders of Liberia and Indonesia, and also chair of the G8 at the time. Some scholars hoped that he would "play a leadership role in making the case for a strengthened focus on equity" (Watkins, 2013b), but he did just the opposite. Before the HLP commenced, Cameron promoted what he called the "golden thread" of development (Cameron, 2012). Owen Barder, Europe director of the Centre for Global Development thinktank, was quick to point out that while this golden thread stressed free markets, growth, and jobs, it did not promote the reduction of inequality and the power of elites (Barder, 2012). Indeed, Cameron's comments during the second of three HLP-meetings revealed that economic growth was a much higher priority for him than fighting inequality (Ford, 2013; Wintour, 2013). Furthermore, at the last meetings of the HLP in May 2013, he actively fought against pressure from NGOs to place a clear commitment to reducing vertical economic inequality in the report. According to one analysis, "President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia, one of Cameron's co-chairs, has been lobbied strongly to include the plan, which would commit developed countries to meet targets to reduce income inequality" but "Downing Street believes this is a mistaken approach" (Watt, 2013).

Nation States

Just as Cameron acted as norm protector in the HLP-process, developed countries were norm protectors during the OWG, preferring to keep the orthodox norm on poverty rather than the emergent norm on inequality. This did not mean that they were against addressing inequality in the framework. All member states mentioned the importance of including inequality during the various sessions of the OWG. For instance, during OWG-8, when inequality was among the topics of discussion (IISD, 2014a), the troika of Pakistan, India and Sri Lanka said that "tackling inequality should be the front, center and end of our work" (Pakistan, India, & Sri Lanka, 2014, p. 3); similarly, the troika of Germany, France, and Switzerland asserted that "Inequalities are the major obstacle to sustainable development" (France, Germany, & Switzerland, 2014b, p. 1); Australia, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom proclaimed that "promoting equality and achieving social equity will be central to a successful post-2015 agenda" (Australia, Netherlands, & UK, 2014a, p. 1); and so on. Also, not a single member state said they were against including inequality in the framework.[15]

Despite agreeing on its importance, whether or not to include reducing inequality as a stand-alone goal was one of the most contentious issues within the OWG, as shown by its repeated appearance and disappearance among the successive versions of the (draft) focus areas (OWG, 2014e, 2014b) and (draft) goals (IISD, 2014d; OWG, 2014c). The battle over the stand-alone goal had everything to do with political interests. During the OWG-sessions, two issues emerged that split the stakeholders. The first disagreement developed between non-state stakeholders (CSOs and UN agencies such as UNRISD) and states. Non-state stakeholders

[15] For all statements, see https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/owg8.html

demanded a strong global norm on vertical economic inequality. States instead had a narrow focus on inequality as social inclusion. The second disagreement was between developing and developed countries about whether between-country inequality should be incorporated.

Despite the calls from non-state stakeholders, only the G77 voiced explicit support of a stand-alone goal on reducing inequality, plus a target on reducing income and wealth at the top end of the distribution. Stiglitz's influential presentation on inequalities may have influenced the G77 in taking this strong stance. At OWG-8, the delegate of Bolivia, on behalf of the G77, thanked him for "shar[ing] such insightful information" (G77, 2014b) and said:

> In many countries, the share of income of the top 1% to 10% of the population has gone up very significantly, while the share of the bottom 40% has declined greatly and in some countries the incomes of the bottom segments of society have declined or stagnated. Reversal of the universal trend of growing income inequality should be also a global goal. . . . One way to address inequality is to put a limit to the wealth and income of the economic elite, for example . . . through taxes on wealth and income. (G77, 2014b)

The troika of Italy/Spain/Turkey supported this, as it was "in favor of exploring all possibilities . . . to find the most efficient approach" (Italy, Spain, & Turkey, 2014, p. 3).

But not *all* countries part of the G77 shared this vision. While the G77 is the largest group of countries, it is also the most diverse group, and the issue created a divide between the least developed states and the major developing economies part of the G77. In particular, the troika of Cyprus/Singapore/United Arab Emirates was very explicit about supporting a crosscutting approach (of these three countries, Singapore and the United Arab Emirates belong to the G77, Cyprus to the EU). They did not want a stand-alone goal, let alone a target on reducing vertical economic inequality. Also at OWG-8, the troika stated:

> the focus on promoting equality, including social equity, in order to advance sustainable development should be practical and balanced by what member states can achieve at the

> implementation level, taking the political, economic, social and cultural sensitivities into account. As such, rather than a dedicated sustainable development goal (SDG) on inequalities, the troika is of the view that we could consider streamlining it into the possible SDGs, targets and indicators, given the cross-cutting nature of equality. (Cyprus, Singapore, & UAE, 2014b, p. 1)

The troika would repeatedly bring up their view of inequality as a crosscutting theme during the entirety of the OWG-process (Cyprus, Singapore, & UAE, 2014d, 2014c, 2014a), showing that avoiding a stand-alone goal on reducing inequality was a priority. Singapore and the United Arab Emirates did not have the political will to put into practice policies that would narrow the gap between the rich and the poor. An Oxfam report based on *The Commitment to Reducing Inequality Index 2018*, an index developed in response to SDG10, ranked Singapore among the bottom ten governments globally on tackling inequality (Development Finance International & Oxfam, 2018). In Singapore, income inequality has consistently increased ever since the 1990s as Singapore gained affluence, far more than other countries with long periods of high growth. This increase in inequality is partly the result of government policies that promote meritocracy, as well as a taxation system that according to scholars has become gradually more regressive (Dhamani, 2008; Smith, Donaldson, Mudaliar, Md Kadir, & Keong Yeoh, 2015). The United Arab Emirates was not part of the index, but other reports show it has a vast wealth gap between the super-rich and the rest (Maceda, 2016, 2018). Both countries have experienced high economic growth, further reinforced by government policies, which led to a high per capita income (Dhamani, 2008; Maceda, 2016, 2018; Smith et al., 2015; Thompson, 2016). The conflict within the G77 about whether or not to support a stand-alone goal on inequality thus resulted from the different levels of development of the countries.

Other troika's had similar reasons for fearing a stand-alone goal and the possible focus of such a goal on decreasing the income and wealth share of the rich. Developed member states preferred to strengthen the global poverty norm conveyed by the MDGs, rather than accept the emergent norm on vertical economic inequality. Instead of arguing explicitly against it, the political strategy of most developed member states was to establish a counter-campaign that (1) strategically ignored discussing the concentration and accumulation of income and wealth altogether, and (2) reframed the emergent inequality norm as a combination of social inclusion, reducing multidimensional poverty, and equality of opportunity. Western member states argued that this could easily be integrated into the other goals through targets on non-discrimination, inclusion, migration, et cetera[16]. This strategy is not new: framing is used all the time by powerful states to exert power to influence the policy agendas of others. By creating a narrative about a social problem in a particular way ("inequality is about equality of opportunity and social inclusion") that points to certain types of response as evident ("therefore it should be a cross-cutting issue with targets focused on the poor and marginalized"), and others as irrelevant or unthinkable. It is an effective strategy for keeping out radical solutions and silencing debate on inconvenient issues (Boas & McNeill, 2003). The targets suggested by Australia/the Netherlands/UK are exemplary:

> Inequalities can be addressed by integrating the following measures throughout the framework: - reducing poverty in all its dimensions; - eliminating discrimination in laws, policies and practices . . . ; - reducing inequalities among social groups . . . ; - empowering and inclusion of marginalized groups . . . ; - promoting differentially high per capita income growth at the bottom of the income distribution. (Australia, Netherlands, & UK, 2014b, p. 2)

[16] A crosscutting approach was advocated for by (Australia et al., 2014b; Bulgaria & Croatia, 2014a, 2014b; Canada et al., 2014b; Denmark et al., 2014b; Denmark, Ireland, & Norway, 2014a; France, Germany, & Switzerland, 2014a; Korea, 2014; Pakistan, 2014; Saudi Arabia, 2014; Sweden, 2014)

The measures proposed reorient the meaning of the emergent inequality norm because none of them address income and wealth accumulation at the top.

In response to the widespread calls by CSOs, UN agencies, and member states to address inequality, the co-chairs included it in their first list with focus areas, which they circulated at the start of the negotiating sessions. The description of the focus area covered both within- and between country inequality. It did not address the income and wealth of the rich, but only promoted "differentially high per capita income growth at the bottom of the income distribution" (OWG, 2014b, p. 5). At OWG-9 and 10, developed and non-developed countries alike vocalized that they preferred merging this focus area with another focus area or addressing it as a cross-cutting theme.[17] Furthermore, by OWG-10, even the G77 had ceased to promote vertical economic inequality. Now, only Pakistan suggested a specific target that addressed the income gap between rich and poor (OWG, 2014a, p. 105). Moving away from the "ignore-and-reframe" strategy used by practically all other member states, the troika of Canada, Israel, and the United States said explicitly that it did not want to see a stand-alone goal on inequality because "This could lead us to a sterile debate that economists have been having for generations and that we are unlikely to resolve here" (Canada, Israel, & US, 2014a, p. 4). It is no surprise that this troika spoke out against a stand-alone goal, because the United States is a hegemon that values the idea of meritocracy, and stands negatively towards government-intervention to reduce inequality (Stiglitz, 2012).

In response to these critiques, the co-chairs split the focus area on promoting equality between focus area 1, on poverty eradication (covering promoting equality *within* nations), and focus area 9, which read "promote sustainable industrialization and equality among nations"

[17] (Australia, Netherlands, & UK, 2014c; Australia et al., 2014b; Bulgaria & Croatia, 2014b, 2014a; Canada et al., 2014b; CARICOM, 2014; China, Indonesia, & Kazakhstan, 2014a; Cyprus, Singapore, & UAE, 2014d, 2014c, 2014a; Denmark et al., 2014b; France et al., 2014a; Iran, 2014b; Pakistan, 2014; PSIDS, Nauru, Palau, & Papua New Guinea, 2014; Saudi Arabia, 2014; Sweden, 2014)According to the ENB-summary of OWG-10, so did Benin for the LDCs (IISD, 2014b). Only Belarus and Guyana explicitly mentioned a preference for a stand-alone goal at OWG-9 and 10 (Belarus, 2014; IISD, 2014d).

(OWG, 2014e). However, despite the name, focus area 9 lacked between-country inequality targets (OWG, 2014e). The absence of these targets was used as a window of opportunity by developing countries, acting as policy entrepreneurs (Kingdon, 1984), to address their joint interest in tackling between-country inequalities. At OWG-11, the developing countries voiced widespread discontent with the decision of the co-chairs to remove the between-country inequality targets.[18] Brazil/Nicaragua best exemplified this:

> We must express our surprise with the splitting-up and dilution of the area on equality, its two halves now appearing under other the focus areas on poverty eradication and on industrialization. We do not recall any plea from delegations to proceed in such a manner. In fact we recall several delegations requesting inequality to be strengthened, not only within but, most importantly, among countries. (Brazil & Nicaragua, 2014b, p. 3)

Similarly, the G77 explicitly stated that "the OWG must place priority to the issue of international inequality between countries and not just within countries" (G77, 2014a). These developing countries believed that within-country inequalities disproportionally burdened them, whereas between-country inequality would give due responsibilities to developed countries as well. The developing countries supported their remarks with studies. For instance, Brazil and Nicaragua pointed to UN studies which reveal that "states are more unequal at the international level than they are at the national level" (Brazil & Nicaragua, 2014a, p. 1).

As a result of this widespread discontent about the lack of between-country inequality targets, various developing countries began to vocalize support for a stand-alone goal on inequalities in their statements (Brazil & Nicaragua, 2014b; G77, 2014c; India, 2014; Tunisia, 2014),[19] as well as one developed country group (Spain, Italy, & Turkey, 2014). This shift marks

[18] See (African Group, 2014; Brazil & Nicaragua, 2014b; China, Indonesia, & Kazakhstan, 2014b; China et al., 2014a; Egypt, 2014; El Salvador, 2014; G77, 2014c; India, 2014; Iran, 2014a; LDCs, 2014; South Africa, 2014; Tunisia, 2014). Other developing countries that had emphasized between-country inequality throughout the OWG-process were Bangladesh, Nepal, Cuba, and Argentina/Bolivia/Ecuador (IISD, 2014c).

[19] According to the ENB-summary, so did Tanzania, Guatemala/Columbia, and Costa Rica (IISD, 2014c)

a win for CSOs, who had been pushing for this goal for a long time. However, the developing countries only supported a stand-alone goal in order to get between-country inequality targets re-included; they did not share the CSOs' concern with vertical economic inequality.

Despite the opposing statements of developed countries, which preferred to keep the emphasis on within-country inequality and were in favor of the splitting up of the focus area (Australia et al., 2014b; Bulgaria & Croatia, 2014b; Canada, Israel, & US, 2014b; Cyprus, Singapore, & UAE, 2014d; Denmark, Ireland, & Norway, 2014b), there was now such a large mass of actors in support of an inequality goal that the co-chairs could not ignore it. They included a stand-alone inequality goal in their "zero draft" (OWG, 2014c). Goal 10 had seven targets on reducing inequality among social groups within countries and five targets on international actions to reduce inequalities among countries (OWG, 2014c). In this manner, they included the preferred targets of both developing countries and developed countries.

Developing countries, Major Groups, and CSOs embraced the goal (ACT Alliance, 2014; Beyond2015, 2014; Christian Aid & Center for Economic and Social Rights, 2014; Civil Society, 2014b; Third World Network, 2014; Workers and Trade Unions, 2014) and CSOs warned that they "strongly oppose merging of Goals 1 (Poverty) and 10 (Equality)" (Civil Society, 2014b, p. 1). Nevertheless, CSOs were not satisfied as the goal still lacked a target measuring the income gap between poor and rich.

At OWG-12 inequality remained an area of clear divide as there were several attempts to get rid of the goal. According to the ENB,[20] "Many countries proposed deleting this goal and addressing inequalities throughout the entire set of goals" (IISD, 2014d, p. 7). Another account, from Ranja Sengupta from the Third World Network, confirmed the divide between developing countries and CSOs on the one hand, and developed countries on the other:

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[20] For OWG 12 and 13 the researcher had to rely on secondary documents in the absence of country statements

> Developing countries are arguing for the stand-alone goal on inequality. Several developed countries have argued quite the opposite with many of them stopping short of saying they do not want a stand-alone goal, though they suggested moving each and every target out of the inequality goal and placing them under other goals. The future of the stand-alone goal thus remains uncertain in spite of strong interventions by CSOs to retain it. (Third World Network, 2014)

These accounts show that after it had been removed as a focus area after OWG-10 and reinserted as a stand-alone goal after OWG-11, inequality was now at risk of getting removed again. In response, 161 CSOs from all over the world came out with a joint statement called *A Stand-Alone Goal on Inequality is Essential.* They stated that they were "deeply alarmed by the proposal to combine the Goal 10 on Equality with other listed goals" and urged reconsideration (Civil Society, 2014a, p. 1).

Once again, the OWG did not listen to CSOs. With the unofficial release of a new set of goals, Goal 2 on "Inequality" was combined with Goal 1 on "Poverty Eradication" (IISD, 2014d). This attempt of the co-chairs to reduce the number of goals "did not immediately gain traction" (IISD, 2014d, p. 19): some member states supported it; others did not (IISD, 2014d). When OWG-12 closed, reducing inequality was one of three goals that could still disappear (IISD, 2014d). Faiza Shaheen, a senior researcher on economic inequality for the New Economics Foundation, believed post-OWG-12 that "A goal to address inequality . . . is unlikely to make the final draft" (Shaheen, 2014c). Indeed, at OWG-13, "throughout the week, delegations that did not support a stand-alone goal on inequality argued for moving its targets to other goals" (IISD, 2014e, p. 12). However, resistance was not strong enough to persuade the co-chairs to remove the goal. At the end of OWG-13, the OWG officially adopted the proposal– one that included goal 10 on inequality (OWG, 2014d).

Q2. Which targets on inequality should be included?

The targets adopted under SDG10 in the OWG-proposal addressed both within-country inequality (target 1-4, addressing e.g. income growth for the poorest, inclusion, and eliminating discrimination) and between-country inequality (targets 5-7, e.g. representation in international financial institutions and fairer trade rules, and targets a-c, which addressed the means to achieve goal and targets). The choice for this set of diverse and fragmented targets was the result of a "progressive" deadlock (Langford, 2016). On the one hand, developed countries prioritized targets that would reduce inequality between social groups within countries. Instead, developing countries demanded between-country inequality targets. Since neither the developing nor the developed countries were willing to give in on their preferred targets, the proposal included both.

Per Cobham (2014), this focus on group inequalities represents "important shifts from the focus on absolute income poverty and basic capabilities that characterized the MDGs" (p. 333). Scholars, however, also critiqued the targets proposed by the OWG, because they were quite flawed: most were unquantifiable and vaguely worded, with many targets lacking a specific deadline by which to achieve them. Moreover, the targets distorted the meaning of the norm as contained in the headline of the goal, as they did not address the unequal distribution of income (Fukuda-Parr, 2019; MacNaughton, 2017; Saiz & Donald, 2017). The weak targets in the OWG-proposal resulted from path dependency, country-interests, and lack of technical support.

In terms of path dependency, the OWG had introduced most of the eventual targets proposed under SDG10 in the first document that suggested targets (OWG, 2014c). Since then, the majority of targets had remained unchanged. This was not because the targets were of such high standard, but because member states were preoccupied negotiating the number and content of the goals. They had limited attention for or interest in the exact wording of the targets, something that was outside of their expertise (Fukuda-Parr, 2019). Moreover, several member states believed that the targets would be further refined after the conclusion of the OWG, as the OWG-agreement was supposed to serve as a proposal, not a final compilation (Dodds et al., 2017; IISD, 2014e; Sengupta, 2016).

In addition to path dependency, the weak targets also resulted from country interests. The absence of targets that would oblige countries to reduce the unequal distribution of income and wealth was strategic. Target 10.1 - boosting income of the bottom 40% faster than the average - best illustrates this. It is the only measurable target under SDG10 and directly links to the World Bank's goal to promote shared prosperity. In 2013, the institution added this goal to its existing goal of reducing poverty (World Bank, 2013b). Supposedly, this shared prosperity measure addresses vertical economic inequality within countries. However, by comparing the progress of people at the bottom with national averages rather than with the progress of the most advantaged groups, this measure distorts what inequality is about (Cobham, 2014). The shared prosperity goal of the World Bank and its corresponding target proposed by the OWG imply that all that matters is an improvement at the bottom end - that the amount of income and wealth going to the people at the top is not relevant. Indeed, the target can be achieved without reducing vertical economic inequality, such as when the income for the top 10% of the population grows at an even higher rate than the income of the bottom 40%, at the expense of the middle (MacNaughton, 2017). According to Kate Donald, who works for the Center for Economic and Social Rights, "It was at the Bank's urging that SDG target 10.1 does not focus explicitly on reducing economic disparity per se (as measured by the widely used Gini coefficient or Palma ratio), but instead concentrates on boosting the incomes of the bottom 40%" (Donald, 2017). The World Bank's refusal to use a stronger vertical economic inequality target indicates that the World Bank kept holding on to its neoliberal approach to development, discussed in chapter 4.1.

As already touched on before, target 10.1 in particular received widespread suggestions for change by non-state stakeholders ever since its introduction. For instance, at OWG-12 a coalition of CSOs generally agreed with nine of the ten proposed targets under SDG10, only requesting minor edits, but voiced high dissatisfaction with target 10.1. They asked to replace it with a version of the Palma ratio (Major Groups and other stakeholders, 2014b, p. 29). When this did not happen, at OWG-13 they suggested to at least *add* the Palma ratio to the existing targets, and to strengthen then target 10.4 ("progressively adopt policies especially fiscal policies to promote greater equality") by mentioning redistributive policies and progressive taxations systems (UN DESA, 2014, p. 16). Member states however ignored these repeated suggestions. As a result, the World Bank-target was never replaced, and member states successfully re-conceptualized the norm in the headline goal by making it more about poverty than inequality.

According to Sakiko Fukuda-Parr and Desmond McNeill, this "slippage" when the targets (and later, indicators – see 4.3) were selected, did not only occur in the case of SDG10 but was visible across all goals, and "affected both the level of ambition and the interpretation of the goals, modifying their intended meaning" (Fukuda-Parr & McNeill, 2019, p. 10).

The flaws in the OWG-proposed targets under SDG10 were thus the result of the political process that created them, a process that lacked the necessary technical input to create robust targets as there were no technical bodies that played a significant role in the OWG-process (Fukuda-Parr, 2019). Therefore the targets that had been suggested early on in the OWG process but had little technical backing and were in some cases widely questioned, were only changed lightly or not at all before being included in the final proposal. The inclusion of the inequality goal thus came at the cost of significant compromises in the way that the goal was conceptualized.

Conclusion

At the start of the OWG, which was in charge of establishing a list of goals and targets for the wider intergovernmental negotiations that were to follow, inequality had already emerged as a salient issue among citizens, politicians, and the scientific community, signifying stage 1 of the norm life cycle (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). This was reflected in the widespread agreement among the OWG member states that an inequality norm should be part of the SDGs. Yet its practical translation was subject to a long and tough negotiating process because of disagreements among OWG-members and other stakeholders about what types of inequality to include and in what manner to address them.

Oxfam and Joseph Stiglitz, acting as norm entrepreneurs, persistently advocated for formulating the norm as vertical economic inequality and including this as a stand-alone goal. As a result of Oxfam's advocacy, the norm diffused to other CSOs. Dr. Stiglitz played a vital role in promoting the emergent norm among countries. Yet their persuasion-tactics were ultimately ineffective as throughout the OWG-negotiations there was sustained, significant resistance from developed member states to a stand-alone inequality goal. As protectors of the old norm, they successfully challenged the emergent vertical economic inequality norm by reframing inequality as social exclusion, which focused attention on the poor and marginalized rather than on the wealthy.

As a result of the strong consensus among developed countries in favor of a crosscutting approach, for most of the negotiations, a stand-alone goal seemed to be unattainable. The balance changed when developing countries, acting as policy entrepreneurs, started advocating for a stand-alone goal at OWG-11. This seemingly sudden concern for a stand-alone goal stemmed from their desire to have between-country inequality targets, which at one point in the negotiations had been completely omitted. In the remaining two OWG-sessions the goal on inequality remained contested and was extremely susceptible to removal. However, it remained in place.

The selected targets under SDG10 reflect the different interests of developed versus developing countries: developed countries prioritized targets on social inclusion and equality of opportunity at the domestic level; the developing countries prioritized between-country equality.

Thus, as a result of sustained advocacy by CSOs, including progressive academics, as well as some UN agencies, and ultimately developing countries, the OWG-proposal adopted in July 2014 included what seemed like an ambitious and transformative goal on reducing inequality both within and between countries. However, the corresponding targets did not signify a shift in norms, merely a change in approach about how to achieve the orthodox poverty norm. Since the emergent norm on vertical economic inequality failed to diffuse to states during the OWG, a tipping point was not reached and the norm remained in stage 1 of the norm life cycle. There was however still potential for this to change, as the OWG-agreement was merely a proposal. This is discussed in chapter 4.3.

4.3 From goals and targets to global indicators (2015-ongoing)

This chapter addresses the period post-OWG. Now that the OWG had developed a proposal with goals and targets, the wider Intergovernmental Negotiations (IGN) could begin. According to the guidelines set out in *The Future We Want* (UNGA, 2012), through these negotiations, all 193 member states were supposed to reach final agreement on goals and targets. Second, the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators (IAEG-SDGs), a technical body, was tasked with developing the indicator framework under the authority of the UN Statistical Commission. The IAEG-SDGs consisted of representatives of national statistical offices, and, as observers, representatives from regional and international organizations and agencies (UN DESA, 2015). It is crucial to not only study the inclusion of SDG10 but also the corresponding targets and indicators, because "The choice of measurement tools–the target and indicator–is essential in defining the norm itself'' (Fukuda-Parr & McNeill, 2019, p. 6). This chapter explores which changes were made to the norm on inequality as contained in the OWG-proposal (goal/targets), as well as how the international community decided on the corresponding indicators.

Q1. Should SDG10 and its targets be altered?

The status of the OWG-outcome as proposal left the opportunity to change goals and targets after its completion. Post-OWG, several member states admitted that "in the rush to complete the OWG outcome document within a tight deadline, several targets had been drafted in terms that were technically deficient or incomplete" (Dodds et al., 2017, p. 80). In addition to improving targets, developed countries also hoped to get rid of the stand-alone goal (IISD, 2014e). Indeed, there was a widespread fear among CSOs that during the IGN the inequality goal would be removed: "It was expected that some of the goals or targets proposed by the OWG would be dropped or dramatically modified during intergovernmental negotiations, such as the controversial inequality reduction goal" (Sengupta, 2016). On a more positive note for CSOs, there was also still the potential for a norm on vertical economic inequality to become institutionalized through the targets, and CSOs kept pressuring states to do so (Pogge & Sengupta, 2015; UNDPI, 2014). According to Finnemore & Sikkink (1988, p. 900), in most cases, institutionalization is necessary to reach a tipping point and move an emergent norm toward the second stage of the norm life cycle.

However, at the 68th session of the UNGA in September 2014 it became clear that key member states, particularly the G77, were reluctant to make changes to the proposal. This session was supposed to consider the OWG-proposal for appropriate action. As part of this, the G77 - fearing additional difficult negotiations - made clear that the outcome of the OWG-process should be final, while developed countries preferred a more tentative status of the outcome (Dodds et al., 2017; Leone, 2014). They compromised that "the proposal of the Open Working Group . . . shall be the main basis for integrating sustainable development goals into the post-2015 development agenda, while recognizing that other inputs will also be considered" (UN, 2014a, p. 1), a decision that was accepted by the Secretary-General at the 69th session (UN, 2014b). This reaffirmed the importance that was given by all member states to the OWG-proposal.

During the IGN, member states agreed that they did not want to alter any of the SDGs, but there was no such agreement on the status of the targets: several developed countries felt that targets could be improved through "a technical review" (Canada, Japan, Australia, Denmark, the US, Norway, the UK, Finland, Bulgaria, the Netherlands, Germany, the EU, Cyprus, Spain, the Russian Federation, Comoros), which had been recommended by the Secretary-General (UN, 2014b). The US and Japan were most vocal about this, with the US arguing at one point that as many as 68% of the proposed targets could be substantively improved (IISD, 2015c). However, other member states, led by the developing countries (the G77, France, India, Indonesia, CARICOM, Bolivia, Brazil, Rwanda, PSIDS, Mexico, AOSIS, the United Arab Emirates, Micronesia, the LDCs, Viet Nam), expressed reservations towards a technical review out of concern that it would reopen the entire OWG proposal (IISD, 2015a, 2015c). The G77 was particularly opposed to any changes to the proposal, including any attempts to technically refine the targets (IISD, 2015a, 2015c). Therefore member states decided to refrain from doing so (Dodds et al., 2017). In the end, there was a great deal of support for the OWG-proposal. The overwhelming majority of member states (including the developed countries that had been critical of the targets in an earlier stadium), opposed a reopening (IISD, 2015a, 2015b).

The refusal to renegotiate the targets meant that after eight sessions of the IGN (January to July 2015) all targets suggested by the OWG, even the technically deficient ones, were accepted with only minor linguistic adjustments (and even those minor adjustments received strong opposition the G77) (IISD, 2015c; Langford, 2016). The targets are visible in Table 1. The goals and targets were adopted as part of the Agenda 2030 in September 2015, completing one part of the journey.

Table 1. Targets under SDG 10: Reduce inequality within and between countries (UNGA, 2015, p. 21).

Number	Target
10.1	By 2030, progressively achieve and sustain income growth of the bottom 40 percent of the population at a rate higher than the national average
10.2	By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status
10.3	Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard
10.4	Adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality
10.5	Improve the regulation and monitoring of global financial markets and institutions and strengthen the implementation of such regulations

10.6 Ensure enhanced representation and voice for developing countries in decision-making in global international economic and financial institutions in order to deliver more effective, credible, accountable and legitimate institutions

10.7 Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies

10.a Implement the principle of special and differential treatment for developing countries, in particular least developed countries, in accordance with World Trade Organization agreements

10.b Encourage official development assistance and financial flows, including foreign direct investment, to States where the need is greatest, in particular least developed countries, African countries, small island developing States and landlocked developing countries, in accordance with their national plans and programmes

10.c By 2030, reduce to less than 3 percent the transaction costs of migrant remittances and eliminate remittance corridors with costs higher than 5 percent

Q2. Which indicators should be included under SDG10?

After agreement on goals and targets, the corresponding global indicators had to be developed, according to the process described in paragraph 75 of the 2030 Agenda:

> The global indicator framework, to be developed by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators, will be agreed by the Statistical Commission by March 2016 and adopted thereafter by the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly. (UNGA, 2015, p. 32)

Although this was an opportunity to develop indicators that could improve on the flawed targets under SDG10 as selected by member states, this is not what happened, due to limited opportunities for CSOs to influence the process, obstruction of member states, and hegemonic power.

First, the IAEG-process was much less transparent and open than the OWG-process had been. Because of this, CSOs had minimal opportunities to influence the process and did not feel that their proposals for improved or additional indicators were taken seriously (Civil Society, 2016). Similarly to the OWG-process, when nation states consistently failed to listen to the demand from CSOs for an inequality-target that considered the top wealth brackets, statistical experts from these member states now rejected their proposals to include an indicator on this same topic (Donald, 2016; Shaheen, 2016). Neither the Palma ratio nor the Gini coefficient was included in the proposed indicators at any point (IAEG-SDG, 2015; UNESC, 2015; UNSD, 2015a). As a result, according to Shaheen (2016, p. 100), “this is a goal that is radical in namesake but placid in reality.”

Second, the process for the definition of the indicators – which would normally have been merely technical – became politicized (Caballero, 2019; Fukuda-Parr & McNeill, 2019). Behind the refusal of the IAEG-SDGs to seriously consider CSO's proposals was an earlier decision of member states that severely limited the options of the technical committee. At the third meeting of the IGN, member states had instructed the IAEG-SDGs that indicators must directly respond to the goals and targets agreed by the OWG; must not undermine or re-interpret the targets; must maintain the balance achieved; and should not introduce any new or contentious issues (IISD, 2015c; UN DESA, 2015). This severely limited the choice of measurement tools let to a situation where the characteristics of the targets heavily influenced the indicators: the indicators were locked in by choice of the targets.

Lastly, hegemonic power played a role in the selection of indicators. Before the first meeting of the IAEG-SDGs, the UN Statistical Division had compiled a list with a suggested indicator for each target (UNSD, 2015a) based on a list of proposals (UNSD, 2015b). However, only agencies could propose indicators, CSOs could not. The indicator chosen for target 10.1 on vertical economic inequality was the indicator promoted by the World Bank, "Growth rates of household expenditure or income per capita among the bottom 40 percent of the population and the total population" (UNSD, 2015a). This indicator was chosen based on the criterium of the UNSD to give precedence "to the proposals by agencies with a mandate in the specific area and/or already responsible for global monitoring on the specific indicator" (UNSD, 2015a, p. 1). By using this criterium, they reinforced the power of orthodox norms (already institutionalized) over emergent ones and served the purposes of powerful interests. The World Bank was promptly assigned as "custodian" of this SDG target.

In March 2016, at the 47th session of the UN Statistical Commission, the IAEG presented a report with a final proposal for global indicators to monitor the SDGs (UN, 2016). The UNGA adopted the indicator framework developed by the IAEG-SDGs in July 2017 (UN, 2017). In that same resolution, it supported the continued work of the Statistical Commission to develop, improve, and refine the indicators further.

Conclusion

This section has shown that behind what appears to be a strong norm on inequality lurked political compromises that resulted in weak, technically deficient targets and indicators. These targets and indicators do not explicitly address the unequal distribution of income and wealth and are thus not aligned with the norm set in the goal.

Although the goal seemingly sets a strong norm on reducing inequality within and between countries, the corresponding targets and indicators merely extend the existing poverty norm by focusing on poverty and exclusion rather than closing the gap between the poor and the rich. Thus, despite their best attempts all throughout the Post-2015 process, norm entrepreneurs were never able to persuade a critical mass of states to adopt a robust new global norm on vertical economic inequality. As a result of this failure to persuade states, the norm never reached the threshold to move from stage 1 to stage 2 in the norm life cycle.

In terms of the targets, member states did not allow for the much-needed technical proofing post-OWG despite the recommendation of the Secretary-General to do so, out of fear to reopen the carefully negotiated OWG-proposal and the steadfast refusal of the G77 to any modifications to the document.

In terms of the indicators, the choice of the measurement tools for each target was not merely technical but deeply political. Member states ensured that indicators could not deviate much from the established targets. At the IGN, they instructed the IAEG-SDGs that indicators had to follow the targets, and could not take up any additional issues. The inclusion of an indicator on vertical income inequality, such as the Palma ratio, as recommended by CSOs and certain UN agencies, would have gone against these instructions and was ignored. Since indicators had to follow targets, many of the indicators are technically weak as well.

5. Conclusions & Discussion

The research question that lay at the heart of this study was: “Why and how was it decided to include SDG10 on reducing inequality within and between countries in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals in its current form?” To answer this question, the researcher performed desk research, analyzing a large number of relevant documents.

During the first years of the negotiations on the SDGs, a wide array of stakeholders recognized the importance of addressing inequality, but it appeared very unlikely that it would become a stand-alone goal. This research added to the literature by showing that this only changed very late in the OWG-process, thanks to developing countries who acted as policy entrepreneurs. They were unsatisfied with the lack of between-country inequality targets and used a window of opportunity to join non-state actors in demanding an inequality goal. In this way, CSOs - led by Oxfam and professor Stiglitz as norm entrepreneurs - did eventually get the stand-alone goal they had so persistently been advocating for.

SDG10 has widely been recognized as one of the most transforming elements of the 2030 Agenda (Saiz & Donald, 2017) because its inclusion appeared to signal a radical shift with the poverty-focused MDGs and with the previously documented widespread political resistance among member states to address inequality (Chancel et al., 2017; Oxfam, 2014; Palma, 2011; Piketty, 2014; Stiglitz, 2012). Does the goal signify a breakdown of those political obstacles? The answer is no. This study extends current theoretical insights by showing that the reason that Agenda 2030 includes an inequality goal is not that member states have become more positive of policies and reforms to decrease inequality, but because the targets and indicators that are supposed to measure inequality are not in line with the headline goal. Because targets and indicators do not address income and wealth at the top and are technically deficient, the goal has much less transformative potential than the headline goal makes it out to be.

The only measurable target included in SDG10 is a shared prosperity measure originating from the World Bank, which emphasizes income growth at the bottom of the population. Since studies have shown that inequality has increased mainly because the wealthiest individuals have become wealthier (UNDESA, 2013), it is unlikely that policies and practices instigated as a result of SDG10 will reduce vertical economic inequality. SDG10 thus does not represent a significant shift in how member states think about inequality, merely a strengthening of the existing global norm on poverty. Addressing the role of the wealthy elite in the rise in inequality remains an extremely political issue.

This study also revealed the specific tactics used by member states to accomplish keeping out the emergent norm of targets and indicators. The targets under SDG10 cover both within- and between-country inequality, as a result of a "progressive" deadlock: member states were more concerned with having their preferred targets included than with attempting to remove targets they disagreed with. Developed member states, followed by developing member states, successfully used an "ignore-and-reframe" strategy to keep targets to reduce income and wealth accumulation out of the goal. They *ignored* the repeated calls of CSOs to use SDG10 to convey a global norm on reducing vertical economic inequality, such as the Palma ratio; and they successfully *reframed* the emergent norm on inequality as social exclusion. This has resulted in a clear focus on horizontal inequalities in the targets.

This analysis also shows that when non-state stakeholders and developing countries unite forces, they can successfully push for measures that are opposed by developed countries. It would be interesting to find out if the successful teaming up of developing countries and non-state stakeholders to push for an issue is part of a broader trend in global governance. Further research could look into the negotiations on the other SDGs, as well as other intergovernmental negotiations, to see to what extent this is the case. What conditions determine if an issue that is not supported by developed countries, becomes part of a global agreement? Does this happen repeatedly or only in the case of SDG10 or the SDGs in general, possibly because of the breaking up of traditional blocs as a result of the novel seat structure? Alternatively, are the developing countries gaining global negotiating power at the expense of hegemonic forces?

In addition, Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) have shown that in order for an emergent norm to become widely accepted, a critical amount of states have to support the norm. However, it is not clear which characteristics these states should have. How many developing countries would have to start accepting the emergent norm on vertical economic inequality before a tipping point is reached? In following future global negotiations on sustainable development and inequality, this is an interesting question to keep in mind.

Furthermore, this study points to a critical flaw in the process to develop SDGs: the lack of sufficient technical oversight. Fukuda-Parr and McNeill (2019) have shown that the watering down of targets relative to the goal was not unique to SDG10 but a widespread phenomenon. The current study contributed to this finding by showing that this was caused by a lack of technical oversight during the OWG-process. It is unwise to let member states decide on targets, for two reasons: they have significant political interests to choose targets that may not be the best measurements for the goals (as was the case with the shared prosperity target); and they do not have expertise in this field. By giving the member states so much freedom in deciding on the targets, they became highly politicized, and so did the corresponding indicators that were locked in. Of course, it is unlikely that member states would ever agree to let technical commissions independently decide on targets and indicators. However, future negotiations could reserve a more prominent role for technical experts from the beginning in order to assist member states in setting the targets.

Despite the unprecedented attempt to address inequality in the SDGs, the weak targets and indicators under goal 10, especially in terms of vertical economic inequality, thus make it unlikely that inequality will be significantly reduced over the timespan of the agenda. However, the inclusion of Goal 10 may lay the foundation for further normative change in the future.

Although the research has made several contributions to the existing literature, there are also a few limitations. First, qualitative research is much more subjective than quantitative research because the data need to be interpreted by the researcher. Second and most significantly, halfway during the negotiation analysis, another study was published that had almost the same research objective (Fukuda-Parr, 2019). On the positive side, Fukuda-Parr’s findings, which were based on document reviews, observation at meetings, and interviews with stakeholders, correspond with the findings of this study. This shows high reliability. On the downside, it means that the current study contributed less to the existing literature then was initially thought.

Also, the internal validity could be higher. Although a large quantitity of data from a variety of sources was used(primary, secondary, from national governments, UN agencies, as well as CSOs), the data could have been richer by including interviews. Initially, the researcher had planned on doing interviews with some key figures in the negotiations to increase credibility. However, the researcher decided against this when it became clear that Fukuda-Parr (2019) had just done this. Lastly, there is low external validity. The research design, which chose depth over breadth, does not allow for generalizing the findings to other SDGs.

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