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The Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development:
A driving force for Multilateralism and
Corporate Strategies.

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List of acronyms

| | |
|---------------|--|
| ASEAN | Association of Southeast Asian Nations |
| ASEM | Asia-Europe Meeting |
| ASviS | Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development |
| BES | Equitable and Sustainable Well-Being |
| CEB | Chief Executives Board |
| CGIL | Italian General Confederation of Labour |
| CNR | National Research Council |
| COP 21 | Conference of Parties |
| COP | Communication of Progress |
| CSR | Corporate Social Responsibility |
| DEF | Document of Economy and Finance |
| DGMO | Directorate General for Global Affairs |
| ECESA | Executive Committee of Economic and Social Affairs |
| ECOSOC | Economic and Social Council |
| EEAS | European External Action Service |
| ENEA | Agency for New Technologies, Energy and Sustainable Economic Development |
| ESG | Environmental, Social, Governance |
| EU | European Union |
| GAC | General Affairs Council Configuration |
| GRI | Global Reporting Initiative |
| HLPF | High-Level Political Forum |
| ILO | International Labour Organization |
| ISO | International Standard Organization |
| ISPRA | National Institute for the Protection and Environmental Research |
| ISTAT | National Institute of Statistics |
| IUCN | International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources |
| KPI | Key Performance Indicators |
| LEED | Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design |
| MAECI | Ministry of International Affairs and International Cooperation |
| MATTM | Italian Ministry for the Environment Land and Sea |
| MDG | Millennium Development Goals |
| MEF | Ministry of Economy and Finance |
| MGoS | Major Groups and Stakeholders |
| MNE | Multinational Enterprise |

| | |
|----------------|--|
| NAP | National Action Plan |
| NCP | National Contact Point |
| NDC | National Determined Contribution |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organizations |
| NSDS | National Sustainable Development Strategy |
| OCSE | Organizzazione per la Cooperazione e lo Sviluppo Economico |
| OECD | Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| OSCE | Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe |
| PCSD | Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development |
| PNR | National Reform Programme |
| PPPs | Public-Private Partnerships |
| RBC | Responsible Business Conduct |
| SDG | Sustainable Development Goals |
| SDSN | Sustainable Development Solution Network |
| SDSN | Sustainable Development Solutions Network |
| SME | Small and Medium Size Enterprise |
| SNSvS | Italian Strategy for Sustainable Development |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNCED | United Nations Conference on Environment and Development |
| UNCSD | United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development |
| UNDESA | United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| UNECA | United Nations Economic Commission for Africa |
| UNECE | United Nations Economic Commission for Europe |
| UNECLAC | United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean |
| UNEP | United Nations Environmental Programme |
| UNESCAP | United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific |
| UNESCWA | Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia |
| UNFCCC | The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change |
| UNGP | United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights |
| UNSDG | United Nations Sustainable Development Group |
| VNR | Voluntary National Reviews |
| WCED | World commission on Environment and Development |
| WSSD | World Summit on Sustainable Development |

Introduction

In the last few years, the concept of sustainable development has gained significant momentum, especially following the adoption in September 2015 of the United Nations 2030 Agenda. Today, the dimension of sustainability permeates political agendas, business strategies, civil society initiatives, and increasingly concerns individual decisions, especially among young generations. Notably, several of the main current global challenges are sustainability-related. Namely, the ecological debt, caused by the overuse and depletion of national resources, constitutes a severe threat for the economy and the overall quality of life. Moreover, according to the World Bank, nearly 800 million people live below the international poverty line of US\$1.90 a day, and inequalities within and across nations are still a reason of deep concern. Such complex challenges are interconnected and interdependent, and therefore require a comprehensive response, which integrates the economic, social, and environmental dimensions by generating positive spill-over effects. Indeed, action is required at the international, regional national and local levels, both coming from the public and the private sector, according to the principles of vertical and horizontal subsidiarity. The publication of the 2030 Agenda is a clear statement on the unsustainability of the current model of development, not only in environmental terms, but also as regards the economic and social dimensions. Accordingly, the idea of sustainability as a solely environmental issue is overcome, with the consolidation of a unified vision of the different dimensions of development. Thus, sustainability cannot be confined to the maximization of a singular good, but, on the contrary, it requires a coherent balance between ecological transition, social empowerment, and economic growth and innovation¹. All countries, regardless of the classic distinction between under-developed, emerging, and developed countries, are called to contribute to the transition towards a sustainable world. To this end, each State is called to define a Strategy for sustainable development, enabling the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in which the Agenda is articulated, and the monitoring and reporting of the achieved progress within a process coordinated by the United Nations. However, public administration alone cannot achieve what is required by the 2030 Agenda and, therefore, the participation of all components of society, including citizens, businesses, social partners, the research and knowledge community, cities, municipalities, and rural areas, is a fundamental requirement. From here, the unifying character of the instrument, which galvanizes multiple stakeholders in the pursuit of universally shared goals.

This research aims to analyse the transformative impact of the 2030 Agenda, both as regards the public and the private sector, specifically focusing on multilateralism and innovative corporate strategies. Firstly, the 2030 Agenda is described in relation to the enhancement of multilateralism, by analysing the system of global governance in support of its effective implementation. Subsequently, the attention shifts to the impact of the Agenda and its SDGs on the business sector. Furthermore, after a brief introduction to sustainable development and, specifically, on the Agenda, the analysis starts with the recognition of the main International Organisations and Fora involved in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and which form an integrated

¹ Leslie Paul Thiele, *Sustainability* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 9.

multi-layered governance system. Subsequently, the research goes through the examination of state-level commitments, namely the preparation of national strategies and Voluntary National Reviews, and concludes with the final focus on the private dimension, and specifically on sustainability-oriented strategies.

In particular, the first chapter explores the evolution of the concept of sustainable development, both through a literature review and a description of the long pathway, marked by several International Conferences and Agreements, for the creation of an international institutional framework for sustainable development. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development culminates the process above and is described in its most salient features, with particular emphasis on the universality and inclusiveness of its addresses and scope of application, and the envisaged system of Global Partnership.

The internship at the Sustainable Development Unit of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs was crucial for the collection of relevant data and information on the international initiatives and instruments for the promotion and implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the relative SDGs. Specifically, the monitoring of the multilateral Fora on sustainability issues (United Nations, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, European Union, Global Compact, G7 and G20) was particularly useful for the development of the 2nd chapter of this research paper, dealing with the enhancement of multilateralism motivated by the global Agenda for sustainable development. In addition, a comprehensive understanding of the Italian Strategy for Sustainable development was further developed through the organization of an inter-ministerial meeting, convened by the Sustainable Development Unit. It involved the relevant ministries and aimed at collecting the stance of the various public authorities as regards the 2030 Agenda, for defining the Italian standing at the European Council's Working Party on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In addition, the research on the engagement of the private sector and the civil society was necessary for scrutinizing the multi-stakeholder approach provided for by the Agenda.

As regards the realization of the third chapter, dealing with the crucial role of the private sector and the potential of the 2030 Agenda in shaping corporate strategies, a short literature review on the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility has been included to explain the gradual introduction of environmental and social concerns in business activities. This pathway sets the basis for the concrete introduction of the SDGs in corporate strategies. The case study on the Italian company Salini Impregilo S.p.A., specialized in the construction and civil engineering sector provides a concrete example of the effective endorsement of the principles of sustainable development in business strategies and reporting mechanism. The case study has been developed through an interview with the Sustainability and CSR Manager of the company and the consultation of the company's Consolidated Non-financial Statement.

Chapter 1

1.1 An introduction to sustainable development.

The concept of sustainability derives from the Latin *sustinere* and springs from the conservationism and preservation movements of the 19th century and the environmental movement of the 20th century. Although the concept has witnessed a profound evolution, which has further intensified in the last decades, the idea is that of guaranteeing the balance between the satisfaction of current needs and the preservation of future generations' opportunities.

Sustainability-related issues such as the compatibility between natural resources and the economic development of States have been subject to much debate, at least from the end of the XVIII century. Notably, Thomas Malthus work on the relationship between food availability and population growth dates back to 1798. Undoubtedly, environmental concerns were central in shaping the process towards the definition of sustainability. In 1864 George Perkins Marsh, after the destruction of the forests of the Green Mountains in Vermont, published *Man and Nature*, a manifestation of the early conservation movement, advocating for the restoration of the environment. In the late 1800s, Gifford Pinchot, the chief of the United States Forest Service, developed a *conservation ethic* and, was referred to as the father of conservation. In particular, he wrote:

The central thing for which Conservation stands is to make this country the best possible place to live in, both for us and for our descendants. It stands against the waste of natural resources which can be renewed, such as the food-producing soils and the forests; and most of all it stands for an equal opportunity for every American citizen to get his fair share of benefit from these resources, both now and hereafter.²

Specifically, the publication in 1910 of his treatise on conservation led to the development of a specific approach for the management of natural resources, the *conservationism*, aimed at ensuring long-term human benefits. *Conservationism* was complemented by the work of John Muir, focusing primarily on environmental degradation caused by human exploitation, which led to the development of the *preservationist* approach. Progressively, technological innovations and rising demographic trends pushed the concern into new arenas. Namely, the book *Silent Spring*, wrote in 1962 by Rachel Carson, raised attention on the devastating effects of pesticides or, Paul Ehrlich's book *The Population Bomb* concerned the severe impact of the rising human populations. As regards technological evolutions, Barry Commoner's *The Closing Circle*, related technology and the inequitable distribution of resources to environmental degradation.

The renowned book *The Limits to Growth*, published in 1972 by the Club of Rome, with 30 million copies distributed in 30 languages, became the best-seller environmental book. It brought together many of the concerns mentioned above but, rather than relating the concept of sustainability to limited practices and events,

² Gifford Pinchot, *The Fight for Conservation* (New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1910), 79.

as in the previous literature, it analysed it from a global perspective. The main message contained in the book and persuasively suggested by its title is the following:

If the present growth trends in world population, industrialization, pollution, food production, and resource depletion continue unchanged, the limits to growth on this planet will be reached sometime within the next one hundred years. The most probable result will be a rather sudden and uncontrollable decline in both population and industrial capacity.³

Accordingly, in the context of conservation and intergenerational obligations, in 1980 the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) introduced the concepts of “sustainable utilization” and “sustainable development” in its publication *World Conservation Strategy*. One year later, Lester Brown, founder of the Worldwatch Institute⁴, published the book *Building a Sustainable Society*, addressing issues such as deforestation, loss of biodiversity, overpopulation, and threats to food production.

Finally, the concept of sustainable development was clearly defined and found its linguistic feet, in the Brundtland Report *Our Common Future*, published in 1987 by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Here, sustainable development is defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”⁵ This definition of sustainability mainly concerns the compatibility of economic development and protection of the environment, while introducing the notion of social equity between generations. With this more precise and all-encompassing definition, sustainable development was quickly mainstreamed in governmental and scholarly interest. Nevertheless, the concept of sustainability has been challenged for its abstractedness and incapability of generating concrete policies for the responsible utilization of natural resources, compatible with their long-term availability. This concern was forwarded by the winner of the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences, Robert Solow⁶.

Initially, the concept of sustainable development was employed in the context of international cooperation, mainly concerning less-developed and developing countries. In particular, the principle of sustainable growth has always been controversial, by requiring developed countries to adopt production-consumption processes and lifestyles, and developing countries to grow economically and demographically, without compromising the ecosystem. Notably, in the 1950s, with the process of decolonization, “new” African and Asian states became members of the United Nations, and started to call for an increased attention and action for development from the international community⁷. Only recently, and particularly with the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the concept of sustainable development was extended to all countries

³ Donatella Meadows, Jorgen Randers, and Dennis Meadows, *The Limits to Growth: The 30-Year Update* (White River Junction: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2004), 122.

⁴⁴ The Worldwatch Institute is the first research organization for the study of global environmental issues.

⁵ “Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future”, United Nations, August 4, 1987, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/5987our-common-future.pdf>

⁶ Robert Solow, “An almost practical step towards sustainability” (Lecture, University of Calgary, October 8, 1992) https://haskayne.ucalgary.ca/files/haskayne/RobertSolow_AnAlmostPracticalStepTowardSustainability_Sep93.pdf

⁷ Robert Jackson and Georg Sørensen, *Introduction to International Relations: Theories and Approaches* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 186.

of the world, regardless of their level of development but taking into account the extremely different national needs and potentials. Indeed, the dimension of sustainability started to permeate new dimensions of the social, political, and economic spheres. The concept of sustainable development is now generally associated to issues such as food security, energy, industry, population and urban development, entailing the question of the management of international public goods, the interdependence between peace, security, environment and economic growth, and the need for institutional and social changes, thus concerning a myriad of different actors.

Furthermore, sustainability traditionally includes three main dimensions: economic, social, and environmental. However, the institutional and governance dimensions are becoming increasingly crucial for both the local and international management of sustainable development. In particular, before the 2030 Agenda, there emerged an urgent need to improve the institutional framework for sustainable development, by creating an effective and integrated system of global governance including all institutions and actors involved in the implementation and monitoring of the sustainability transition. The national and international dynamics entailed by the implementation of the 2030 Agenda laid the foundations for the progressive development of links and interdependencies between diverse actors, from both the public and the private sphere, and at the local, national, regional and international level.

1.2 The international process towards a common reference framework for sustainable development.

Already in the 70s, the raising of environmental issues populated the public debate, as confirmed by the UN Conference on the Human Environment of 1972 in Stockholm, the first major conference on international environmental issues. The Stockholm Conference represents a turning point in the development of international environmental law and politics⁸ and the relative Declaration places the preservation of the environment as a humanity's priority purpose, just like peace and economic development. In particular, the forwarded 26 principles of the Declaration mostly concern social well-being and the safeguard of the environment, according to the criteria of fair distribution of natural and economic resources, among present and future generations⁹. Most importantly, the Stockholm Conference envisaged the creation of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), which, together with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other United Nations agencies, constitutes a milestone of the sustainable development governance system¹⁰.

⁸ "Report of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment" United Nations, New York 1973, https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/CONF.48/14/REV.1%20

⁹ "Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment", United Nations, June 16, 1972, https://www.soas.ac.uk/cedep-demos/000_P514_IEL_K3736-Demo/treaties/media/1972%20Stockholm%201972%20-%20Declaration%20of%20the%20United%20Nations%20Conference%20on%20the%20Human%20Environment%20-%20UNEP.pdf

¹⁰ "Rapporto SDGs 2019, Informazione Statistica per l'Agenda 2030", Istat Istituto Nazionale di Statistica, published April 17, 2019, https://www.istat.it/it/files//2019/04/SDGs_2019.pdf

The Rio United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) or Earth Summit of 1992 is a second major instance for the consolidation and evolution of the concept of sustainable development. It provided for environmental protection as an essential element of economic growth and the inter-generational responsibility in the use of resources¹¹. On this occasion, many Governments started to search for ways to supplement their economic policies with the principles of sustainable development. The primary outcomes of the Earth Summit were: the adoption by more than 178 countries of the Agenda 21¹², a global action plan for sustainable development; The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development¹³, containing the 27 principles of nations' rights and duties in the pursuit of human development and well-being; the Statement of principles for the Sustainable Management of Forests; The Convention on Biological Diversity¹⁴; The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)¹⁵, delineating non-binding limits on greenhouse gas emissions for individual countries. Also, in 1992, the UN General Assembly established the Commission on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) aimed at ensuring an adequate follow-up of the Rio UNCED¹⁶. The UNCSD was subsequently replaced by the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development¹⁷, which creation was mandated in 2012 by the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio +20), *The future we want*.

The occasion of the Earth Summit +5 in 1997 highlighted the profound acceleration in the spread of sustainable development-related concerns. Mainly, the Summit gave central stage to the delay in the overall achievement of the objectives set out by Agenda 21 due to the phenomenon of globalization, which enhanced the disparity between developed countries, witnessing a reduction of poverty, and underdeveloped countries, which, on the other hand, observed a significant deterioration of their socio-economic conditions. From here the necessity of a strategy allowing all countries of the world to benefit from the phenomenon of globalization, and reducing its impacts on vulnerable countries and communities¹⁸. Furthermore, the need for a stronger cooperation and partnership among countries was reiterated in the Millennium Summit of the United Nations in 2000, occasion where, unanimously, the Heads of State and Heads of Government signed the *Millennium Declaration*¹⁹. With the adoption of this document, all the 191 United Nations Member States and at least 22 international organizations, committed to the achievement by 2015 of 8 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs aimed at reducing extreme poverty and hunger; achieving universal primary education;

¹¹ "United Nations Conference on Environment & Development Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 3 – 14 June, Agenda 21", United Nations, accessed March 1, 2019, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/Agenda21.pdf>

¹² Ibid.

¹³ "The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development", UNESCO, accessed March 2, 2019, http://www.unesco.org/education/pdf/RIO_E.PDF

¹⁴ "Convention on Biological Diversity", United Nations, 1992, <https://www.cbd.int/doc/legal/cbd-en.pdf>

¹⁵ "United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change", United Nations, 1992, <https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/conveng.pdf>

¹⁶ "Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on the report of the Second Committee (A/RES/47/191)", United Nations, January 29, 1993, <https://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/47/ares47-191.htm>

¹⁷ "Resolution adopted by the General Assembly (A/RES/67/290)", United Nations, July 9, 2012, https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/67/290&Lang=E.

¹⁸ "Resolution adopted by the General Assembly (A/RES/S-19/2)", United Nations, September 19, 1997, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/S-19/2.

¹⁹ "Resolution adopted by the General Assembly (A/RES/55/2)", United Nations, September 8, 2000, <http://www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.htm>.

promoting gender equality and empowering women; reducing child mortality; improving maternal health; combating HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases; ensuring environmental sustainability; and developing a global partnership for development.

The 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg, with the adoption of the relative *Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development*²⁰ and *Plan of Implementation*, restated the global commitments to environmental protection and poverty eradication and emphasized the importance of multilateral partnerships. Subsequently, the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, also referred to as *Rio+20*, focused on two main objectives: the need for a transition to a green economy, minimizing global threats such as climate change, loss of biodiversity desertification; and the promotion of the global socio-economic well-being. The outcome document of Rio+20, *The Future We Want*²¹, already envisaged the possibility of developing a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), building upon the MDGs, and of establishing the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

By analyzing the conferences that have took place from 1972 to 2012, we can deduce that there has been a shift from the primary emphasis on environmental issues underlying the Stockholm Conference, which were gradually complemented by social and economic development concerns at the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit in 1992, towards a closer attention on poverty alleviation at the Millennium Summit in 2000 and the WSSD in Johannesburg in 2002. Undoubtedly, in the long pathway towards a universal, internationally recognized, institutional framework for sustainable development, 2015 constituted a landmark year for the improvement of multilateral relations and the adoption of significant policies and agreements. As explained in the following paragraph, the 2030 Agenda lays down a concrete action plan and opens the way for a new shared global vision of the concept of sustainable development, mainly characterized by universality, inclusiveness, and multi-stakeholder engagement. Additionally, four other significant achievements and events that took place in 2015 should be mentioned: the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction; the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development; the Development Summit in New York; and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

1.3 Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In the occasion of the the UN Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015, culminating the negotiation process on the post-2015 development agenda²², the United Nations General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development²³. The global Agenda is articulated into 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), 169 targets, and 244 indicators and constitutes “a plan of action for people,

²⁰ “Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development”, United Nations, September 4, 2002, <http://www.un-documents.net/jburgdec.htm>.

²¹ “Resolution adopted by the General Assembly (A/RES/66/288)”, United Nations, July 27, 2012, https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/66/288&Lang=E

²² “Draft outcome document of the United Nations summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda (A/69/L.85)”, United Nations, August 12, 2015, https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/69/L.85&Lang=E

²³ “Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015 (A/RES/70/1)”, United Nations, October 21, 2015, https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E

planet, and prosperity”²⁴, striving for a “world that is just, rights-based, equitable and inclusive”²⁵. As the outcome of an international process that lasted for decades and building on the Millennium Development Goals (constituting the Agenda for Development for the period 2000-2015), the 2030 Agenda delineates the global guidelines to stimulate action over the next years for the achievement of sustainable development. In particular, the 2030 Agenda focuses on five areas: people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership. Therefrom, encompassing, in a balanced manner, the three pillars of sustainability: economic, social, and environmental. The SDGs concretely address the current global challenges by translating the Agenda’s core values and principles into specific and measurable objectives, with particular emphasis on poverty, climate and environmental degradation, inequality, peace, justice and prosperity.

Specifically, the 17 SDGs are articulated as follows:

| | | |
|-----------|--|--|
| 1 | No poverty | End poverty in all its forms everywhere |
| 2 | Zero hunger | End hunger achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture |
| 3 | Good health and well-being | Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages |
| 4 | Quality education | Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all |
| 5 | Gender equality | Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls |
| 6 | Clean water and sanitation | Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all |
| 7 | Affordable and clean energy | Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all |
| 8 | Decent work and economic growth | Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all |
| 9 | Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure | Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation |
| 10 | Reduced inequalities | Reduce inequality within and among countries |
| 11 | Sustainable cities and communities | Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable |

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ “Mainstreaming the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, United Nations Development Group, October 7, 2015, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/9478undgguidancenote.pdf>

| | |
|--|--|
| 12 Responsible consumption and production | Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns |
| 13 Climate action | Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts |
| 14 Life below water | Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development |
| 15 Life on land | Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss |
| 16 Peace, justice and strong institutions | Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels |
| 17 Partnerships for the goals | Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development |

Through these concrete and intertwined SDGs, the 2030 Agenda constitutes a global road map centered on the utmost necessity of achieving universal peace and freedom, eradicating poverty, and pursuing a sustainable transformation of our society, economy, and environment by 2030. The SDGs constitute a remarkable achievement of multilateral cooperation, enhancing the intrinsic connection between the challenges related to sustainability and the new models of economic and social development. Due to the complexity and breadth of the challenges, all actors at different levels (local, national, regional and international) were called upon in the definition and subsequent realization of the 2030 Agenda. In addition, the interconnectedness and indivisibility of the goals suggest that the Agenda must be implemented in an integrated rather than fragmented manner. In particular, some goals are conceived as a means for the achievement of other more overarching ones. For example, Goals 6 and 7, dealing respectively with water and energy, constitute a means for the achievement of Goal 3 on health and wellbeing.

While the MDGs were mainly conceived by and addressed to States, the SDGs require an integrated multi-stakeholder approach and a revitalized Global Partnership. In general, by trying to overcome categories and divisions and by endorsing the principles of inclusiveness and universality, the 2030 Agenda marks a milestone, breaking up with the previous conferences on sustainable development. Indeed, the 2030 Agenda is an inclusive instrument, engaging not only Governments and the United Nations system, but also local authorities, the private sector, the academia, and the civil society, and mobilizing all kinds of resources and means of implementation, under the imperative of universality and ensuring that none is left behind. Specifically, the private sector is playing an indispensable role, with several corporations around the world actively promoting the business case for sustainability. The underlying principle of universality reflects the absolute legitimation and political consensus, encountered by the 2030 Agenda among different actors.

Also, differently from the MDGs, which divided countries into donors and developing countries, the SDGs are broader in their scope of action and provide for the full and effective participation of all countries of the world. Furthermore, the SDGs are global in nature and assume that everyone and every country has a meaningful role to play in the pursuit of sustainable development. In particular, the Sustainable Development Solution Network (SDSN) and the Bertelsmann Foundation assessed the preparedness of OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries for achieving the SDGs through a “stress test”. What emerged was a blurred distinction existing between developed and developing countries as regards sustainability issues. Accordingly, only Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland, and Switzerland were considered as ready for the concrete achievement of the goals.

On the other hand, the 2030 Agenda takes into account national diversity in terms of capacity, resources and level of development²⁶. Indeed, in 2017 the United Nations Statistical Commission created the Inter-Agency Expert Group on SDGs²⁷ which has proposed a list of 244 indicators constituting the reference framework for the monitoring of the SDGs. In order to facilitate the implementation of the global indicators by all countries, they have been classified into three levels (Tier I, II, and III), based on their conceptual clarity and the presence of an internationally established methodology and standards. Tier 1’s indicators are conceptually clear and have an internationally established methodology and standards. Besides, the first group’s indicators are regularly produced by 50 percent of the countries where the indicator is relevant. Tier 2 is composed of those indicators that are not conceptually clear nor regularly produced by countries but have internationally established methodology and standards. Finally, methodology or standards for Tier 3’s indicators are currently in the development phase or will be developed and tested in the future²⁸.

While being a powerful instrument of vertical and horizontal policy coherence at both national, regional and international level, the 2030 Agenda is not legally binding and, therefore it is aspirational in nature and constitutes a *soft law* instrument²⁹. Indeed, all the progress that will be illustrated in the following chapters constitute a voluntary commitment of the single states and relevant stakeholders, which, through the work of their administrations and membership in international instances seek to ensure compliance with the SDGs. The aspirational nature of the Agenda is reiterated by the name Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), which, according to paragraph 84 of the 2030 Agenda are state-led, voluntary, undertaken by both developed and developing countries, and involve multiple stakeholders. VNRs are published yearly on the Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform and constitute an incentive for Governments to formulate powerful national strategies and show tangible achievements. Hence, the active commitment towards the realization of

²⁶ “The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs”, European Commission, last modified January 1, 2019, http://ec.europa.eu/environment/sustainable-development/SDGs/index_en.htm

²⁷ “Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 6 July 2017 (A/RES/71/313)”, United Nations, July 10, 2017, <https://undocs.org/A/RES/71/313>

²⁸ “Tier Classification for Global SDG Indicators”, United Nations Statistical Commission, April 4, 2019, https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/Tier%20Classification%20of%20SDG%20Indicators_4%20April%202019_web.pdf

²⁹ “Hard Law / Soft Law”, European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights, accessed February 25, 2019, <https://www.ecchr.eu/en/glossary/hard-law-soft-law/>

the SDGs serves as a source of soft power³⁰ in the context of foreign policy, shaping the external reputation of countries and influencing multilateral and bilateral relations. For what concerns the G20 countries, for example, sixteen countries have already presented their VNRs in the past few years, defining their strategy for sustainable development, showing relevant signs of progress, and identifying the administrative bodies in charge of leading the process. From 2016 to 2018, as many as 102 countries have already presented the VNRs³¹. Some of the countries attribute the power of leading and overseeing the achievement of the SDGs to existing bodies, such as the Prime Minister, while others have established ad hoc bodies. Furthermore, the UN sustainable development action plan set out by the 2030 Agenda is a transformative instrument that requires the adoption of concrete policies and an adequate monitoring system in order to ensure long-term progress and accountability. The High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on sustainable development, which meets every year at the UN Headquarter in New York, has been conceived as the primary global instance for monitoring, evaluating and orienting the implementation of the SDGs³².

As a confirmation of the role of the SDGs as “an overall international, institutional framework for sustainable development to 2030”³³, the global goals are aligned with the following international agreements and processes: the Post-2015 Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (Sendai Framework); the Paris Agreement of the 21st Conference of Parties (COP 21); and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development. In particular, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda was adopted three months ahead of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as the outcome of the 2015 Third International Conference on financing for development (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 13-16 July 2015). The system of financing for sustainable development is one of the main enablers for supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. In particular, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda integrates financial flows and policies with sustainable development’s related priorities.

Undoubtedly, even though the SDGs involve multiple governmental and non-governmental actors all over the world, the UN system has still a significant role in coordinating and supporting Member States in their implementation process. For what concerns the coordinating mechanisms provided for by the UN system, the Executive Committee of Economic and Social Affairs Plus (ECESA Plus), brings together 50 plus UN entities, such as the World Trade Organization, the International Organization for Migration and various research institutes, intending to coordinate their actions. Additionally, the UN system promotes joint follow-up at the thematic level, through collaborative mechanisms such as UN-Energy, UN-Water, and the High-Level Task Force on Global Food and Nutrition Security. Finally, the United Nations System Chief Executives

³⁰ “Soft Power”, Cambridge Dictionary, accessed February 26, 2018, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/it/dizionario/inglese/soft-power>

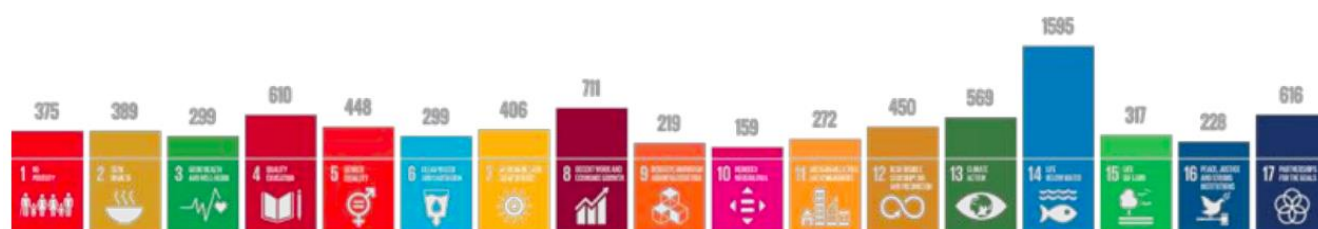
³¹ Nathalie Risse, “Global Workshop Launches Preparations for 51 VNRs in 2019”, *IISD / SDG Knowledge Hub*, December 13, 2018, <https://sdg.iisd.org/news/global-workshop-launches-preparations-for-51-vnrs-in-2019/> (accessed February 20, 2019).

³² “Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 9 July 2013 (A/RES/67/290)”, United Nations, August 23, 2013, https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/67/290&Lang=E

³³ “Italian businesses: practices towards a sustainable development”, Global Compact Network Italy, accessed March 2, 2019, https://www.globalcompactnetwork.org/files/pubblicazioni_stampa/pubblicazioni_network_italia/Report-Italian-Businesses-Practices-Towards-Sustainable-Development.pdf

Board (CEB), and the United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) coordinate the follow-up of the Agenda in their respective areas of competence³⁴.

The 2030 Agenda for sustainable development is a transversal instrument, promoting collective action at the local, national, regional, and international levels, transcending national boundaries and overcoming the classic public-private distinction. Notably, the enhancement of multilateralism and international cooperation and the involvement of the private sector motivated by the 2030 Agenda are promoted by the Goal 17 “Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development”. The main idea underlying this goal is the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships between different actors, namely national governments, the international community, civil society, and the private sector. The placement of the SDG17 as the last goal reflects its overarching nature and necessary entailment by the other goals. Indeed, partnerships are not limited to the SDG 17, but, on the contrary, they are cross-cutting instruments applicable to all goals of the 2030 Agenda, as demonstrated by the following figure from the UN open source repository of partnerships for the goals, summarizing partnership initiatives for each SDG.



NUMBER OF REGISTERED INITIATIVES ACROSS THE SDGS

35

Cooperation between different actors and the creation of networks and partnerships are vital for the 2030 Agenda, constituting fundamental requirements for its implementation. Active collaboration and synergic interactions for sustainable development entail the need for solidarity towards the most vulnerable categories, including the sharing of knowledge and financial and technological resources. The 17 SDGs are indivisible, and many of them cover multiple policy areas. Thus, coherence is necessary, not only among different levels of administration and relevant stakeholders but also across different policy fields. Areas such as energy, water resource management, and health are strongly interlinked, and should be addressed through a ‘nexus approach’, providing for multi-sectoral strategies, policies, projects and initiatives³⁶. Thus, global partnerships, and particularly public-private partnerships (PPPs) are crucial for an effective system of governance and policy coherence. In turn, in order to be effective, partnerships should be oriented at leveraging each partner’s comparative advantage.

³⁴ “United Nations system”, Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform, accessed March 3, 2019, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/unsystem>

³⁵ “Partnership Exchange: The Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, 2018 Report”, Division for Sustainable Development Goals, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, accessed March 3, 2019, https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/2569Partnership_Exchange_2018_Report.pdf

³⁶ “Reflection paper: Towards a sustainable Europe by 2030”, European Commission, published January 30, 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/rp_sustainable_europe_30-01_en_web.pdf

1.4 Current trends in Sustainable Development.

As regards the overall perception of the 2030 Agenda, currently, the general commitment towards the realization of the SDGs is witnessing a profound acceleration, including the mobilisation of all countries at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) and the involvement of a large number of stakeholders. Particularly, the last years have been characterised by several meetings at the international level, the development of new reporting standards for both the public and the business sector and the publication of studies and the spread of awareness-raising initiatives. Furthermore, the new global Agenda for sustainable development had a significant impact on the global public opinion, as stressed by the Brookings Institution's study, comparing the international resonance generated by the SDGs after the publication of the 2030 Agenda and that of the MDGs during the period 2000-2015. The study highlighted a significantly higher media coverage for the SDGs.

As regards the real progress that has been registered in the sustainability field, notwithstanding the global approach envisaged by the 2030 Agenda, given the profound inequalities still existing across countries concrete actions and policies are local and are determined by the economic potential of the countries. For this reason, and due to the breadth of sustainability-related challenges, adequately assessing global progress towards sustainable development is not an easy task. Numerous studies have been devoted to the definition of indicators for the measurement of the SDGs and to monitor progress and evaluate performance in different regions, such as the World Bank's Atlas for Sustainable Development³⁷. Before analysing the transformative impact of the 2030 Agenda in the following chapters, an overview of what emerged during the 2018 HLPF is necessary for providing a realistic picture of the current situation.

The 2018 HLPF addressed the theme of "Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies"³⁸. Mainly, an in-depth-review was dedicated to the progress made to achieving Goal 6 (Clean Water and sanitation), Goal 7 (Affordable and clean energy), Goal 11 (Sustainable cities and communities), Goal 15 (Life on land) and Goal 17 (Partnership for the Goals) which is revised every year, due to its enabling function for the realization of the other goals. Overall, an active mobilization and some significant signs of progress have been registered, however, what has been highlighted is that only an acceleration of the pace can bear the hope for meeting the purpose of realising the goals by 2030. The UN Report in preparation of the High-Level Political Forum 2018 has evidenced an improvement of global living standards compared to ten years ago, nevertheless, major challenges such as climate change, conflicts, poverty, food insecurity, inequality, and rapid urbanisation seem still far from solved³⁹. As regards the presented VNRs, many countries have shown numerous difficulties in the realization of the goals, while others have shown institutional improvements with the establishment of inter-ministerial committees on sustainable development, the creation of partnerships, the

³⁷ "Atlas for Sustainable Development Goals 2017: from World Development Indicators", Open Knowledge Repository, accessed March 8, 2019, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/26306>

³⁸ "High-Level Political Forum 2018", United Nations, accessed February 15, 2019, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/high-level-political-forum-2018/>

³⁹ "Italy and the Sustainable Development Goals: ASviS Report 2018", ASviS, November 2019, http://asvis.it/public/asvis/files/ASviS_REPORT_2018_ENG_web.pdf

mobilization of local authorities, universities, civil society, and the private sector. In the first years of implementation of the global Agenda, Member States have encountered some shared obstacles, namely the inadequacy of the statistical capacity of monitoring and assessment bodies, growing demographic trends and ageing populations and the lack of the right skills and knowledge needed for an effective inclusion of more women and young people in the labour market. In this respect, certain aspects have been prioritized such as the need for increased public and private investment in research and innovation, the strengthening of national statistical systems, and the definition of efficient strategies for financing the SDGs⁴⁰.

Specifically, what has been registered globally is a reduction of the families living on less than \$1.90 per person per day in the last twenty years but an increase in the percentage of undernourished people. Improvements in health and wellbeing have been achieved in the past ten years, and the incidence of HIV, tuberculosis and hepatitis B is declining. However, malaria cases have increased. The participation rate in primary education has raised, nevertheless, the minimum standards of literacy and numeracy are still not met by more than half children and adolescents. Overall, gender discrimination has witnessed a reduction, but women are still deprived of basic rights and opportunities. For what concerns access to water and energy, water scarcity is still a reason of deep concern in many countries, but there has been an increase in the proportion of people with access to energy from 78% to 87%, and a doubling in developing countries. Labour productivity has increased and there has been a marginal fall in the unemployment rate from 2009 to 2017. The augmentation of companies in the high-medium-technology sectors generates 44.7% of the total value of production, and there has been an increase in the share of manufacturing in global GDP and a reach of 84% of the third-generation broadband (3G). As regards inequalities within and across countries, there has been an unprecedented growth in the income of the poorest 40% of people in less developed countries, and actions are being devoted to encouraging exports from less-developed countries. Current growing trends in urban populations are challenging the realization of Goal 11 for sustainable cities and communities, guaranteeing adequate infrastructures and clean air. The introduction of national policies for sustainable production and consumption and an increase in the number of companies endorsing sustainability in their strategies and reporting suggests a paradigm shift in the private sector's activity. Data on climate change, life below water, and environmental degradation are alarming. In particular: 2017 has been registered as the hottest years ever recorded; there has been a dramatic fall of the share of biologically sustainable fish stocks from 90% to 69% and a substantial increase in ocean acidity and coastal water's deterioration; and despite an increase in the protection of forests and a fall in forest disappearance, a considerable share of cultivable areas is experiencing a decline in productivity. Countries have been called to take action to face climate change and environmental degradation and 168 out of the 175 countries that have ratified the Paris Agreement have reported their national contributions to the UN. Goal 16 "peace, justice, and strong institutions" is being hampered by the persistence of war or other forms of violence in many regions of the world. In this context, a positive achievement can be identified in the establishment of a national body dedicated to human rights in more than half of the countries

⁴⁰ Ibid.

of the world. Concerning international cooperation, in 2017 Official Development Assistance (ODA) amounted to \$US146.6 billion, which is not enough⁴¹.

The above information is obtained from the analysis of the outcomes of the 2018 HLPF carried out by the Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development (ASviS), in its annual report (Italy and the Sustainable Development Goals: ASviS Report 2018). For more updated data we must await the 2019 HLPF which focus will be on “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality”.

⁴¹ Ibid.

Chapter 2

2.1 The 2030 Agenda: a driving force for multilateralism.

Contemporary international relations have witnessed a profound evolution concerning the issues and actors they involve. Nowadays, the relations entertained by the States do not only happen between state-leaders, but they occur at many different levels, including many different actors such as private individuals, groups, societies and branches of government. Indeed, transnational relations between individuals and groups other than state-actors must be included in the analysis of current global issues, namely that of sustainable development.⁴² Simultaneously, the dialogue among countries remains a reference framework and, at the same time a valuable resource as regards the allocation of responsibilities and burden-sharing negotiations, as demonstrated by the Paris climate agreements of 2015 and the 2030 Agenda with its *Monitoring and Review Mechanisms*.

Robert O. Keohane has defined as “the practice of co-ordinating national policies in groups of three or more states”⁴³. Multilateralism has been fueled by the publication of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which activated several international processes and created opportunities for debate and exchange of expertise, constituting a forum for negotiation between states and other relevant actors. Being the SDGs global in nature, they can only be realised by the UN Member States “devoting [themselves] collectively to the pursuit of global development”⁴⁴. The United Nations Agenda has called for a stronger and more coherent multilateral system, enabling the delivery of economic, social, and environmental transformations. This system involves all countries and International Organizations of the world, creating, together with the relevant actors of the civil society, private sector, academia, and local governments, a unique system of multi-level governance. Interdependence between actors is in this sense envisaged for the development of multi-sectoral projects for the achievement of the SDGs, crossing various policy areas, transcending national boundaries and overcoming the distinction between public and private agendas. Naturally, a well-developed system of governance, involving such a multitude of diversified political, social and private actors, at different layers, implies compliance with the principles of vertical and horizontal subsidiarity. Particularly, the Oxford English Dictionary defines subsidiarity as “the principle that a central authority should have a subsidiary function, performing only those tasks which cannot be performed at a more local level”⁴⁵. Vertical subsidiarity refers to the distribution of public powers among different layers of the administration (i.e., the European Union and the Member States); while horizontal subsidiarity concerns the sharing of competences between public and private actors.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and sustainability issues in the broad sense recur powerfully in the field of international relations, and they are registering an increasing presence in the national

⁴² Robert and Sørensen, *Introduction to International Relations: Theories and Approaches*, 105.

⁴³ Robert O. Keohane, "Multilateralism: An Agenda for Research" *International Journal* Vol. 45, No. 4 (Autumn, 1990): 731, https://www.jstor.org/stable/40202705?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

⁴⁴ United Nations, “Resolution adopted by the General Assembly (A/RES/70/1)”

⁴⁵ “Subsidiarity”, Oxford English Dictionary, accessed February 20, 2019, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/subsidiarity>

public opinions of various countries. Currently, every multilateral forum, organization, or conference includes the SDGs in their agenda, assessing their real contribution and promoting initiatives towards their realization. As a matter of consequence, several countries orient themselves towards foreign policy strategies in line with the economic, social and environmental criteria witnessed by the UN Agenda, thus shaping their identity and positioning in the negotiation processes. Undoubtedly, given the raising attention paid at the international level on sustainability-related issues, the positioning of a given country as regards the implementation of the SDGs generates repercussions on its international standing and a relative advantage at the national and strategic level.

Besides the three traditional pillars of sustainability, also the institutional and *governance* ones are increasingly indispensable. Specifically, the promotion of effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels, as expressly required by the SDG 16, highlights the centrality of the political dimension of sustainability. Furthermore, the very concept of *sustaining peace* and the preventive approach to the crisis, delineated by the UN Security Council⁴⁶, introduced an even more evident nexus between the SDGs and the quintessential value promoted by the United Nations, *Peace and Security*.

While the multilateral system behind the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is witnessing a constant and extremely rapid evolution, the fora and instances effectively involved in the development of a multi-level system of governance for sustainable development certainly include: The United Nations, The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), The European Union and the UN Global Compact. In particular, as regards the United Nations system, the annual High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), meets annually for eight days and, since 2013 it represents “the main United Nations platform on sustainable development”⁴⁷. Specifically, the HLPF provides for: the *Voluntary National Presentation*; the mechanism of *Monitoring and Review*, with the contribution of custodian agencies for statistical production; the preparatory activities and thematic conferences for single SDGs or for specific geographic areas under the auspices of the five UN Regional Commissions⁴⁸, namely the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), and Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). These constitute the main steps for the international follow-up of the fulfilment process for the realization of the SDGs.

Remarkably, the active cooperation in economic and statistical matters between the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is remarkable. In addition, the institution of the OECD Council and Partners on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development highlights the forceful engagement of the organization. The OECD, thanks to pilot

⁴⁶ António Guterres, “Secretary-General’s briefing to the Security Council on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace”, (speech, New York, April 25, 2018), <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/news/secretary-generals-briefing-security-council-peacebuilding-and-sustaining-peace>

⁴⁷ “High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.”, United Nations, accessed February 4, 2019, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf>.

⁴⁸ “United Nations Regional Commissions New York Office”, Regional Commissions, accessed May 3, 2019, <http://www.regionalcommissions.org/>

studies on the positioning of the OECD membership with respect to the values promoted by the 2030 Agenda, and the comparison of member states' concrete achievements in this field, provides data for assessing the global performance on sustainable development⁴⁹. Moreover, the *OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises*⁵⁰, together with analogous directives at the level of the European Union and its focus on Responsible Business Conduct (RBC), enables the creation of a reference framework for the engagement of the private sector in the pursuit of sustainable development.

At the European Union level, the adoption of the decision *A Sustainable Development Future: the EU response to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*⁵¹ of June 2017 by the General Affairs Council configuration (GAC), under proposal of the European Commission entailed the mainstreaming of European Policies to the 2030 Agenda. Mainly, it required the Commission's Directorates-General and Executive Agencies, together with the Council Groups to evaluate the conformity of their legislative and administrative activity to the UN Agenda. Indeed, on 30 January 2019, the European Commission published the Reflection Paper *Towards a sustainable Europe by 2030*⁵² which is the first step for a comprehensive implementation strategy in 2019 in compliance with the United Nations 2030 Agenda, behind which the EU was, indeed, one of the leading forces. Sustainable development is deeply rooted in the European project and was at the heart of the process of the European Integration, which "helped to overcome post-war poverty and famine, and have created a space of liberty and democracy where European citizens could reach unprecedented levels of prosperity and well-being."⁵³ According to Eurostat's publication *Sustainable Development in the European Union 2018 edition*⁵⁴, EU Member States are among the SDGs top performers, and, as a result, the EU is one of the best places in the world to live in. The Council of the European Union welcomed the Commission's Reflection Paper, paving the way for a comprehensive implementation strategy. Notably, on 9 April 2019 adopted its conclusions, stressing the necessity of an acceleration of the implementation of 203 Agenda "both globally and internally, as an overarching priority of the EU, for the benefit of its citizens and for upholding its credibility within Europe and globally."⁵⁵ Once definitely settled, the EU Framework for SDGs will serve as the reference framework for Member States for setting their strategic goals. Besides, together with other G20 partners and International Organizations, the EU is part of the G20 Compact with Africa, boosting investments in African countries.

⁴⁹ OECD, *Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development 2018: Towards Sustainable and Resilient Societies*, (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2018), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264301061-en>

⁵⁰ OECD *Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises*, (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2018), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264115415-en>

⁵¹ "A sustainable European future: The EU response to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", *Council of the European Union*, June 20, 2017, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/23989/st10370-en17.pdf>

⁵² European Commission, "Reflection paper: Towards a sustainable Europe by 2030" <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/39019/st08286-en19.pdf>

⁵³ European Commission, "Reflection paper: Towards a sustainable Europe by 2030"

⁵⁴ "Sustainable Development in the European Union: Overview of progress towards the SDGs in an EU context" *Eurostat*, September 18, 2018, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/4031688/9226701/KS-02-18-827-EN-N.pdf/99e61150-e84c-4d5b-ba16-36a75d55855d>

⁵⁵ "Towards an ever more sustainable Union by 2030", Council of the European Union, April 9, 2019, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/39019/st08286-en19.pdf>

The UN Global Compact, building on the concepts of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Responsible Business Conduct, actively engages thousands of large and small companies around 159 countries. The establishment of the Global Compact in 2000 in Davos, under the proposal of the United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, constitutes a “turning point in the valorization of the role of companies globally”⁵⁶. The first demonstration of the effectiveness of the Global Compact was the Corporate Sustainability Forum of Rio +20, attended by over 2.700 people, belonging to companies, institutions, NGOs, and academia. On this occasion, with more than 200 commitments to action, the call “to define strategic ways to create shared value based on synergistic relationships with institutions and stakeholders”⁵⁷ aroused. The 2030 Agenda for sustainable development created an excellent opportunity to concretize the Global Compact’s mission of corporate sustainability and for making global goals local business. The already pre-existent ten principles, which will be further analysed in the following chapter⁵⁸, are indeed reviewed in accordance to the SDGs and the multi-year strategy for the UN Global Compact is rooted in the objective of driving business awareness and action for the achievement of the global goals.

Besides the aforementioned international instances, in the context of the enhancement of multilateralism motivated by the 2030 Agenda, also Sectorial Multilateral conferences are playing a pivotal role by raising awareness and strengthening the interlinkage of the main issues that sustainability entails, such as ocean protection, transports, and infrastructure. Additionally, a quintessential role is undoubtedly carried out by regional organizations or intergovernmental instances. Namely, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE); the European Council; or the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), comprising 21 Asian countries, the European Union and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Secretariat, and raising awareness on subjects traceable to 2030 Agenda such as business and human rights and corruption.

Each of these global commitments to sustainable development is based on the specialization, functions, and composition of the membership (developed and developing countries, different regional or sectoral areas) of each specific international organization, forum or conference. Often, they influence each other, even adopting analogous decisions. This process of mutual influence requires a system of active surveillance of the respective standings. Hence, there exists a lower decisional level, composed of rules, guidelines, recommendations, codes of conduct, and technical standards which generates concrete repercussions in the broader implementation system of sustainable development.

2.2 The response of the community of states.

Even though 2030 Agenda is a global instrument and, as explained by the previous paragraph, it represents a driving force for multilateralism, mobilizing a significant number of international actors, States still play an

⁵⁶ Global Compact Network Italy Foundation, “Italian Businesses: practices towards a sustainable development”, 3.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ “The Ten Principles of the UN Global Compact”, UN Global Compact, accessed February 22, 2019, <https://www.unglobalcompact.org/what-is-gc/mission/principles>

indispensable role. Indeed, by adopting the 2030 Agenda, governments committed to “achieving sustainable development in its three dimensions – economic, social and environmental – in a balanced and integrated manner” and to “implement the Agenda within [their] own countries and at the regional and global levels”⁵⁹.

Undeniably, as noted by James Crawford, “Many of the things international law tries to do, have to be done at the national level”⁶⁰. National procedures and instruments for implementing and monitoring the SDGs include the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), carried out by the UN member states, Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) established by the Paris Agreement (UNFCCC), National Strategies and national statistical systems’ contributions (i.e., ISTAT’s SDGs Report 2019). All countries of the world should abandon the limited income-oriented approach in favor of an integrated vision capable of promoting an inclusive, balanced, and sustainable development. For achieving this end, it is necessary to identify policy solutions and employ all available instruments, including budgetary policies and structural reforms. Country-specific approaches must be chased, because of the substantial differences existing among countries and, consequently, the impossibility of a universal or foreordained formula⁶¹.

In particular, the VNRs⁶² on the state of implementation of the 2030 Agenda are presented annually at the HLPF, the multi-stakeholder platform promoting the sharing of experiences in the implementation of the SDGs. As they represent the means for the measurement at both the national and international level of the progress against the SDGs and relative targets and indicators, they constitute the heart of the follow-up and review mechanism of the 2030 Agenda. This system allows the sharing of best practices and possible improvements with the view of promoting effective and coherent implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Therefrom, countries are expected to share their actions, methodologies, and progress undertaken for the achievement of the SDGs.

Governments prepare the VNRs through a “consultative, inclusive and participatory process involving all Major Groups and other stakeholders”⁶³ and according to paragraphs 78 and 79 of General Assembly resolution 70/1, all actors of government, civil society, members of parliament and other institutions should be involved in the process⁶⁴. The institutions charged of leading the VNRs and the modalities for the direct engagement of the various stakeholders are chosen autonomously by Member States and, accordingly, they vary from country to country. For facilitating the drafting of the VNRs, the UN Department of Economic and

⁵⁹ United Nations, “Resolution adopted by the General Assembly (A/RES/70/1)”.

⁶⁰ James Crawford, *Chance, Order, Change: The Course of International Law: General Course on Public International Law*. (La Haye: Hague Academy of International Law, 2014), 214.

⁶¹ “Italy”, Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, United Nations, accessed March 4, 2019. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/memberstates/italy>

⁶² “regular reviews in the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) are to be voluntary, state-led, undertaken by both developed and developing countries, and provide a platform for partnerships, including through the participation of major groups and other relevant stakeholders”.

⁶³ “Q&A for Voluntary National Reviews at the 2019 HLPF”, Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, United Nations, accessed April 19, 2019,

https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/225292019_VNRs_Q_and_A_rev_25_April_2019.pdf

⁶⁴ United Nations, “Resolution adopted by the General (A/RES/70/1)

Social Affairs (DESA) has prepared a Handbook⁶⁵ and a synthesis of reports of 2016, 2017 and 2018 HLPFs, and provides capacity building support for facilitating the arrangement of the VNRs by Member States.

According to the VNRs Database, 47 countries (7 for the second time) are expected to present their VNR at the 2019 HLPF in July⁶⁶. As far as political choices are concerned and, as emerged from the OECD Survey on Planning and Co-ordinating the Implementation of the SDGs, it is often the Office of the President or Prime Minister that leads SDG implementation but in other cases, coordination responsibility is assigned to line ministries with cross-cutting influence⁶⁷ or to *ad hoc* bodies. Additionally, according to the SDG Index and Dashboards Report published by the Bertelsmann Foundation and the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), most of the G20 countries have started the process of integrating the SDGs in their strategies.

Specifically, the following table illustrates the different national institutional systems of governance adopted by 16 of the G20 countries that have presented the VNRs. This provides an overview of the institutional arrangements that the commitment to the 2030 Agenda has required, with some countries establishing dedicated coordination units and specific action plans.

| Country (G20) | Year of the VNR | Institutional Framework |
|----------------|-----------------|--|
| Japan | 2017 | Prime Minister; SDG Promotion Headquarters. |
| Germany | 2016 | State Secretaries Committee for Sustainable Development; Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainable Development; Council for Sustainable Development; Federal Chancellery. |
| France | 2016 | Interministerial Representative for Sustainable Development; General Commissioner for Sustainable Development; Prime Minister; Committee on international experts; Minister of the Environment, Energy and the Sea; Minister of State for Development and Francophonie; National Council for Ecological Transition; National Council for Development and International Solidarity; National advisory Commission on Human Rights; Economic, Social and Environmental Council; Interministerial Committee for International Cooperation and Development (CICID). |
| United Kingdom | 2019 | Department for International Development (DFID); Cabinet Office; Government Departments; Devolved Administrations. |
| Italy | 2017 | Council of Ministers; Prime Minister; Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Ministry of Finance. |
| Canada | 2018 | Prime Minister; Minister of Children, Families and Social Development; SDG Unit; Federal ministers, departments and agencies; Government of Canada; Group of seven Ministers; Statistics Canada; Sustainable Development Goals Data Hub. |
| China | 2016 | Government Departments |
| Brazil | 2017 | Brazilian Government; National Commission for the Sustainable Development Goals. |
| India | 2017 | National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog); Prime Minister; State Governments. |

⁶⁵ “Handbook for the preparation of Voluntary National Reviews, The 2019 Edition”, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) United Nations, accessed March 10, 2019,

https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/20872VNR_hanbook_2019_Edition_v2.pdf.

⁶⁶ HLPF 2019: “Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies: SDG 16 implementation and the path towards leaving no one behind”.

⁶⁷ “OECD Survey on Planning and Co-ordinating the Implementation of the SDGs: First Results and key Issues”, *OECD*, accessed March 10, 2016, <https://www.oecd.org/gov/cob-sdg-survey-overview-of-results.pdf>

| | | |
|-------------------|------|---|
| Australia | 2018 | Australian Government; Interdepartmental group of senior officials; Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C); Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). |
| Mexico | 2018 | Office of the President of the Republic (OPR); Specialized Technical Committee on Sustainable Development Goals (CTEODS); Working Group for Legislative Monitoring of the SDGs; National Council of Agenda 2030; Commission for the Implementation of Agenda 2030 |
| Republic of Korea | 2016 | Presidential National Commission on Sustainable Development (PNCSD); Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Ministry of Environment; Statistics Korea; Office for Government Policy Coordination; National Assembly; Special Committee on Sustainable Development; Korea National Assembly UN SDGs Forum (NSD); Korea Association for Supporting the SDGs for the UN (ASD). |
| Indonesia | 2017 | Ministry of the National Development Planning/”Bappenas”; Technical team for the preparation of the VNR; SDGs Secretariat; National SDGs Coordination Team. |
| Turkey | 2016 | Ministry of Development; Sustainable Development Coordination Commission (SDCC). |
| Saudi Arabia | 2018 | Minister of Economy and Planning (MEP); The King. |
| Argentina | 2017 | Consejo Nacional de Coordinación de Políticas Sociales (CNCPS); Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos (INDEC). |

Table 1⁶⁸

While stressing the universal and inclusive nature of the scope of its addressees, the 2030 Agenda assigns Member States the task of creating their own national strategy. This implies several duties for national governments. These include: the institution of a system of governance reflecting the level of ambition of the commitment expressed at the international level; a precise configuration of the national strategy defining the attribution of resources and public instruments; the mainstreaming of the 17 goals if they contrast with national interests; the presentation of their VNR at the HLPF.

The concept of policy coherence for sustainable development is expressed in target 17.14 as the necessary means of implementation of all SDGs. According to the OECD, policy coherence for sustainable development is “an approach and policy tool to systematically integrate the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development at all stages of domestic and international policy making”⁶⁹. The VNRs presented by the G20 countries (see Table 1) illustrate different institutional systems for supporting the SDGs implementation. Nevertheless, the setting of a coherent institutional framework for sustainable development is not automatic. On the contrary, governments should establish supporting institutional structures and reconcile divergent policy pressures, namely differing domestic and international priorities, and sectoral interests. In particular, one of the most difficult challenges of ensuring policy coherence for sustainable development is to reconcile short-term priorities with long-term objectives such as the SDGs.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ “States Members of the United Nations and States members of specialized agencies”, Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, accessed April 5, 2019, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/memberstates>

⁶⁹ OECD, *Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development 2018: Towards Sustainable and Resilient Societies*.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

2.3 An overview of the Italian Strategy for Sustainable Development.

Sustainability-related issues such as social inclusion, well-being, and regional disparities have assumed an increasingly pivotal role in the Italian public debate over the last years. This was primarily due to the slow recovery of the Italian economy from the financial crisis, which did not generate steady improvements in well-being but, instead, it has exacerbated some socio-economic problems. Compared to other European countries, Italy is characterized by a more pronounced social and territorial division. In particular, the past two economic recessions and the recent transformation of global markets have enhanced the economic backwardness and have significantly damaged the Italian social fabric. Furthermore, Italian demographic trends are still negative. Social inequality has increased, highlighting the need for an immediate response to several critical issues such as globalization, demographic trends, and migration. Coherently with the commitment made in September 2015 with the adoption of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Italian government undertook the process of integration of the SDGs in the economic, social and environmental planning. In parallel, also the European Union has committed to the transposition of the 2030 Agenda at the communitarian level. Thus, EU Member States should perceive communitarian objectives as a reference for the definition of their final strategic objectives. Hence, at the national level, the implementation of the Italian Strategy for Sustainable Development (SNSvS) or, as referred to by the United Nations, National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS), should conform to the existing policy papers and in particular to the National Reform Programme (PNR) and the Document of Economy and Finance (DEF). In addition, proposed actions and operative instruments should be aligned with the multiple pre-existing objectives provided for by the European Semester (i.e., EU 2020 targets).⁷¹

The Italian Strategy for Sustainable Development (SNSvS) was presented to the Council of Ministers on October 2, 2017, and subsequently approved by the Inter-ministerial Committee for Economic Planning (CIPE) on December 22, 2017. Consequently, the SNSvS was shared with the other countries through the VNR mechanism in New York at the 2017 High-Level Political Forum. It designs a vision of the future and development based on sustainability, commonly shared and essential value for dealing with contemporary challenges. Particularly, the five years-long strategy focuses on bringing Italy back to a condition of widespread prosperity, characterized by a significant reduction of poverty and inequalities (particularly among youth and women), and an environmentally sustainable economic system, including the restoration of firms' competitiveness. The challenging task of preparing the SNSvS, representing the strategic framework for sectoral and territorial policies in Italy, was given to the Italian Ministry for the Environment Land and Sea (MATTM). The SNSvS is the result of a complex inter-institutional consultation process involving central administrations, local authorities, civil society, and the private sector. In particular, the main research authorities (National Research Council (CNR); National Institute for the Protection and Environmental Research (ISPRA); Italian National Agency for New Technologies, Energy and Sustainable Economic

⁷¹ "La Strategia Nazionale per Lo Sviluppo Sostenibile", Ministero Dell'Ambiente E Della Tutela Del Territorio E Del Mare, October, 2017, https://www.minambiente.it/sites/default/files/archivio_immagini/Galletti/Comunicati/snsvs_ottobre2017.pdf

Development (ENEA); and the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT)); 217 actors comprising Universities and various nationally relevant scientific associations, have been consulted for the examination and consolidation of technical and scientific aspects. In addition, since the beginning, the dialogue with the civil society has been actively carried out, also motivated by the European and international demand for the involvement of the citizens in the decision-making process. More than 200 NGOs have been implicated in the analysis of the national context and the definition of widely shared objectives. Importantly, also the local authorities have participated by collecting regional priorities and concerns. Among stakeholders, the Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development (ASviS), founded in 2016 to raise awareness on the importance of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Italian society and gathering 200 of the most important institutions and networks of the civil society, gave an enormous contribution. Additionally, ASviS publishes its yearly report, which constitutes a valuable document at both the national and international level and “represents the Alliance’s primary contribution to transparent governance in Italy and aims at supporting Italian policy-makers at all levels in designing efficient and coherent strategies for sustainable development”⁷². Furthermore, since 2017, the Alliance organizes every year the Sustainable Development Festival for sensitising on sustainability and SDGs-linked initiatives.

As regards the public sectors, the relevant national ministries cooperated throughout the definition of the SNSvS. Specifically, the MATTM has collaborated with the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, the Ministry of International Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI), and the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF). The strategy constitutes the road map for applying the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the national level. The President of the Council endorses the strategy and is tasked with leading and coordinating the implementation of the strategy, supported by the MATTM and MAECI. Specifically, the directive issued on March 2018 by the former President of the Council, Paolo Gentiloni, charges the Cabinet Office of coordinating economic, social and environmental policies for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, through a Committee chaired by the President of the Council and composed of all the ministers and the various representatives of local authorities. In addition, according to the directive, annually, each ministry should assess its contribution to the SDGs, and the Committee should report on the implementation of the strategy⁷³. Policy coherence is, therefore, the first step for the implementation, under the imperative of Art. 95 of the Italian Constitution, stating that “The President of the Council conducts the general policy of the government and is responsible for it. He ensures unity in political and administrative policies, promoting and coordinating the activity of the Ministers”⁷⁴.

In particular, the President of the Council is supported by the MATTM for coordinating the internal action, and by the MAECI for the external implementation and coordination. In addition, as already stressed, not only the Governments of the UN Member States, but also the civil society and the private sector are indispensable

⁷² ASviS, “Italy and the Sustainable Development Goals: ASviS Report 2018”.

⁷³ Ibid. 26.

⁷⁴ “Constitution of the Italian Republic”, Senato della Repubblica Italiana, 24, https://www.senato.it/documenti/repository/istituzione/costituzione_inglese.pdf

addressees of the 2030 Agenda, and therefore they constitute an integral part of the definition of the of national policies for sustainability.

The SNSvS undergoes an annual review and monitoring process, mainly thanks to the valuable contribution of the Italian Institute of Statistics (ISTAT), charged with the monitoring of the Italian performance with respect of the 17 SDGs and the related indicators. On April 17th of this year, ISTAT has published the second edition of the *SDG Report: Statistical Information for 2030 Agenda in Italy*⁷⁵, producing an updated set of 123 UN-IAEG (Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG indicators)-SDGs indicators and 303 statistical measures. What is remarkable of the new report, constituting an overview of the Italian SDGs performance, is the increased attention to the “no one left behind” principle through the acknowledgement of Italian regional diversity. In particular, chapter 5 of the report provides regional breakdowns for 175 statistical measures.

The MEF has the role of harmonizing the implementation of the strategy with the official documents of economic policy, by integrating national economic priorities with the SDGs. Indeed, the SNSvS should be coordinated with the National Reform Programme (PNR) and with the Document of Economy and Finance (DEF). The Council of Ministers has approved the 2019 DEF in April 9th and its fundamental objective is the return to an economic development’s phase characterized by greater social inclusion and an improvement of the general quality of life, generated by a reduction of poverty, guaranteed access to education and work, and inverting the negative demographic trend. The coordination of the official documents of economy and finance with the equitable and sustainable well-being (BES) indicators⁷⁶ represents a major achievement. It is a step towards a *modus operandi* where economic measures are not only conceived on the basis of their impact on national GDP, but also in terms of the effects they are expected to have on the families’ wealth, income distribution, social inclusion, and the environment. Specifically, after the law L.163/2016⁷⁷ on the content of the budget law, for the first time, the equitable and sustainable well-being (BES) indicators have been integrated within the cycle of economic programming in 2016. In particular, since 2017, the Ministry of Economy and Finance develops the BES Annex⁷⁸ to the Economy and Financial Document (DEF) and the Relation to the parliament on the BES indicators⁷⁹. After the adoption of the law L.163/2016, Italy was recognised as the first country of the European Union and the G7⁸⁰ having integrated by law the dimension of the equitable and sustainable well-being within public policies’ adoption and evaluation.

⁷⁵ Istat, “Rapporto SDGs 2019, Informazione Statistica per l’Agenda 2030”.

⁷⁶ “Measures of Equitable and Sustainable Well-being.”, Istat Istituto Nazionale di Statistica, accessed April 10, 2019, <https://www4.istat.it/en/well-being-and-sustainability/well-being-measures>

⁷⁷ “Modifiche alla legge 31 dicembre 2009, n. 196, concernenti il contenuto della legge di bilancio, in attuazione dell’articolo 15 della legge 24 dicembre 2012, n. 243. (16G00174)”, Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, August 4, 2016, <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2016/08/25/16G00174/sg>

⁷⁸ “Il nuovo Rapporto sul Benessere Equo e Sostenibile allegato al DEF 2019”, Ministero Dell’Economia E Delle Finanze, April 18, 2019, http://www.mef.gov.it/inevidenza/article_0405.html

⁷⁹ “Relazione sugli indicatori di benessere equo e sostenibile 2019”, Ministero Dell’Economia e Delle Finanze, February 25, 2019, http://www.dt.mef.gov.it/modules/documenti_it/analisi_progammazione/analisi_programmazione_economico/Relazione_BES_2019.pdf

⁸⁰ G7 countries: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Besides the aforementioned policy effects, the cross-cutting nature of the SDGs requires effective coordination at all levels of the policy-making process, including both horizontal and vertical coordination. In particular, through the State and Regions Conference, the Italian government encourages local and regional authorities to participate in the implementation of the NSDS. In addition, Italian civil society has shown its commitment to sustainable development. Namely, the confederation of Italian industry, Confindustria addresses the theme of sustainable development in the section *A sustainable Italy: investment as an insurance policy for the future* of the Italian industrialists' programme. In particular, "investing in the environment, the regions and culture to create development; developing mobility, logistics, and communications; aligning energy costs with European averages"⁸¹ constitute the main aspects of the programme. Additionally, in March 2018, the Italian General Confederation of Labour (CGIL) presented the *Integrated Platform for Sustainable Development*, striving for environmental protection, legality, and job creation. In 2018, also the permanent Third Sector Forum called upon the member organizations to align their activities in light of the SDGs⁸².

2.4 The Case Study on the Sustainable Development Unit at the MAECI.

"Foreign policy involves goals, strategies, measures, methods, guidelines, directives, understandings, agreements, and so on, by which national governments conduct international relations with each other and with international organizations and non-governmental actors."⁸³ In the context of this research paper, foreign policy involves the 2030 Agenda with the relative 17 SDGs, the methodology and guidelines for implementation, coming from the Agenda itself, but also from other international organizations' directives and positioning (i.e., the Council Conclusions Towards an ever sustainable Union by 2030). The National Strategy for Sustainable Development is divided into the five core areas of the 2030 Agenda: People, Planet, Prosperity and, Partnership. While the first four areas mainly deal with the domestic dimension; the last one concerns international cooperation, regulated by the law 125/214⁸⁴, and constitutes a priority in the context of foreign policy. As specifically stressed by the SDG 17, cooperation is an underlying principle of the 2030 Agenda and constitutes one of the main requirements for its implementation. Thus, in the spirit of a joint effort of the international community, Italy and the other developed countries should help in supporting less advanced countries in the achievement of the SDGs. Naturally, this domain deals with the external dimension of the SNSvS and envisages the Three-year Programming and Policy Planning Document of the Italian Development Cooperation 2016-2018⁸⁵ as the main reference document, which integrates the principles of the 2030 Agenda into the Strategy for Italian Development Cooperation.

⁸¹ ASviS, "Italy and the Sustainable Development Goals: ASviS Report 2018", 30.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Robert and Sørensen, *Introduction to International Relations: Theories and Approaches*, 252.

⁸⁴ "Disciplina Generale Sulla Cooperazione Internazionale per lo Sviluppo", *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana*, August 11, 2014, https://www.aics.gov.it/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/LEGGE_125-2014.pdf. (accessed April 26, 2019).

⁸⁵ "Documento triennale di programmazione e di indirizzo 2016-2018 sulla cooperazione internazionale per lo sviluppo", Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale, accessed April 8, 2019, https://www.esteri.it/mae/resource/doc/2017/03/doc_triennale_2016-2018_-_finale_approvato.pdf

Thus, Foreign Affairs Ministries, as key players in international relations and multilateral instances, are called upon to integrate and revise their action lines, in the awareness of the growing centrality of sustainability issues. In particular, environment, energy, business, education, human rights, and health should not be conceived as isolated issues, but in their continuous interaction. Consequently, they entail the reconciliation of concurrent or even conflicting interests. In this sense, the Italian Development Cooperation is decisive for defining a coherent positioning in sustainability-related fields such as international trade, the use of resources, disciplines for investments and the respect of human rights in the productive sector.

The Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI) is charged with the activities of external implementation and coordination. Traditionally, Italy's foreign policy conforms with the 2030 Agenda's economic, social and environmental criteria, shaping its identity and standing at the European and global level. Increasingly, the institutional dimension of sustainable development qualifies as an essential corollary in terms of legality and the creation of a law-oriented environment of cohabitation of extremely diversified actors. This is particularly relevant in the context of the relationship with commodity-producing countries, namely as it happens for the extractive industries for Kimberly Process, EITI, CONNEX, but also when the chains of subcontractors make use of the work of developing countries (for example for the textile sector). Through its participation in the National Contact Point (NCP) at the Ministry of Economic Development (MISE), the MAECI monitors the implementation of the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, regulating relevant economic actors' behavior.

The MAECI is composed of eight Directorates-General. As a consequence of the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a Coordination Unit for sustainability issues (*Coordinamento per i temi della sostenibilità*) was instituted in 2016 as part of the Directorate General for Global Affairs (DGMO). The unit oversees the activities for the foreign policy for sustainable development and shapes the Italian positioning in multilateral instances, by participating in various working groups. In particular, its main task is to ensure policy coherence for sustainable development, both at the level of the other Directorates General of the MAECI, and between national actors, including different levels of the administration, private and non-governmental actors. Furthermore, this unit promotes the Italian stance as regards sustainability at the main international fora (United Nations, European Union, OECD). Sustainable Development is indeed a top priority issue for the DGMO, both for what concerns thematic dossiers, the economic and financial governance, and the activities promoted by the geographic Directorates. During the course of action of the Sustainable Development Unit, particular commitment has been devoted to the United Nations Global Compact; the participation to the National Contact Point (NCP) on the OECD Guidelines for multinational enterprises; the awareness-raising initiatives on corporate social responsibility; and the preparation of the dossiers on the Kimberly Process Certificate Scheme.

Remarkably, after the publication of the European Commission's reflection paper, the MAECI has undertaken a series of meetings and preparatory works in view of the Council Conclusions on the 2030

Agenda. In particular, the Sustainable Development Unit has convened a coordination inter-ministerial meeting on the 2030 Agenda involving the relevant ministries (including the Ministry of Economic Development (MISE); the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF); the Ministry of Environment, Land and Sea Protection (MATTM); the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research (MIUR); and the Ministry of Labor and Social policies (MLPS); the National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT); and the Presidency of the Council of Ministers). The meeting served as a means for collecting the stance of the various public authorities as regards the Agenda for sustainable development, in view of the preparatory meetings of the European Council's Working Party on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the General Affairs Council, regularly attended by the MAECI.

Chapter 3

3.1 The pivotal role of the private sector in achieving the SDGs.

“An economy is a system of relationships focused on the production, distribution, exchange and consumption of goods and services. Each of these activities exploits resources and, at least potentially, generates waste. In turn, each of these activities impacts the social system”⁸⁶.

From here, the necessity for economic actors to find sustainable means for creating profits and growth, since growth-based economic strategies for accelerated development are only viable in the short-term.

One of the main features of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is the inclusiveness of its field of application. It constitutes a comprehensive framework for a global socio-economic transformation, concerning both the public and the private dimensions. The SDGs need to be implemented at all levels, indeed “National and local governments, businesses, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), academia, citizens, are all responsible for contributing to the global chain, essential to reach the ambitious SDGs.”⁸⁷ Specifically, the private sector has a significant role to play since businesses are the motors of innovation and can adapt in a more dynamic and faster way to the challenges of sustainability than Governmental actors. The economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development are interconnected, and indeed, the companies able to align their strategies to the SDGs will develop a “competitive advantage both *per sé* and over competitors”⁸⁸.

The effective commitment of the business world is a fundamental prerequisite for the global realization of the SDGs, and specifically for closing the annual funding gap for the SDGs, amounting to trillions of dollars⁸⁹. Today, several companies are classified as multinational corporations. A multinational corporation “owns or controls production of goods or services in one or more countries other than their home country, engages in enough business activities outside the country of origin that depend financially on operations in two or more countries, and takes its management decisions based on regional or global alternatives”⁹⁰. Accordingly, these companies are often even bigger than States, as regards their turnover and the number of employees. Thus, the realization of the SDGs cannot disregard the business sector and its transformative power. Concretely, private companies create 90% of jobs, and as a consequence, they have always played a crucial role in poverty reduction and economic development⁹¹.

In turn, big corporations should be aware of the contribution they can give to development issues, and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) must take advantage of the opportunity provided for by the SDGs to grow and enhance their competitiveness and reputation. Furthermore, companies are more and more

⁸⁶ Thiele, *Sustainability*, 145.

⁸⁷ Global Compact Network Italy, “Italian businesses: practices towards a sustainable development”. 8.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Mahmoud Mohieldin and Svetlana Kimenko, “How the private-sector can help fund the Sustainable Development Goals”, *World Economic Forum*, July 31, 2018, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/07/unlocking-private-sector-funds-for-sustainable-development>

⁹⁰ Raffaele Marchetti, *Global Strategic Engagement: States and Non-State actors in Global Governance*, (USA: Lexington Books, 2016), 84.

⁹¹ Mohieldin and Kimenko “How the private-sector can help fund the Sustainable Development Goals”.

confronted with challenges limiting their potential to grow, such as weak financial markets and scarce natural resources. In this context, the endorsement of the SDGs could represent an opportunity for companies to address contemporary issues, while generating economic growth.

As a matter of consequence, in several countries, the engagement of the private sector in the SDGs implementation is regulated by official policies. Namely, the United Nations and national governments are increasingly requiring the private sector to adapt their business strategies to stricter social and environmental standards, since a stable, equitable and inclusive economic growth cannot come solely from the public sector, but it requires the involvement of actors from the business sector and the civil society. Intending to facilitate the sustainability of the private sector, public authorities have the responsibility of creating a regulatory framework and to effectively intervene through the introduction of economic, social and environmental measures, also intended to encourage investments⁹².

Already in the negotiation process for the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the private sector was actively involved and, after the adoption of the Agenda, businesses are pledging their support for the achievement of the Goals. The Major Groups and Stakeholders (MGoS), were integral to the development and implementation of the Agenda. Specifically, the categories of *Business and Industry, Children and Youth, Farmers, Indigenous peoples, Local Authorities, Non-Governmental Organizations, Scientific & Technological Community, Women, Workers & Trade Unions, Persons with disabilities, Volunteers, Ageing, Education and Academia* constituted the driving force for the development of projects, initiatives, advocacy, knowledge-sharing, and the monitoring of the 2030 Agenda⁹³. Currently, companies all around the world, regardless of size and industry, are increasingly orienting their strategies towards the SDGs and including non-financial information in their annual reports. This change of paradigm has been confirmed by KPMG's study *The Road Ahead* which analyses companies' sustainability and corporate social responsibility performance of 4900 companies in 49 countries⁹⁴, highlighting that 93% of the 250 world's largest companies report on their sustainability performance.

3.2 Corporate social responsibility and Responsible Business Conduct.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) "encompasses all the practices put in place by companies in order to uphold the principles of sustainable development"⁹⁵. Accordingly, companies, while being economically efficient, should protect the environment and have a positive impact on society. The concept of Corporate Social Responsibility is increasingly employed in modern business discourse and management sciences, particularly with the raising of environmental and social concerns in the second half of the 20th century. In

⁹² Ignazio Visco, "Sviluppo sostenibile e rischi climatici: il ruolo delle banche centrali" (speech by Governor Ignazio Visco at the Sustainable Development Festival, Rome, May 21, 2019), https://www.bancaditalia.it/pubblicazioni/interventi-governatore/integov2019/visco_21052019.pdf

⁹³ "About Major Groups and Other Stakeholders", Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, accessed May 2, 2019, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/mgos>.

⁹⁴ ASviS, "Italy and the Sustainable Development Goals: ASviS Report 2018", 10.

⁹⁵ "CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) Definition and Examples.", CSR and Sustainable Development commitments and media platform, accessed May 5, 2019, <https://e-csr.net/definitions/csr-definition/#a-simple-definition-of-csr>

particular, consumers became more critical and responsible when making their consumption decisions, and governments started to impose the respect of environmental and social standards to companies. This resulted in a gradual proliferation of environmental reports in the nineties, which then evolved into effective sustainability reports, including all three dimensions of sustainable development.

The concept of CSR is not new, and, indeed, discussions on corporate responsibility and the business role in society started already in the 1920s, as demonstrated by the article *The Social Significance of Business*⁹⁶ published in 1927 in the Harvard Business Review by the Dean of the Harvard Business School, Wallace B. Donham. Subsequently, in the 1950s, CSR gained momentum with the rise of large corporations, and it was introduced in the work of some American managers. The central idea was that, by focusing on their impact on society and the environment, companies could have other kinds of benefits besides profit. For example, by responsibly managing environmental impacts, the company would avoid the long-term risks and costs entailed by natural disasters. In 1953, the economist Howard R. Bowen published a book entitled *The Social Responsibility of Businessman*⁹⁷, introducing a comprehensive discussion on social responsibility and business ethics, and providing the first recognized definition of CSR. In the 1980s, researchers were working on the relationship between CSR and profitability, and between Corporate Social Performance and Corporate Financial Performance. In 2001 the European Union defined CSR in the Green Paper *Promoting a European Framework for Corporate Social Responsibility* as:

The voluntary integration of companies' social and ecological concerns into their business activities and their relationships with their stakeholders. Being socially responsible means not only fully satisfying the applicable legal obligations but also going beyond and investing 'more' in human capital, the environment, and stakeholder relations.⁹⁸

After ten years, the European Union offered a more concise definition of CSR, referring to it as "The responsibility of enterprises for their impact on society"⁹⁹. Nevertheless, even after more than half a century of researches and discussions, there remains a lack of consensus over a single, widely shared definition of CSR.

Generally, all these attempts had the common goal of widening businesses' duties by including non-financial considerations in their financial statements. Indeed, in the 21st century's world, increasingly characterized by social and environmental concerns, Milton Friedman's vision of profit as the only responsibility of enterprises¹⁰⁰, and the traditional conception of business, are not viable anymore. Furthermore, CSR requires businesses to act in accordance with the overarching goals of society. Thus, the

⁹⁶ Wallace B. Donham, "The Social Significance of Business", *Harvard Business Review* (1927).

⁹⁷ Howard R. Bowen, *The Social Responsibilities of the Businessman*. (USA: University of Iowa Press, 2013).

⁹⁸ "Communication from the commission concerning corporate social responsibility: a business contribution to Sustainable Development., European Commission, July 2, 2002, https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/communication-corporate-social-responsibility-sustainable-development-com2002347-20020702_en.pdf

⁹⁹ "Corporate Social Responsibility & Responsible Business Conduct", European Commission, accessed May 13, 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/growth/industry/corporate-social-responsibility_en

¹⁰⁰ Brendan Shea, "Business Ethics: The Friedman Doctrine and Its Critics.", *Academia.edu*, accessed May 10, 2019, https://www.academia.edu/32256021/Business_Ethics_The_Friedman_Doctrine_and_Its_Critics.

current concern is on what the business sector must concretely do for sustainable development. After the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, CSR effectively represents the invitation to corporations to act towards the achievement of the SDGs.

Today, companies are increasingly aware of the benefits in terms of efficiency and reputation generated by the endorsement of responsible strategies. Therefore, among medium/big size companies, it is common to find CSR and sustainability concerns in the organizational structure, strategies or reporting mechanisms. Nevertheless, there is no “law” in the world forcing companies to uphold a CSR strategy. The International Standard Organization (ISO) develops a series of “market relevant International Standards that provide solutions to global challenges.”¹⁰¹ Notably, the ISO 26000 guidance standard on social responsibility constitutes the reference framework for companies moving towards socially and environmentally responsible strategies.

Certainly, public authorities have a crucial role in promoting responsible business practices. The European Union has encouraged several voluntary and mandatory actions to promote CSR, in compliance with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs)¹⁰², by promoting the development of national action plans (NAPs), and the realization of the SDGs. Moreover, in 2011, the European Commission adopted the renewed strategy for CSR, and in March 2019, it published a staff working document¹⁰³ describing the progress of the Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) in the implementation of CSR¹⁰⁴. Besides, according to EU’s 2014/95 Directive on non-financial reporting¹⁰⁵, certain large undertakings and groups must communicate non-financial and diversity information to the Union.

It is worth noting that an alternative concept has complemented CSR. The OECD defined Responsible Business Conduct (RBC) as “making a positive contribution to economic, environmental and social progress with a view to achieving sustainable development and avoiding and addressing adverse impacts related to an enterprise's direct and indirect operations, products or services”¹⁰⁶. Furthermore, the two publications *OECD guidelines for multinational enterprises* and *OECD due diligence for responsible business conduct*¹⁰⁷ are based on the acknowledgement of the potential of enterprises “to generate growth, employment, and skills through their operations and sourcing”¹⁰⁸ and the impact they can have on the territories and communities where they operate. The work of the OECD regarding CSR and RBC is significant, providing unique expertise on the

¹⁰¹ “All about ISO”, International Organization for Standardization, accessed May 18, 2018, <https://www.iso.org/about-us.html>.

¹⁰² “Guiding principles on business and human rights”, United Nations, November 11, 2011, https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/GuidingPrinciplesBusinessHR_EN.pdf

¹⁰³ “Commission Staff Working document - Corporate Social Responsibility, Responsible Business Conduct, and Business and Human Rights: Overview of Progress”, European Commission, published March 20, 2019, <https://ec.europa.eu/docsroom/documents/34482>

¹⁰⁴ “Corporate Social Responsibility & Responsible Business Conduct”, European Commission.

¹⁰⁵ “Directive 2014/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 October 2014 amending Directive 2013/34/EU as regards disclosure of non-financial and diversity information by certain large undertakings and groups”, European Union, 22 October 2014, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32014L0095>.

¹⁰⁶ “Corporate Social Responsibility & Responsible Business Conduct”, European Commission.

¹⁰⁷ “OECD due diligence guidance for responsible business conduct”, OECD, 2018, <http://mneguidelines.oecd.org/OECD-Due-Diligence-Guidance-for-Responsible-Business-Conduct.pdf>

¹⁰⁸ “Guidelines for MNEs - Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.”, OECD, accessed May 10, 2019, <https://mneguidelines.oecd.org/>.

matter and convening governmental actors, the business sector, and the civil society in the development of practical approaches. In this context, the social policy principles for multinational enterprises (or MNE Declaration)¹⁰⁹ developed by the International Labour Organization (ILO) provides further guidance for ensuring enterprises' responsible workplace practices and social policy. In particular, the MNE Declaration contributes to the achievement of Goal 8 of the 2030 Agenda on decent work and economic growth.

Finally, the concepts of CSR and RBC are actively promoted by the United Nations Global Compact, which is, precisely, the largest corporate sustainability initiative in the world, encouraging companies to align their strategies with “universal principles on human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption”¹¹⁰. The UN Global Compact's ten principles provide a framework definition of responsible business and contributes to the achievement of the SDGs. Indeed, there exists a profound interconnection between the ten principles and the SDGs, as demonstrated by the figure below, contained in the UN Global Compact White Paper: *The UN Global Compact Ten Principles and the Sustainable Development Goals: Connecting, Crucially*¹¹¹.



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¹⁰⁹ “Tripartite Declaration concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy”, International Labour Organization, March 2017, http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---emp_ent/---multi/documents/publication/wcms_094386.pdf

¹¹⁰ UN Global Compact “The Ten Principles”.

¹¹¹ “WHITE PAPER The UN Global Compact Ten Principles and the Sustainable Development Goals: Connecting, Crucially”, United Nations Global Compact, 2016, https://www.unglobalcompact.org/docs/about_the_gc/White_Paper_Principles_SDGs.pdf

¹¹² Ibid.

Moreover, the UN Global Compact has the crucial role of ensuring a coherent reference framework for companies, by effectively bridging the pre-existing principles on CSR to the new, more detailed SDGs. Thus, the global goals for sustainable development have complemented previous economic, social, and environmental criteria and standards, mapping the way towards better-targeted action and transformations.

3.3 Sustainability-oriented corporate strategies.

The realization of the SDGs at the macro level directly connects with economic growth, specifically as regards the Goals 8,9 and 12, respectively “Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”; “Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation”; and “Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns”. Thus, the achievement of every single SDG would generate a positive impact on the private sector by creating opportunities for expansion into new markets and tackling global and local risks. Furthermore, the SDGs constitute a fundamental instrument for addressing risks connected to environmental and climate degradation, inequality, lack of development, and geopolitical instability. Naturally, the business sector can only derive long-term benefits from social and environmental progress, such as reliable access to natural resources, resilient societies, and an educated and healthy workforce. As a confirmation of the private sector’s focus on the SDGs is the adoption of new standards of performance evaluation, developed by the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), substituting the G4 guidelines. The GRI standards include the SDGs, therefore allowing companies to assess their environmental social and economic impact¹¹³.

From the investment market point of view, stakeholders and investors are paying increasing attention to nonfinancial information and are requiring companies to limit their environmental and social impact. Therefore, according to the 2017 EY Investor Survey¹¹⁴, “weak corporate governance, poor environmental performance, resource scarcity, climate change and human rights risks are most likely to alter investors’ decisions”¹¹⁵. Investors consider sustainable strategies and performances as a great competitive advantage, shaping their investment decisions, almost with the same influence of price or technical efficiency. In particular, central banks and supervisory authorities contribute to raising awareness on risks and their transmission to the financial system, constituting a role model for all investors. In particular, the key to the achievement of the SDGs is to impel companies to comply with ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) criteria relevant to the SDGS in their strategies. Furthermore, ESG-based investing is increasingly popular, with several institutional investors integrating ESG considerations into investment strategies¹¹⁶. Specifically, this year, the Bank of Italy adopted an investment strategy that integrates ESG considerations in portfolio management. This new investment methodology excludes investment securities issued by companies non-

¹¹³ ASviS, “Italy and the Sustainable Development Goals: ASviS Report 2018”, 10.

¹¹⁴ “The poll: ESG Investor Survey”, EY, May 2017, [https://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/ey-reporting-the-poll-ESG-investor-survey/\\$FILE/ey-reporting-the-poll-ESG-investor-survey.pdf](https://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/ey-reporting-the-poll-ESG-investor-survey/$FILE/ey-reporting-the-poll-ESG-investor-survey.pdf)

¹¹⁵ “Why Sustainable Development Goals Should Be in Your Business Plan”, EY, March 09, 2017, https://www.ey.com/en_gl/assurance/why-sustainable-development-goals-should-be-in-your-business-plan

¹¹⁶ Mohieldin and Kimenko “How the private-sector can help fund the Sustainable Development Goals”

conforming to the UN Global Compact's principles and privileges the bonds having the best ESG profile¹¹⁷. However, there is still a lack of understanding of the link between ESG standards and the SDGs, and only a few companies and investors are using the more specific and targeted SDGs in their sustainability strategies.

In general, by focusing on the SDGs, companies can galvanize and inspire stakeholders to achieve the globally shared objective of sustainability. Additionally, more than two-thirds of corporate managers consider sustainability as crucial to the competitiveness of their business and success in the marketplace¹¹⁸. Consequently, companies adhering to the 2030 Agenda and therefore, committing to the relative SDGs, should align their strategies and policies to the Goals and give proof of their progress through nonfinancial reports. In general, SDGs motivate corporate actions and commitment in one or more of the following areas: "social investment and philanthropy, core business operations and value chains; public advocacy and policy dialogue"¹¹⁹.

Certainly, the concrete endorsement of the SDGs into corporate strategies is not instantaneous. The first critical step is the assessment of the relationship and cause-effect mechanisms existing between the goals and the business. More specifically, the company needs to align corporate priorities with the SDGs creating most opportunities over the long-term, having the most significant impact on risks, and, most of all, where the company can give the greatest contribution. After having identified the priority SDGs, for ensuring the monitoring of the progress, companies should determine their targets and key performance indicators (KPIs)¹²⁰. These should be consistent with the relevant SDGs and 169 targets provided for by the 2030 Agenda. At this point, the company must identify eventual sectors where adjustments are required (i.e., supply chains, new products or services, innovation, research, and development). In concrete terms, common practices include: the reduction of the intense use of natural resources by the adoption of energy and water efficiency-based models; investments in the education of the workforce and in the development of innovative technologies; the development of management system respecting standards and certifications; and paying more attention to the needs of the communities where the company operates.

Moreover, sustainable strategies not only have the potential of transforming business models, but they can have an extremely positive impact on the communities where the company delivers its products and services. In addition, the endorsement of sustainability represents a means for strengthening the relationship and the level of mutual trust between the company and its relative consumers and suppliers, in accordance with the SDG 12 on "Responsible consumption and production".

The achievement of the global goals generates revenue, fosters innovation, and provides opportunities for growth. All the progress made in the achievement of the SDGs and the impact of the companies' activities can be recorded and included in the core business and reporting cycle¹²¹. Indeed, the creation of visible shared

¹¹⁷ Ignazio Visco, "Sviluppo sostenibile e rischi climatici: il ruolo delle banche centrali"

¹¹⁸ Nice Beaches, "Shumpeter: Good Business", *The Economist*, May 19, 2012, 76.

¹¹⁹ Global Compact Network Italy, "Italian businesses: practices towards a sustainable development", 20.

¹²⁰ EY, "Why Sustainable Development Goals Should Be in Your Business Plan."

¹²¹ "To be reliable, disclose the right information to stakeholders and monitor the progress towards the SDGs, sustainability information need to be integrated into companies reporting cycle" (SDG 12.6)

value enhances competitiveness and allows the company to obtain recognition from relevant stakeholders, both at the local and international levels. As concerns reporting on the SDGs, there is not an established methodology and, for this reason, companies have considerable freedom in adopting their best-fit solution. However, quality criteria are proposed by several consultancy firms (i.e. *How to report on the SDGs*¹²² published in 2018 by KPMG, one of the Big Four auditors¹²³).

Nevertheless, the global achievement of the SDGs cannot be driven by a single enterprise. Therefore, the active collaboration between business' sectors and across different industries is crucial for producing significant environmental, social, and economic outcomes. Companies should pursue active collaboration with other actors such as governments, urban settlements, nonprofit organizations, and academia¹²⁴ in compliance with Goal 17, providing for a revitalized system of partnerships for sustainable development.

To summarize, the Executive Director of the UN Global compact Lise Kingo, identified three main ingredients for businesses to contribute to the SDGs:

1. Leadership: Top-level commitment is necessary for the creation of sustainable strategies;
2. Collaboration: Co-design, co-development, and co-investments are required to create shared outcomes;
3. Transparency: It is fundamental for businesses to regularly and transparently report their progress.¹²⁵

3.4 Building a sustainable future: The Case Study on Salini Impregilo S.p.A.

The industrial group Salini Impregilo has been chosen as the practical case study for the last part of this research paper, to demonstrate the importance that CSR and, more specifically the SDGs, have on shaping corporate strategies. The Salini Impregilo group was founded in 2014 with the merger by incorporation of Salini into Impregilo and had been operating in the construction sector for over 110 years. The Italian company is a leading global infrastructure company, and it operates in over 50 countries of 5 continents (Africa, America, Asia, Europe, Oceania) with 35.000 employees. In Italy, it is the largest engineering and general contractor group, and it is a global leader in the construction of dams, airports, railways, hydroelectric plants, public and industrial buildings, and in the civil engineering sector for the realization of waste-to-energy plants and environmental protection. The company is a Multinational enterprise, and it ranks first in the classification of Italian constructions' companies operating abroad¹²⁶. With more than a century of activity, Salini Impregilo has developed a solid business model characterized by a shared-value approach, able to combine the creation of economic value, while generating social and environmental value for the communities and the territories where it operates¹²⁷.

¹²² "How to report on the SDGs", KPMG, February 2018, <https://assets.kpmg/content/dam/kpmg/xx/pdf/2018/02/how-to-report-on-sdgs.pdf>

¹²³ KPMG, Deloitte, Ernst & Young (EY) and PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC).

¹²⁴ EY, "Why Sustainable Development Goals Should Be in Your Business Plan."

¹²⁵ Global Compact Network Italy, "Italian businesses: practices towards a sustainable development", 22.

¹²⁶ "Rapporto 2018 sulla presenza delle imprese di costruzione italiane nel mondo", ANCE, September 27, 2018, <http://www.ance.it/docs/docDownload.aspx?id=46628>

¹²⁷ "Relazione finanziaria annuale 2018", Salini Impregilo, December 31, 2018, <https://www.salini-impregilo.com/static/upload/relaz/relazione-finanziaria-annuale-2018---rettifica.pdf>



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The following information has been collected through the conduct of an interview¹²⁹ with Francesco Tomaiuolo, Sustainability and CSR Manager of the company, and by consulting the 2018 Consolidated Non-Financial Statement.

The company operates in the civil engineering sector, in particular, dealing with hydroelectricity, mobility, and constructions. Because of its mission, it has always contributed to the fulfilment of the primary necessities of the territories and communities where it operates.

The aim of “Boosting Local Economies” underlies Salini Impregilo’s corporate strategy, supporting local communities and creating new employment, especially by engaging the local workforce in the areas where the projects are located. Good infrastructures are crucial drivers of economic growth and development, and they constitute the network where all the economic and social activities rest. Indeed, a good system of infrastructures provides access to basic services, supports territorial development, and improves the communities’ quality of life. The infrastructure sector, however, is directly affected by the main trends at the global level, namely climate change, rapid urbanization, and technological developments, which shape the decisions of governments and economic operators. Moreover, it is expected that two-thirds of the world’s population will live in cities by 2050¹³⁰. Hence there is a pressing need to improve the global system of urban infrastructures, as remarked by the SDG 9¹³¹.

¹²⁸ “Business Sustainability Model”, Salini Impregilo, accessed May 29, 2019, <https://www.salini-impregilo.com/en/sustainability/modello-di-business-della-sostenibilita.html>.

¹²⁹ The interview has been conducted at the Salini Impregilo office in Rome, on April 17, 2019.

¹³⁰ “Building a Sustainable Future”, Salini Impregilo, accessed April 15, 2019, <https://www.salini-impregilo.com/en/sustainability/building-a-sustainable-future.html>

¹³¹ “Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation”

Even before the spread of the awareness on sustainable development, which has witnessed an intensification with the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, the Salini Impregilo group was already conscious of the potential of the environmental, social and economic impact of its works. The new global goals further confirmed this commitment and, specifically, they required the reconciliation of previous policies to the specific SDGs and related indicators.

In general, the company identifies two main pillars of sustainability constituted of the sustainability dimension that is intrinsic to the company's field of application; and the company's specific strategy and policies for sustainable development. The first pillar deals directly with the construction projects and links Salini Impregilo's main areas of operations to the relevant SDGs. In general, the company's projects "help to enhance accessibility and raise countries' economic potential through energy and transport infrastructure"¹³², therefore acting as a catalyst for development and socio-economic wellbeing.

Specifically, hydroelectricity is one of the main sectors where the company operates, and it constitutes the most inexpensive source of renewable energy. The works of the hydroelectric sector, therefore, contribute to the pursuit of the SDG 7 "Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy". For example, through the ambitious Koysha Hydroelectric Project in Ethiopia¹³³, Salini Impregilo is going to ensure access to clean energy to several million people, by enabling "Ethiopia to become a leading player in the production of energy in the African market"¹³⁴.

For what concerns the water sector, which encompasses the whole water cycle, the company directly operates in countries suffering from drought stress, such as Saudi Arabia¹³⁵. In particular, it develops systems of desalination, water purification, and drainage. In this way, Salini Impregilo significantly contributes to the global pursuit of the goal 6 "Ensure access to water and sanitation for all".

Another field of operation of the company, that generates important outcomes in terms of sustainability, is that of mobility and transports. In particular, the construction of railways, subways, roads, and high-speed trains have a twofold value. They improve the overall system of infrastructures, in line with the SDG 9 "Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization"; and, alternative means of transportation to cars, significantly reduce CO₂ emissions, contributing to the realization of Goal 11 "Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable" and of the all-encompassing Goal 13 on climate action. Particularly, the group is currently involved in the development of nine metro systems including the Grand Paris Express in France, the Red Line in Doha, Qatar; Line 3 of the Riyadh Metro in Saudi Arabia; and Cityringen in Copenhagen, Denmark¹³⁶.

¹³² Salini Impregilo, "Building a Sustainable Future"

¹³³ "Koysha Hydroelectric Project", Salini Impregilo, accessed May 17, 2019, <https://ethiopia.salini-impregilo.com/en/projects/koysha-hydroelectric-project.html>

¹³⁴ "Salini Impregilo in Ethiopia", Salini Impregilo, accessed May 17, 2019, <https://ethiopia.salini-impregilo.com/en/>

¹³⁵ "Salini Impregilo in Saudi Arabia", Salini Impregilo, accessed May 17, 2019, <https://www.salini-impregilo.com/en/press/news-events/salini-impregilo-in-saudi-arabia.html>

¹³⁶ "Salini Impregilo celebrated World Environment Day 2019", Salini Impregilo, Milan, Accessed June 6, 2019, <https://www.salini-impregilo.com/en/press/news-events/salini-impregilo-celebrated-world-environment-day-2019.html>

Several buildings realized by the Salini Impregilo group are the result of green building's life-cycle. Specifically, the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) system, an initiative of the US Green Building Challenge, is the one employed in Italy and is based on the integration of environmental and social requirements in the whole life-cycle of the projects (engineering, procurement, construction). The objective is the mitigation of the negative environmental and social impacts that the buildings' life-cycle entails.

The second pillar of sustainability concerns the realization of projects and the related policies and guidelines. In particular, a series of company's priorities have been related to the achievement of one or more SDGs.

1. Health and safety in the workplace: This is one of the main company's fundamental values. Indeed, Salini Impregilo follows the ISO 45001:2018 certified health and safety in the workplace management system¹³⁷. The group has 35.000 direct employees and as many labourers, working in the various construction sites. In particular, labourers are often really young and at the first work experience. The education provided by the company is not only aimed at reducing workplace accidents but is mostly allows workers to know how to work safely in any kind of environment and work position. Therefore, the company has a positive impact on the overall working community, guaranteeing decent working conditions (SDG 8) and ensuring "healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages" (SDG 3). Particularly, Salini Impregilo's worksite clinics assist local communities, providing more than 13.600 free health interventions in 2017.
2. Adequate infrastructures: Infrastructures are one of the main driving forces of the economy, and they act as multipliers of investments. Salini Impregilo commits itself to the use of local labour and suppliers for the realization of infrastructures. In addition, the company has developed a computational model for evaluating its yearly contribution to GDP and in terms of earnings. The central idea is that of the creation of shared value, composed of the revenue of the company and the local territorial and societal gains. This shared-gain perspective fulfils the SDG 8 "Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all".
3. Environmental protection and circular economy: The protection of the environment is one of the main longstanding priorities of the group, as demonstrated by the fact that Salini Impregilo has been one of the first European companies to introduce a specific Environmental Policy in 2002. Indeed, the company is a resource-intensive industry, employing great quantities of raw materials, including scarce resources, and contributing to the global system of transportation. The company endorses the principle of sustainable production and consumption in line with the SDG 12 "Ensure sustainable production and consumption patterns", and the principle of circularity governs its resources and waste management. Salini Impregilo operates in accordance with environmental management systems

¹³⁷ "ISO 45001:2018 – Occupational health and safety management systems – Requirements with guidance for use", International Organization for Standardization, accessed May 29, 2019, <https://www.iso.org/standard/63787.html>

certified to ISO 14001 standards¹³⁸, aiming at minimising the environmental impacts of the whole construction's lifecycle over the long term.

4. Diversity and social inclusion: The construction sector is traditionally a male domain, and indeed, even little changes towards a more gender-wise diverse working force constitute significant progress in bridging the gender gap. Specifically, the company's policies undertaken in recent years are concerned about favouring the inclusion of females in the technical profiles. For what concerns other types of diversity within the working force, Salini Impregilo is significantly ahead. Indeed, its employees comprise 110 nationalities and several religions, and they have very different life experiences. This constitutes a great added value for the company and an essential element for its growth. More than 770.000 thousand hours of training are provided to employees and several training initiatives in cooperation with foreign universities have been promoted. Undoubtedly, this commitment to inclusion, diversity, and education, supports the achievement of the SDG 5 and 10, respectively "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" and "Reduce inequality within and among countries". Importantly, Salini Impregilo, after having confirmed its "Best Employer of Choice" ranking at fifth place for three consecutive years, obtained the fourth place in the 2019 ranking¹³⁹.

Particularly, with the publication of the 2030 Agenda, the introduction of specific measures for the achievement of sustainability by the company has witnessed an acceleration and the principles of sustainable development constitute the cornerstone of Salini Impregilo's projects. Nevertheless, the underlying driving factor was the change in market demands. In particular, investments for infrastructures have been revitalised, and an industry for the development of sustainable technologies has been activated. Specifically, a lot more constraints have been imposed at the construction stage and in the tender process for construction contracts. Sustainable strategies are increasingly required and constitute an added value to projects. For example, in certain tendering procedures, some bonus points might be assigned to companies favouring sustainable impact-reducing solutions.

Moreover, the system of financing for great projects, mostly coming from central and international banks, increasingly requires companies to respect specific environmental and social standards. Therefore, the serious compliance to the 2030 Agenda of large undertakings such as Salini Impregilo, which receives directives and funds from entities like governments and banks, and that constantly competes in tender processes, constitutes a great competitive advantage and a means to respond to the market changing conditions. Particularly, that of construction, is an extremely competitive sector, where everything is determined by public tenders, according to the evaluation of the technical offer and the price of projects and, progressively, the compliance with sustainability standards.

¹³⁸ "ISO 14001:2015." International Organization for Standardization, accessed May 20, 2019, <https://www.iso.org/standard/60857.html>.

¹³⁹ "Ranking Best Employer of Choice 2019", CESOP HR Consulting Company, accessed May 19, 2019, <http://www.cesop.it/best-employer-of-choice/ranking/ranking-best-employer-of-choice-2019/>

For what concerns the organizational structure, Salini Impregilo's corporate governance model is based on the traditional management model and is in line with "a system of principles (Code of Ethics and Policies) and management and control tools (risk management, procedures and controls), designed to supervise significant non-financial topics in line with the regulations applicable in the countries where it operates, standard principles and international guidelines"¹⁴⁰. As a demonstration of its commitment to CSR, Salini Impregilo's management system is in accordance with the following international standards: ISO 9001 (Quality management systems)¹⁴¹; ISO 14000 (Environmental management)¹⁴²; ISO 45001 (Occupational Health and Safety management systems)¹⁴³; and ISO 37001 (Anti-bribery management systems)¹⁴⁴.

Already before the introduction of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Corporate Social Responsibility Department, acted as a facilitator, coordinator, and collector of information, for the monitoring and the promotion of projects for internal improvements for sustainable development. The CSR Department does not deal with all aspects of sustainability, given its transversal nature. On the contrary, the dimension of sustainability permeates all the Directorates-General and departments and is inserted in the job descriptions of various positions. Salini Impregilo has a matrix form of organisation and everyone, at all levels, is involved in the realization of the SDGs. Furthermore, in 2017 Salini Impregilo revised its *Code of Ethics*¹⁴⁵, ruling the conduct of the company's workforce, and addressing "the directors, statutory auditors, managers and employees of Salini Impregilo as well as all those parties that directly or indirectly, temporarily or on an ongoing basis, work with the Company, to the extent of their duties and responsibilities."¹⁴⁶

Remarkably, Salini Impregilo has been the first Italian society in the construction sector to produce and publish an Environmental Report in 2002, and it has been the first one to publish a Sustainability report, drafted according to the guidelines of the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) in 2009. Until 2016 Salini Impregilo voluntarily published its Sustainability Report and, starting from 2018, it prepares the Consolidated Non-financial Statement, pursuant to Legislative Decree no. 254/2016, and in line with the *2016 GRI Sustainability Reporting Standards*. The Statement is contained in the annual report of the company and it constitutes the Communication of Progress (COP) of the company for the UN Global Compact. The Statement covers the macro topics of Personnel, Human rights, Environment, Anti-Corruption, Supply chain, and social aspects. Precisely, the CSR Department supervises the non-financial reporting system and the Company's Board of Directors approves the Statement.

¹⁴⁰ Salini Impregilo. "Relazione finanziaria annuale 2018"

¹⁴¹ "ISO 9001:2015.", International Organization for Standardization, accessed May 10, 2019, <https://www.iso.org/standard/62085.html>

¹⁴² "ISO 14000 Family – Environmental Management.", International Organization for Standardization, accessed May 17, 2019, <https://www.iso.org/iso-14001-environmental-management.html>.

¹⁴³ "ISO 45001:2018 – Occupational health and safety management systems – Requirements with guidance for use", International Organization for Standardization, accessed May 17, 2019, <https://www.iso.org/standard/63787.html>

¹⁴⁴ "ISO 37001 Anti-bribery Management Systems.", International Organization for Standardization, accessed May 25, 2019, <https://www.iso.org/iso-37001-anti-bribery-management.html>

¹⁴⁵ "Code of Ethics", Salini Impregilo, 12 April 2017, <https://www.salini-impregilo.com/static/upload/cod/codice-etico.pdf>

¹⁴⁶ Salini Impregilo "Relazione finanziaria annuale 2018"

Salini Impregilo is a signatory of the UN Global compact, since 2013, and also of the Global Compact Network Italy, as confirmation of its active engagement in CSR and its conviction that “the performance of a business goes beyond mere economic dimensions, extending to social and environmental spheres, and relations with stakeholders: employees, customers, local communities, institutions and the public administration”¹⁴⁷. In particular, the chief of the CSR Department, Francesco Tomaiuolo, considers that the activities carried out by the Global Compact Network Italy, are crucial for forwarding new issues and allowing the confrontation between different economic actors and networks on matters such as supply chain and human rights, comprised in the 10 Global Compact Principles. The main objective is to develop common methodologies to deal with such matters, in order to facilitate the undertaking of responsible strategies by businesses.

¹⁴⁷ “Impregilo joins the Global Compact”, Salini Impregilo, October 28, 2013, <https://www.salini-impregilo.com/en/press/news-events/impregilo-joins-the-global-compact.html>

Conclusion

This research paper analyses the transformative character of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, through the description of the unique multi-layered global governance system it entails, and the impact it has on the private sector. After a brief introduction to sustainable development and the most salient and innovative features of the 2030 Agenda, the research moves to the description of the multilateral initiatives motivated by the 2030 Agenda and the analysis of state-level mobilizations. Subsequently, after having explored the concepts of Corporate Social Responsibility and Responsible Business Conduct, the last part of this research deals with the crucial role of the private sector for sustainable development and the influence of the SDGs on corporate strategies. This, also under the pressure of the market, entailing more considerable attention to sustainability from economic actors. As shown by the Italian Strategy for Sustainable Development and the Case Studies on the external coordination carried out by the MAECI and of the Italian company Salini Impregilo S.p.A., the SDGs have been included in both public and private agendas, permeating the definition of public policies and institutional developments, and orienting corporate strategies and projects to new, non-financial indicators. There emerges the strong interdependence between different stakeholders, transcending levels of administration (local, national, regional, international), crossing different policy areas, and blending the classic public-private distinction. This is mainly due to the transversal and multi-sectoral character of the SDGs, ranging from poverty reduction to ocean protection, or from energy to gender equality.

Specifically, the description of the multi-stakeholder platform provided for by the High-Level Political Forum of the United Nations, where Member States are encouraged to present their VNRs and share their experiences, illustrates, not only the active mobilization at the national and international level, but also the importance of monitoring and reporting mechanisms. Indeed, the articulation of the 17 SDGs in 169 targets and 244 indicators signals the concreteness of the Goals, oriented to immediate and measurable progress. In this regard, a modern social phenomenon could constitute a significant turning point for an acceleration in sustainability policies both for its dimensions and unifying character. That is the *Fridays for Future* movement, which brings together young people of around 100 countries. It reveals a global and diffused feeling among young generations, demanding concrete and immediate action to counteract climate change effects from Governments, and more in general, from generations that preceded them. This request, based on the keywords hope and action, is coherent with the classic definition of sustainable development of the Brundtland Report, given by World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987, according to which “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”¹⁴⁸.

In conclusion, the abovementioned social phenomenon, together with the strengthened collaboration between extremely diversified countries and stakeholders, within a constantly evolving multilateral and

¹⁴⁸ United Nations, “Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future”

institutional context, and the pressure of the market, could represent a factor of hope for a paradigm shift towards greater effectiveness of sustainability policies.

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Abstract

Nella presente ricerca si sono volute approfondire le recenti evoluzioni internazionali sullo sviluppo sostenibile, con particolare riferimento all'Agenda 2030 delle Nazioni Unite, la quale, tramite il suo impatto trasformativo sul sistema multilaterale e di *governance* e sul settore privato, accompagnata anche da alcuni fenomeni sociali e tendenze di mercato, potrebbe costituire un cambio di paradigma nell'approccio ai temi della sostenibilità. Nel corso dell'analisi vengono anche esaminati i casi pratici del Coordinamento svolto dal Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale, per quanto riguarda la dimensione multilaterale, e dell'impresa Salini Impregilo S.p.A. per l'approfondimento della dimensione privata dello sviluppo sostenibile.

Il dibattito sullo sviluppo sostenibile, avviato già da diversi decenni e caratterizzato da fasi di accelerazione e di stasi, si è arricchito di un nuovo importante tassello con l'adozione, nel settembre 2015, dell'Agenda 2030 per lo Sviluppo Sostenibile delle Nazioni Unite. Tale strumento si inserisce in un confronto internazionale nel quale le agende politiche nazionali, le strategie d'impresa e le iniziative della società civile dimostrano una crescente attenzione ai temi della sostenibilità. Un'importante e oggettiva novità è rappresentata da un fenomeno sociale che, sia per le dimensioni che per i suoi contenuti unificanti, potrebbe rappresentare la chiave di volta per l'accelerazione delle politiche per la sostenibilità. Ci si riferisce alla mobilitazione che vede coinvolti giovani provenienti da circa 100 paesi, che sostengono attivamente il movimento *Fridays for Future*. Il movimento è il risultato di un sentimento diffuso e globale delle nuove generazioni, che pretendono dai governi e, in generale, dalle generazioni che li hanno preceduti, interventi concreti ed immediati e comportamenti in grado di contrastare i cambiamenti climatici e un cambio di passo dell'economia. La richiesta dei giovani, fondata sulle parole chiave speranza e azione, è coerente con i contenuti sostanziali della definizione classica di sviluppo sostenibile, contenuta nel Rapporto Brundtland, pubblicato nel lontano 1987 dalla Commissione Mondiale sull'Ambiente e lo Sviluppo (WCED), secondo la quale: "lo sviluppo sostenibile è uno sviluppo che soddisfi i bisogni del presente senza compromettere la possibilità delle generazioni future di svilupparsi"¹⁴⁹..

L'Agenda 2030 per lo Sviluppo Sostenibile delle Nazioni Unite rappresenta il culmine di un lungo processo, composto da conferenze e accordi internazionali, in un periodo che va dal 1972 con la Conferenza di Stoccolma, al 2012 con la Conferenza delle Nazioni Unite sullo Sviluppo Sostenibile, anche chiamata *Rio +20*. Il 2015 può essere considerato un anno decisivo, durante il quale è rilevabile un cambiamento di approccio nei confronti della sostenibilità e un'evoluzione evidente del sistema multilaterale e di *governance* per lo sviluppo sostenibile. Infatti, oltre all'Agenda 2030, nel 2015 sono stati raggiunti anche tanti altri accordi fondamentali, come ad esempio l'Agenda di Addis Abeba, un nuovo piano globale per il finanziamento allo Sviluppo o gli accordi di Parigi sui cambiamenti climatici.

¹⁴⁹ United Nations, "Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future"

L'Agenda 2030 viene definita: “un piano d'azione per le persone, il pianeta e la prosperità”, nel quale vengono integrati i tre pilastri della sostenibilità: ambientale, economico e sociale. Viene definitivamente superata la concezione della sostenibilità come una questione unicamente ambientale, arrivando a una maggiore consapevolezza del nesso esistente tra le attuali emergenze legate alla sostenibilità e la necessità di nuovi modelli di sviluppo economico-sociale. I 17 Obiettivi di Sviluppo Sostenibile (Sustainable Development Goals - SDGs) di cui si compone l'Agenda sono ulteriormente declinati in 169 targets e 244 indicatori, i quali traducono le attuali sfide globali in obiettivi specifici e misurabili. Gli obiettivi sono interconnessi tra loro e alcuni di essi sono propedeutici alla realizzazione di altri. Quest'interconnessione e la complessità delle sfide epocali proprie degli SDGs è il punto di partenza per comprendere la necessità, sempre più evidente ed improcrastinabile, di realizzare nel concreto un approccio integrato e *multi-stakeholder* per la realizzazione degli obiettivi e di *partnership* globali. L'universalità e la trasversalità dell'Agenda la rendono uno strumento innovativo, che coinvolge non solo i Governi di tutti gli Stati, il sistema delle Nazioni Unite e le organizzazioni internazionali, ma riconosce il ruolo chiave delle imprese, della società civile, delle amministrazioni locali, del mondo dell'università e della ricerca. In questo modo l'Agenda tenta di superare categorie e divisioni che hanno marcato tante Conferenze internazionali sul tema dell'ambiente e dello sviluppo sostenibile.

Il pieno coinvolgimento di attori non statali nelle relazioni internazionali è in via di intensificazione, tuttavia per quanto riguarda l'attuazione della sostenibilità e il re-indirizzamento dei sistemi economici, il rapporto bilaterale e multilaterale tra Paesi è imprescindibile per la realizzazione dell'Agenda globale. Come forse mai accaduto sul piano multilaterale, l'Agenda 2030 fornisce un quadro di riferimento caratterizzato da una legittimazione globale e da un diffuso consenso politico. In questo contesto, il confronto tra Paesi è uno schema di riferimento indispensabile per la negoziazione di oneri e la ripartizione di responsabilità. Il confronto coinvolge e impegna contestualmente altri attori rilevanti come le organizzazioni internazionali, la società civile e il settore privato, creando un sistema di *governance* multilivello, nel quale i legami di collaborazione e interdipendenza trascendono i confini nazionali, sviluppandosi a livello locale, nazionale, regionale e globale, e superando la classica distinzione pubblico-privato. In questo senso, il principio di sussidiarietà verticale e orizzontale, e la messa in pratica di meccanismi istituzionali per garantire un'effettiva *Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development* sono considerati i prerequisiti necessari per una transizione efficace e duratura. Si tratta, nel concreto, di definire, implementare e monitorare politiche coerenti e integrate, favorendo la sinergica interazione di *stakeholders* di diverse aree politiche. Questo evidenzia un altro aspetto fondamentale dell'Agenda 2030, la quale, oltre che integrare in maniera bilanciata la dimensione economica, sociale e ambientale, conferisce un ruolo fondamentale alla dimensione istituzionale della sostenibilità.

L'Agenda 2030 e, in generale, i temi legati alla sostenibilità ricorrono ormai in modo pervasivo nelle relazioni internazionali. Ormai, non vi è Foro o Organismo multilaterale che non valuti, trasversalmente, la conformità della propria azione e il proprio contributo alla realizzazione degli SDGs. Sempre più Paesi fanno

del proprio impegno verso lo sviluppo sostenibile un carattere identificativo del proprio orientamento in sede negoziale. Infatti, la conformità ai criteri economici, sociali e ambientali definiti nell'Agenda, conferisce prestigio nel contesto internazionale, e ripercussioni a livello nazionale. Nonostante lo scenario multilaterale che contrassegna l'Agenda 2030 sia in costante evoluzione e coinvolga sempre nuovi *partners*, è importante evidenziare la centralità di Organismi quali: Nazioni Unite, Organizzazione per la Cooperazione e lo Sviluppo Economico (OCSE), Unione Europea e *Global Compact* delle Nazioni Unite.

Per l'attuazione concreta degli impegni è stato, per esempio, istituito il Foro Politico di Alto Livello sullo Sviluppo Sostenibile (High-Level Political Forum – HLPF), convocato sotto gli auspici del Consiglio Economico e Sociale (ECOSOC) delle Nazioni Unite e tenuto ogni anno. L'HLPF costituisce la principale occasione per valutare i progressi compiuti nella realizzazione degli SDGs a livello sia globale che nazionale. Nello specifico, esso opera tramite la presentazione da parte degli Stati Membri delle cosiddette *Voluntary National Reviews* (VNRs), volte a definire tramite un processo consultativo, inclusivo e partecipativo, che coinvolga differenti categorie di *stakeholders*, la strategia nazionale per il raggiungimento degli obiettivi e a “Rendicontare in modo periodico e, il più possibile, esaustivo i progressi dei singoli Stati nell'implementazione dell'Agenda 2030 per lo sviluppo sostenibile”. Inoltre l'HLPF prevede un meccanismo di monitoraggio e revisione degli indicatori, attraverso Agenzie statistiche specializzate e l'organizzazione di riunioni multilaterali settoriali, tematiche o relative a specifiche aree geografiche. In sintesi, l'HLPF costituisce una piattaforma multilaterale per la condivisione di esperienze e buone pratiche, l'individuazione di problematiche e difficoltà e la mobilitazione dei portatori di interesse, mirata ad accelerare la realizzazione degli obiettivi e la formazione di *partnership* per lo sviluppo sostenibile.

La Strategia Nazionale Italiana per lo Sviluppo Sostenibile (SNSvS) è stata presentata all'HLPF a New York nel 2018. In questo caso, in linea con l'Articolo 95 della Costituzione Italiana, il compito di guidare e coordinare l'attuazione della SNSvS è stato affidato al Presidente del Consiglio, con il supporto del Ministero dell'Ambiente e della Tutela del Mare, per quanto riguarda il coordinamento interno, e del Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale (MAECI), per il coordinamento esterno. Il Ministero dell'Economia e delle Finanze ha invece il ruolo essenziale di armonizzare la SNSvS con i documenti ufficiali di politica economica. A questo proposito, in Italia, un traguardo concreto è rappresentato dall'integrazione, a decorrere dal 2016 del tema della sostenibilità nelle politiche pubbliche, con gli indicatori di Benessere Equo e Sostenibile (BES) nel processo di programmazione economico-finanziaria, e la loro inclusione nel Documento di Economia e Finanza (DEF). Grazie a questo intervento l'Italia si qualifica come il primo paese del G7 e dell'Unione Europea ad aver introdotto la dimensione del benessere equo e sostenibile nella politica economica.

Restando nell'ambito del multilateralismo, la SNSvS è strutturata in cinque aree principali: Persone, Pianeta, Prosperità, Pace, Partnership, le prime quattro aree riguardano la dimensione domestica della sostenibilità, l'ultima, relativa alla Partnership per lo sviluppo sostenibile è riferita alla dimensione esterna e, nello specifico alla cooperazione internazionale e alla politica estera. In questo senso, i Ministeri degli Esteri,

sono chiamati ad aggiornare le proprie linee d'azione alla luce della crescente centralità dei temi della sostenibilità negli ambiti di proprio interesse. Il contesto multilaterale è infatti essenziale per confrontarsi con altri Paesi, sia quelli all'avanguardia nell'ambito della sostenibilità, sia quelli che affrontano le maggiori difficoltà. A tale riguardo, potendo orientare l'impiego delle risorse e la disciplina degli investimenti, la cooperazione internazionale costituisce un ambito imprescindibile per la realizzazione degli obiettivi. Inoltre, l'azione di coordinamento svolta dai Ministeri degli Esteri è essenziale per la definizione di un chiaro orientamento nazionale in sede negoziale nei confronti dell'Agenda 2030. In Italia, ad esempio, il MAECI, ha stabilito, in seguito all'adozione dell'Agenda 2030, un'Unità di Coordinamento per i temi della sostenibilità, presso la Direzione Generale per la Mondializzazione e gli Affari Globali (DGMO). Essa ha il compito di assicurare la coerenza della politica estera con l'Agenda 2030, curando, in raccordo con altre Direzioni Generali, sia il coordinamento tra soggetti nazionali sia la posizione italiana in tema di sostenibilità nei Fori internazionali. Alla sostenibilità viene dedicata prioritaria attenzione da parte della DGMO, tanto nei dossier tematici sulla *governance* economica e finanziaria e le questioni globali, quanto nell'attività delle Direzioni geografiche. In particolare, meritano di essere menzionati, l'impegno sul Global Compact delle Nazioni Unite, la partecipazione al Punto di Contatto Nazionale sulle linee guida OCSE per le imprese multinazionali, le iniziative di sensibilizzazione in materia di responsabilità sociale di impresa e la cura dei dossier sul *Kimberly Process Certificate Scheme*, iniziativa per la trasparenza dell'industria estrattiva.

Sempre di più, l'Agenda 2030 e gli SDGs, oltre a rappresentare un forte incentivo per il multilateralismo, la creazione di un sistema di *governance* multilivello e la mobilitazione a livello nazionale, influiscono sul settore privato e sulle strategie *corporate*. In particolare, le imprese, attori fondamentali nella transizione alla sostenibilità, anche sulla spinta del mercato, negli ultimi anni, hanno, in molti casi, condiviso i principi della sostenibilità, includendoli all'interno delle proprie strategie e valutando la propria conformità ai criteri economici, ambientali e sociali definiti nell'Agenda. Il sempre maggiore coinvolgimento del settore privato è un altro aspetto che innova le tematiche della sostenibilità rispetto al passato. Le imprese sono in grado, infatti, di rispondere alle sfide della sostenibilità e contribuire alla realizzazione degli SDGs in modo più immediato e dinamico degli Stati¹⁵⁰. In questo contesto, sempre più la complementarità tra attori pubblici, privati e società civile rappresenta uno dei principali requisiti per garantire una crescita economica stabile, equa e inclusiva.

Nonostante il dibattito sulla Responsabilità Sociale d'Impresa (*Corporate Social Responsibility*) e il ruolo delle imprese nella società abbia radici lontane, ultimamente questo concetto viene sempre più impiegato nelle strategie aziendali. Oggi le imprese sono maggiormente consapevoli dei benefici, sia in termini di efficienza che di reputazione, dell'adozione di strategie e sistemi di produzione responsabili, basati sulla realizzazione degli SDGs. In particolare, la crescente attenzione delle grandi e piccole aziende per l'Agenda 2030 è dimostrata dall'adozione da parte di molte di esse dei nuovi standard di valutazione della *Global*

¹⁵⁰ Nicolò Sartori and Daniele Fattibene, "Il settore privato e l'Agenda 2030 delle Nazioni Unite", *Affarinternazionali*, July 26, 2018, <https://www.affarinternazionali.it/2018/07/settore-privato-agenda-2030-onu/>

Reporting Initiative (GRI), che includono gli SDGs. L'utilizzo di questo nuovo sistema consente alle imprese di valutare l'impatto economico, sociale e ambientale della propria attività e di rendicontare i propri progressi. Il vantaggio competitivo per le imprese aderenti agli obiettivi globali e a quelli che vengono definiti criteri *Environmental, Social and Governance* (ESG) è misurabile sia in termini di migliore possibilità di accesso ai mercati finanziari, che sul fronte dell'allargamento del proprio mercato di riferimento. I due aspetti soprarichiamati sono riferibili rispettivamente: alla constatazione che gli intermediari finanziari tengono sempre più conto dei fattori di sostenibilità nelle proprie strategie, come dimostrato dal recente inserimento dei criteri ESG nella strategia di investimento e nella composizione del portafoglio azionario della Banca¹⁵¹; e alla sempre più ampia diffusione di modelli di consumo responsabile, in funzione dei quali sempre più consumatori, specialmente i più giovani, orientano le proprie scelte in base al rispetto da parte delle imprese di corrette norme sociali e ambientali.

Facendo specifico riferimento a un caso concreto, che può essere considerato all'avanguardia con riferimento all'approccio strategico fondato sulla sostenibilità, si osserva che il gruppo industriale italiano Salini Impregilo S.p.A, operante nel settore delle costruzioni e dell'ingegneria civile, rappresenta un esempio pratico di come gli SDGs stiano influenzando le attività economiche. Tale impresa è tra i principali leader mondiali del settore idroelettrico, dell'edilizia e dei trasporti. La realizzazione di infrastrutture contribuisce concretamente a soddisfare le esigenze primarie dei territori e delle comunità, valorizzando le risorse locali e promuovendo la crescita economica e sociale delle popolazioni. Inoltre, l'impresa ha sviluppato negli anni una propria strategia di sostenibilità, riconducendo i vari settori, nell'ambito dei quali opera, ad alcuni specifici SDGs. Per esempio, il settore acqua e quello idroelettrico contribuiscono rispettivamente agli SDGs 6 e 7, rispettivamente riguardo la gestione sostenibile dell'acqua e delle strutture igienico-sanitarie e l'accesso a sistemi di energia economici, affidabili, sostenibili e moderni. O ancora, il settore della mobilità e dei trasporti contribuisce agli SDGs 9 e 11, che promuovono infrastrutture resistenti e città sicure e sostenibili. L'impresa ha anche individuato una serie di priorità della propria strategia che si collegano agli obiettivi globali, tra queste le politiche in termini di salute e sicurezza dei lavoratori, la salvaguardia dell'ambiente, e l'inclusione sociale, attraverso politiche occupazionali rispettose della parità di genere, della formazione e del benessere dei lavoratori. Il gruppo Salini Impregilo è stata la prima società italiana nel settore delle costruzioni a pubblicare un *Environmental Report* nel 2002 e a il *Sustainability Report* secondo le linee guida GRI. Inoltre, l'adesione dell'impresa al *Global Compact* nel 2013 è il risultato di una storia aziendale da sempre attenta alle tematiche della sostenibilità. A partire dal 2018 l'impresa rendiconta annualmente i propri progressi in ambito di sostenibilità nella propria Dichiarazione Consolidata di carattere Non-Finanziario, redatta ai sensi del Decreto Legislativo 254 del 2016 e in linea con i *GRI Sustainability Reporting Standards (2016)*.

In conclusione, la consapevolezza delle nuove generazioni, la collaborazione tra Paesi e attori estremamente diversificati, in un contesto multilaterale e istituzionale in continua evoluzione, e la spinta del mercato, che impone una maggiore attenzione da parte degli attori economici verso la sostenibilità, potrebbero

¹⁵¹ Ignazio Visco, "Sviluppo sostenibile e rischi climatici: il ruolo delle banche centrali"

costituire un fattore di speranza per un'inversione di tendenza verso un approccio più concreto delle politiche per lo sviluppo sostenibile. Si tratta di azioni, scelte e comportamenti atti a generare cambiamenti immediati, che si contrappongano all'astrattezza e ai risultati insoddisfacenti sul piano pratico, che spesso hanno caratterizzato le tematiche legate alla sostenibilità.