



# The national development plans after the SDGs: Steering implications of the global goals towards national development planning

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## ABSTRACT

This article seeks to understand how the nationalization of the SDGs exercises affects NDPs. Drawing on theories of norm localization, it examines NDPs and visions of five countries to see how the SDGs as normative tools shift or steer a pre-existing alignment between global and domestic norms. Our study finds that the SDGs offer alternatives to traditional normative frameworks, but they have not fundamentally changed the state's dominant development paradigm. The SDGs have created a flexible space for norm translation through technical communication and approaches that appeal to the domestic discourse. Our study shows the dynamics of norm localization and flexibility provided by the SDGs as they interact with domestic norms and the state's sovereignty in creating space for sustainable development. This article contributes to the literature on the steering impacts of global goals in shaping national development planning and domestic policy choices through the identification of norm localization occurrences in NDPs.

## 1. Introduction

This article examines the steering effects of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on the National Development Plans (NDPs) that were released after the adoption of the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The 2030 Agenda calls on countries to formulate comprehensive plans to achieve development goals. It creates an opportunity for the SDGs to promote national goal-setting processes and influence domestic policymaking. In contrast to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that focused on human development, the SDGs cover a far broader and more comprehensive set of goals and indicators to be implemented. In response to this, scholars have attempted to analyze the ways the national development planning and the SDGs may interact as well as the plans' implications for the SDGs (Chimhowu et al., 2019). However, current research has yet to pursue an understanding of the SDG potential influence to stimulate new directions of national development planning. Systematic work on understanding the steering effects of the SDGs on NDPs merits a greater examination, especially as we seek to accelerate the achieving of the SDGs through mainstreaming into domestic plans, policies, and strategies.

The potential strategic interactions between the SDGs and NDPs

could also provide an insight to better understand present normative communication between global and domestic norms, especially since the last two decades have witnessed a revival in national development planning. Multiple studies have highlighted this trend of expanding the use of national planning; the number of countries with an NDP more than doubled in 2006–2018 from 62 to 134 (Chimhowu et al., 2019). National development planning has increasingly become an essential aspect of states' attempts to deal with the complexity of socio-economic and environmental processes at the national and global levels.

This renewed interest in national development planning can be attributed to five compatible motivations (Munro, 2019). First, some countries have benefited from the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC) and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) to build state capacity and, therefore, plan for the future. Second, governments are using NDPs to respond to various international agreements and global agendas (e.g., the Paris Agreement and SDGs). Third, some governments use NDPs to respond to the risks of globalization and economic liberalization policies. Fourth, high-income countries depend on NDPs as a tool for monitoring. Finally, few states or, to use Munro's label, 'development dissidents', utilize NDPs to promote the national agenda against the international development agenda (Munro, 2019: 3–4).

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This article is interested in the second motivation, which focuses on the interaction between NDPs and global goals. In particular, we look at how the SDGs have so far come to influence domestic norms accommodated within the NDP. Central to this is the ongoing debate on the use of the global goals as a policy tool in shaping the normative evolution of development and the consequences of these global goals on development thinking and policy choices (Biermann et al., 2017; Fukuda-Parr and McNeill, 2019; Kanie and Biermann, 2017). The SDGs have marked a methodological shift in generating global norms from its goal-setting process (Fukuda-Parr, 2016). The implications range from how ideas are conceptualized to actors' behavior and policy choices (Broome and Quirk, 2015; Fukuda-Parr, 2016; Fukuda-Parr and McNeill, 2019). NDPs as documents that convey domestic norms and reflect local politics and agency; thus, we argue, are at the frontline to be influenced by choice of measurements, knowledge, and politics brought by the SDGs. In addition to being a strategic device used by the state to situate a national agenda, the NDP also provides a means of helping us understand the domestic constructions of norms and translation of global norms into implementation.

Lacking a legally binding accountability mechanism (Pogge and Sengupta, 2016), the SDGs, as normative tools, are open to multiple interpretations, leaving ample space for policymakers to work through them and decide how national development objectives should be engaging with them. The article thus assumes that the SDGs will not be fully integrated into the NDPs. The SDGs will be selected based on domestic development priorities and might be used to legitimize national development goals and policies that have already been set (Horn and Grugel, 2018). Nevertheless, the article aims at exploring the potential steering effects of the SDGs and how the NDP as a domestic means of development interact with the SDGs. The article, thus, is interested in the reconstruction outcome in which global norms are given meaning in the NDP.

Among the many global norms promoted in the SDGs, this article limits itself on norms instrumental to the national development approach and interventions, namely sustainable development, rule-of-law, and participation. 'Sustainable development' norm is defined as a normative concept to satisfy basic human needs and reasonable standards of welfare for all living beings; to achieve more equitable standards of living; to be pursued with great caution due to actual or potential disruption of biodiversity and the regenerative capacity of nature, both locally and globally, and; to be achieved without undermining the possibility for future generations to attain similar standards of living and similar or improved standards of equity (Lafferty, 1996: 189). This intergenerational justice and equity concept led to the participatory approach for sustainable development (Bethoux and La Branche, 2011). The 'participation' norm in global goals reflects the one recognized in the Rio+20 Conference outcome document (para 14) as "opportunities for people to influence their lives and future, participate in decision-making and voice their concerns are fundamental for sustainable development". The 2030 Agenda also recognized the central role of 'rule-of-law' at all levels and on transparent, effective and accountable institutions, relevant to "the need to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies that provide equal access to justice and that are based on respect for human rights (including the right to development) (para. 35). While sustainable development is the fundamental principle behind the SDGs, the other two norms are present across the agenda text and multiple SDG targets with rule-of-law enshrined in SDG16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions) and participation in SDG17 (Partnerships for the goals).

This article seeks to explore whether, and if so, how far the SDGs steer a shift or push a pre-existing alignment between global and domestic norms in the NDPs from its current normative framing and cognitive messages. Using norm localization (Acharya, 2004), the article explores potential occurrences where localization of global norms takes place. We acknowledge the difficulty of a comprehensive examination of the SDGs' steering capacity on norm localization by merely analyzing

NDP documents. However, identifying norm localization occurrences within the documents may provide important insights around the steering effects; to show if the new generation of the NDPs is simply a continuation of or a break from norms that shaped national development planning prior to the adoption of the SDGs. The article contributes to the growing academic research on national development planning in the context of global goals (Chimhowu et al., 2019; Horn and Grugel, 2018; Munro, 2019) by offering insights from NDPs across time.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. In section 2, we discuss the concept of 'norm localization' in the context of global goals and NDPs. Section 3 introduces our methodology for examining how the SDGs function as vehicles for global norms to spread within the sphere of national development planning. Section 4 presents the narratives of the selected NDPs to trace norm localization across three main themes. Subsequently, we provide an analysis of the findings in terms of the dynamics of norm localization (section 5) before offering conclusions in section 6.

## 2. National Development Plans and the global goals

The calls to adopt and mainstream the SDGs into domestic policies and plans and integrate the three sustainable development dimensions are unprecedented for many countries. While some countries have experiences in mainstreaming global frameworks such as climate change into national plans and policies, in practice, such a framework has yet to be mainstreamed within over-encompassing plans like NDPs and not with a comprehensive framework such as the SDGs. Integrating the environment into policies shows us that mainstreaming seldom results in a significant impact on policy and instead stops at the level of policy statements (Adelle and Nilsson, 2015).

The SDGs assign principal responsibility to states for their implementation and leave to national development planners to decide how to integrate the SDGs into domestic plans under the aspiration of collective action. From the outset, the international community has been encouraging countries to base their national development strategies on meeting the SDGs rather than the narrower targets of economic growth promoted by the Bretton Woods Institutions (World Bank and International Monetary Fund). Even these institutions that have a critical role in monitoring the agenda's implementation have come to align their goals with the SDGs (Gaspar et al., 2019; The World Bank Group, 2019). The release of multiple guidelines on SDG localization and the voluntary national review (VNR) mechanism create standards and processes against which accountability can be demanded. By doing so, the SDGs have become an institutionalized vehicle for internationally agreed norms. Therefore, unlike the MDGs, the SDGs have higher chances in guiding states' behavior, including influencing priorities that are considered legitimate for states and other domestic stakeholders. In short, the notion of SDG mainstreaming makes domestic development norms significantly exposed to global norms.

The norm localization approach argues that the changes to the diffused norms may occur at two different levels: the scope and tasks of an institutional setting or at the level of linked instruments and procedures (Acharya, 2004: 252). This approach further elaborated the process of negotiation around new norms as having three not temporally distinct dimensions: translation in discourse, translation into law, and translation into implementation (Zimmermann, 2017: 54). The introduction of various SDG localization guidelines and the practice of integrating the SDGs into the domestic implementation process, including NDPs, place the SDGs as normative tools to guide norm localization at the level of instruments and procedures and in the dimension of translation into implementation. SDG localization processes provide spaces and opportunities for domestic actors to discursively link or resist global norms to domestic norms. This exercise by local actors, we argue, is embedded into a domestic context that is not independent of other contexts and may link to other debates occurring in different settings.

We further argue that the SDGs and the localizing process of global

norms promoted by the SDGs pose a considerable widening of domestic policymaking challenges, at least in three visible aspects: normative framework, structural reform, and cognitive capacities and messages. On the normative framework, the SDGs' core characteristics as a goal-setting agenda differ from the current approaches of national development planning, which is based on short-medium term strategy-setting. NDPs are constructed based on principled priority (Friend and Hickling, 2005), while mainstreaming the SDGs puts human, social, environmental, economic, and institutional objectives on the same level (Nilsson and Persson, 2017). On structural reform, the SDGs pose a challenge to national development planners as they require setting long-term goals, cross-sectoral and cross-actor policymaking, and participatory decision-making processes (Stafford-Smith et al., 2017). On the cognitive capacities, we can expect that the new NDPs will differ from past plans in offering a broader subset of development issues and expanding the scope of implementation to encompass the SDGs. The SDGs also advocate systems thinking and knowledge (Le Blanc, 2015), encouraging national policymakers to engage in foresight and diagnostic mechanisms, which examine the whole process instead of the end goals. Localizing the SDGs, ideally, necessitates national development planning to shift towards a process-based approach from the traditional fixed-goal approach, a dominant mechanism of planning in dealing with systems (Bagheri and Hjorth, 2007). Lastly, NDPs are means of exercising domestic development paradigms in the context of the national socio-economic system. Hence, localizing the SDGs with, to some extent, global norms attached to NDPs entails the alignment of cognitive messages between domestic development norms and global norms.

The SDGs are unique in how they have re-conceptualized development as universal, inclusive, and sustainable, challenging the North-South dichotomy (Fukuda-Parr and McNeill, 2019; Fukuda-Parr and Muchhala, 2020). The SDGs are the outcome of intensely contested processes among working groups with competition for acceptance of ideas and responsibilities in setting up the collective vision of development. These contested processes resulted in the SDGs representing the competing ideas and narratives permeating the development field (Fukuda-Parr and McNeill, 2019). The concept of universality reflecting a cosmopolitan moral constraint on ambition is paired and contrasted against the need for differentiation (Long, 2015). This means that regardless of its universality, the SDGs cannot be expected as a template for development that states will simply adopt (Horn and Grugel, 2018).

The stipulation agreed on the 2030 Agenda that implementation of the SDGs is based on the national circumstances and priorities put the SDGs into a unique position of flexibility. The actual amount of space afforded for norm localization depends on the degree of the global norm: "the more precise the norm, the less flexible the attitude of both external and domestic actors and the less substantial the ultimate localization" (Zimmermann, 2017: 6). While international guidelines are available, the SDGs apply low precision in their implementation, depending on models and practices that guide the international and domestic community's approach. The SDGs do not attach concepts such as compliance or partial compliance to any of the global norms it has accommodated within; the wording of the agenda was carefully crafted as a promotion instead of demanding compliance and as 'universal script' instead of 'legal or soft norms'. For example, in rule-of-law (SDG16), the language used is within the narrative of corruption reduction, effective, accountable, transparent institutions, and participatory and representative decision-making. It omits using highly contested languages such as protection of civil freedoms and political rights. The SDGs are, thus, operationalized through a more persuasion-oriented mode of interaction, in which we argue, accept a degree of leeway in regard to norm localization.

The central element of our study focuses on the intersection between national development planning and norm localization. Grounded on the perspective of norm localization (Acharya, 2004), we focus on how global normative tools such as the SDGs can influence domestic norms embedded in NDPs in three folds: contestation, framing, and adaptation.

However, in lieu of focusing on the politics of local actors, we offer insights from NDPs as documents by-product of local politics and agency. Contestation describes a localization process of idea transmission where domestic practices may offer resistance to new external norms and need balancing of contested ideas (Acharya, 2004). Framing covers the ways norms are being communicated by using language that establishes their value (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998). Adaptation is a process where practices and domestic norms may be adjusted in accordance with external norms (Acharya, 2004). We stop short of suggesting that norm localization reflected in the NDPs follows the hierarchical trajectory of localization as offered by Acharya (2004), i.e. the initial norm goes through a period of contestation, leading to its framing or adaptation. Our initial assumption is that since we focus on one type of document, it is difficult to judge if localization processes do not happen parallel through other discourses and documents. We use the term 'norm localization' in this article to denote results of global norms diffusion into domestic norms where these do not equate either to rejection or full adoption. Table 1 elaborate our version of norm localization through language and narratives of the NDP.

First, the contestation reflected in the NDP would be fuelled by the tension due to the differences of normative framework between the SDGs and NDPs, materializing in the elaboration of national priorities. Also, the SDGs are not legally binding, yet its adoption of the goal-setting process to articulate global norms can be used to evaluate performance, legitimize, or reject domestic policy choices (Fukuda-Parr and McNeill, 2019). While recent NDPs might give the impression that the SDGs are being used simply as checklists for socio-economic aspirations such as achieving poverty reduction, reducing inequality, and gender equality, they can inspire an alternative mindset in how development is viewed by the public and treated by the international community by introducing more holistic perspectives and transformational shifts in NDPs. On this basis, we argue that the SDGs as normative tools have the power to challenge the rigid state-led and economic-driven NDPs prevalent in developing countries, especially in public sector reform.

Second, the SDGs offer cognitive messages that can be framed in ways that establish their value to the domestic audience. For example, the SDGs serve to translate a norm from the language of words to that of numbers (Fukuda-Parr and McNeill, 2019), turning the development agenda into actionable priorities. The combination of setting time-bound targets and actionable priorities can be used to mobilize

**Table 1**  
Norm localization through languages and narratives of NDP.

Contestation	Contested meaning (assignment of values) and function (acceptable justification of behavior; legitimacy or appropriateness) occur between domestic and global norms in the sense of norm recognition and validation expressed in the NDP.  Condition 1: Domestic norms remain strong while certain disagreements over the meaning and function of norms are observed in the NDP.  Condition 2: Interpretive differences between domestic and global norms are observed in the NDP.
Framing	Global norms' meaning and function are framed (interpretation, arguments for and against, support or rejection) in the NDP in ways that establish their value to the local audience. Condition 3: Global norms are framed in the NDP in ways that show congruence with domestic norms. Condition 4: Global norms are framed in the NDP to justify or contribute to the legitimacy of the domestic norms or agenda.
Adaptation	Global norms may be reconstructed (omission, addition or modification) or redefined (approximated to or deviate from) in the NDP in accordance with domestic norms' meaning and practices or vice versa. Condition 5: Certain aspects of domestic norms may be pruned in the NDP to fit global norms. Condition 6: Certain meaning of global norm is redefined or discursively adapted in the NDP through grafting to connect with domestic norms.

attention and frame the need for action, including financing, policy, and structural reforms. All of those are also supported by the idea of ownership (Gaspar et al., 2019), emphasizing the involvement of domestic stakeholders and alignment to local contexts. Viewed from the perspective of norm diffusion, such characteristics that accommodate local sensitivity are more likely to succeed (Acharya, 2004).

Third, the SDGs can be used by national development planners to deal with the consequences of local politics, economics and culture prevalent in norm diffusion (Alger and Dauvergne, 2020). The low precision of the SDGs in regards to global norms holds the potential for national development planners to discursively adapt global norms to connect with domestic norms or vice versa. Instead of prescription, the SDGs attach values to its 'universal script' of global norms. For example, the participatory approach promoted within the SDGs calls for "responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels" (Target 16.7) and leaves states on how to implement it. At the outset, evidence-based decision-making, open data, and whole-of-society are highly promoted by the international community for SDG implementation. Bringing these approaches under the broader participatory umbrella may help advance the adaptation of participation norms as envisioned at the global level.

It is important to note that while the understandings presented above show that the SDGs open renewed opportunities, they remain empirically incomplete of what this means for NDPs. We acknowledge that while norm localization may produce an incremental shift towards fundamental change, this comes as a long process (Acharya, 2004). Also, the practical logic of NDP involves a more nuanced understanding of planning paradigms (Chimhowu et al., 2019). In this paper, we are interested in pushing further these empirical understandings of the steering effects of the SDGs and the characteristics of norm localization that underpin variations in the newly released NDPs.

### 3. Methodology

Understanding how development at the global level influences domestic policymaking is a critical part of implementing global norms as a core aspect of global governance (Jörgens, 2004). Drawing from theories of domestic effects of global norms within international relations, we look at norm diffusion as one of the analytical mechanisms to examine how the SDGs function as vehicles for global norms to spread within the domestic sphere. In particular, our interest lies in norm diffusion that addresses localization (Acharya, 2004).

Exploring the influence of global goals towards domestic norms reflected in NDPs benefits from a case study approach, allowing the identification of differences and similarities across different domestic contexts. In this study, we selected five selected cases with NDPs published between 2010 and 2021. Analyzing NDPs in series allows closer examination of changes, in which we categorize the plans into three periods: before, during/shortly after or well after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. For NDPs released in 2015–2017, we presume the process to develop the plan started before the SDG adoption in 2015 or around the time of Open Working Group (OWG) negotiations for the SDGs. As an initial analysis in this subject, we selected our cases to countries in the Middle East, East Africa, and Asia-Pacific to offer cross-regional perspectives. State of economic and human development are also considered when selecting countries to provide a balanced view from least developed to middle income to developed economies. This article acknowledges that the planning horizon of the NDPs is five years duration. While many countries have released five-year NDPs, some states have also developed a long-term vision of 15–20 years. These visions are often broken down into multiple NDPs. The selected NDPs are Bangladesh (2011, 2016, 2020), Malaysia (2011, 2016, 2021), Oman (2016, 2021), Qatar (2011, 2018), and Tanzania (2011, 2016, 2021). Oman's 2040 Vision is examined in addition to the NDPs. Bangladesh's Visions (PP2021 and PP2041), Malaysia's Vision 2030, and Tanzania's Vision 2025 are analyzed to provide supplementary information.

Conducting a qualitative content analysis of NDPs requires a systematic, directed, and summative approach (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). In particular, directed content analysis will help investigate the extent to which Acharya's norm localization could be transferred to the context of SDG localization. We selected three themes from those used by Chimhowu et al. (2019). These three themes not only focus on the directive content of the plans but also the means where norms are expectedly embedded and can be directly influenced and shaped by the global goals. In particular, this study attempts to examine the 'sustainable development' norm within the orientation and planning underpinning theme, the 'rule-of-law' norm within the public sector reforms theme, and the 'participation' norm within the multi-stakeholder engagement theme. The adoption of these themes allowed us to contextualize the findings drawn from the content analysis and, with multiple NDPs analyzed, present findings of what has and has not changed. The themes and norms are:

1. Orientation and planning underpinning (in regard to 'sustainable development' norm);
2. Public sector reform (as a dimension of 'rule-of-law' promotion);
3. Multi-stakeholder engagement (as means of 'participation' norm).

Our case narratives and analysis are based on causal process tracing (CPT) (Collier, 2011) to understand how NDPs and their directive contents and linkages to the SDGs explain the dynamics of norm localization. By analyzing NDPs across series, we indicate where norm localization occurs in the NDPs through contestation, framing, and adaptation. As content analysis is inherently reductive, particularly when dealing with complex text, the analysis drew insights from literature related to the historical and critical review of NDPs, development paradigms, and socio-economic policies of observed countries to help explain NDPs within their domestic settings. As a supplementary analysis, we reviewed statements delivered during OWG sessions on SDGs and Post-2015 intergovernmental negotiations, including statements from Group 77 and the African Group. The next section discusses the findings summarized in Table 2 below.

### 4. An examination of National Development Plans and visions: case narratives

#### 4.1. Case 1: what has not changed?

The orientation of observed NDPs and Visions is centered around economic objectives regardless of development status. For example, Bangladesh's 7th Five Year Plan (FYP) balances the economic and social aspects of development by emphasizing top-down –economic growth, industrialization, and expansion of rural economy– and bottom-up development paths –interventions based on people's needs. These themes are a continuation of its 6th FYP (GED, 2016: xIviii). Neoliberal policies such as market-oriented reform policies are common ideas underpinning observed NDPs. These policies continue to be a key part of the 8th FYP, with COVID-19 reinforcing the importance of speeding up these reforms, including tax and banking, capital market, energy pricing, and environmental fiscal reforms (GED, 2020: 72, 359, 483). Tanzanian Five Year Development Plan (FYDP) II 2016–2021 reflects the trend of the neoliberal economy of competitive capitalism in low and middle-income countries. It focuses on capacity, diversification, and exploitation of geographical advantages (MFP, 2016: 1–2). Tanzania FYDP III 2021–2026 continues with this theme of industrial competitiveness, adding human development as its caveat (MFP, 2021: 4–5). Inclusive and sustainable industrialization promoted by SDG9 has started to materialize in the recent NDP (MFP, 2021: 46). For Tanzania, this is based on the concern of labor skill imbalance relative to what is needed for sustainable industrialization (MFP, 2021: 24).

The focus on economic objectives can also be observed in the NDPs of oil-rich Gulf monarchies. Qatar's most recent plan, the 2nd National

**Table 2**  
Emerging themes in the observed NDPs throughout three periods.

Country	NDP before the SDGs (2010–2014)	NDP during and shortly after the SDG enactment (2015–2017)	NDP post-SDG enactment (2018–present)
<b>Orientation and planning underpinning</b>			
Bangladesh	Growth acceleration, poverty reduction, regional disparity management (p.23).	Growth acceleration, inclusive, self-dependent, collaborative (p.xli).	Growth acceleration, attaining major SDG targets by 2030 (p. xliii).
Malaysia	<b>Economic objectives</b> (growth (p.7) and economic sustainability (p.16))	<b>Economic objectives</b> , green and sustainable growth (p.1-8).	<b>Economic objectives</b> , sustainable and inclusive economic growth (p.1-11), green growth (p.6-14).
Oman	<b>Economic diversification</b> ; Economic growth, job creation, PPP (p.14-15).	<b>Economic diversification</b> , geopolitical tensions, technology, knowledge, innovation. (p. 30–34).	<b>Economic growth</b> , socioeconomic development, environmental sustainability (p. 14–15).
Qatar	<b>Economic growth</b> and human and social development (p.39-41).	No NDP.	<b>Economic diversification</b> ; knowledge-based society; social protection. (p. 4–5, 89–90).
Tanzania	<b>Economic growth</b> (p.7).	Pro-poor and <b>economic growth</b> through rapid industrialization and domestic priorities (p.2).	Open & industrial economy for human development (p.4).
<b>Public sector reforms</b>			
Bangladesh	Growth (p.27; 45), private sector investment (p.60), education (p.67).	Participatory democracy, partnerships, decentralization (p.23).	Social security, stronger institutions, public finances, climate policy (p.xliii).
Malaysia	Human capital development to support economic objectives (p.17), <b>public service</b> (p.29).	<b>Public service</b> : rationalizing public sector institutions, liberalization, regulatory reform (p.1-17).	<b>Public service</b> : whole-of-government (p.13-21), transformation to overcome negative growth (p.1-11).
Oman	<b>M&amp;E</b> : Government performance, e-government (p.91).	Flexible, innovative, future-oriented public sector with a sectoral structure for effective <b>M&amp;E</b> (p. 40–41).	Accountable <b>M&amp;E</b> , participatory legislative, judicial system & oversight to combat corruption (p.129-130).
Qatar	<b>Public service</b> : institutional capacity, innovation, performance-based management (p.40, 49, 62).	No NDP.	Efficient, transparent, and accountable <b>public service</b> , interministerial coordination (p.8-9, 40).
Tanzania	<b>Economic reform</b> : good governance, strong institutions, market liberalization (p.10).	<b>Economic reform</b> : good governance (p.76), private sector involvement (p.3).	<b>Economic reform</b> : strategic resources use, business environment, peace, security (p.4; 31; 35).
<b>Multi-stakeholder engagement</b>			
Bangladesh	No reference.	<b>Participatory planning</b> and governance at <b>local level</b> (p.382).	<b>Participatory planning</b> and decision-making at

**Table 2 (continued)**

Country	NDP before the SDGs (2010–2014)	NDP during and shortly after the SDG enactment (2015–2017)	NDP post-SDG enactment (2018–present)
Malaysia	No reference.	Consultancy role in urban development (p.9-11).	<b>Local level</b> (p.436; 558). Planning and implementation, transition to whole-of-nation for green growth (p.8-11). <b>PPP</b> (p.56); participatory framework for civil society oversight (p.134).
Oman	No reference.	<b>PPP</b> ; youth engagement for future innovative planning; role of local governments (p. 14–15).	<b>PPP</b> (p.56); participatory framework for civil society oversight (p.134).
Qatar	Social protection system; PPP (p.26, 120, 179).	No NDP.	Implementation process (p. 223–225).
Tanzania	Participatory M&E (p.104).	Consensus around economic strategic direction and structural transformation (p.33).	Policies and implementation deliberations (p.161).

Note: Dominant themes expressed through repetitive narrative across multiple NDPs are highlighted in bold letters.

Development Strategy (NDS-2) 2018–2022, is a continuation from its preceding NDS-1 (2011–2016), placing economic diversification and the shift to a knowledge-based society to reduce reliance on hydrocarbon revenues at the center of national planning (GSDP, 2011: 39–41, GSDP, 2018a: 4–5). Similarly, economic diversification and job creation away from oil resources are predominant narratives in the national planning of Oman, where the government had since 2015 released two NDPs, the 9th Five-Year Development Plan (2016–2020), the 10th Five-Year Development Plan (2021–2025) and a long-term vision (Oman Vision 2040). A notable development in Oman’s most recent NDP is how such narratives are framed within a broader framework that emphasizes the importance of environmental planning with references to circular economy, blue and green economy, and renewable energy (SCP, 2021b: 15).

NDPs and Visions provide space for the sustainable development norm accommodated in the SDGs when it serves domestic objectives. For instance, while the economic pillar of sustainable development is implicitly stressed in Oman NDPs, its Vision 2040 document explicitly refers to SDG8 (Decent work and economic growth), which calls for structural economic transformation by increasing local industrial capacities for economic diversification. In fact, the document of Oman Vision (2040) includes a table mapping its objectives to all SDGs, but SDG8 is mapped six times, more than any other goals (SCP, 2018a: 41). Regardless, the rationale for this engagement with the SDGs does not seem to potentially transform the dominant approaches to sustainable development challenges. Instead, the focus on economic diversification directly responds to the state’s priorities, including the volatility and low oil prices, geopolitical tensions in the Gulf region, and the need to maximize the elasticity towards external shocks (SCP, 2021: 7).

National priorities preceding global norms is a common theme implied across observed NDPs. For example, Bangladesh considers the SDGs a preset of determined objectives based on national circumstances and priorities (GOB, 2014: para. 10). This framing is repeated in the 8th FYP by stating that the plan “covers the development aspiration of the country incorporating the targets of the SDGs” (GED, 2020: 139). The 7th FYP engages selectively on goals and targets that resonate with national visions and objectives, such as SDG12 (Responsible consumption and production), and leaves limited space for environmental sustainability, mainly referred to as conservation of natural resources and

pollution control measures (GED, 2016: xlix). The 8th FYP maps all SDGs against its national priorities, including relating environmental SDGs (SDG13, SDG14, SDG15) with its priority on environment, climate change, and disaster management (GED, 2020: 154). However, a closer examination reveals that at the target level, the identified linkages are quite narrow and selective instead of covering all targets under a goal.

The provision of space for the SDGs in the NDPs is carefully curated. In the case of Tanzania, the SDGs remain selectively present in FYDP III as in FYDP II, such as decent employment, reducing inequality, poverty reduction and social protection. The framing of these ideas fits with the domestic priorities of pro-poor and economic driven policies. For example, FYDP II stated their intention to utilize the SDGs as catalysts to strengthen existing industrialization, human development, and implementation effectiveness objectives (MFP, 2016: 2). The plan identifies SDG1, SDG2, SDG3, SDG4, SDG5, SDG6, SDG7, SDG9, and SDG17 as relevant for its realization (MFP, 2016: 41). FYDP III underlines the SDG implementation 'to accelerate the economic growth and social development' (MFP, 2021: 4). The plan does not specifically mention priority goals. Framing is a common approach within observed NDPs where states link global norms with domestic strategies. For Bangladesh, as stated in its latest NDP, the SDGs are relevant to domestic strategies in tackling inequality and poverty by focusing on accelerating growth and improving human development (GED, 2020: 35). Malaysia's 12 MP frames SDG integration as a tool to improve its decision-making on circular economy (EPU, 2021: T3-5). Tanzania's FYDP I-III shows an example of how global norms such as participation and rule-of-law are framed to permeate the national socio-economic structure. This means a combination of policy, structural reform, and strategic partnerships, all required to enable implementation to boost private sector involvement in industrialization (Planning Commission, 2011b: 51; MFP, 2016: 15; MFP, 2021: 44).

A similar trend is seen in the reference linking structural transformation and public sector reforms. Reference to good governance is present by introducing the whole-of-government approach in the plans (e.g., Bangladesh, Malaysia and Tanzania). However, public sector reform strategies covering strengthening civil service and public-private partnerships (PPPs), devolution to local governments, and reforming planning and budgetary processes reflect more on the structural transformation of economies and societies strongly advocated by the Bretton Woods Institutions, instead of the whole-of-government approach. In Malaysia, the intention to have systemic changes in development approaches is not necessarily mirrored in the narrative of public sector reform in 11 MP and 12 MP, which remains focused on transforming public service for productivity driven by the Post-Washington Consensus, e.g., service delivery, rationalizing public sector institutions, liberalization, and regulatory reform (EPU, 2016: 1–11; EPU, 2021: 13–21). In Bangladesh, a new national development planning practice is defined with reference to global norms in two folds: stakeholder engagement and evidence-based monitoring and evaluation (M&E). The inclusion of SDG indicators as one of the 7th and 8th FYP assessments is framed as a part of strengthening domestic M&E efforts (GED, 2020: 135). On the stakeholder engagement, although there are elements of connectivity with the SDGs, the conceptual characteristics to move towards participatory governance reflect the Vision (CPD, 2007: 1–7). Bangladesh's PP2021 was prepared under the initiative of the NAGORIK Committee 2006, a citizen's group, and emerged through a consultative process. PP2041 was similarly developed through a participatory process (CPD, 2007: vii). However, reading into the last two NDPs shows that similar engagement has not been adopted to the public-private relationship. PPPs are envisioned in multiple facets of green growth and service delivery, pursued to deepen the neoliberal strategy of deep marketization of development (Neusiedl, 2017). Thus, it remains unclear to justify if the SDGs influence structural transformation and public sector reforms.

Observed NDPs show how national development planners continue to pragmatically address contesting narratives between global and

domestic norms. Malaysia's 11 MP and 12 MP are prime examples where the visibility of norm translation on the social dimension of sustainable development (e.g., inclusiveness, equitable society) manifests Malaysia's pragmatic adaptation of neoliberal domestic policies while adhering to global norms. These narratives cater to Malaysia's constant requirement for political stability enforced by a strong state and the need to adapt to the demands and opportunities of Malaysia's capitalist development in the context of globalization (Juego, 2018). "Ensuring that no one is left behind" (LNOB) is the most direct reference to the SDGs in Malaysia Vision 2030 (MEA, 2019: 2), which aligns with the 11 MP and 12 MP's objective to address inequality (EPU, 2016: 1–18; EPU 2021: T2-3). Reading into the 11 MP's strategies shows the state's nationalist view in addressing the shortfalls of development disparities. The principle of LNOB is translated as encompassing all Malaysians, yet the plan focuses significantly on Bumiputera, especially their socio-economic level (EPU, 2016: 1–9). Similarly, Qatar's NDS-2 indicates that the social development pillar, Qatar's Social Protection Strategy (SPS), is inspired by the 2030 Agenda's LNOB. While observed documents generally acknowledge the interconnectedness of national and global goals, they do not necessarily respond to the ambition of the global agenda for transformative change and the principles of human rights approaches. For instance, transformation in Qatar's NDS-2 is understood in terms of reducing the country's reliance on hydrocarbon revenues and the shift into a knowledge-based society, a developed country capable of achieving sustainable development (Weber, 2014). Instead of promoting social inclusion to tackle the root causes of social exclusion, the plan adopts a narrow interpretation of social development by prioritizing the very poor based on Islamic and humanitarian values (GSDP, 2018a: 238). In doing so, in both cases, the SDGs are framed to legitimize polarity management, where ethnic and other social relations play a critical role in directing the structure of the country's political economy (Juego, 2018). Further, the common language of sustainable development is used to support the economic underpinning of the 11 MP and 12 MP, including empowerment, poverty reduction, resilience, transformation, and sustainable growth. The anchoring of sovereignty and neoliberal economics to the polity of sustainable development here serves to filter global norms and gain a substantial degree of social legitimacy.

#### 4.2. Case 2: what has changed?

The 8th FYP of Bangladesh added goal-oriented targets in its development approach, such as achieving UMIC status by 2031, attaining the SDGs, and eliminating extreme poverty by 2031 (GED, 2020: xliii). These targets are based on the progress review of 7th FYP against the newly adopted long-term Perspective Plan (PP2041). Like the SDGs, PP2041 set measurable targets to reach Bangladesh's goal of becoming a high-income country by 2041. These long-term targets are then spelled out into mid-term targets in four series of FYP, starting with the 8th FYP. The interconnectedness between NDPs and the SDGs is more visible to most recent NDPs with explicit references to the SDGs. Bangladesh's 8th FYP clearly stated that attaining the SDGs is one of the main objectives of the plan (GED, 2020: xlii), and both 12th Malaysia Plan (12 MP) and Oman Vision 2040 align their strategic directions with explicit reference to the SDGs (EPU, 2021: I-3, SCP, 2018a: 21–43, 47). These are quite a departure from their previous NDPs, where only endorsement and vague references to SDGs or MDGs are visible.

The objectives of Qatar's NDS-2 are broadly aligned with the SDGs according to the sectors though they are not mapped into the SDGs. NDS-2 refers explicitly to three SDGs. First, the NDS-2 envisions achieving resilient and safe cities based on SDG11 (Sustainable cities and communities). Second, NDS-2 refers to SDG16 with an aspiration for safe, peaceful, and integrated societies, based on the National Committee for the Alliance of Civilizations that Qatar launched in 2010. Finally, NDS-2 pays special attention to the SDG17 with a focus on global partnership for development cooperation. In particular, the document includes a

new chapter on global partnership and international cooperation to strengthen the country's regional and international roles in providing means of SDG implementation.

Another interesting observation is the contesting narratives of NDPs in framing global norms. Looking at participation and sustainable development in Malaysia's 11 MP, their frames focus on addressing inequality, integral in achieving the SDGs. Yet, its practical application is primarily driven by the neoliberal economy through liberalization and privatization. The 12 MP has better engagement with climate change and environmental sustainability compared to previous MPs, although framed within the discussion on green growth (EPU, 2021: T3-2). With the SDGs representing a global framework for the private sector to contribute to development, they strengthen the recurring theme contesting inequality and privatization introduced in the 1971 New Economic Policy (Gomez, 1997; Juego, 2018). For Tanzania, the contesting narratives of globalization and self-reliance are driven by national interests and sustained through oscillation between the dominant narrative of economic liberalization and the equally powerful anti-liberalization forces within Tanzanian society (Cooksey, 2011). As shown in FYDP II and FYDP III, sovereignty's narrative finds homage in the ownership norm promoted by the SDGs.

In contrast to a brief reference to the SDGs in Oman's previous NDP (2016–2020), Oman Vision 2040 uses the SDGs as a central mechanism for building consensus on Oman's development agenda. There is an explicit mapping of all strategic directions and objectives to the SDGs in different sectors. The vision distinguishes between a direct link, when the strategic direction maps to three or more SDGs, and an indirect one when the strategic direction maps to only one or two SDGs. It further discusses the implications of these interlinkages for policymaking (SCP, 2018a: 39–41). The SDGs, in this sense, play a role in creating narratives and framing domestic norms. While the vision's document employs the language of the SDGs to underscore the importance of enhancing the welfare and social benefits, boosting the private sector, and achieving environmental sustainability, the national economic narrative remains a central concern throughout the document. This is especially the case of the vision's theme on environmental protection and natural resources sustainability, which is framed as a means to support the national economy. As mentioned earlier, SDG8 has been referred to several times, more than any other goals, reflecting the importance of economic growth in the vision's strategic directions. From the perspective of national planners, the SDGs, focusing on balancing the three pillars of economic growth, social protection, and environmental stewardship, are means of framing policy discussions and policymaking as viewed by the ruling government.

In both of Qatar's recent NDPs, public sector reform necessitates the development of institutions to be more efficient, transparent, and accountable (GSDP, 2011: 40; GSDP, 2018a: 8–9). Similarly, Oman's last two NDPs aim at cultivating administrative bodies that are flexible, innovative, and future-oriented (SCP, 2016: 90; SCP, 2021b: 129–130). Oman's Vision 2040 explicitly maps public sector reforms to SDG16 while acknowledging that it will be difficult for the country to move towards a knowledge-based economy without sustainable institutional performance (SCP, 2018a: 40–41). Still, it is not clear how the mapping of these objectives into SDG16 or even the use of cosmopolitan language pertaining to notions of global governance can go beyond the surface; while Oman's 10th Five-Year Development Plan (2021–2025) briefly mentions the importance of accountability and combating corruption in the public sector (SCP, 2021b: 129–130), the plans and vision of these two gulf monarchies fail to mention justice or discuss how the reforms will ensure participatory and representative decision-making at all levels. Rather, the focus is more on notions of innovation and future orientation that are vital for broadening economic areas in the logistics and knowledge economy away from hydrocarbon-based economic activities.

The recent NDPs signal a more careful reading and translation of global norms. For example, on sustainable development principles,

recent NDPs significantly softened the framing of LNOB from legitimizing polarity management to a more globally promoted language of inclusive development. The 12 MP attached the LNOB narrative to the whole-of-nation approach, social justice, a decent standard of living, and empowering specific target groups (EPU 2021: T2-3). Similarly, in Bangladesh, LNOB is attached to inclusive development through better quality of data and improved service delivery narrative (GED, 2020: 439, 448).

There are changes in the application of the multi-stakeholder engagement narrative. In Malaysia, multi-stakeholder engagement is siloed in many areas of the 11 MP, i.e., specific roles designated for particular actors (EPU, 2016: 9–11). Nonetheless, more active participation is envisioned, e.g., consultancy role of private sectors and CSOs in the development of City Competitiveness Master Plans. The reluctance to embrace meaningful participation can be attributed to Malaysia's historical political-economic characteristics, a combination of measures to maintain authoritarianism, and an open market economy (Lafaye de Micheaux, 2017). However, the framing of participation seems to improve in the 12 MP with explicit linkage to policy planning and implementation. The 12 MP also attaches a whole-of-nation approach to various agendas, ranging from strengthening stakeholders collaboration to delivering green growth and addressing poverty (EPU, 2021: 3–30, 5–21, 8–11).

While Oman's previous plan does not mention multi-stakeholder partnership and instead focuses on strengthening public-private partnerships (SCP, 2016: 59–61), both the 2040 Vision and the recent NDP attempt to align with what the SDGs advocate for multi-stakeholder engagement, collaborative planning, and participatory governance. For example, the Vision document points to how multi-stakeholder engagements helped realize the new vision. Its preparation was conducted through workshops and governorates meetings with various social groups that included the private sector, CSOs, youth, and national experts (SCP, 2018a: 3). The role of multi-stakeholder partnerships as a means to achieve the vision is also emphasized with a specific role expected from certain stakeholders, most prominently the private sector with an expectation to play a major role in the economic diversification, and the Omani youth who is expected to play a role in finding innovative solutions to help in the country's transition. It remains to be seen how the state will translate this vision into practice. Overall, the document can be seen as a tool for the country to signal new directions; while its link to the SDGs may give the impression that there is an interest in generating support from the international community, the SDGs are at the same time being used to legitimize and encourage this shift.

Qatar's NDS-2 attempts to promote multi-stakeholder engagements narrative despite being considered an expert-led plan with a strong technical and economic evidence base but limited social embeddedness (Chimhowu et al., 2019: 83). The document refers to the multi-stakeholder engagement that preceded the publication of the plan, with the participation of ministries and government agencies, the private sector, CSOs, and universities (GSDP, 2018a: 3). NDS-2 acknowledges that the implementation is impossible without the inclusion of these diverse stakeholders. With economic diversification being a central objective, NDS-2 emphasizes the role of the private sector to increase efficiency, enhance competition, and provide opportunities for global partnerships. CSOs are expected to continue playing a role in education, community development, and social protection. Both the private sector and CSOs are expected to partner with government agencies to contribute to the social protection programs and help in measuring NDS-2 performance and indicators (GSDP, 2018a: 223–225, 274–275). Similar to Qatar's NDS-1, NDS-2 does not mention decentralization, nor does it assign any specific role to local governments in the implementation process.

Recent NDPs also use the SDGs' multi-stakeholder engagement narrative to improve the past engagement approach that entails narrower means of engagement. Tanzania's FYDP II emphasizes a participatory governance approach that pays particular attention to citizens'

participation (MFP, 2016: 33) without elaborating on a broad and active stakeholder engagement envisioned in the SDGs. The efforts include forming consensus around areas determined by the state, such as the strategic direction of the economy and structural transformations, and partnerships to establish businesses and bankable projects. Specific roles and responsibilities are allocated to non-state actors to build capacity and provide expertise (MFP, 2016: 117–119). Simultaneously, the state's role is maintained in the development delivery with limited participation from the non-state actors, especially in strategic sectors (MFP, 2016: 112). FYDP III improves the narrative by seeking to establish stakeholder dialogues to deliberate on policies and the implementation of interventions in its M&E mechanism (MFP, 2021: 161). Broader roles and responsibilities are expected from non-state actors, including finance and implementation through sectoral strategic plans (MFP, 2021: 153).

## 5. Case analysis

### 5.1. Contestation: balancing contested ideas and development paradigms

The SDGs present a broader and more holistic set of policies. While focused on competitive capitalism, it also lodged on inclusive capitalism that serves the causes of human equality and diversity. For example, SDG8 and SDG9 show an attempt to reduce the market rule subjecting social relations to the price form by advocating more social protections such as decent work instead of labor market flexibility, access to public goods, and environmental commons into natural market processes. NDPs showcase a preset of a determined understanding of global goals based on national circumstances and priorities. Our findings revealed common elements and variations in the ways NDPs reveal domestic meanings and functions of sustainable development, public sector reforms, and multi-stakeholder engagement. First, all plans show pragmatic adaptation to current economic priorities such as economic diversification, industrialization, sustainable economic growth, investment, and social concerns such as inequality and poverty. Domestic development norms remain strong when addressing sustainable development. The broad agenda brought by the SDGs creates flexibility for NDPs to continue with their preset goals and policies, as shown by the continuity of messages between the current and the previous plans. Second, the depth and character of sustainable development, public sector reforms, and participation reflected in the plans differ considerably across countries.

Nevertheless, balancing contested ideas is prevalent across NDPs in interpreting norms. For example, public sector reforms can mean transferring power to private sectors on one side, strengthening governments' roles on another, while sustainable development is about balancing environmental sustainability and accelerating economic growth without addressing potential trade-offs. Bangladesh's 7th FYP attempts to reduce the contestation between sustainable development norm and domestic development means by referring to the SDGs primarily as development goals, development-oriented, development-focused, and development-enabled agenda (GOB, 2014: para. 8; GED, 2016: 27–28).

The flexibility of the SDGs appears to allow this interactive perspective between domestic and global norms to balance contested meanings of sustainable development. The SDGs, after all, are results of contested intergovernmental negotiations where national priorities were exposed in the process. Bangladesh shows that states are consistent with their interventions during OWG sessions, intergovernmental negotiations, and their NDPs. Domestic priorities narrate the language of the SDGs' sustainable development norm, e.g., prioritization, right to development (Planning Commission, 2011a: 203; GOB, 2013: para. 3–5; GED, 2016: 27). Although sustainability is frequently mentioned in Bangladesh's 7th FYP, a broader perspective of sustainable development is preferred, with limited emphasis on the SDGs. The plan sees the sustainable development agenda as 'striking the right balance between

equitable national economic progress and human development' (GED, 2016: xli), stressing the 'development' aspect of the 'sustainable development' norm. Greater engagement with the SDGs is observed in recent plans, including Bangladesh's 8th FYP and Malaysia's 12 MP. The SDGs also act as normative tools where universal global norms might counter domestic priorities, such as broadening the definition of inclusive development by attaching the narrative to the LNOB concept. Considering that sustainable development strategies are an iterative process (Meadowcroft, 2007), repeated cycles of mainstreaming the SDGs into NDPs rather than a one-off exercise are needed to increase engagement between domestic and global sustainable development norms.

The observed NDPs show that state sovereignty influences norm localization through which domestic priorities act as filters to the adoption of global norms. Taking the case of sustainable development, we found that NDPs vary in their approach to the challenges related to environmental sustainability. While Qatar illustrates a clear understanding of the environmental challenges to be tackled in transforming into a sustainable country, the implementation mechanisms of environmental strategies outlined in its NDS-2 remain opaque when juxtaposed with the country's high reliance on hydrocarbon resources and rapid industrialization. Similarly, the documents of Oman's latest vision and plan do not elaborate on how the government plans to balance the exploitation of natural resources and the development program, which includes environmental protection as one key pillar.

The same could be echoed about the 'participatory' reflected in the Oman vision's focus on sustainable urban development as one of the national priorities. The centralized pattern of decision-making means that any urban development strategy cannot be effectively delivered without public participation and inclusive partnerships. Similarly, although the SDGs stress the need for global cooperation on critical issues such as climate change, the examined NDPs set environmental objectives as if they could be addressed within national boundaries. For example, Malaysia 12 MP outlines its strategies to strengthen environmental governance around regulatory framework, institutional and human capital, and the capacity of local authorities (EPU, 2021: 8–26). Cooperation and policy dialogue with the international community is promoted to complement national efforts in accelerating SDG implementation (EPU, 2021: 8–26). National development planners, thus, continue to rely on narratives that would safeguard national sovereignty rather than reimaging development from a truly global perspective.

### 5.2. Reframing: norm localization through technical communication

From the perspective of constructivists, norms are not the reflection of a fixed preference of states, but instead, norms are seen as influencing the construction of those interests and choices (Bae, 2008). Based on this understanding, the SDGs as global normative tools can affect domestic norm localization through two fronts: the use of language as technical communication and the adoption of approaches. The extent how which these influences are materialized in NDPs involves reframing in the institutional process driving the plans. In states with a robust constitutional backing and long history of developing NDPs in a top-down manner within the most politically powerful office (e.g., Malaysia and Oman), we found that the ways the SDGs steer the framing of domestic priorities are more subtle and with fewer alignments than in states with greater external support and stronger bottom-up mechanisms (e.g., Bangladesh). Even in supportive frames, the domestic framing of the global agenda is not stable but shifted over time. For example, Bangladesh 6FYP frames the MDGs only in the context of improving the M&E and stocktaking process (Planning Commission, 2011a: 19) compared to 8FYP, which outlines engagement with all SDG targets and develops integrated SDG-NDP M&E (GED, 2020: liii).

Our findings suggest that the SDGs' appeal to national development planners could be attributed to their success in framing sustainable development in the context of economic growth, attaching the language of 'sustainable, inclusive, and sustained' as repetitively stipulated in the



2030 Agenda Declaration and SDG8. The SDGs as normative tools trigger a discursive shift in framing sustainable development and rule-of-law more than their precedent MDGs. Using language that appeals to the prevailing domestic discourse, the SDGs offer a more dynamic view of attaching global norms to narratives appealing to the domestic discourse. For example, Malaysia's recent NDP frames the SDGs as complementary to green financing and investment strategies (EPU, 2021: 8–27), while Oman Vision 2040 frames the SDGs around efforts to improve governance index and quality of judicial processes (SCP, 2018a: 47).

One assumption is that such framing that began during the inter-governmental negotiations has resulted in less contestation during norm localization at the implementation level and created universal values that are acceptable for states. For example, instead of attaching the concept of sustainable development to the human rights discourse advocated by global leaders and grassroots activists, the SDGs reflect the careful choice of accountability measures (Winkler and Williams, 2017). As such, it makes localization of global norms more likely to occur, and in the case of the SDGs, in an institutionalized manner. In particular, the SDG implementation and reporting processes facilitate norm localization by institutionalizing it within the existing national development mechanism. For example, Tanzania's FYDPs clearly state that the localization of the plan will also provide avenues to domesticate the SDGs (MFP, 2016: 2; MFP, 2021: 4). Doing so attaches global norms to the idea of domestic ownership and sovereignty.

Further, by repeating the importance of national circumstances in its text, the SDGs show that it provides space for adjusting global norms to make them more congruent with domestic beliefs and practices. It also put a perspective that the concept behind the SDGs was to strengthen and enhance, not replace, existing institutions. Global norms are framed through technical communication and the introduction of mechanisms such as localizing the SDGs that may strengthen the profile of domestic actors instead of focusing on external support, as was the case during the MDGs. A prime example is how Malaysia 12 MP frames the central role of SDGs in improving domestic M&E systems through a participatory approach (EPU, 2021: 8–26).

Another point on which our findings tallied with existing research is that while domestic framing corresponds to some extent with themes in global frames, it never replicates them completely (Zimmermann, 2017: 195). Although there is a common ground of using the language and vocabulary of SDGs to familiarize NDPs with global norms, states seem to be selective in picking which words to be included in their NDPs and in which narratives those words contribute. In other cases, the selection appears to be eclectic, offering little coherence between the messages delivered by selected words and the prevalent domestic development paradigm regarding the public sector reform. We found that the language of the SDGs influences NDPs with selective, limited or different interpretations and meanings to those attached to global norms. While adjectives such as “transparent” and “accountable” are used to describe how the desired public sector reforms should be, the language that refers to democracy or political reforms are almost never used in the documents. In the case of Oman and Qatar, it is not democratic but efficient and innovative public institutions that are emphasized; only such institutions would help the two countries transition to knowledge-based

economies. Such an outlook is inherent to the monarchies of the Arab states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), where a transition from the rentier model is at the heart of the development planning to avoid what could be a significant threat to existing state structures.<sup>1</sup>

The translation of global norms characterized with low precision and flexibility at the implementation level centers respectively on the provision of normative tools. The SDGs as normative tools promote development approaches that are being mainstreamed at the global level, e.g., green and blue economy, low-carbon development. Among the advocated approaches, the observed NDPs show that development approaches based on the economics of development appeal more to states than other aspects of sustainable development. While the idea at the global level is to promote these new approaches to transform development in all three pillars, the translations in NDPs are reserved more for the economy. For example, states consistently link an evidence-based approach with macroeconomics modeling in NDPs than socio-environmental models. Vision documents are more flexible in envisioning non-economic aspects of development, as in Bangladesh, or a development associated with liberal democracy and good governance, as in Tanzania. When these visions are translated into development objectives, economic development frames are again at the forefront, e.g., reform in Tanzania means policy, institutional and systemic reforms to overcome economic challenges (MFP, 2021: 4). It confirms that states see NDPs as blueprints of economic policymaking foremost and, thus, primarily reserved for economic policies with only a little space left for anything else.

### 5.3. *Adaptation: the reconstruction of global norms to fit domestic contexts*

The SDGs provide a pathway for states to experiment with reconstructing or redefining global norms based on their domestic circumstances and priorities. This is the case with the new approaches in the participation norm promoted within the SDG narratives, e.g., evidence-based, whole-of-government, whole-of-society. Referencing or employing such approaches into the NDP implementation strategies represents the adaptation efforts of existing participatory processes to comply with global norms by giving them globally accepted characters. It conforms to the argument that states are socialized to comply with certain things by international society by internationally held norms (Finnemore, 1996).

We have argued earlier that the SDGs have attempted to advocate for a more inclusive development that serves the causes of human equality and diversity. We also recognized the degree and nature of adaptation evoked in the NDPs focused on the meaning and application of norm instead of a norm's validity. It is evident how the state attempts to make national development planning more inclusive and bottom-up by inserting greater non-state actors' participation. Bangladesh, for example, explicitly envisions greater democratic participation in their development process (GED, 2020: Iii). On the other hand, some states are less clear about their plans to develop more inclusive participation. Those of Oman and Qatar discuss the role of such actors in terms of consultation. It implies that civil society has no capacity in drafting, passing or revising any proposed legislation. Indeed, public participation in GCC countries has been redefined as representative participation

<sup>1</sup> Rentier states are those whose “economic power and ultimately political authority rests on their dual capacity to extract rents externally from the global environment and subsequently to distribute these rents internally” (Karl, 1999: 38). In the Arab States of the Gulf region, the wealth generated from oil and gas exports did not only help these states achieve the current development but also drive their new development agendas. Moreover, it continues to strengthen state capacity to a degree where the state is the employer for most citizens. Due to the decline in oil prices since 2014 and dwindling reserves (in Oman), the monarchies of Qatar and Oman sense the pressure to remain in power. This is why economic diversification is a central theme in their NDPs.

limited to consultative councils, in which chosen citizens are elected as representatives. These councils have insignificant latitude in policy-making as opposed to senior royals acting as executive bodies in key ministries. Further, consultative participation is often presented as a part of multi-stakeholder engagement, giving the impression it is of equal weight as active participation in decision-making and implementation.

When it comes to influencing domestic actors' involvement in the development processes, we found that supportive frames of SDGs do not necessarily lead to inclusive and meaningful participation of non-state actors across all aspects of development. States also decided on the depth, breadth, and extent of government-society relations, as observed in how NDPs outline the variety of roles of non-state actors in development. Two types of engagement can be found: public-private partnerships, which underscore the critical role of the private sector in driving NDPs forward. The private sector's proactive role is deemed vital for helping Oman and Qatar realize their economic diversification objective and, ultimately, their transition to knowledge-based economies. It is important to note that the NDPs do not elaborate on processes nor roles of non-state actors for effective oversight and accountability as envisioned by SDG16. The second type of engagement occurs during the planning phase and appears more consultative than a real partner in the implementation process. Such engagement includes actors such as CSOs and Academia. As evident in the examined NDPs, the presence of these actors is still very thin, and their powers are limited to consultation or persuasion. Participation as envisioned at the global level with diverse, well-informed, and actively engaging participants in decision-making, thus, has yet fully manifested in NDPs.

Looking further at the adaptation of participation, one observed pattern is that the SDGs act as a norm promoter for global and domestic norms. While the shift within the neoliberal policies has created spaces for non-state actors to participate in the development process lodged through good governance and public sector reform, the SDGs have further promoted them through the repetitive advocacy of multi-stakeholder engagement, collaborative planning, and participatory governance. In short, the SDGs are being used to legitimize and encourage this shift. Moreover, the SDGs have encouraged broader participation beyond governmental institutions. Specifically, SDG16's call for responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making at all levels is not only about government but also about the relationship of government to society. However, broadening participation could also be leveraged towards the state's power, as seen in NDPs' selective framing and adaptation responses to reforms. We observed that sustainable development related to socio-economic equality are quite visible in NDPs, but values related to equal participation and democracy are not adequately translated. For instance, inclusive and participatory are reflected in NDPs, but not responsive and representative. These variations reflect the dynamics between normative environments that serve as the blueprints for state priorities and the SDGs as normative tools.

## 6. Conclusion

This article aimed to explore the influential extent of the SDGs in steering or stimulating norm localization reflected in the NDP through contestation, framing, and adaptation. We asked this question in light of the recent emergence of national development planning following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. Using five cases from countries in the Middle-East, East Africa, and Asia-Pacific, we argued that the SDGs as normative tools act as promoters for global norms in three different aspects: 1) the normative difference between the SDGs and NDPs on its flexibility to articulate global norms has the power to contest domestic norms; 2) the SDGs offer cognitive messages to establish the value of global norms to the domestic audience, and; 3) the broad language of SDGs can be employed by national development planners to advance norm localization through selective framing and adaptation.

Our analysis shows that although the post-2015 NDPs are still incapable of fully reflecting the transformative potential of the SDGs, they can be seen as a significant step in national development planning that localizes global norms. As much as the SDGs have resulted from an intense contested process, our results show that the global contestation transcends the domestic sphere. First, while the SDGs offer alternatives to traditional normative frameworks by introducing various development approaches mainstreamed at the global level, domestic priorities act as filters to the adoption of global norms. This is especially the case with the sustainable development norm. Second, by promoting the ownership and the importance of domestic circumstances, the SDGs have created a more flexible space for domestic norms to interact with global norms, primarily through technical communication and the adoption of approaches. However, domestic frames, such as those of public sector reforms, do not replicate global frames completely. Third, on norm adaptation, NDPs employ approaches promoted by the SDGs as an effort to comply with global norms by giving domestic norms globally accepted characters. The prime example is the broadening of participatory processes. This confirms that norm localization is a dynamic process (Acharya, 2004) and that the SDGs leave a great amount of flexibility to national development planners to interpret or adapt global norms in their NDPs in a variety of ways.

NDPs are the reflection of states' pragmatic adaptation to the current shift in neoliberal policies. There is little doubt that NDPs embrace a preset of determined understanding of development paradigms based on national circumstances and priorities. The continuity of messages across plans leads to the assumption that the SDGs have not yet fundamentally changed the state's dominant domestic norms. However, the SDGs as normative tools have succeeded in taking advantage of the space created by the ongoing shifts and framing in the domestic norms through languages that appeal to the prevailing domestic discourse. In the context of globalization, the SDGs have created opportunities that states want to appeal to. The SDGs may, in this sense, be used as a tool of "legitimizing development goals and policies that have been decided on" (Horn and Grugel, 2018: 74), and this may lead to SDG prioritization or cherry-picking that defies the integrated and indivisible nature of the SDGs (Forestier and Kim, 2020).

Finally, NDPs touch upon various aspects of what constitutes an inclusive development as reflected in the SDGs, be it multi-stakeholder engagements, collaborative planning, or participatory governance. This often challenges or helps reproduce certain aspects of previous NDPs related to national sovereignty and state-building issues. Still, while the depth and breadth of such experimentations differ in each of the examined plans, the SDGs' mark on national planning is evident in the NDPs' adoption of globally accepted policy process mechanisms.

## CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Mahesti Okitasari:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Validation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Tarek Katramiz:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Validation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. Both authors contributed equally to this paper.

## Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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