



The Faculty of Law, University of Groningen

is pleased to announce & invite you to the

International Law for the Sustainable Development Goals

Workshop Series 2017-2018

In 2017-2018 the Department of International Law, University of Groningen, will organise a Workshop Series and an International Conference to explore the role and relevance of international law to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. International lawyers, including academics and practitioners, alongside policy-makers, civil society, industry and experts from other disciplines will discuss how international law can shape, bolster and constrain the realisation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the coming years.

Background

A “supremely ambitious and transformational vision” for all

In September 2015, 196 world leaders adopted the new global development agenda for 2015-2030, widely known as the “Sustainable Development Goals” (SDGs). The SDGs Agenda consists of an ambitious set of 17 Goals and 169 targets, and stresses that these are to be “implemented in a manner which is consistent with the rights and obligations of States under international law”. In particular, States provide that the SDGs Agenda is:

... guided by the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, including full respect for international law. It is grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, international human rights treaties, the Millennium Declaration and the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document. It is informed by other instruments such as the Declaration on the Right to Development.

Despite the foregoing emphatic statement, what does it mean that the SDGs are guided by, grounded in, and informed by international law? International law itself is far from being self-evident and lacks consistency and implementation in various fields. This Workshop Series aims at exploring the role, potential and limitations of international law in achieving the SDGs.

1 NO POVERTY



2 ZERO HUNGER



3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



4 QUALITY EDUCATION



5 GENDER EQUALITY



6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION



7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY



8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



Overarching Questions

#1 Old problems, New Solutions?

The SDGs agenda recycles, to a certain extent, **well-known, (sustainable) development problems that have seen no or little progress in past decades**. The Millennium Development Goals were not (fully) attained, and international law has not always been a help in this respect; salient obstacles to equitable sustainable development remain in international law. For instance, intellectual property law and aspects of international trade law have proven in practice to be an impediment to access to medicines. Achieving sustainable development extends beyond the traditional environmental and technological debates to the complex social dimensions of governance and gender equity. Moreover, the status and content of the 'principle of sustainable development' in international law remains unclear. What makes us optimistic that international law will facilitate sustainable development in the coming 15 years? At the same time, we are also confronted with **new pressing global problems**, including migration flows, substantial increase in non-communicable, life-style related diseases, plastic-based ocean pollution, natural resources scarcity and the digital divide. A preliminary question is therefore whether the SDGs sufficiently 'capture' these global challenges. Further, what are the limitations of current international law to articulate and effectively address them? How can international lawyers, law-makers and scholars (propose to) use **existing legal regimes and principles** (e.g. human rights law, environmental law, the right to science, the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, inter- and intra-generational equity), but also pursue **innovative legal approaches** in order to accelerate progress across all 17 SDGs?

#2 International Law and the Objective(s) of Sustainable Development?

The theme '**International Law for the Sustainable Development Goals**', and the emphasis on international law in the SDG Agenda, brings to the fore the question of whether international law serves the consolidated vision of sustainable development, as formulated in the SDGs. Does international law have a unified, specific object and purpose in the first place? If so, **should sustainable development and/or the SDGs constitute a structural, guiding principle** for lawyers, law-makers and scholars when making, interpreting and applying international law?

#3 Integrated Goals, Fragmented International Law?

The SDGs encapsulate, in principle, an integrated vision for sustainable development. Yet, on closer look, notwithstanding the inclusive, multi-stakeholder manner in formulating the Goals, **many Goals, targets and their related indicators appear to overlap, conflict or leave essential gaps**. What is then the **role of international law** regarding such overlap, conflict or gaps? What role for international law to support the realization of this agenda **in light of its own fragmented nature**? What are the available tools and approaches in international law that we can employ to mitigate policy incoherence in international affairs and, hence, ensure a successful implementation of the SDGs? Conversely, are the SDGs a reason to rethink how international law is created, applied and implemented? How can international law benefit from synergies and collaborations with other stakeholders and disciplines?

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#4 International Law and Local Realities

Grounding the SDGs in international law further raises the issue of whether international law is sufficiently equipped to guide States and other actors in reviewing and realising the SDGs in a manner serving the needs of local contexts. Or, is it rather that international law reinforces structural inequities between those States which have ample capacity to implement ambitious goals, and those that have not? To what extent are international obligations and ambitious goals placed upon developing States realistic? “Leaving nobody behind”, including those “furthest behind” in developing States, should make one appreciate and address the structural constraints that hamper centralised and devolved governments in implementing universal international norms. Constraints include lack of resources, weak governance structures, gender-based disparities that disadvantage women, poor environmental conditions and poor service delivery chains. Examples of failing service delivery in many parts of the world include access to clean water and energy or the distribution of medicines to all parts of the population. A specific challenge that is increasingly stark in view of the different realities facing cities and rural areas.

Workshop Series Programme

The currently planned six workshops and final conference will span the breadth of the SDGs framework addressing thematic and cross-sectoral issues. Regular updates of the programme can be found through the Series’ website. We warmly invite all international lawyers as well as scholars and practitioners from other fields to join us in discussing how international law can contribute to transforming our world.

00	Special Opening Lecture, Prof Joyeeta Gupta (May 2017)
01	‘International Law for the SDGs: Challenges and Prospects?’ (May 2017)
02	‘Sexual and Reproductive Rights & the SDGs’ (September 2017)
03	‘Financing & Technology Sharing’ in International Law (October 2017)
04	‘International Law & Accountable, Transparent Institutions’ (December 2017)
05	‘Health: Non-Communicable Diseases, Sustainable Development and Industry Involvement’ (February 2018)
06	‘Essential Services Access for Safe, Sustainable and Resilient Urban Settlements’ (April 2018)
07	‘Energy & Environment’ (June 2018)

Concluding International Conference
(September 2018)

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