

# A Pocket Guide to Environment and Sustainable Development Governance

THIRD EDITION



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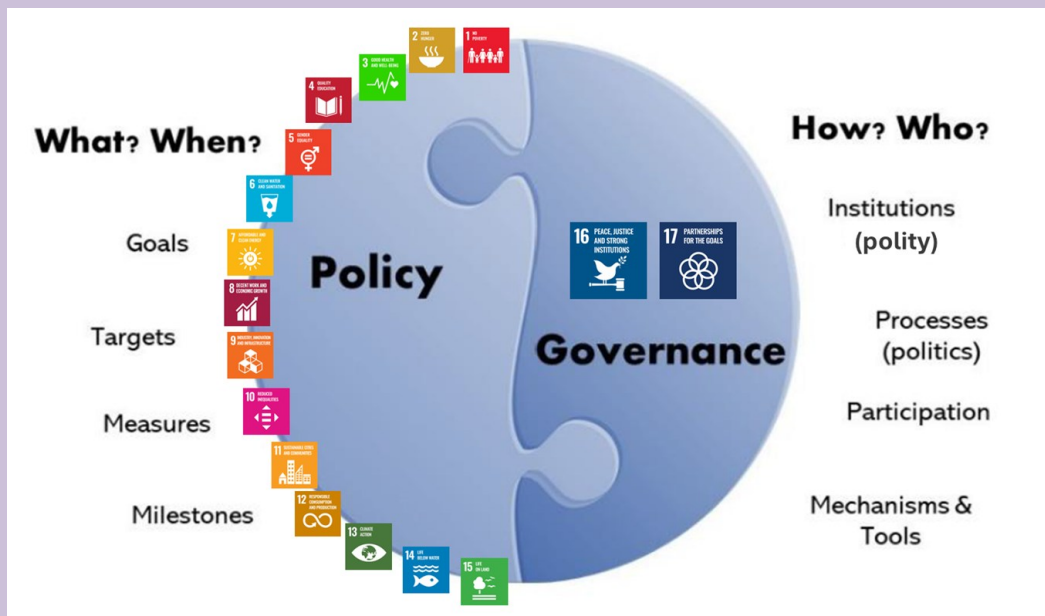
Louis Meuleman

# About this Guide

This guide was composed by a team from [Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future](#) (SF). It follows version one and two, 2011 and 2012, respectively, which were a joint initiative of SF and [the Commonwealth Secretariat](#), in response to the perceived ‘knowledge gap’ on the history and dynamics of global governance for sustainable development.

The adoption on September 25, 2015, of the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) marked an increased focus on governance issues. Policy objectives and targets (“What”) are key, but they cannot be implemented without adequate and tailored governance frameworks (“How?”). This Pocket guide is not about setting policy targets, but about how to achieve them.

Policy and governance are two sides of one coin, or two pieces of the same puzzle.



Graph based on Meuleman, L. 2025, [‘Waking up a Sleeping beauty? - Towards a quality protocol for indicator SDG 17.14.1 on Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development \(PCSD\)’](#). DG REFORM & ICF, Publications Office of the European Union.

All SDGs have, besides policy targets, also governance targets (marked with letters). However, SDG 16 (institutions, rule of law) and 17 (partnerships, means of implementation, policy coherence) offer the most cross-cutting governance concepts.

This Guide starts with sustainable development as a foundation, but then concentrates on environmental governance as one of the three dimensions of sustainability governance.

We hope that this Guide will provide the necessary background information on global environmental and sustainable development governance to allow both governmental and non-governmental stakeholders to familiarise themselves with key issues more comprehensively.

The topic of ‘environmental and sustainable development governance’ is potentially vast, as governance touches on almost all decisions and policy considerations at all levels. To make this guide manageable and accessible, we have structured the main issues into 12 short chapters.

It is important to note that the insights and ideas outlined in the Guide are not exhaustive. This is partly because the editorial process had to include some level of selection to avoid the publication becoming unwieldy. Some of the information contained in this updated version of the Pocket Guide may become redundant as a result of the outcome of upcoming global events.

In addition, this version of the Pocket Guide is a draft to be presented during UNEA 7 in December 2025 in Nairobi. Comments will be integrated at the beginning of 2026 and evolve to a final version.

Many thanks go to the SF team that collaborated on this draft: Felix Dodds (Project Lead & Co-author), Rene Marker-Katz (Researcher & Co-author), Jan-Gustav Strandenaes (Lead Consultant & Editor), and Louis Meuleman & Charles A. Nouhan (Contributing Authors).

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We also acknowledge the foundational work of the First Edition Editor, Hannah Stoddart, whose vision and editorial leadership shaped the original guide.

Our appreciation further goes to the Contributing Authors of the First and Second Editions, whose collective scholarship and commitment laid the groundwork for this updated volume: Milena Bottero, Jack Cornforth, Jeannet Lingan, Kirsty Schneeberger, Andrew Shaw, Nadine Smith, Janet Strachan, and Robert White.

To all contributors, reviewers, and supporters—thank you. Your efforts continue to advance understanding of sustainable development governance and inspire ongoing collaboration in pursuit of a more just and resilient world.

## Editors' Note

This guide offers a high-level overview of sustainable development governance and the major actors shaping it. It is not intended to be comprehensive, but rather a starting point for understanding the landscape. Where possible, links and references are included to support deeper exploration and further research.

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# Acronyms and Abbreviations

<b>CBD</b>	Convention on Biological Diversity
<b>CIFs</b>	Climate Investment Funds
<b>COP</b>	Conference of the Parties
<b>CSD</b>	UN Commission on Sustainable Development
<b>CSR</b>	Corporate Social Responsibility
<b>CTE</b>	Committee on Trade and Environment
<b>CTF</b>	Clean Technology Fund
<b>DSD</b>	Division for Sustainable Development
<b>ECOFIN</b>	Economic and Financial Committee
<b>ECOSOC</b>	Economic and Social Council
<b>EMG</b>	Environmental Management Group
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization
<b>GATT</b>	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
<b>GEF</b>	Global Environment Facility
<b>GEO</b>	Global Environment Organisation
<b>GMEF</b>	Global Ministerial Environment Forum
<b>GRI</b>	Global Reporting Initiative
<b>IACSD</b>	Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development
<b>ICE</b>	International Court for the Environment
<b>IEG</b>	International Environmental Governance
<b>IFC</b>	International Finance Corporation
<b>IFI</b>	International Financial Institution
<b>IGM</b>	Intergovernmental Group of Ministers
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>IPCC</b>	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
<b>JPOI</b>	Johannesburg Plan of Implementation
<b>MEAs</b>	Multilateral Environmental Agreements
<b>MEF</b>	Major Economies Forum
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>PIC</b>	Prior Informed Consent
<b>PP</b>	Precautionary Principle
<b>REDD+</b>	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation in Developing Countries
<b>SCF</b>	Strategic Climate Fund
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>UNCCD</b>	UN Convention to Combat Desertification
<b>UNCED</b>	UN Conference on Environment and Development
<b>UNCSD</b>	UN Conference on Sustainable Development
<b>UNCTAD</b>	UN Conference on Trade and Development
<b>UNDESA</b>	UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs
<b>UNDG</b>	UN Development Group
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNECE</b>	UN Economic Commission for Europe
<b>UNEO</b>	UN Environment Organisation
<b>UNEP</b>	United Nations Environment Programme
<b>UNFCCC</b>	UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
<b>WEO</b>	World Environment Organisation
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization
<b>WSSD</b>	World Summit on Sustainable Development
<b>WTO</b>	World Trade Organization