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International governance: how can we (still) cooperate?

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2025 will mark the 10th anniversary of the Paris Climate Agreement. Taking stock will also come with engaging in a necessary new phase of accelerating both the response to financing requirements and climate action. But the need for updating and innovation goes beyond the climate sphere. Given the deleterious state of multilateralism and the attacks on a rules-based world order, it is time to take a significant step towards greater efficiency and justice in all systems of international governance for sustainable development. IDDRI is present on several of these fronts of innovation: climate change, biodiversity, oceans, reform of the international financial architecture and renewal of North-South partnerships. This makes it possible for us to enrich our work in each of these fields by drawing inspiration from the obstacles and solutions tested in others. In the context of the cross-cutting challenges hampering international cooperation, this blog post sets out the key avenues opening up opportunities and the key players to be mobilized.

Sustainable development issues obviously do not stop at borders, and there is therefore a particular challenge in going beyond the national roots of administrations and policies to manage the related cross-border issues. While the issue of international governance is not new, it is particularly important today as the geopolitical context is unfavourable to cooperation, and is characterized by dominant discourse favouring nationalist solutions, competition and strategic autonomy ([IDDRI, 2025](#)), strong criticism of the insufficiently inclusive nature of multilateralism ([IDDRI, 2025](#)) and international negotiations facing numerous challenges ([IDDRI, 2025](#)).

This context, which has changed radically in recent years ([IDDRI, 2025](#)), calls for a rethink of the mechanisms of international governance in order to better prepare for the future, especially as we enter an emblematic year for sustainable development, marked by the 10th anniversary of the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). What is the way forward for a committed and positive discourse on international governance? This is the challenge that IDDRI has set itself for the coming years, and which this newsletter, focusing on international governance, proposes to launch.

The 10 years that reshaped multilateralism for sustainable development

While 2015 was not without its tensions, as our publication ([IDDRI, 2025](#)) shows, it was undoubtedly a dynamic year for multilateralism. Significant progress was made with the adoption of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on financing, the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Climate Agreement. After the low point in the climate negotiations in Copenhagen in 2009, there was renewed diplomatic momentum thanks to a favourable political cycle and strong leadership. One example is the climate commitments made by the United States and China at a G2 meeting—a situation that would be difficult to envisage today. But the success of the signing of these historic agreements is also based on their design and inherent innovations, in particular: their universal nature and a theory of horizontal change capable of spreading signals for action well beyond the signatory States. The study published today ([IDDRI, 2025](#)) analyses these innovations and their resonance in the current context.

It is often said that the 2015 agreements would not exist if they were to be adopted today. Crises and conflicts have followed one another since then, and their variable-geometry management has put multilateral institutions to the test. Systemic rivalries between major powers have become structural in an increasingly multipolar and polycentric world order. In this regard, the impact of President Trump's new term in office, which seems to advocate an even more nationalistic and anti-sustainability agenda, is still uncertain. Despite delays in implementation, the 2015 agreements have so far politically survived this storm. But in a context where anticipation has become more difficult, the question of the role of international governance of sustainable development and climate arises: it could either be limited to purely technical cooperation, avoiding divisive issues; or evolve into an empty shell, symbolic but with no real support or progress from its stakeholders. Climate and sustainable development regimes could also be instrumentalized by the rise of a transactional logic in international relations; this is already partly the case.

The universal approach that ensures participation by all countries in exchange for flexibility was an important innovation of the Paris Agreement. For the sake of consensus, it left aside the questions of responsibility and distribution of costs, which are even more acute today. At a time when distributional conflicts, particularly those inherent in climate change, are intensifying, the conditions for forms of multilateral cooperation that are differentiated in terms of responsibility and redistributive in the sense of justice between countries seem to be even less likely than before COP 21. And the fora where these legitimate questions can be resolved are not clearly identified.

The Paris Agreement and the SDGs have created objectives and concepts that can be easily adopted by all stakeholders, including economic actors. In particular, the 'net zero' concept has become a reference for many

companies and organizations beyond the climate sphere, even if there has been a certain amount of backtracking, particularly in the United States following the election of President Trump. However, this success brings with it new challenges, such as the need to translate concepts into more precise signals of transformation at sectoral level or in terms of accountability for commitments. Current debates on the need to better align international financial institutions with climate and sustainability goals represent significant progress, but also highlight what remains to be achieved.

Five levers for action to renew international governance

Against this backdrop, IDDRI has identified five specific areas that appear to be key levers for helping to strengthen the international governance of sustainable development.

1. Understanding the forces at work and renewing coalitions in support of sustainable development

2024 was an unprecedented election year ([IDDRI, 2024](#)). 2025 is likely to be a year of political settling in, with a possible reshaping of international dynamics. And while environmental issues have received little attention during the various elections, their results will have an undeniable impact on countries' commitment to sustainable development. Newly installed or (re)confirmed governments, often with a less strong parliamentary majority, may have to find new balances, which opens up new opportunities, but may also pose risks of reversals in areas taken for granted. Against a backdrop of heightened geopolitical tensions and in anticipation of a year of important international deadlines in the field of sustainable development, IDDRI will analyze the forces at play, the competing political projects for renewed or alternative forms of governance and those that aim to undermine them, and highlight possible avenues for cooperation.

2. Identifying and deploying innovations in international governance, particularly beyond their initial scope

The number and diversity of international instruments adopted in recent years in the field of sustainable development (Paris Climate Agreement, 2030 Agenda, High Seas Treaty) make it necessary to examine their content and assess their results, albeit in a preliminary way, against a backdrop of growing resistance to environmental issues. The question of relevance and lessons learned arises, for example, in relation to the Paris Agreement (particularly its bottom-up approach) and its associated instruments (work programmes, COP, the Global Stocktake, nationally determined contributions, etc.), the 10th anniversary of which is bound to generate analyses and judgements of varying degrees of accuracy and relevance, and which has already begun to inspire international discussions in other areas, such as biodiversity ([IDDRI, 2024](#)). Because of its role in the preparation and development of the Paris Agreement, IDDRI will be analyzing the achievements and failures of this agreement in the light of the expectations expressed when it was adopted in 2015, as part of a diagnosis and recommendations for the post-Belém period (COP30), and will be fueling discussions in the biodiversity arena ([IDDRI, 2025](#)) and, more broadly, on the functioning of multilateralism.

3. Promoting better coordination of international fora and initiatives

Sustainable development issues cut across political areas and communities. Addressing them is complex in a siloed international system that reproduces the areas of competence of national ministries without the mechanisms for interministerial coordination. The question of international coordination in a context where there is no hierarchy between international organizations and between conventions is therefore of critical importance at a time when global objectives (in particular the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions) have permeated the multilateral system, whether within technical sectoral organizations or more horizontal and exposed organizations such as the World Trade Organisation or the World Bank; and this without mechanisms aimed at monitoring, providing calls to action, or

identifying shortcomings to ensure that efforts are moving in the same direction. This is also a major challenge in terms of the coherence of policies and the direction provided to economic players. Drawing on its broad coverage of sustainable development issues, IDDRI will analyze the dissemination and integration of environmental objectives (in particular those of the Paris Agreement) in international fora and among various economic players, and inform discussions on the performance of coordination tools in partnership with others, in particular the OECD.

4. Supporting the implementation of international rules through monitoring, evaluation and accountability mechanisms

At both national and international level, recent years have seen a significant development in international law (hard and soft) and national legislation in the environmental field. Implementing these rules remains a major challenge today, in a context where international organizations are weak in ensuring compliance and in an international climate marked by a reluctance on the part of States to strengthen international enforcement mechanisms. The non-application of the law hinders the necessary transformational changes. It also threatens the credibility of institutions that may be perceived as ineffective and not respected, and can be a source of friction between jurisdictions and an uneven playing field in markets. In this context, monitoring and evaluation tools, as well as basic principles for assessing the multiplicity of initiatives, particularly private ones, that have emerged in the field of sustainable development, are alternative mechanisms that can strengthen the force of international decisions through transparency and accountability of implementation efforts, and distinguish actors who apply the law, or are even more ambitious, from those who do not.

5. Reconnecting international financing with global issues

The issues of international financing for sustainable development have taken on particular and cross-cutting importance in view of the financial stakes involved, the macroeconomic constraints on the mobilization of domestic resources and international financial flows (particularly for the least developed countries) and the increased competition between uses (climate, biodiversity, etc.). Against this backdrop, questions are being raised about reforming the governance of international financial institutions so that the voice of recipient countries can be heard more effectively, the allocation of funding can be reconsidered in the light of countries' needs, multilateralism can be rethought in terms of new sources of funding such as international taxation, and the fragmentation of multilateral funds can be brought under control.

On these issues, IDDRI will strengthen its partnerships and forge new alliances to support effective multilateralism. International cooperation remains the ultimate horizon for sustainable development, i.e. an environment conducive to social prosperity and a favorable business ecosystem. This does not mean that it should not be reviewed, revisited, rebalanced and reinvested differently. IDDRI has made this one of its key missions.

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