CALL FOR PAPER PROPOSALS

THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS:
WHAT ROLE FOR MULTINATIONAL ENTERPRISES?

A special Issue to be published in
Journal of International Business Policy

Proposal Submission Deadline: April 1, 2019

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Special Issue description

In 2015, all 193 United Nations (UN) member states unanimously committed to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. These 17 goals were established following a massive stakeholder consultation that involved governments, companies, civil society organizations, and knowledge institutes, while including the voices of over a million people from around the globe. Frontrunner Multinational Enterprises (MNEs) have taken an active role in this consultation process – thereby not only helping to formulate goals and targets but also providing legitimacy to the whole effort. The SDGs aim to simultaneously advance a diverse range of sustainable development themes with universal coverage. Notwithstanding criticism for either being too ambitious or not being ambitious enough, the SDGs are likely to constitute the most important frame of the global development agenda until 2030.

It is beyond dispute that MNEs have vast opportunities for helping to achieve the SDGs. According to the business community there is a clear business logic to the SDGs, as contributing to the SDGs can unlock $12 trillion in business opportunities. But whether companies can make this materialize depends on their further actions, in interaction with governmental policies and strategies of non-governmental organizations. Extant IB research has not kept pace with the expanding role of business organizations in sustainable development – in particular in international agenda-setting activities such as the SDGs, and in creating cross-sector partnerships with non-market actors. By defining the world’s sustainable development priorities, the SDGs offer a unique opportunity for studying MNEs’ engagement with diverse and interlinked development challenges.

This special issue is aimed at bringing together IB research that wants to understand, accelerate, and materialize these opportunities. Related contributions have gradually begun to appear in the IB literature (Journal of World Business, Transnational Corporations and Journal of International Business Policy). They provide some stepping stones and research agendas for this special issue. The timing of
this special issue also makes it possible to solicit more empirical contributions since SDGs are now well under way, and therefore it should be possible to consider the results of early implementation projects.

The Journal of International Business Policy (JIBP) aims to be a leader in publishing high quality research analyzing emerging public policy trends and their impact on international firms. Through this Special Issue call, JIBP aims specifically to champion research analyzing the contribution of MNEs to processes of global goal-setting and implementation in the area of sustainable development. This special issue is intended to be a first focal point triggering IB scholarly attention to this area. For that reason, this special issue is also accompanied by a Paper Development Workshop at the AIB annual conference in Copenhagen on 24-27 June 2019.

We welcome proposals addressing the following empirical and theoretical angles concerning the implementation of the SDGs:

- Research on the role of MNEs in institution building and agenda-setting processes;
- Studies examining the role of MNEs in adapting to changing institutions and dealing with ‘institutional voids’ while also contributing to the creation of ‘common goods’;
- Contributions on the management challenges related to the ‘internalization’ and ‘external alignment’ questions surrounding the SDGs;
- Interdisciplinary approaches: Applying insights from related management research fields to IB theories - e.g. the growing attention to ‘grand challenges’ or complexity theory;
- Gender-mainstreamed approaches: Theoretical and empirical analyses of the potential for MNEs to contribute meaningfully to the gender equity and equality targets that cross-cut most of the 17 SDGs;
- Contributions that cover the way MNEs from different regions (and national institutional constituencies) in the world participate and contribute; the influence of home country institutions (country of origin effect) on the adoption of the SDGs;
- Studies on the role played by frontrunner MNEs in helping define international societal agendas;
- Sectoral approaches that consider the way specific sectors can contribute to the SDGs;
- Papers addressing specific SDGs in terms of the role played by MNEs in implementation;
- Papers that focus on specific characteristics of the SDGs, such as the actionability of SDG targets and the ethical duties conveyed by them;
- Historical parallels of the role played by MNEs in previous forms of multi-stakeholder engagement;
- Historical accounts of the role played by MNEs in the formation of the SDGs as part of a multi-stakeholder process;
- Value proposition challenge: How can MNEs move from a focus on existing markets to a focus on future markets and human needs?
- Priority and materiality challenge: How can MNEs prioritize specific SDGs and make them material in areas of management (like innovation, international marketing)?
- The nexus challenge: How are the SDGs interlinked and on what basis do companies select a portfolio of SDGs?
- The communication challenge: How do MNEs effectively involve stakeholders in the SDG discourse?
- The partnering challenge: What constellations of partnerships with non-market actors are needed to enable companies to effectively contribute to the SDGs?
- The methodological challenge: What are proper evaluation methods to assess the contribution of companies to complex societal challenges like the SDSs?
- The investment challenge: What financial innovations are needed to overcome the finance gap that lies between the ambitions and the realization of the SDGs?
- The governance challenge: What new (proto) institutional set-ups are needed for navigating the SDGs?
The implementation challenge: Critical studies on “SDG washing” by MNEs; what evidence exists and how can this phenomenon be reversed?

The normative challenge: Can companies make their operations more environmentally sustainable and socially responsible by creating norms, rules, and standardized procedures for their own conduct?

The activation challenge: How can MNEs move beyond their relatively narrow/passive role in the SDGs (“avoid harm”) and plan and implement business models that support externally actionable SDGs that seek to actively “do good”?

The distance challenge: The role of host and home countries (institutional distance) and the role played by subsidiaries in the implementation of an SDGs strategy (localization of the SDGs).

Liability and legitimacy: Can embracing the SDGs help companies in overcoming the ‘liability of foreignness’ and ‘embeddedness’. How can embracing international voluntary norms help in in obtaining local legitimacy with host countries?

Action research in which SDG implementation experience can be shared on a case by case basis.

These issues are not meant to be exhaustive but illustrative of possible proposal topics.

We welcome proposals from research in all relevant scientific fields and especially welcome proposals bridging various scientific disciplines. A paper can be aimed at theory development, but can also be empirical (aimed at collecting and interpreting larger data samples or specific case studies). We seek a broad range of proposals addressing SDGs and MNEs that make novel contributions to IB research, also beyond this Special Issue.

Special Issue Proposals

Proposals should be written in English and not exceed a total of seven (7) pages and 4000 words – five (5) pages for the body which can include charts, graphs, diagrams, and up to two (2) pages of references. The 4000-word count includes all text in the charts, graphs, diagrams, and references. Only electronic submissions of proposal(s) will be accepted, submitted via the Manuscript Central portal for JIBP: https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/jibp. A maximum of two (2) proposals, either as an author or a co-author, may be submitted.

We seek original, unpublished work to move the scholarly conversation on SDG issues forward. Proposals may be rooted in or derived from prior work, but the submitted proposal must reflect significant development. Any proposal submitted that is judged to be identical or substantially similar to work already published, presented or under review for another conference or publication, will not be considered for invitation to develop a full manuscript.

Proposals are easiest to handle if submitted in PDF format. MS Word (or equivalent) will also be accepted. The title should be listed in the header of each page. Please use single spacing and 10-point font or larger. All proposals received by the deadline date (April 1, 2019) are deemed as original and final.

Timeline from Proposal to Publication

- April 1, 2019: deadline for submission of proposals via Manuscript Central portal for JIBP (https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/jibp)
- May 30, 2019: notification of acceptance or rejection of proposals for development as full manuscripts for submission
- June 24-27, 2019 (AIB 2019 Copenhagen): organization of Paper Development Workshop (PDW) with the editors (for accepted proposals only)
- December 1, 2019: deadline for submission of the full manuscripts
- December 2019 – August 2020: double-blind peer review, revision, and editorial notification of manuscript acceptance of rejection for inclusion in JIBP special issue
- December 2020: publication of JIBP special issue

Proposals are reviewed by the special issue editors, so they are not anonymous. Proposals should include name and institutional affiliation of all authors. Authors invited to submit full manuscripts can expect a standard double-blind peer review process once submitted.

Selected bibliography


Le Blanc, D. (2015). Towards integration at last? The sustainable development goals as a network of