Beyond 2030: Scenarios and Potential Outcomes

Reflections on the Future of the Global Sustainable Development Framework

An Independent Reflection Group on Beyond 2030

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A White Paper by a Reflection Group on Beyond 2030

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Executive Summary

This white paper explores a wide range of potential scenarios and outcomes for the forthcoming political process to establish a global sustainable development framework beyond 2030. Written by an Independent Reflection Group on Beyond 2030, representing a group of 16 individuals operating in their personal capacities, the paper draws on their collective experience from the post-2015 negotiations and the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to date, to present an analysis of the choices to be made in the negotiations for a Beyond 2030 Agenda.

The 2026 United Nations SDGs Report notes that only 15 per cent of SDG targets with sufficient trend data are on track to be achieved by 2030, indicating mixed progress towards implementation. Slow implementation can partly be attributed to a lack of coordinated delivery architecture at many levels, yet finance, accountability, policy coherence and data are all affected primarily by political will rather than technical challenges alone. Since 2015, polarization, fiscal constraints, shrinking civic space, a UN trust and liquidity crisis and waning faith in multilateralism have all contributed to weaker SDG implementation and present a challenging environment for the Beyond 2030 negotiations. Emerging issues, from AI and climate change to health security and intensifying conflicts, will also have a profound impact on sustainable development beyond 2030. Lessons from both the post-2015 negotiations and SDG implementation show that process design shapes substance, and that transparent, inclusive stocktaking builds the trust and legitimacy the Beyond 2030 negotiations will depend on.

The paper presents an early stocktaking of scenarios and potential outcomes for the Beyond 2030 process to provide background and context to help inform Member States, the international community and all stakeholders about the options and choices that lie ahead. The paper does not advocate any specific outcomes that it outlines. However, it does outline five key principles that the Reflection Group considers critical to the process ahead and uses to assess each outcome: (1) universality and preserving ambition; (2) integration, coherence and resilience against fragmentation; (3) human rights and leaving no one behind; (4) process integrity, legitimacy and participation; and (5) evidence, deliverability and long-term effectiveness. Central among these principles is the idea that movement away from the principles of sustainable development that underpin the 2030 Agenda should be unacceptable.

The paper presents four broad scenarios that outline how a future agenda and the process ahead may evolve. Within these scenarios, the paper identifies 13 potential outcomes, which provide the background to and context for specific proposals and their substantive or institutional arrangements, along with details concerning their benefits, drawbacks, risks and political feasibility. The outcomes are neither predictions nor mutually exclusive, and they illustrate the difficult choices faced by Member States when negotiations begin. The main finding is that no outcome is free of trade-offs.

The four scenarios are as follows:

Continuity
This scenario would preserve commitments but leave implementation gaps unresolved.

Recalibration
This scenario could address implementation or institutional gaps but could risk regression by reopening negotiations on existing commitments in a challenging political context.

Recomposition and Transformation
This scenario could better address systemic or institutional challenges but would require high levels of political will, trust and solidarity among Member States.

Contraction and Fragmentation
This scenario could sharpen the Agenda's focus but would create significant tensions with the principles of universality, accountability, integration and non-regression.

Normative achievements must be preserved, but they will not be enough on their own. Political ambition must be accompanied by political commitment to financing, accountability and coherence. This report is a first step in making clear the choices that UN Member States face as discussions on what follows the SDGs get under way. The report calls for a transparent, evidence-informed process with meaningful participation of civil society and other stakeholders, which will be essential to the legitimacy of whatever framework emerges.

1. Introduction: Background, Purpose and Scope

The 2030 Agenda, adopted in 2015 after an innovative and inclusive intergovernmental process with broad stakeholder participation, established a universal and integrated framework for sustainable development. Despite these ground-breaking successes, this achievement should not be overly romanticized: agreement on these hard-earned outcomes required difficult political compromises, and implementation has exposed important limits in financing, accountability, policy coherence and delivery.

As 2030 approaches, the 2026 UN Sustainable Development Goals Report finds that only 15 per cent of the 139 targets with sufficient trend data are currently on track to be achieved by 2030. Implementation remains uneven, significant gaps remain, and it is clear that Member States must do more to advance the 2030 Agenda in the critical final years remaining. At the same time, discussion is beginning about what should follow, extend or reshape the current framework. The 2027 SDG Summit is therefore likely to be an important milestone for stocktaking and for signalling the direction of the process ahead.

This paper, produced by an Independent Reflection Group on Beyond 2030, examines the main political choices, trade-offs, risks and implementation conditions associated with different Beyond 2030 scenarios and potential outcomes. Its purpose is to support informed discussion before positions harden, particularly in a multilateral environment that is more fragmented and fiscally constrained than in 2015.

1.1) An Independent Reflection Group on Beyond 2030

The paper is produced by an **Independent Reflection Group on Beyond 2030**, comprising 16 experts from a range of institutional backgrounds, including academia, civil society, global networks, think tanks and international organizations. Members of the Group participate in their personal capacities rather than as representatives of their respective organizations. The Group brings together members with diverse and extensive experience within the multilateral sustainable development system, including some who advised on or helped facilitate the post-2015 negotiations and who have supported implementation of the 2030 Agenda and related political and institutional processes.

The Group's work is grounded in members' personal participation and engagement in past and ongoing SDG-related processes and draws upon their individual expertise and experiences. This personal-capacity approach creates space for politically grounded, evidence-informed judgment – including the examination of options that members or their organizations may not advocate – without claiming to represent any institution or constituency.

1.2) Purpose and scope

The purpose of the paper is to provide an initial independent stocktaking, mapping and analysis of potential scenarios and political outcomes for those involved in the upcoming process to establish a sustainable development framework beyond 2030. The relevance of looking beyond 2030 is also reflected in the Pact for the Future, which refers to advancing sustainable development "by 2030 and beyond" and invites the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), under the auspices of the General Assembly, to consider this question in September 2027.

The paper has two linked purposes: first, to distil lessons from the post-2015 process, the implementation of the SDGs to-date and the current political context shaping Beyond 2030; and second, to detail and assess a set of plausible scenarios and potential outcomes for this agenda, including by analysing them in light of shared principles, trade-offs and feasibility considerations. Rather than advocating any preferred model, it identifies cross-cutting findings, safeguards and questions that should inform choices across different possible futures. The focus is the future global architecture and political process for sustainable development in the years leading up to 2030: what could be retained, selectively adapted, fundamentally reconfigured, or even narrowed or fragmented. Emerging pressures – including financing and debt, climate and environmental disruption, technological change and AI, inequality, shrinking civic space and multilateral legitimacy – are treated as cross-cutting conditions that may shape all scenarios.

The paper also lays out recommended core principles that we believe should be considered in any process going forward. These principles are founded on the desire to improve sustainable development outcomes on all fronts and are based on lessons learned from the post-2015 negotiations, as well as from the 2030 Agenda's implementation and follow-up to date. While no decisions have been taken as yet about the Beyond 2030 process itself, we hope this stocktaking and analysis can help guide Member States, the international community and other stakeholders through potential scenarios and outcomes to better inform choices to be made in the years ahead.

1.3) Analytical framework: Scenarios, Outcomes and Principles

For analytical purposes, the paper distinguishes between scenarios and outcomes – each representing a different level of analysis. Scenarios are broad conceptual configurations of how a future agenda and its institutional architecture might evolve. Outcomes describe specific possible substantive or institutional developments or arrangements within those configurations. In other words, within each scenario, the paper identifies more specific outcomes that illustrate how that broad direction could take shape. Analysis of specific outcomes include details on what each would look like in practice, as well as its political logic and rationale, practical benefits and drawbacks, and political feasibility and risks.

More information on this analysis of scenarios and outcomes can be found on page 18 →

The specific outcomes are subsequently assessed through the lens of key guiding principles outlined in this paper: universality and preserving ambition; integration, coherence and resilience against fragmentation; human rights and leaving no one behind; process integrity, legitimacy and participation; and evidence, deliverability and long-term effectiveness. The analysis of the key guiding principles, included at the end of this paper, considers how well each potential outcome aligns with these principles, while also highlighting where trade-offs or tensions may arise between different choices. It is intended as an initial assessment of the potential implications of different options, rather than a definitive judgment, and further work to deepen this analysis will be a focus of the Group's work in the future.

More information on the methodology and analysis of key principles on page 15 →

1.4) Scenarios at a glance

The paper examines four broad scenarios: Continuity, Recalibration, Recomposition and Transformation, and Contraction and Fragmentation. These four potential scenarios should be read as a means of structuring and categorizing the choices ahead and examining the directions that the political process could take going forward.

Table 1 summarizes some of the key analysis and reflections outlined in Chapter 4 of this paper. The subsequent analysis in that chapter provides further context and detail on key outcomes under each scenario.

Table 1

Scenario	Overview	Rationale and context
Continuity	Carry the SDGs and 2030 Agenda forward through a rollover or bounded technical update, without substantive political renegotiation of goals or targets.	Would protect universality and preserve a common framework with existing institutional and political investments and achievements, but would do little to resolve financing, accountability gaps or implementation constraints.
Recalibration	Retain the goals-based architecture while negotiating selective changes to goals, targets, means of implementation, follow-up and review.	Could address known delivery gaps while preserving continuity, but reopening parts of the framework would create risks of regression, politicization and negotiation overload.
Recomposition & Transformation	Change the organizing logic, institutional architecture or model of cooperation more fundamentally, aiming to transform the system on many fronts.	Could respond to emerging systemic challenges and institutional weaknesses but would require greater political will and entail higher transition costs, with some selective risks to universality, comparability and political feasibility.
Contraction & Fragmentation	Narrow, delay or weaken the common global framework, formally or in practice. Could include a non-consensus agreement on all or part of the eventual political outcome.	Could refine focus and improve deliverability or short-term political flexibility but would create the clearest tensions with universality, integration, accountability, equitable participation and overall transformation.

2. Context and strategic debates shaping Beyond 2030

2.1) Stocktaking and lessons learned: Looking back at the post-2015 process and the 2030 Agenda to date

Foundational Design Features of the 2030 Agenda

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development represented a significant evolution in global development cooperation. Its core design features greatly expanded the normative scope of development beyond the Millennium Development Goal era. The principles of universality, integrated and indivisible goals, leaving no one behind, a human-rights-based approach, gender equality, partnership, and voluntary follow-up and review created a shared political language and helped move the discourse away from a traditional donor–recipient frame.

This normative approach to sustainable development enabled political and institutional shifts:

- National planning and reporting through Voluntary National Reviews;
- Regional forums that contextualized global commitments;
- An expanded research agenda and data systems; and
- Broader participation from civil society, academia and non-state actors.

At the same time, there were significant challenges in achieving these principles because they were so ambitious. Universality introduced tensions around differentiated responsibilities and domestic policy space. The breadth of the Agenda made it possible for implementers to argue that prioritization was difficult and exposed the Agenda to criticism that its failures were technical rather than political. Integration and indivisibility created coherence but also complexity. Voluntary review encouraged learning and the building of national coalitions but limited accountability for non-delivery and led many to see Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) as highlighting positive developments and progress only. These challenges have prompted different responses, including calls for a more focused development framework, demands for stronger accountability grounded in human rights and, in some cases, broader challenges to multilateral cooperation itself. Nevertheless, like all international frameworks, the Agenda represents the compromise agreement that was possible in 2015 and articulates a coherent vision of sustainable development based on normative values.

The State of the 2030 Agenda

A decade of implementation shows a mixed record. Progress has been achieved across several goals, but delivery remains uneven across countries and regions, shaped by financing constraints and debt pressures, institutional capacity gaps, data limitations and contested evidence, policy incoherence across sectors and persistent accountability weaknesses. The political context shifted significantly during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, which further exposed vulnerabilities in financing, governance and institutional resilience. Political constraints continue to shape implementation far more than technical or institutional ones.

The Secretary-General's reports document persistent delivery gaps, whose underlying drivers include insufficient political will and structural inequalities in the global system. At the same time, assessments should recognize progress and lessons from implementation, including in the Global South, rather than relying exclusively on deficit-focused narratives that reinforce perceptions of failure.

Lessons from the post-2015 negotiation process

The post-2015 process demonstrated that inclusive, transparent negotiation can generate political momentum and legitimacy. The Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals' structure, broad stakeholder engagement, open science panels and global consultations helped create ownership and a shared vocabulary. These elements contributed to the Agenda's legitimacy and should inform any future process.

Key lessons include:

- Process design helps shape substance;
- Transparency and inclusivity build trust in process and the outcome;
- Participation must be meaningful, not symbolic;
- Sequencing matters for political management; and
- Legitimacy emerges from broad engagement and ownership, not only from negotiated text.

One lesson from the Open Working Group was its ability to soften long-standing political barriers and ease divisions that often emerge in complex multilateral negotiations – fostering a more collaborative mindset and approach and encouraging Member States to reach across political groups to build common positions. Additionally, the Open Working Group placed a significant focus on genuine stocktaking – devoting its first eight sessions (March 2013 to February 2014) to an open and inclusive process – which in turn significantly lowered the political stakes and reduced potential tensions early in the process.

The Open Working Group on the Sustainable Development Goals

The Post-2015 process took place between 2013 and 2015. It began with the Open Working Group (OWG) on Sustainable Development Goals, which held 13 formal sessions from March 2013 to July 2014, including an initial stocktaking phase comprising eight sessions. This was followed by intergovernmental negotiations on the 2030 Agenda from January to September 2015, culminating in the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the UN Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015.

This open process also allowed negotiations to start with a higher level of trust among Member States and confidence that the process would yield more transformative outcomes. In today's increasingly polarized and fragmented multilateral environment, solidarity and trust-building may be critical prerequisites for any successful process or outcome going forward. Yet the Agenda will always be a product of its time, and any future framework will need the flexibility to adapt to changing contexts.

Lessons from the SDGs' implementation decade

Implementation results have been mixed, as extensively documented through the UN Sustainable Development Reports to-date. The challenges encountered do not necessarily call into question the underlying principles of the 2030 Agenda but highlight the interdependence of many factors, including but not limited to:

- **Goals and policy coherence**
  The scope and scale of the Agenda have been repeatedly presented as an implementation challenge, yet complexity was always deemed essential to meet the objectives of coherence and transformation.
- **Accountability and financing**
  Follow-up and review have remained voluntary, while persistent financing gaps and insufficient means of implementation have constrained progress towards achieving the SDGs.
- **Local ownership and participation**
  Partnerships for delivery were identified in the Agenda as essential; they are nowhere more critical than at the local level, requiring the participation of those affected by change.
- **Data and institutional follow-up**
  Significant initiatives have focused on the production of more data, but the additional data has not always led to institutional ownership for delivery. Data aligned with institutional responsibility has driven implementation, but without that institutional link, the availability of data has often led to limited corrective action.

Where these elements aligned, progress accelerated. Where they diverged, delivery stalled. Recent multilateral processes, such as Financing for Development, climate negotiations, digital governance, health security and UN reforms, underscore the need for stronger institutional coherence and clearer links between commitments and the means of implementation.

Key obstacles to developing a Beyond 2030 Agenda

The next phase faces political, structural and narrative obstacles. Some are similar to those faced during the post-2015 negotiations, while others have evolved and grown significantly in the past decade. They include, among others:

- Polarization and geopolitical tensions;
- Financing and fiscal constraints;
- Shrinking civic space and crackdowns on fundamental freedoms;
- Evolving data, evidence and monitoring requirements;
- Fragmented narratives around sovereignty, progress and global cooperation; and
- Risks of regression if principles are weakened without principled justification.

Each of these obstacles deserves significant analysis beyond what this paper is able to achieve, but the key point here is that each of them shapes the feasibility of any future arrangement and underscores the need for clarity on what must be preserved.

2.2) The Current Moment: Political context of Beyond 2030

The world today faces interconnected political, economic, climate, and governance shocks that are undermining progress on the 2030 Agenda as a whole, while challenging the authority and legitimacy of international institutions like the United Nations. At a time when multilateral cooperation is essential for the cross-border and regional challenges presented by conflict, climate change, rapid technological development, many countries are retreating, both financially and politically, from their global commitments in favor of narrower priorities defined by regional blocs, coalitions of the willing and transnational or multi-stakeholder networks. While these efforts can preserve momentum where global agreement stalls, they can also bypass the principles of universality and accountability upon which many multilateral frameworks depend. With national implementation and multilateral institutions constrained by financing scarcity and geopolitical tensions stalling action due to the increasing politicization of various agendas and mandates, the United Nations is facing a dual-crisis of trust and legitimacy.

Emerging Issues for Beyond 2030

There will be many issues that the next sustainable development framework beyond 2030 could be asked to address, that the 2030 Agenda may not adequately reflect.
These include, among others:

- Digital transformation, artificial intelligence, digital governance and data sovereignty
- Health security and pandemic preparedness
- Climate, biodiversity, food and energy transitions
- Demographic change, urbanization, human mobility, structural and territorial inequality
- Financing, debt, measures of progress, Beyond GDP and Global Public Investment
- Authoritarianism, shrinking civic space, peace, conflict, rising militarization and security spending

More information on these emerging issues can be found in chapter 5 on page 37 →

The UN80 reform initiative responds in part to the UN's liquidity crisis driven by late and withheld contributions; that crisis has forced hiring freezes and programme reductions, even as cross-border challenges keep reliance on multilateral cooperation high, while bilateral official development assistance is dwindling. Across the world, democratic norms are being eroded by the rise of authoritarian and anti-rights ideologies, and have led to the dismantling of judicial institutions, rollbacks on media freedoms and human rights, and widespread misinformation and disinformation that are further fuelled by political polarization. The 2030 Agenda itself is also facing waning political support from some Member States, with politicization of various sustainable development issues leading to backsliding commitments on some fronts. Debates over sovereignty, effectiveness, growth, participation, global cooperation and the role of evidence now shape how the Agenda is interpreted and implemented. Organized and growing backlash against certain rights, gender equality, multilateral cooperation, efforts to combat climate change, alongside attacks on civil society organizations, journalists, researchers and data systems, threatens the integrity of the agenda.

3. Recommended guiding principles for the Beyond 2030 Agenda

The principles outlined below represent key recommendations that the Reflection Group believes would provide a strong foundation for the sustainable development agenda beyond 2030 regardless of the outcome. Based on reflections on lessons learned from the post-2015 political process and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda to date, these cross-cutting and non-prescriptive principles may help strengthen the legitimacy of the Beyond 2030 process itself and maximize the impact of the eventual Beyond 2030 framework in the decades to come.

3.1) Universality and preserving ambition

These principles address whether an outcome protects the fundamental ambition and universal character of the 2030 Agenda while providing room to become more ambitious. The 2030 Agenda's framework and commitments provide a baseline and a strong foundation for future action. The ambition of the Beyond 2030 framework must identify where those commitments remain unfulfilled and why they were unmet, prioritize action to help countries deliver them, and consider whether and how commitments or the framework itself may need to evolve.

Sustainable development has always been a ***universal*** undertaking, applying to all countries while recognizing different national contexts and capacities. Differentiated implementation can support universality when all countries remain accountable for their commitments; it should not become a justification for abandoning shared ambition.

> “Differentiated implementation can support universality when all countries remain accountable for their commitments; it should not become a justification for abandoning shared ambition.”

Preserving ambition means that the future framework would preserve and build upon the substantive ambition, commitments and principles of the 2030 Agenda. This principle applies to both substantive commitments and the political commitments embedded in the post-2015 process itself. The next negotiation must match and build on the transparency, accessibility and inclusivity that defined the SDG negotiations.

3.2) Integration, coherence and resilience against fragmentation

These principles will help ensure that any future sustainable development agenda continues to view sustainable development as an integrated and indivisible undertaking, connecting its economic, social, environmental and institutional dimensions. Experience with the 2030 Agenda has shown how closely many issues are linked and the value of an integrated approach to implementation. For the future agenda, such an approach would mean coordinating implementation at the global, regional and national levels.

The principles of integration, coherence and resilience against fragmentation are critical for addressing risks of fragmentation on both a horizontal basis (i.e., between thematic issues) and a vertical basis (i.e., on the global, regional and national levels), as well as across different actor groups (state and non-state), across countries (external spillover effects) and across generations.

The 2030 Agenda has helped highlight the integration and indivisibility of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development on both substantive and institutional levels. Following this principle, the future agenda would preserve and strengthen these interlinkages. A future framework aligned with this principle would resist fragmentation or approaches that advance some dimensions at the expense of others.

If it is to be successful, the next agenda needs to be designed with ongoing reforms of the UN system, financing architecture and multilateral governance in mind. ***Cross-system coherence*** is essential for implementation and review.

Regionalization and decentralization can serve as important approaches to strengthening ownership, relevance and implementation. Enabling regional cooperation and diversifying entry points for engagement could help reduce fragmentation and enhance legitimacy, while reinforcing rather than replacing the universal character of the agenda.

3.3) Human rights and leaving no one behind

These principles reaffirm the centrality of human rights, gender equality, non-discrimination and the commitment to leave no one behind in any future sustainable development agenda. Building on the foundational commitments of the 2030 Agenda, including the endeavour to reach those furthest behind first, they emphasize the importance of protecting fundamental freedoms, addressing structural inequalities and ensuring that the rights and needs of marginalized and excluded populations remain central to future commitments and implementation.

To ensure consistent action to address inequality, the commitment to ***leave no one behind*** must remain at the heart of any future framework. Fulfilling that commitment requires prioritizing people and communities facing the greatest inequalities, exclusion and disadvantage and strengthening the ability to reach those furthest behind first.

Human rights are a foundational pillar of the UN and of the 2030 Agenda. For the future agenda to align with this historical priority, it would have to safeguard and expand the centrality of ***human rights and civic space*** in any future arrangement, particularly given intensifying trends of democratic backsliding on many fronts.

3.4) Process integrity, legitimacy and participation

These principles address key procedures involved in the development of the next sustainable development agenda. They address whether the process is broad, inclusive and consultative, involving not only Member States and UN agencies but also meaningful opportunities for civil society and other stakeholders to contribute to outcomes, building on the precedent of the post-2015 process. They require high levels of transparency and accessibility and also underline the importance of participation by experts and key partners at the regional, national and local levels. This broad participation is essential not only for the legitimacy of the new agenda but also for the shared responsibility and commitment needed to implement it.

The Beyond 2030 process should build upon the modalities of the post-2015 negotiations to ensure the ***inclusive and meaningful participation of civil society and other stakeholders.*** There are clear models and approaches to implementing this principle, and civil society and all other stakeholders should have a meaningful role from the outset, with broad, accessible and substantive participation.

Process integrity should be prioritized, with negotiations preserving the procedural gains of the post-2015 process: transparency, accessibility, sequencing and inclusive design. Weakening process norms increases the likelihood of negotiation paralysis or superficial consensus. Any decisions on modalities should be based on this principle.

3.5) Evidence-based practice, deliverability and long-term effectiveness

These principles consider how to ground the next sustainable development agenda in data, evidence and lessons learned from the 2030 Agenda to date, while considering political incentives, institutional capacities, financing, monitoring, review and other key issues that will help ensure the achievement of the commitments made. They also assess whether the outcome can adapt to changing conditions and emerging risks over time and incorporate strategic foresight and intergenerational considerations over the delivery timeline of the new agenda and beyond.

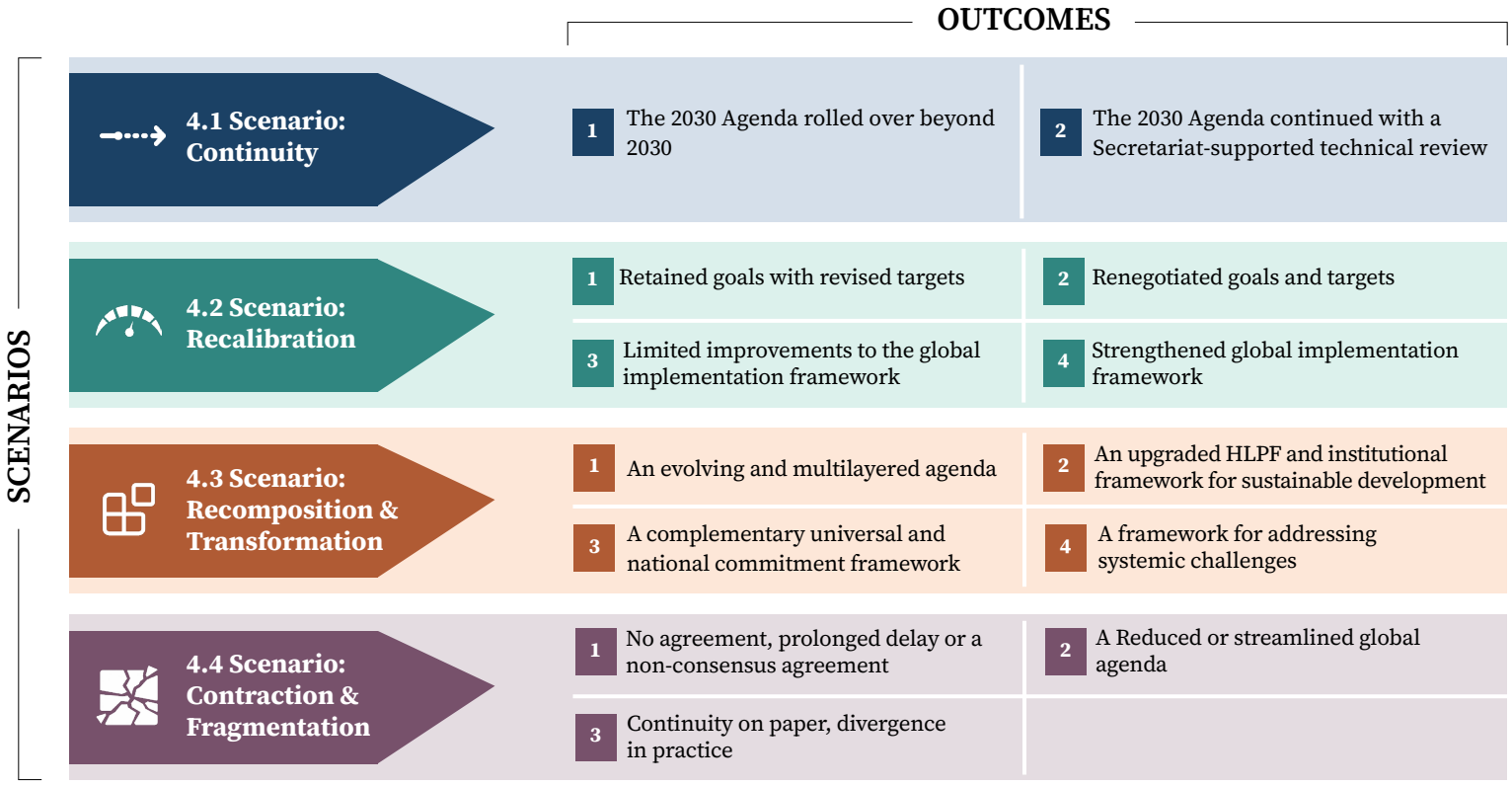
A critical lesson from SDG implementation is the central importance of reliable and valid data and ***evidence-based practice*** and learning. Strengthening credible monitoring systems and data ecosystems is essential for accountability, comparability and trust. Following this principle, a future framework would also address questions of contested evidence and politicized data.

Beyond 2030 commitments must also be balanced with feasibility and political realism. Principles must guide the negotiation, but political constraints will shape what is achievable. The challenge is to preserve normative gains while designing arrangements that can be delivered under real-world conditions.

The Beyond 2030 framework should ***embed long-term thinking, strategic foresight and intergenerational considerations systematically*** across the UN's work. Embedding these practices could help shift decision-making beyond short-term political cycles and help the UN better anticipate emerging risks, while safeguarding the needs of both present and future generations.

4. Scenarios and potential outcomes for a Sustainable Development Framework Beyond 2030

Section breakdown:



How to read and interpret this analysis

This section explores a range of scenarios and potential outcomes for the sustainable development agenda beyond 2030. The analysis is intended to provide insights into a non-exhaustive and non-prescriptive menu of options and possibilities, examining the implications, opportunities and challenges associated with different pathways. These reflections are based on key lessons learned from the post-2015 political process and implementation of the 2030 Agenda to date. Analysis draws on existing proposals, as well as early conversations and debates on Beyond 2030 and takes into account the ever-shifting political and institutional context of the current moment.

What each Scenario covers

Scenarios represent broad outlines of different approaches to developing the global sustainable development agenda beyond 2030. Each scenario brings together a range of related potential outcomes within a common framing that encompasses shared characteristics, themes or areas of focus and provides an overarching context for understanding and examining the more specific outcomes.

What each Outcome covers

Outcomes describe specific potential proposals or arrangements within a sustainable development agenda beyond 2030, ranging from changes to substantive priorities to reforms to its institutional architecture and implementation or review mechanisms. Each outcome explores the underlying rationale, benefits, drawbacks, potential trade-offs and other practical considerations, as well as political feasibility and risks.

Analysis of each potential outcome examines:

1. What this would look like in practice:
A description of the outcome, including important background information, key features and potential implications;

2. Logic and rationale:
The underlying motivations, priorities and assumptions that define the political and institutional context;

3. Practical benefits and drawbacks:
Potential advantages or positive impacts of each outcome, alongside limitations, compromises or unintended consequences, outlining what could be gained or lost; and

4. Political feasibility and risks:
Diplomatic, institutional, financial or other challenges related to the political process itself that could impact the likelihood of the outcome emerging as a feasible option or create risks of regression in ambition or legitimacy.

Understanding the relationship between Scenarios and Outcomes

The scenarios and outcomes outlined in this paper are intended to structure analysis of the range of possible pathways for the Beyond 2030 process ahead. These potential outcomes do not represent mutually exclusive choices, and elements of different outcomes could coexist or evolve over time. While this paper outlines some of these details separately, the eventual Beyond 2030 framework is likely to combine multiple aspects of many of the outcomes identified in the paper, alongside other potential ideas not considered here. Subsequent analysis of the relationships and linkages between these outcomes will be a focus of the Reflection Group going forward, as the Beyond 2030 process develops.

For example, Member States could decide to roll over the SDGs without renegotiation or technical updates, while strengthening, upgrading or reinforcing the institutional architecture for implementation and follow-up. That combination would incorporate Outcome 1 of the Continuity scenario, as well as elements of Outcomes 3 or 4 of the Recalibration scenario, and potentially even elements of Outcomes 2 or 4 of the Transformation scenario.

4.1) Scenario: Continuity

Carrying forward the Agenda through rollover or a bounded technical review, retaining existing goals and substantive commitments

Under a Continuity scenario, the SDGs and the substantive commitments of the 2030 Agenda remain the global framework for sustainable development beyond 2030. Two potential outcomes are considered. In the first, Member States would carry the Agenda forward as it stands, while routine statistical work would continue. In the second, continuation would include a dedicated technical review supported by the UN Secretariat to improve measurement and clarify how the existing framework could be used beyond 2030. This review would not change existing goals or substantive commitments.

Member States would retain political oversight, including decisions on continuation, a new timeframe or the mandate for a technical review. Either outcome could follow a straightforward recommitment or negotiations that ultimately reaffirm the existing framework. The distinction concerns what would be carried forward rather than whether negotiations occur. Continuity would preserve a common framework and existing implementation systems but would not itself resolve financing, accountability and other gaps. Negotiated substantive changes to goals, targets or implementation arrangements are considered under Recalibration.

Outcome	Overview
Outcome 1: The 2030 Agenda rolled over beyond 2030	Member States would carry the Agenda beyond 2030, with or without a new collective timeframe, retaining existing goals and substantive targets while routine statistical work would continue without a dedicated technical review.
Outcome 2: The 2030 Agenda continued with a Secretariat-supported technical review	The Agenda would continue with a dedicated Secretariat-supported technical review within an agreed mandate to improve measurement and clarify its continued use without changing existing goals and substantive commitments.

For an analysis of how each potential outcome aligns with the key principles identified in this paper, see the Scenario 1: Continuity table in Annex A on Page 42 →

Outcome 1 The 2030 Agenda rolled over beyond 2030

What this would look like in practice

Member States would reaffirm the continuing relevance of the 2030 Agenda and its principles beyond 2030, with or without formally extending its timeframe. Existing goals and targets would be carried forward without a dedicated technical review or substantive redesign, while routine statistical work would continue. The SDGs would remain a shared political and policy reference point, allowing national strategies, monitoring systems, Voluntary National Reviews and other implementation arrangements to continue drawing upon the Agenda. Rollover itself would not introduce substantive changes to goals, targets, financing commitments or follow-up arrangements; stronger implementation of existing commitments would remain possible.

Logic and rationale

Rollover might appeal to governments seeking to preserve a common framework while avoiding the political and transaction costs associated with reopening the full Agenda, as well as the risk of weakening commitments. It could follow a straightforward recommitment or emerge as a compromise after negotiations between governments seeking a narrower agenda and those seeking greater ambition. The same continuity outcome could therefore be reached through different political routes, with different implications for ownership, trust and the resources available for implementation.

Practical benefits and drawbacks

The principal benefit of this outcome would be preservation: existing political commitments, monitoring infrastructure, planning systems, and reference points for advocacy and accountability would remain usable. On the one hand, treating the Agenda as an enduring framework could reinforce the continuing relevance of unmet commitments. A straightforward recommitment could limit negotiation costs; negotiated reaffirmation could make governments' positions more visible and renew ownership, including among actors who did not participate in the post-2015 process. On the other hand, prolonged negotiations could also consume resources, deepen mistrust and weaken confidence in collective progress. Retaining the framework would not itself resolve financing, accountability or implementation gaps, although stronger delivery would remain possible under existing commitments.

Political feasibility and risks

Rollover could be easier to agree than substantive redesign, but support cannot be assumed, and the negotiating route would affect its feasibility. Operationally, existing systems could continue, while delivery would depend on financing, capacity, policy coherence, accountability and meaningful participation. Continuation without a collective deadline could reduce the sense of urgency; repeated extensions could normalize non-delivery. Interim milestones and meaningful follow-up would therefore matter under either variant. If political attention, resources, civic space and implementation deteriorated, formal continuity could become the "continuity on paper, divergence in practice" considered under Contraction and Fragmentation.

Outcome 2 The 2030 Agenda continued with a Secretariat-supported technical review

What this would look like in practice

Member States would carry the 2030 Agenda forward with a bounded technical review under their political oversight. The UN Secretariat and relevant expert and statistical bodies would support the review within the agreed mandate. The review would examine how existing targets are monitored and applied beyond 2030: for example, improving disaggregation and identifying references requiring a decision on their timeframe. It would retain the goals and the substance and ambition of the targets. The review would bring these findings together in a consolidated set of technical recommendations for continuation beyond 2030, drawing on existing statistical processes. Recommendations would follow the relevant approval procedures; the Secretariat would not independently amend political commitments. Adding or substantively revising goals or targets would require a separate political decision and fall under the Recalibration scenario.

Logic and rationale

This outcome would keep the framework usable beyond its original timeframe while preserving the balance achieved in 2015. A dedicated review could provide a common evidence base on implementation experience and technical gaps. The Secretariat would support decisions within an agreed mandate, rather than independently determine new political commitments. A Secretary-General's report could inform either Continuity or Recalibration: its mandate and the decisions on its recommendations, rather than the report itself, would distinguish the approaches.

Practical benefits and drawbacks

A technical review could improve monitoring methods, data quality and disaggregation, while retaining common reference points and explaining breaks in comparability. It could also identify substantive questions for separate political consideration. Technical work could not itself resolve gaps in commitments or weak financing and accountability, and it could burden statistical systems with limited capacity. Choices about what is measured would affect whose experiences remain visible, making transparent methods and meaningful consultation essential.

Political feasibility and risks

Feasibility would depend on a clear mandate, adequate resources and technical capacity, and meaningful input from national statistical offices, independent experts, civil society and affected communities. The main risk would be that apparently technical changes might weaken commitments or obscure non-delivery – for example, by dropping overdue targets or reducing attention given to groups for whom data scarce. Transparent criteria, public explanations and safeguards for comparability would therefore be essential. Substantive changes to commitments would require separate political decisions under Recalibration. Any new timeframe would likewise require a Member State decision and should preserve accountability for original deadlines and unmet commitments.

4.2) Scenario: Recalibration

Considers selective substantive and institutional changes within a continued global framework

Under a Recalibration scenario, Member States would reaffirm the goals-based architecture of the 2030 Agenda while selectively adapting or renegotiating the goals, targets and global implementation framework. Rather than simply extending the existing framework (Continuity) or negotiating an entirely new agenda (Recomposition), Recalibration would focus on Member States negotiating bounded changes to ensure that the framework remains relevant, effective and capable of guiding sustainable development beyond 2030.

Recalibration would build on adaptation that has already occurred during implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including periodic revisions to the global indicator framework by the Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs). For Beyond 2030, this logic could be applied more systematically to existing or new goals, targets, means of implementation, and institutional arrangements for follow-up and review. Under Continuity, a technical review would serve to update existing commitments or improve the way they are measured. Under Recalibration, Member States would negotiate changes to the targets, including adding targets under existing goals (Outcome 1); alternatively, they could reopen the goals themselves, potentially even extending the list of goals (Outcome 2). Based on potential changes to goals or targets, Member States would then also need to mandate a revision of the indicator framework.

Recalibration represents an adaptive scenario, but one that carries significant risks. The core goals-based structure would retain international legitimacy but might require selective updates to remain credible, fundable and politically fit for purpose. The central challenge is to ensure that necessary adaptation maintains the balance achieved in 2015, finds consensus and builds on the strength of the 2030 Agenda rather than providing an opportunity to regress, lower ambition or abandon politically difficult commitments.

Outcome	Overview
Outcome 1: Retained goals with revised targets	Member States would retain the 17 goals while selectively renegotiating targets to reflect implementation experience, changing conditions, emerging issues and international commitments adopted since 2015.
Outcome 2: Renegotiated goals and targets	Member States would renegotiate selected goals and targets through additions, revisions, removals or consolidation, while retaining the broad normative foundation and goals-based architecture of the Agenda.
Outcome 3: Limited improvements to the global implementation framework	Member States would improve the global implementation framework slightly, building on existing multilateral agreements regarding means of implementation, follow-up and review.
Outcome 4: Strengthened global implementation framework	Member States would renegotiate to significantly strengthen the global framework through enhanced means of implementation, stronger follow-up and review, better evidence, meaningful participation, and linking review to implementation and resource allocation.

For an analysis of how each potential outcome aligns with the key principles identified in this paper, see the Scenario 2: Recalibration table in Annex A on Page 43 →

Outcome 1 Retained Goals with Revised Targets

What this would look like in practice

The 17 goals would remain unchanged, while Member States would negotiate additions, revisions, removals or mergers of the targets. Targets with expired time horizons could be renewed or replaced; those achieved, overtaken by subsequent major multilateral agreements or rendered less relevant by changing circumstances could be reconsidered; and commitments that remain important but have proved insufficient could be strengthened. New or revised targets could address emerging issues and integrate major multilateral agreements, conventions and frameworks adopted since 2015, enabling the SDGs to remain an overarching framework that reflects current sustainable development commitments.

Logic and rationale

This outcome responds to calls for updates and greater contextual relevance, while acknowledging that, given the current geopolitical landscape, it would be difficult and risky to reopen negotiations on the goals. Some targets need updating because their original time horizons have expired, while others no longer adequately capture the phenomena for which they were designed, as societies, economies and technologies have changed. Framing the exercise as evidence-based recalibration rather than reopening the list of SDGs could facilitate consensus. Integrating emerging issues and subsequent agreements could restore topical relevance while reinforcing the framework's role as a central reference point for sustainable development.

Practical benefits and drawbacks

The goals framework could be maintained while improvements were made. Updating and consolidating targets could strengthen relevance, national ownership, and the fit between global benchmarks and contemporary realities. Changes could also address major blind spots, improve coherence across international commitments and create renewed political momentum without reopening the 17 SDGs. One potential drawback is that the changes might not be significant enough to accelerate implementation.

Political feasibility and risks

Choices about what targets to revise, remove or add could become politically contested. Consensus could be at risk. Hard-won commitments, including those relating to human rights, gender equality, environmental protection and more, could be diluted under the guise of technical simplification. Clear criteria would be needed to distinguish legitimate updating from attempts to weaken commitments that remain substantively relevant but have not been achieved. Failure to achieve a target by 2030 should not itself justify weakening or removing it. Political feasibility might be relatively high where revisions are supported by evidence, expired deadlines or subsequent intergovernmental commitments, but lower for issues where international consensus remains weak. Operational feasibility would depend on avoiding duplication, contradictory standards, unfunded mandates and excessive reporting requirements.

Outcome 2 Renegotiated goals and targets

What this would look like in practice

Member States would negotiate additions, revisions, removals or mergers of goals and targets based on lessons from implementation, changed global conditions and international commitments adopted since 2015. This could involve, for example, consolidating SDGs or selectively reformulating their scope. Additions could address new and emerging sustainable development challenges such as digital governance, artificial intelligence, health security, mobility, care and peace economies, democratic resilience, civic space, culture and planetary boundaries, as well as climate, food and energy transitions. The political focus would be on renegotiating goals and targets while the broad normative foundation and goals-based implementation architecture would remain intact.

Logic and rationale

This outcome responds to lessons from implementation and calls for revision and greater contextual relevance at the level of the SDGs themselves. More than 10 years of implementation have revealed gaps, overlaps or imbalances in the way sustainable development priorities are organized across the 17 SDGs. This outcome could address those issues without abandoning the overall SDG model.

Practical benefits and drawbacks

Consolidation or revision of goals and targets could renew political ownership, improve coherence across agendas and better reflect contemporary realities, priorities and needs while addressing major gaps or overlaps. It could improve relevance and strengthen ownership among governments, stakeholders and citizens. Reopening the SDGs would also reopen some of the central political compromises underpinning the 2030 Agenda, making this approach more politically demanding on Member States than updating just the targets.

Political feasibility and risks

Reopening individual SDGs and their targets would pose a high risk of diluting or removing hard-won commitments on issues such as human rights, gender equality and environmental protection during the negotiation process. Clear non-regression criteria would be needed to distinguish legitimate changes from attempts to weaken commitments that remain substantively relevant. The political feasibility of achieving a consensus outcome on a new set of goals would be rather low; it might be higher for selective revisions that are supported by evidence and implementation experience. Operational feasibility would require willingness to adapt national planning, monitoring and institutional systems in accordance with the changes.

Outcome 3 Limited improvements to the global implementation framework

What this would look like in practice

The substantive goals would remain broadly intact, and targets might or might not be updated or renegotiated, but the focus would shift to changes in the global implementation framework – that is, the means of implementation and the follow-up and review of SDG implementation. For this outcome, Member States would pursue a limited update of the global framework in line with existing multilateral agreements. They could draw on the Sevilla Commitment for the means of implementation and recalibrate commitments on financing, capacity-building, domestic fiscal space and other areas. For follow-up and review, they could build on the most recent General Assembly review of ECOSOC and the HLPF's format and organizational aspects. They could improve Voluntary National Review processes, regional follow-up, science-policy interfaces, meaningful stakeholder participation and mechanisms for translating review findings into political guidance for future implementation. Those changes would centre on enhancing peer learning and mutual support.

Logic and rationale

This outcome reflects recognition that implementation gaps, inadequate financing and institutional constraints have impeded progress, and that better-aligned institutions, clearer responsibilities and more credible financing arrangements may unlock progress that renegotiating goals or targets could not. This approach rests on the understanding that the SDGs themselves represent an agenda that remains highly ambitious and relevant and that greater gains can be achieved by improving the implementation architecture itself.

Practical benefits and drawbacks

Recalibrating means of implementation and follow-up and review could improve coherence and delivery and strengthen links across levels of action. It could also expose unresolved disagreements over sovereignty, reporting burdens, burden-sharing, debt, tax cooperation, lending reform and domestic policy space. Institutional adjustments could improve coordination but might become technical exercises disconnected from resources and the power relations shaping implementation.

Political feasibility and risks

Political feasibility would be higher where reforms build on existing agreements and institutions and when they emphasize learning, peer exchange, implementation support and course correction. However, these limited updates to the implementation framework might be ineffective if they failed to connect means of implementation or review findings to transformative changes in policy decisions and funding patterns.

Outcome 4 Strengthened global implementation framework

What this would look like in practice

In contrast to the previous outcome, Member States could opt for more ambitious reforms to the global-level implementation framework. The means of implementation could include global public investment, taxing high-net-worth individuals, blockchain-based smart contracts and digital payments, shock-agnostic debt-service-suspension clauses or Beyond GDP metrics. Member States could also choose to address politically challenging issues, such as debt architecture reform, international tax cooperation, trade, technology transfer and even reforms to the international financial architecture. For follow-up and review, Member States could decide to introduce digital tools, extend reporting to local governments and private sector actors, mandate an official synthesis report on input from non-state actors and include citizen data. They could move reporting towards more interactive reviews that incorporate independent scientific assessments, findings from other global reviews, civil society reporting and timely digital monitoring. However, this recalibration would remain below the level of mandatory reporting or sanctions.

Logic and rationale

Significantly strengthening the means of implementation and follow-up and review could address the discrepancy between international commitments and the gaps in their implementation, whether due to a lack of capacity or of political will. While there is diversity in how the SDGs are applied and implemented, the role of the institutional architecture is to provide a space for countries and communities to learn from and support each other to improve national implementation. The political focus would be on improving the enabling framework that is needed to achieve the goals.

Practical benefits and drawbacks

Greater investment by Member States in the global-level implementation framework would help tackle implementation gaps, especially in countries with limited capacities. It would also improve policy learning and provide governments and stakeholders with a stronger evidence base and means for course correction. If findings remain disconnected from policy, financing and decision-making, they might have no effect. Once again, operational feasibility would hinge on clear mandates, adequate resources, reliable evidence, meaningful participation and robust mechanisms that turn the means of implementation and the findings of reviews into transformative action.

Political feasibility and risks

Stronger recalibration of the global implementation framework might be perceived as undue external intervention, scrutiny and unfair burden shifting and thus be rejected. Political feasibility would be challenging. Despite broad recognition of financing constraints, concrete redistributive, fiscal and institutional reforms remain contested. Changes to follow-up and review would be more contentious where they imply stronger scrutiny or redistribution of authority, or where they create additional obligations and burdens. Operational feasibility would depend on clear mandates, adequate capacity and financing, reliable evidence, meaningful participation and mechanisms connecting review findings to subsequent policy, implementation and resource allocation.

4.3) Scenario: Recomposition & Transformation

Change the organizing logic, institutional architecture or model of cooperation more fundamentally

Recomposition would involve a more substantial reimagining of the global sustainable development framework. Transformation in this scenario refers to a more fundamental shift in the way the Beyond 2030 framework is structured or approached, as opposed to examining implications for transformative implementation. More substantial changes to current approaches and frameworks could provide additional opportunities for increasing legitimacy, action and follow-up for the Beyond 2030 Agenda. This scenario would include exploring other models that move beyond the current time-bound and goals-based framework to ask whether it remains sufficient for a world facing intersecting crises of inequality, climate change, conflict, democratic erosion, debt, care, digital disruption and declining trust. It could explore alternative ways to conceive of development and structure the institutional architecture for sustainable development, which remains an indispensable part of further supporting implementation of the next agenda and safeguarding against regressive outcomes.

Recomposition should not be treated as automatically more progressive, ambitious or desirable. Such approaches could be more responsive to practical limitations of current models, but some might raise questions or additional feasibility challenges related to universality, fragmentation, budgetary considerations, accountability and other issues. However, these challenges are directly related to Member States' individual and collective political will. In other words, if political will existed to make substantial changes in the way the current system operates, the possibility for positive impact would be significant. Conversely, if political will were lacking, exploring approaches like these could actually risk regressive outcomes and undermine efforts to implement the Beyond 2030 Agenda.

Outcome	Overview
Outcome 1: An evolving and multilayered agenda	This outcome would elevate the SDGs to a permanent set of ambitions, featuring either an ongoing agenda with a revision cycle or an agenda with multiple layers of time-bound elements over the medium and long term.
Outcome 2: An upgraded HLPF and institutional framework for sustainable development	Member States would strengthen or replace the HLPF with a UN body providing more continuous leadership, coordination and review, with options ranging from a subsidiary body to a new principal organ.
Outcome 3: A complementary universal and national commitment framework	Member States would establish the minimum universal level of ambition that all Member States would be expected to uphold (whether through rollover of the SDGs or otherwise), while creating structured opportunities and a framework for countries to outline nationally determined development commitments.
Outcome 4: A framework for addressing systemic challenges	This outcome would organize the agenda around addressing interconnected systemic challenges and risks to sustainable development, aiming to promote a paradigm shift.

For an analysis of how each potential outcome aligns with the key principles identified in this paper, see the Scenario 3: Recomposition & Transformation table in Annex A on Page 44 →

Outcome 1 An evolving and multilayered agenda for sustainable development

What this would look like in practice

This outcome would organize the agenda around regular substantive revisions or multiple layers of short-, medium- and long-term goals rather than a single overarching deadline. It could also elevate the SDGs to a permanent set of ambitions without time-bound deadlines altogether, and could feature an ongoing agenda with a regular revision or review cycle. An ongoing agenda with a revision cycle could involve plans to revisit and refresh the substance of the goals every 10 years. Such a multilayered agenda could be executed through sets of short-, medium- and long-term goals simultaneously, recognizing the multidimensional nature of sustainable development and the need for gradual, cumulative progress. This outcome could also include regional goals recognizing needs and differentiated capacities and responsibilities, building upon complementary frameworks such as the African Union's Agenda 2063.

Logic and rationale

A substantial reworking such as this one would address the concern that the existing development model has lost legitimacy in recent years. It would respond to the criticism that the framework fails to address the interconnected nature of sustainable development challenges and would create space for adaptive governance. This outcome also acknowledges the compounding nature of sustainable development pursuits and the necessity for triage in various contexts.

Practical benefits and drawbacks

This outcome could create a clearer political narrative and allow more extensive reconsideration of underlying development assumptions, addressing some of the aforementioned critiques of the existing framework. In a framework such as this, targets, goals and implementation could be tailored for new and emerging challenges. It might be more difficult to quantify progress because the approach would have a less developed conceptual framework. A revision cycle or layered timelines would also require greater administrative and operational expenditure at a time when the UN system is facing a liquidity crisis.

Political feasibility and risks

This outcome could create a risk of regression if the goals were reopened and renegotiated to fit into a new architecture such as the ones described here. With less political will on a number of issues, some elements of the agenda would be at risk of being lost. These issues, in some cases, might correspond to the multidimensional challenges the outcome would seek to address. Additionally, shorter intervals for reviewing and revising the framework's short-term targets could risk institutionalizing potentially highly contentious political negotiations among Member States on a more regular basis.

Outcome 2 An upgraded HLPF and institutional framework for sustainable development

What this would look like in practice

In much the same way that the Human Rights Council holds the mandate to strengthen the promotion and protection of human rights, this outcome would seek to upgrade the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) or replace it with a stronger body with a more prominent role within the UN's architecture. Options could range from establishing a "Sustainable Development Council" as a subsidiary body of the General Assembly, similar to the Human Rights Council, to the more ambitious option of establishing a sustainable development body as a new principal organ of the UN.

Logic and rationale

Any upgrades to the institutional architecture such as these would substantially elevate sustainable development within the UN system by creating a body with greater political authority, visibility and capacity to deliver on the ambitions of the Beyond 2030 Agenda. Establishing such a body could underscore the cross-cutting importance of the sustainable development agenda and the immense ambitions that Member States and the UN have committed to through the 2030 Agenda and whatever comes next. An upgrade would create a simplified hierarchy that would truly make the HLPF the apex of the UN system's work on sustainable development, as was originally intended by a significant number of Member States.

Practical benefits and drawbacks

A stronger institutional framework would increase the political visibility of sustainable development at the UN, putting it on par with other key UN pillars, such as human rights. Expanded opportunities for dialogue and sustained work throughout the UN calendar could dramatically increase the international community's ability to respond and adapt to newly arising challenges. Member States need to ensure that the placement and role of this upgraded body fit in seamlessly with other existing mechanisms related to specific sustainable development issues, such as functional commissions of ECOSOC. Member States would also have to dedicate adequate financing to sustain an elevated institutional framework.

Political feasibility and risks

A subsidiary body of the UN General Assembly could potentially be established through a General Assembly resolution without Charter amendment, while the creation of a new principal organ – or the repurposing of an existing principal organ – would require Charter reform. Upgrading the HLPF or creating a new and elevated body to replace it would require additional budgetary commitments from Member States. These funding challenges would create a practical risk that Member States might make lofty commitments to upgrading the architecture for sustainable development, while neglecting to finance and support it, leading to a weakened framework that is stretched even more thinly across the system and throughout the UN calendar.

Outcome 3 A complementary universal and national commitment framework

What this would look like in practice

Member States would establish the minimum level of universal ambition that all Member States would be expected to uphold (whether through rollover of the SDGs or otherwise), while creating opportunities for countries to make additional voluntary commitments that would outline more ambitious goals, targets, financing, actions or implementation plans. Such commitments could be modelled on the Paris Agreement's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), where Member States could periodically submit nationally determined high-ambition commitments that exceed the universal goals and targets. These additional commitments could be tracked alongside the core global framework, with common expectations for transparency, implementation, review and accountability.

Logic and rationale

This approach would preserve and set baseline ambitions for a universal global sustainable development agenda, while creating space for additional commitments, financing and political leadership where consensus among all Member States might not be possible. It could also encourage other governments, through competition and peer pressure, to strengthen their own commitments over time and create opportunities to reward and recognize political leadership. This added action-oriented layer could encourage more governments to take a leading role in and commit to more ambitious action towards the Beyond 2030 Agenda, while preserving a minimum level of ambition for the Agenda itself.

Practical benefits and drawbacks

This approach could encourage a race to the top in ambition, where Member States could look to make stronger commitments and introduce action plans to increase their visibility and legitimacy. Coalitions of the willing around various commitments could also help mobilize financing, political will and learning, and provide opportunities to highlight and showcase successful approaches that could be replicated by Member States. However, a proliferation of voluntary commitments and coalitions could make the overall framework more complex and create uneven participation or visibility across different issues. It could also lead to further fragmentation if governments make commitments only on issues that are most relevant for them or in areas where they have made progress, while ignoring areas where they are lagging behind.

Political feasibility and risks

Safeguards for a commitment-based approach would need to be thoroughly considered to ensure that Member States – both individually and collectively – do not prioritize their own selected high-ambition initiatives or issue areas at the expense of others. Additionally, a coalition-of-the-willing approach could also exacerbate existing inequalities or imbalances in Member States' engagement with these agendas, or provide space for groups to mobilize around more regressive approaches.

Outcome 4

A framework for integration of systemic challenges, promoting a paradigm shift and strengthening resilience

What this would look like in practice

This future agenda would focus on systemic challenges and deal with them in a more integrated way, promoting a paradigm shift. A framework could establish several systemic challenges as overarching goals, within which the SDGs would be nested as a minimum baseline for action, be organized around interconnected risks that serve as systemic challenges to sustainable development. Including climate breakdown, conflict, pandemics, technological disruption, financial instability and democratic or institutional erosion. The future agenda could also focus on fostering synergies and a shift away from siloed approaches, building on the Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) framework of six transformative pathways and on the Beyond GDP agreement. A more radical version could advocate a greater shift in paradigm – for example, in terms of post-growth and the right to development – or raise fundamental questions about what we consider to be growth or success. Such substantive changes would also require a departure from a fixed time-bound framework that could instead rely on a cyclical model or upgraded HLPF (see Outcomes 1 and 2 of this section).

Logic and rationale

This outcome reflects today's interconnected challenges and crises more directly and addresses the concerns that progress on the SDGs has stalled due to systemic barriers. The recognition of the interdependence of goals within the outcome could create opportunities for greater cross-sector and multi-stakeholder action, including strengthened collaboration across ministries at the national level and agencies across the UN system. The attention to risk also answers calls to establish greater cohesion across the humanitarian, development and peace nexus.

Practical benefits and drawbacks

This outcome could improve anticipatory and adaptive governance, taking risk, structural inequality and injustice into account across policy areas. These measures could, in turn, further strengthen the links between development, human rights and peacebuilding. With a focus on the overall enabling environment for sustainable development, achieving this outcome would require substantial negotiations and a reworking of the infrastructure for review and accountability.

Political feasibility and risks

A considerable reworking of the substantive areas of the agenda would require significant political will to put the need to address systemic barriers on the agenda, which has proven difficult as evidenced by the negotiations on the FfD4's Sevilla Compromiso. Even where there was an appetite to explore and embed these risks and systemic challenges in the architecture, there would be a high risk for disagreement and also potential for securitizing of development or an outsourcing of responsibility from States to the private sector. Systemic challenges remain politically sensitive, which suggests low political feasibility. Operationally, addressing such challenges would require cross-sector coordination, anticipatory data, early-warning systems and stronger links between institutions that would require time and financial investment.

4.4) Scenario: Contraction and Fragmentation

Weakening or breakdown of the shared global framework, with more fragmented, divergent or reduced approaches to sustainable development

Under the Contraction and Fragmentation scenario, the global sustainable development framework would narrow, weaken or dissolve due to political polarization, geopolitical competition and declining trust in multilateral institutions. Within this scenario, Member States might struggle to build consensus on shared priorities, principles or commitments, leading to reduced ambition, selective cooperation or the absence of a successor to the 2030 Agenda. Some of the potential outcomes examined below reflect a failure to reach consensus, particularly where financing constraints, shrinking civic space, contested evidence and competing narratives around sovereignty make broad global agreements increasingly difficult to negotiate. Instead of a unified global framework for sustainable development, this scenario could lead to a more fragmented development system: some regions could advance their own agendas, some countries could pursue bilateral or thematic cooperation, and others deprioritize sustainable development altogether. While such fragmentation could create space for tailored or regionally owned approaches, it would carry the significant risks of weakening shared norms, reducing comparability, undermining accountability and eroding incentives for coordinated financing and implementation.

Outcome	Overview
Outcome 1: No agreement, prolonged delay or a non-consensus agreement	Member States would fail to reach agreement on a successor or extension to the 2030 Agenda, potentially weakening the common global framework and increasing reliance on fragmented regional, bilateral or thematic arrangements.
Outcome 2: A Reduced or streamlined global agenda	Member States would negotiate a narrower global agenda with fewer goals or commitments, potentially concentrating attention and resources on selected priorities while risking reduced ambition, universality and integration.
Outcome 3: Continuity on paper, divergence in practice	Member States would maintain a formally agreed global framework, but uneven political commitment, financing and implementation would progressively weaken its effectiveness, accountability and coherence.

For an analysis of how each potential outcome aligns with the key principles identified in this paper, see the Scenario 4: Contraction and Fragmentation table in Annex A on Page 45 →

Outcome 1 No agreement, prolonged delay or a non-consensus agreement

What this would look like in practice

In this outcome, Member States would not negotiate or agree on a successor or extension to the 2030 Agenda, either because negotiations stalled or never formally begin. They might instead conclude an agreement whose limited support or weakened commitments would undermine coordinated implementation, or reach a non-consensus agreement that would further fragment the universality and ownership of the framework itself. Without a functional global framework, the principles behind sustainable development would be translated into shared commitments only on an ad hoc basis, leaving the UN without a clear mandate and governments without a common reference point for planning, monitoring or financing. Regional or thematic processes would evolve independently, creating a patchwork of priorities, standards and cooperation arrangements that would vary widely across regions. This outcome is a plausible result of geopolitical tensions and domestic political pressures.

Logic and rationale

There is no guarantee that the 2030 Agenda will be succeeded by another global framework, particularly in a context of polarization, contested norms and competing priorities. There is also a realistic political path towards a very weak, non-consensus agreement. Some governments may prefer flexibility, nationally determined priorities or issue-specific cooperation over a comprehensive global agenda. Others may be unwilling to compromise on politically sensitive issues such as rights, gender equality, climate ambition or financing responsibilities, leading to negotiation paralysis.

Practical benefits and drawbacks

Failure to agree could create space for tailored bilateral or regional cooperation among actors seeking faster or more targeted progress. It might allow issue-specific or regional arrangements to evolve with greater ownership and contextual relevance. However, the potential benefits from such cooperation would be very small in comparison with the drawbacks: the absence of a global framework would eliminate shared norms, comparability and incentives for coordinated action, weakening the coherence and legitimacy of sustainable development efforts.

Political feasibility and risks

The lack of a global agreement would weaken normative commitments and reduce incentives for implementation, monitoring and financing, particularly around issues that may not be prioritized by specific government administrations. It would undermine coordinated review and accountability, leaving parallel processes without a shared architecture or common metrics. This outcome would carry high risks of regression, dilution and fragmentation, particularly for cross-border challenges that require collective action.

Outcome 2 Reduced or streamlined global agenda

What this would look like in practice

A smaller set of global commitments would be negotiated, focusing political attention and implementation capacity on a limited number of priorities such as poverty reduction, basic services, relief aid, pandemic prevention or a small cluster of measurable outcomes. The agenda might resemble a narrower, Millennium Development Goal–style framework, with fewer goals, simplified targets and reduced reporting requirements. This approach would reduce thematic breadth and simplify monitoring, potentially appealing to governments facing capacity constraints or political fatigue. It might be framed as a pragmatic response to complexity, resource limitations or the need to rebuild consensus around a smaller set of priorities – potentially in response to the risk of a non-consensus agreement. A narrower agenda could be accompanied by a focus on technical cooperation.

Logic and rationale

Some actors might view a narrower agenda as more achievable, measurable or politically sustainable, particularly in contexts where broad agendas are seen as unrealistic or politically contentious. For Member States that would otherwise support sustainable development, this scenario might be seen pragmatically as the only realistic way of maintaining consensus. A streamlined framework might appeal to governments seeking clarity, reduced complexity or lower negotiation costs, especially if they believe that a smaller set of priorities can generate more visible results.

Practical benefits and drawbacks

A focused agenda could reduce complexity and concentrate resources on agreed priorities, improving measurability and reducing reporting burdens. It might help rebuild political consensus around a smaller set of commitments and could help better align the international system's work with this new agenda as well. However, it would require difficult choices – in a potentially challenging negotiating environment – about what would be excluded and risk weakening the integrated treatment of interdependent challenges such as climate, inequality, gender equality and governance, thereby hindering the achievement of all goals. Further, it would risk undermining the principle of universality with a reduction in shared priorities between the Global North and the Global South.

Political feasibility and risks

Trade-offs would include loss of ambition, reduced coherence and potential omission of relevant but politically difficult commitments. Political feasibility would depend on how priorities were selected and how excluded issues were treated in other processes. Operational feasibility would depend on clear definitions, adequate financing and capable implementation systems; simplicity alone would not guarantee better delivery and might mask deeper structural challenges that have created many of the problems that the 2030 Agenda aims to solve.

Outcome 3 Continuity on paper, divergence in practice

What this would look like in practice

A global text would be agreed, but Member States would selectively implement, finance or report on commitments, resulting in formal continuity but divergence in practice. This outcome might also be the result of a non-consensus agreement, albeit with broader support than in the no-agreement scenario. Regions or blocs would advance their own priorities without strong alignment with the global framework, creating uneven delivery and fragmented cooperation. Existing goals and reporting structures would remain in place, but their effectiveness would decline as incentives for financing, monitoring and course correction weakened. The UN would cease to play a central role in coordinating efforts for sustainable development. This outcome reflects a world where maintaining formal consensus is easier than sustaining shared commitment to delivery.

Logic and rationale

This outcome could emerge where governments prioritize domestic agendas, regional cooperation or geopolitical alliances over global commitments. It reflects a pragmatic choice to preserve the appearance of some consensus while avoiding difficult negotiations or politically sensitive compromises. It might also reflect the need to sustain cooperation despite global deadlock or contested norms.

Practical benefits and drawbacks

This outcome would preserve a common reference point and avoid an overt breakdown in negotiations, allowing the UN to maintain a symbolic framework without the means for successful coordination and implementation. It might enable context-specific approaches and cooperation among willing partners. However, it would conceal widening gaps between commitments and delivery, undermining accountability, comparability and financing incentives.

Political feasibility and risks

Trade-offs would include uneven accountability, selective financing and declining incentives for coordinated action. This outcome resembles Continuity in retaining the agreed framework but is distinguished by sustained erosion of financing, monitoring, accountability and coordinated implementation. In the current geopolitical context, feasibility might be high, as it would allow a semblance of consensus without equivalent commitment to implementation. Operational feasibility would be low, given weak incentives for monitoring, financing and course correction, and the risk that divergence might become normalized over time.

5. Variables, risks and emerging issues for Beyond 2030 deliberations

5.1) Variables and risks for the Beyond 2030 process and negotiations

The Beyond 2030 process will unfold amid significant political and institutional uncertainty, with several developments likely to shape both the negotiating environment and the range of possible outcomes. These variables should be closely monitored in the months and years ahead, with each having the potential to impact the ambition and conduct of the process, either positively or negatively.

UN leadership during transition

The transition of UN leadership in advance of the Beyond 2030 process could influence the priorities, convening capacity and support available for deliberations and implementation. The new Secretary-General's priorities could have a bearing on the process and help to shape the attitudes of Member States towards it.

Taking stock of UN80 reforms

The outcomes of the UN80 reform process will likely impact many institutional conditions under which a Beyond 2030 framework would be implemented. Changes to UN structures, mandates, financing and working methods could create new opportunities or constraints for how Member States and the UN system deliver on this new agenda.

Important elections upcoming

Major national elections over the coming years could significantly alter the geopolitical environment and governments' willingness to engage in ambitious multilateral cooperation. These elections could impact not only levels of ambition but also negotiating tactics and the process design itself – whether to mitigate risks of regression or to maximize ambition.

Outcomes from the 2027 SDG Summit and 2028 Pact for the Future review

The 2027 SDG Summit and 2028 review of the Pact for the Future will help frame and inform the Beyond 2030 process. Their outcomes may provide early signals on Member State priorities, areas of emerging consensus and the appetite for more fundamental reform of the global sustainable development framework.

2028 Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review

The next Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) will help shape how the UN development system operates during the transition to a Beyond 2030 framework. Its decisions on coordination, financing, country-level support and implementation could therefore have important implications for what a future agenda can realistically deliver.

5.2) Emerging issues for Beyond 2030

In addition to a markedly different political and institutional context, many issues and strategic debates have emerged since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda in 2015. Some important topics that go beyond the scope of this paper warrant deeper analysis as the Beyond 2030 debate develops. Further research in these areas can help identify opportunities, risks and design choices that should inform the negotiation process. This is only a snapshot of some emerging issues.

Digital transformation, artificial intelligence, digital governance and data sovereignty

Faster and more extensive data collection, alongside increasingly accessible artificial intelligence, is generating debates about data sovereignty and giving rise to concerns about governance, as digital systems and artificial intelligence are increasingly shaping public services, labour markets, education, democratic information environments, surveillance, energy use and the distribution of economic value, as well as space exploration.

Health security and pandemic preparedness

The COVID-19 pandemic moved health security from a sectoral concern to a global priority, exposing the fragility of supply chains, financing and burden-sharing. Recognition of global health interdependence amid globalization creates pressure for stronger preparedness, equitable access and resilient health systems, and interacts with contested pandemic-agreement negotiations, such as the WHO Pandemic Agreement, adopted by consensus at the 78th World Health Assembly on 20 May 2025.

Climate, biodiversity, food and energy transitions

The interaction between climate impacts, biodiversity loss, food systems and energy transitions has gained recognition, demonstrating multidimensional and cross-cutting impacts affecting livelihoods, fiscal space for development, urbanization, mobility, public health and peace. A key consideration is how a future Beyond 2030 framework can adequately acknowledge and address interdependence and embed a systems-thinking approach to development.

Demographic change, urbanization, human mobility, and structural and territorial inequality

Demographic change, rapid urbanization, displacement and migration are reshaping labour markets, care systems, public services and territorial inequalities. These pressures are testing whether a global framework can speak to subnational and transnational realities. Future arrangements will need to determine how to connect national priorities with regional, urban and local realities.

5.2) Emerging issues for Beyond 2030 *(Cont'd)*

Financing, debt, measures of progress, Beyond GDP and Global Public Investment

Financing is both a means of implementation and a lever for the agenda at large. It shapes whether social, climate, health, digital and local commitments can be delivered. Debt service, fiscal space, tax cooperation, concessional finance, public investment and the governance of global public goods are central concerns. Debate about measures beyond GDP asks whether widely used measures of development progress adequately capture well-being, ecological limits and resilience.

Rising conflict, militarization and security spending

The impacts of conflict and rising military spending reverberate across societies, disrupting maritime trade, supply chains and energy sectors and exacerbating climate change, inequalities and poverty as a result. The normalization of violence, coupled with the availability of weapons and arms, contributes to violence of many kinds, including mass shootings, the expansion of armed militias and organized crime networks, and gender-based violence.

Power, authoritarianism and disruptions to multilateralism

Multilateralism is increasingly under strain, with various processes at the United Nations currently being steered or stalled by a select few States. As inequalities within societies deepen and power becomes concentrated in the hands of the executive and the super-rich, the rule of law globally is under attack, with authoritarian ideology and political structures spreading across the world. This raises the following question: how might unchecked power potentially capture the process and agenda, and what is at risk as a result?

6. Conclusion and the way forward

As the international community approaches 2030, the challenge extends beyond determining what framework should follow the SDGs to sustaining collective ambition in a markedly different political and institutional environment. The scenarios and potential outcomes examined in this paper illustrate the choices, trade-offs and risks ahead. Preserving the normative achievements of the 2030 Agenda while addressing persistent financing, accountability and implementation gaps will be essential. Equally important will be ensuring that the process itself builds legitimacy, broad ownership and meaningful participation, particularly when consensus cannot be taken for granted.

These considerations underscore the importance of early, evidence-informed engagement by Member States, the United Nations system, civil society and other stakeholders. Stocktaking of existing commitments and processes, together with lessons from national and local implementation, regional perspectives, independent research and the knowledge of communities affected by inequality and exclusion, can help identify areas of convergence and inform future choices.

The 2027 SDG Summit offers an important opportunity to advance this reflection and inform subsequent discussions, without prejudging future negotiations. Action 12 of the Pact for the Future invites the High-level Political Forum, under the auspices of the General Assembly, to consider in September 2027 how to advance sustainable development by 2030 and beyond. The SDG Summit and the 2028 review of the Pact are distinct but consequential processes. The 2028 Pact for the Future review provides an opportunity to assess implementation of the Pact's commitments, while the SDG Summit offers a dedicated intergovernmental forum for considering the future direction of sustainable development. Maintaining clarity about their respective mandates, while drawing on relevant outcomes and identifying opportunities for coherence, will be important as discussions evolve.

This Independent Reflection Group on Beyond 2030 offers this white paper as an initial contribution to these discussions, encouraging dialogue and further analysis of the political feasibility, implementation requirements and safeguards associated with different potential outcomes. Ultimately, the choices ahead concern more than the design of a future sustainable development framework. They will test the international community's ability to preserve collective commitments, strengthen implementation, protect civic space and ensure meaningful stakeholder participation. They will also shape the credibility, relevance and effectiveness of multilateral cooperation for sustainable development in the years to come.

Annex A: Assessment of outcomes in relation to the guiding principles

Table A.1 provides an initial assessment of how each potential outcome **(Chapter 4)** aligns with the guiding principles **(page 15)** identified in this white paper at the time of publication. This non-exhaustive analysis is not intended to recommend any particular outcome or express a preference among them or to judge the overall efficacy of the respective outcomes or scenarios identified. It is also not meant to predict what the eventual Beyond 2030 framework will look like or which elements of the outcomes analysed will be included. Further in-depth analysis of these outcomes and principles will be a part of the Reflection Group's work as the Beyond 2030 process progresses.

Each outcome is assessed through the lens of the five guiding principles recommended in this paper, responding to the analytical questions outlined below:

1. **Universality and preserving ambition:** *Does this outcome preserve universal commitments and existing levels of ambition while creating opportunities to go further?*
2. **Integration, coherence and resilience against fragmentation:** *Does this outcome strengthen an integrated and coherent approach to sustainable development, or does it risk fragmentation between issues, institutions, countries or regions?*
3. **Human rights and leaving no one behind:** *Does this outcome advance the commitment to leave no one behind and also protect and strengthen human rights and fundamental freedoms?*
4. **Process integrity, legitimacy and participation:** *Does this outcome enable an inclusive, transparent and meaningful process that builds broad ownership and legitimacy?*
5. **Evidence-based practice, deliverability and long-term effectiveness:** *Does this outcome provide credible conditions for implementation, accountability and long-term effectiveness, and can it adapt to future risks and opportunities?*

For this analysis, each outcome is colour-coded to indicate the degree of alignment with each principle and includes a brief commentary on the details, context, nuances, trade-offs and other considerations related to this assessment.

Assessment Key

Each assessment is color-coded into the following categories:

✓ **Strong** alignment with the principle

− **Mixed** (both strong and weak) alignment with the principle

× **Weak** alignment with the principle

? **Unclear:** Uncertainties and variables make it difficult to definitively assess

Scenario 1: Continuity

Outcome	Preserving Ambition and Universality	Integration, Coherence and Resilience against Fragmentation	Human Rights and LNOB	Process Integrity, Legitimacy and Participation	Evidence, Deliverability and Long-Term Effectiveness
Outcome 1: The 2030 Agenda rolled over beyond 2030	Preserves universality and the existing floor of ambition, but creates little inherent impetus to raise ambition and risks gradual hollowing-out.	Preserves the integrated global framework and common reference point, limiting formal fragmentation across issues and countries.	Retains existing rights and LNOB commitments, but does not itself strengthen them or prevent weakening in implementation.	Uncertain. Rollover leaves open who would be consulted and how governments would reach a decision.	Preserves established systems but does not itself resolve financing, accountability and delivery constraints, or adapt the framework to emerging challenges.
Outcome 2: The 2030 Agenda continued with a Secretariat-supported technical review	Retains existing goals and substantive commitments; safeguards are needed to prevent technical adjustments from lowering ambition or obscuring unmet targets.	Preserves the integrated global framework; coordinated technical work can improve consistency and avoid fragmented monitoring approaches.	Better disaggregation could strengthen rights and LNOB, by making excluded groups more visible, provided gaps in data do not become grounds for weakening scrutiny or commitments.	Uncertain. Member States would oversee the review. Who would participate and how their input would shape the recommendations remain open questions.	Can improve measurement and evidence use if resourced; comparability and statistical capacity matter, while stronger delivery also requires financing and accountability.

Scenario 2: Recalibration

Outcome	Preserving Ambition and Universality	Integration, Coherence and Resilience against Fragmentation	Human Rights and LNOB	Process Integrity, Legitimacy and Participation	Evidence, Deliverability and Long-Term Effectiveness
Outcome 1: Retained goals with revised targets	✓ Preserves the 17 universal Goals while allowing targets to be updated and strengthened.	✓ Preserves the integrated SDG architecture while improving alignment with emerging issues and subsequent agreements.	– Retains rights and LNOB commitments, but target revisions could weaken them in practice.	– Avoiding Goal renegotiation may facilitate consensus, but target revisions still require transparent and participatory decisions.	✓ Updates targets using evidence, changing conditions and implementation experience while retaining the Goals.
Outcome 2: Renegotiated goals and targets	– Could raise ambition through additions and revisions, but reopening Goals creates clear regression risks.	– Could address gaps and overlaps, but selective restructuring may weaken integration and coherence.	– Could strengthen rights and LNOB, but also exposes contested commitments to dilution or removal.	– Could renew political ownership, but legitimacy depends on an inclusive and transparent renegotiation process.	– Uses implementation evidence to update the framework,but substantial changes could disrupt established planning and monitoring systems.
Outcome 3: Limited improvements to the global implementation framework	✓ Preserves substantive goals while strengthening financing, implementation and follow-up needed for delivery.	✓ Builds on existing multilateral agreements to strengthen implementation coherence.	– Could reduce implementation gaps, but equitable financing outcomes are not guaranteed.	– Could strengthen accountability and participation, but reforms remain politically contested.	– Directly addresses delivery gaps through stronger financing, institutions, evidence and follow-up.
Outcome 4: Strengthened global implementation framework	✓ Stronger reviews and financing can help identify and address implementation gaps, and prevent regression.	✓ Backed by MoI, stronger global follow-up and review can improve coordination and coherence, and reduce fragmentation.	✓ Independent evidence, citizen data and civil society reporting can strengthen visibility of LNOB gaps; funding will help to close these.	✓ Meaningful participation and more robust review can strengthen legitimacy and accountability.	✓ Stronger evidence and links to implementation can improve learning, course correction and delivery.

Scenario 3: Recomposition & Transformation

Outcome	Preserving Ambition and Universality	Integration, Coherence and Resilience against Fragmentation	Human Rights and LNOB	Process Integrity, Legitimacy and Participation	Evidence, Deliverability and Long-Term Effectiveness
Outcome 1: An evolving and multi-layered agenda	✓ Permanence sets a baseline for long-term ambition and elevates the new agenda in prominence.	✓ Could create a long-term vision and promote coherences across the system.	? If human rights and LNOB are embedded, could strengthen commitment, but reopening risks entrenching lack of ambition long-term.	– A more permanent agenda would be beneficial, but there may be challenges in reviewing and refining shorter-term targets.	– Potential inflexibility of a permanent agenda may limit adaptability, and provide opportunities for Member States to avoid accountability.
Outcome 2: An upgraded HLPF/ Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development	✓ High level of ambition and elevates the prominence of sustainable development across the UN system permanently.	✓ If designed well and funded adequately, opportunities for integration and system-wide coherence would improve.	? If human rights and LNOB serve as a key pillar, could help ensure coherence. If not, risks further contraction.	✓ Provide increased legitimacy to sustainable development, and provide wider entry points across the system.	✓ Ensure prominence of agenda, and potentially could improve engagement, legitimacy and outcomes.
Outcome 3: A complementary universal and national commitment framework	– Establishes a universal minimum level of ambition. Safeguards needed to prevent "cherry-picking" of issues.	– Can strengthen cooperation, but proliferation of coalitions could fragment the agenda across issues, countries and levels.	– A universal baseline can protect LNOB, but voluntary commitments risk ignoring human rights entirely.	– Flexibility in negotiation process may weaken legitimacy with even less-defined "commitment."	? Could support learning and progressively higher ambition but depends on "political will" of individual Member States.
Outcome 4: A framework for addressing systemic challenges	✓ Protects existing ambition, and attention on systemic barriers to implementation addresses root causes of many issues in a more deliberate way.	✓ A focus on systemic challenges explicitly strengthens coherence and integration, and helps ensure resilience of the new agenda.	? Could strengthen focus on human rights and LNOB as systemic challenges. If not, risks that they are left behind in favour of less inclusive approaches.	– Could theoretically improve the legitimacy and effectiveness of the agenda, but could skew participation towards less inclusive high-level engagement	✓ Potential for embedding long-term resilience. Challenges around political will & institutional buy-in would provide barriers to its deliverability.

Scenario 4: Contraction & Fragmentation

Outcome	Preserving Ambition and Universality	Integration, Coherence and Resilience against Fragmentation	Human Rights and LNOB	Process Integrity, Legitimacy and Participation	Evidence, Deliverability and Long-Term Effectiveness
Outcome 1: No agreement, prolonged delay or a non-consensus agreement	✕ The lack of political will for a global agreement leads to a lack of ambition in delivery and monitoring; there is regression across global agreements and no universal principle.	✕ The sustainable development agenda fragments in this outcome.	– Existing human rights frameworks are not affected, but the lack of global agreement affects how they are viewed. No universal approach to LNOB.	✕ Failure to agree a common framework risks weakening shared accountability and opportunities to influence global priorities.	✕ Prolonged uncertainty risks weakening coordinated financing, monitoring and implementation.
Outcome 2: A Reduced or streamlined global agenda	✕ Represents regression and could well represent an undermining of the principle of universality, given that goals will likely focus on southern countries.	– Protects against fragmentation and incoherence by reducing ambition to that which is globally accepted.	– Represents a challenge to coherence with human rights, and to the full realisation of LNOB, without entirely undermining both.	– There may be greater political consensus for this position, but it would risk shutting out civil society and other voices from the process, harming legitimacy.	– This outcome will be promoted through messages of feasibility, delivery and effectiveness. Yet simplification of complex challenges may result in long term undermining of gains.
Outcome 3: Continuity on Paper, Divergence in Practice	✕ The impact of this outcome on these principles will be shown through stalled implementation, although this will be apparent in the lack of political will in the negotiations.	– Fragmentation will occur through the lack of political commitment to implementation.	– Human rights and LNOB are impacted through non-implementation, with member states blaming the process rather than lack of political will.	✕ The widening gap between agreed commitments and implementation undermines trust and the credibility of collective follow-up.	✕ The lack of implementation significantly hinders delivery and long-term effectiveness.

Authors and Acknowledgements

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Andrew Griffiths co-chaired Beyond 2015, which was the civil society campaign for the post-2015 process, shaping how global civil society had a say in the process, and has worked with civil society organizations around the world on influencing and supporting inclusive VNRs, including leading civil society engagement on the UK 2019 VNR.

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