

Orchestrating Sustainability: Meta-Governance as a Catalyst for Cross-Sectoral Collaboration on the SDGs

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Abstract :

This research examines how meta-governance functions as a reflective governance system that guides complex governance relationships for SDG implementation. It defines meta-governance through network governance theory, institutionalist approaches, and deliberative policy design as the active management of hierarchical, market-based, and networked governance systems to achieve cross-sectoral coherence, normative legitimacy, and adaptive capacity. The study uses qualitative, literature-based methods to show that meta-governance success depends on institutional resilience, inclusive leadership, and embedded reflexivity. Implementing meta-governance faces ongoing challenges from procedural redundancy, symbolic participation, and entrenched power asymmetries. The research demonstrates that meta-governance serves as a context-dependent tool that unites fragmented groups and enhances collective action. This study contributes to sustainable governance theory and provides practical recommendations for policy development in multilevel governance systems.

Key Words : Meta-governance, Sustainable Development Goals, Policy coherence, Cross-sectoral collaboration, Reflexive governance



I. Introduction:

Sustainable development governance is a major and complex challenge facing the twenty-first century. Implementing the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda relies on complex policy tools, multi-actor partnerships, and institutional reforms. The SDGs require coordinated efforts across sectors and levels of governance because they address poverty reduction, environmental protection, and social justice (United Nations, 2015, p. 6; OECD, 2023, p. 14; Allen et al., 2023 & Mintrom, 2023, p. 1253).

The broad commitment to SDG implementation faces significant governance challenges due to fragmented institutions, sectoral silos, and unbalanced power relationships. The lack of actor coherence leads to duplicated efforts that hinder essential synergistic effects (Allen et al., 2023, p. 1263). These obstacles highlight the need to establish an integrated governance framework.

Meta-governance refers to the governance of governance and has emerged as a strategic approach to address coordination deficits (Meuleman, 2018, p. 1962). Meta-governance organizes different governance systems to improve coordination, strengthen accountability, and enhance group participation (Christopoulos et al., 2012; Glasbergen, 2011, pp. 194–202). This approach is particularly significant in SDG implementation, as various stakeholders – including states, civil society, businesses, and international institutions – operate with separate yet interconnected responsibilities (Ottens & Edelenbos, 2018, p. 6; Wilson et al., 2017, p. 193).

The cities of Rotterdam, Toronto, and Hoi An demonstrate how meta-governance enables adaptable and participatory approaches to sustainability issues such as waste management (Frantzeskaki et al., 2014, p. 415; Doberstein, 2013; Vo, 2021). The successful establishment of such frameworks depends on strong political leadership, as shown in Sweden and the EU, while their absence in Brazil leads to decreased coherence (Ashraf & Pircher, 2024, p. 32)

Meta-governance builds institutional legitimacy through transparent processes that include stakeholders, especially marginalized populations (Klijn, et al., 2025, p. 294). The adaptive structure of meta-governance enables continuous policy development and adaptation to global disruptions such as climate change and geopolitical shifts (Mondal et al., 2021, pp. 11–14; (Breuer et al., 2022).

The study begins with the following question: How can meta-governance serve as an innovative coordination tool capable of implementing sustainable development goals, and how can it be considered a philosophy that enhances policy coherence and stakeholder participation?

The study is also based on the following main hypothesis: Meta-governance can effectively contribute to achieving sustainable development goals and promoting policy coherence, provided that three basic conditions are met: (1) the existence of well-established coordinating bodies with adequate funding and authority; (2) the involvement of all stakeholders in the decision-making process; and (3) a culture of reflective learning at the institutional level.

The study examines how meta-governance functions as a coordinating instrument during SDG implementation by assessing its capacity to enhance policy coherence and stakeholder engagement while fostering governance innovation. The research integrates theoretical knowledge with practical examples to evaluate how meta-governance addresses fragmentation and establishes sustainable governance through collaboration.

The paper follows this structure: The next section examines governance and sustainable development through a literature review. Section 3 presents the theoretical framework. Section 4 describes the research approach and the selection of relevant literature. Section 5 presents the findings and analysis. Section 6 interprets the results and explains the theoretical findings, then discusses the policy applications of meta-governance for SDG implementation. Section 7 offers concluding remarks and proposed directions for future research.

II. Literature Review

1. Governance and Sustainable Development

Existing governance models do not effectively address the complex, interconnected challenges of sustainable development. The vertical (multi-level) and horizontal (cross-sectoral) alignment requirements of the 2030 Agenda exceed the capabilities of traditional hierarchical and sectoral governance models (Allen et al., 2023, p. 1263).

The need for governance frameworks that adapt and include diverse actors has gained attention in recent years. SDG implementation, with its polycentric structure combining overlapping authorities and distributed power, requires agile institutions capable of managing conflicts and creating synergies (Cordery & Manochin, 2023, pp. 251–263; Vo, 2021, pp. 30–31; Yadav et al., 2024, p. 5). National systems operating in silos, along with fragmented structures, remain major barriers to progress (Velandar, 2025, p. 4).

Current academic research emphasizes that networked and deliberative governance systems should integrate the state, civil society, the private sector, and epistemic communities. Frameworks addressing these diverse coordination approaches – balancing authority, competition, and collaboration – need to enhance scalability and responsiveness across different levels (Glasbergen, 2011, pp. 194–203; Asaduzzaman & Petri Virtanen, 2021, pp. 304–305).

2. The Concept of Meta-Governance

Meta-governance is a strategic governance approach that unifies hierarchical, market-based, and networked governance to address the limitations of traditional models. It aims to steer existing governance systems toward unified operation and flexibility rather than replacing them (Jessop, 2004, p. 59; Meuleman, 2018).

The integrated approach is especially valuable in sustainability contexts because actors have different interests, capacities, and developmental perspectives. The policy-making process becomes more adaptive through iterative learning and experimentation, as demonstrated by Berlin's energy transition initiatives (Gartlinger & Gualini, 2025, pp. 680–698; Sørensen, 2006, p. 100).

The framework applies to various governance domains, from local to global levels, helping sustainability principles become integrated into multiple environments. The city of

Hoi An in Vietnam used meta-governance to balance government-imposed rules and local creativity in circular economy and waste management practices (Vo, 2021, pp. 16–17). According to Meuleman and Niestroy (2015, p. 12311), meta-governance risks preserving existing power structures and technocratic control unless it is based on transparent and participatory processes. The effectiveness of this approach depends on democratic legitimacy, equitable resource alignment, and inclusive governance.

3. Multi-Actor Collaboration in SDGs

Achieving the SDGs requires various actors, including governments, civil society, private sector entities, international organizations, and knowledge communities, to work together. The hybrid nature of sustainability governance shows how public mandates merge with private innovation and grassroots engagement.

Table (1): Key Stakeholders and Their Functional Roles in Meta-Governance for SDG Implementation

Actor Type	Role in SDG Meta-Governance
State Actors	Strategic planning, resource allocation, legal authority
Market Actors	Investment, innovation, public-private partnerships
Civil Society	Advocacy, accountability, local knowledge, service delivery
International Actors	Technical support, norm diffusion, funding
Epistemic Communities	Evidence production, policy advising, foresight and scenario modeling

The political framework determines how these roles change and take shape. The marginalization of civil society and knowledge actors in fragile or hybrid regimes leads to weakened inclusiveness and reflexivity of meta-governance, according to Ottens and Edelenbos (2018, p. 4).

Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships (MSPs) have become vital coordination tools that help address institutional gaps by providing collaborative spaces for agenda-setting and implementation (Eweje et al., 2020, p. 206). SDG 17 emphasizes the importance of these partnerships in fostering mutual ownership and shared responsibility.

Political leadership holds a crucial role in enabling progress. Countries such as the Netherlands and Sweden have achieved stronger participatory governance and policy coherence through inclusive, consensus-driven leadership (Ottens & Edelenbos, 2019, pp. 11–12; Sundqvist, 2021, p. 2). In contrast, the implementation of SDG commitments in Zimbabwe remains unsuccessful due to its centralized and fragmented governance structure (Tafadzwa Mutambisi & Chavunduka, 2024, pp. 1–12).

Co-creation mechanisms, such as participatory budgeting and deliberative forums improve legitimacy because they reflect the growing understanding that sustainable development requires inclusive continuous dialogue ((Breuer et al., 2022; Wilson et al., 2017, p. 192).

4. Identified Gaps

The literature on meta-governance reveals several significant research gaps. Most studies focus on Western countries, especially the UK, and do not provide sufficient analysis of low- and middle-income nations (Gjaltema et al., 2019, p. 1765).

The warning from scholars indicates that meta-governance strengthens power imbalances unless equity and inclusion are made explicit focus areas. The absence of transparent and participatory mechanisms creates a risk that dominant interests will become more powerful at the expense of marginalized groups (Meuleman & Niestroy, 2015, pp. 12302–12314).

Research on meta-governance lacks sufficient understanding of its interactions with new technologies. Artificial intelligence and digital platforms offer potential for improved coordination and monitoring, but they also introduce risks through biased systems, exclusionary practices, and surveillance activities. Democratic governance requires inclusive design approaches, participatory oversight mechanisms, and ethical safeguards to ensure that technology serves democratic purposes (Batool et al., 2024, pp. 2–3; Ribeiro et al., 2025, pp. 4–5).

The literature lacks adequate examination of feedback mechanisms that support sustainability in reflexivity. The practice of meta-governance lacks sufficient pathways to monitor impact and adjust strategies, as adaptive learning in governance requires these institutional frameworks (Jessop, 2009, pp. 80–83).

III. Theoretical Framework

1. Network Governance Theory

Network governance serves as a critical framework for analyzing how various actors collaborate in situations characterized by mutual authority and interdependence. This model moves beyond traditional hierarchical oversight to focus on public institutions, private actors, civil society organizations, and knowledge communities forming horizontal networks (Rhodes, 1997, p. 15; Sørensen & Torfing, 2005, p. 235; Provan & Kenis, 2008, p. 231).

The approach facilitates comprehensive participation, policy adaptation, and flexible coordination among various sectors in the SDG context (Glasbergen, 2011, pp. 194–195, 203). This method delivers optimal results for addressing complex issues such as climate action and inequality by uniting diverse capacities with organizational powers. Decentralization presents multiple implementation difficulties. The unequal distribution of power, combined with weak monitoring mechanisms, leads to marginalized positions for actors who lack influence (Klijn & Skelcher, 2007, p. 591; Sørensen & Torfing, 2005, pp. 195–218).

The research data confirms its practical value, Sustainability and circularity projects in the Netherlands succeed through collaborative governance at the municipal level (Cramer, 2020, pp. 6–16). Tampere Finland uses network governance to manage circular economy transitions through multilevel planning while demonstrating urban sustainability needs both spatial and digital approaches (Sundqvist, 2021, p. 29). eul

2. Institutional Theory

The institutional framework examines how formal and informal rules, norms, and expectations shape governance dynamics (Scott, 1995, pp. 15–20; March & Olsen, 1989, pp. 3–5). The regulatory and normative structures of institutions establish the governing

principles that determine how actors behave in complex systems (North, 1990, p. 3; Thelen, 1999, p. 387).

Core path dependency theory shows how established institutional frameworks persist despite inefficiencies. Political institutions lack strong corrective feedback mechanisms, making them resistant to change (Pierson, 2000, p. 260). Bureaucracies maintain sectoral logics, creating an inertial barrier to integrated governance approaches within the SDG framework (Dahlmann & Grosvold, 2017, pp. 269–270; Meuleman & Niestroy, 2015, p. 12305).

Institutional entrepreneurship allows actors within the system to challenge and reshape norms to transform the existing framework (Battilana et al., 2009, pp. 66–85). Progress on the SDGs depends on transforming governance logic, as this is essential for achieving the necessary changes beyond policy tools. The ability of institutions to adapt and their resilience determines their capacity to manage trade-offs and align with future strategies (Allen et al., 2023, p. 1263). Understanding the progression of sustainable development governance requires examining the interaction between institutional dynamics and network frameworks.

3. Meta-Governance

The central research framework of this study operates through the concept of governance of governance, which serves as meta-governance. Strategic coordination among different governance modes – such as hierarchies, markets, and networks – enables complex systems to achieve coherence and reflexivity (Jessop, 2004, pp. 49–74; Meuleman, 2018, p. 1991).

The meta-governance framework establishes pluralistic management approaches to regulate interdependencies that pursue collective goals, rather than traditional governance models that focus on a single mode. The SDG framework enables policy harmonization, resolves conflicting norms, and unites actors from various governance levels (Pahl-Wostl, 2019, p. 10; Allen et al., 2023, p. 1253).

Table (2): Multi-Level Meta-Governance Matrix Illustrating Coordination Mechanisms across Local, National, and International Scales

Governance Mechanisms	Local Level	National Level	International Level
Hierarchical	Municipal SDG committees; mayoral directives	Inter-ministerial SDG councils; national strategies	UN mandates; international treaties
Networked	Local CSO forums; participatory budgeting	National multi-stakeholder platforms (MSPs)	Transnational NGO alliances; epistemic communities
Market-based	Clean energy microgrids; community co-ops	Public-private partnerships (PPPs); green bonds	Global finance (GEF, SDG bonds, carbon markets)

The framework demonstrates its value through empirical examples. The meta-governance framework is illustrated by Sweden's inter-ministerial units, Germany's SDG

integration in federal policy, and South Korea's local-level network governance (Ottens & Edelenbos, 2018, p. 32; Birner et al., 2024; Lim & Jung, 2020, pp. 161–184).

The success of meta-governance depends on its ability to provide strategic direction and enable local flexibility (Breuer et al., 2022). This approach is essential in fragile or authoritarian contexts because these systems typically lack legitimacy and institutional trust (Andrade et al., 2022, p. 3).

Meta-governance offers analytical tools and normative guidance to address the fragmented nature of sustainable development. This framework enables actors to unite around common values, create scale-based coordination, and enhance governance during complex and uncertain conditions (Andrade, de Abreu, dos Santos et al., 2022, esp. pp. 3–5).

IV. Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative deductive approach to analyze and integrate theoretical aspects of meta-governance with collaborative sustainability frameworks from existing literature. The study conducts a conceptual analysis of fundamental theoretical works rather than empirical assessments or comparative case evaluations to understand how meta-governance principles relate to sustainable development goals (SDGs).

Two fundamental theoretical frameworks form the basis of this investigation. According to Jessop (2004, pp. 4–7), the strategic-relational approach suggests that complex governance environments become navigable through structurally inscribed strategic selectivity and reflexive meta-steering. According to Meuleman (2018, p. 1969), the normative-pluralist perspective holds that governance styles need to combine hierarchical, market-based, and networked approaches to solve sustainability problems with multiple dimensions.

The research does not seek to discover universal findings or establish statistical connections. The analysis focuses on a systematic review of how meta-governance is presented in academic studies, with attention to coordination, inclusiveness, and policy coherence within sustainability frameworks. The research aims to define theoretical frameworks, identify key meta-governance aspects affecting SDG implementation, and discuss governance pluralism norms.

The research relies solely on secondary data from theoretical literature, academic journal articles, and governance reviews. The analysis uses a qualitative method to map the intellectual landscape of meta-governance in sustainable development discourse through these sources. This research adopts a scoping approach to integrate conceptual contributions from different theoretical perspectives, focusing on governance complexities, actor coordination, and institutional design. Allen, Malekpour, and Mintrom (2023) review cross-level and cross-actor governance obstacles in SDG implementation to show where meta-governance creates opportunities for coherence and transformation. Glasbergen (2011) builds on this work by examining private meta-governance mechanisms that demonstrate how non-state actors use voluntary governance systems to establish sustainability standards.

Christopoulos, Horvath, and Kull (2012) analyze the meta-governance of cross-sectoral policies to demonstrate how strategic coordination and reflexivity support

sustainability transitions governance. Their research synthesizes sources to develop a comprehensive understanding of how meta-governance functions as an adaptive integration system within SDG frameworks. They examine theoretical arguments about the steering power of meta-governance and explore how discourse influences coordination systems and the tensions between organizational planning and strategic leadership. The study draws context from international policy documents and global SDG frameworks to support its theoretical claims but focuses exclusively on academic literature rather than real-world applications or country cases.

The study examines three central debates about meta-governance steering power, as well as the effects of discourse on coordination tools and institutional planning versus strategic action. International policy documents and global SDG frameworks provide contextual references for theoretical claims, but the study maintains an exclusive focus on academic literature, excluding real-world applications and country cases.

This research adopts a theoretical approach to examine meta-governance specifically for sustainable development. It aims to enhance the conceptual understanding and analytical strength of meta-governance frameworks through an organized review of key academic findings. This approach allows the study to develop insights that benefit academic theory and policy debate without seeking to establish empirical generalizations or case-specific inferences.

V. Findings and Analysis

Institutional mechanisms in meta-governance practice facilitate coordination among governance levels and actors. Countries adhering to the 2030 Agenda have established inter-ministerial committees and sustainability councils to support cross-sectoral planning and address fragmentation (Meuleman & Niestroy, 2015, p. 12306; Allen et al., 2023, p. 1257). The Dutch Climate Agreement demonstrates how inclusive dialogue and political leadership enable integrated sustainability strategies (Ottens & Edelenbos, 2018, p. 8).

The strategic use of reflexive tools such as VNRs, sustainability assessments, and performance dashboards enables adaptive learning and policy coherence based on the findings. The planning and budgeting cycles of Finland and Germany integrate these tools to implement meta-governance (Kreienkamp & Pegram, 2020, pp. 4–17; Meuleman, 2018, p. 1997).

Despite progress, institutional misalignments remain a major challenge. Agencies operate with different goals and schedules, creating obstacles for collaborative efforts. Australian regional bodies faced difficulties implementing meta-governance due to dispersed authority (Wilson et al., 2017, p. 189), while Vietnam experienced power disparities and differing priorities among stakeholders (Vo, 2021, p. 58). These examples demonstrate the need for institutions to share common values and build trust among their actors.

The success of meta-governance depends on governance conditions at multiple levels. Collaborative mechanisms are more effective when institutions demonstrate both transparency and capability (Uzzaman & Virtanen, 2021, p. 305). Participatory processes serve as legitimacy tools in fragile and authoritarian systems, but these systems fail to

incorporate genuine stakeholder participation (Lorch & Bunk, 2016, pp. 987–989; Butcher, 2013, pp. 732–734).

The process of meta-meta-governance is controlled by global institutions that determine how governance frameworks are formed within countries. The UN High-Level Political Forum and regional peer networks serve as platforms that guide reforms and apply pressure for improvement (Monkelbaan, 2019, p. 129; Lindström, 2024, p. 140). Some countries integrate these frameworks into their operations, while others make only superficial changes to satisfy external requirements (Kalterina Shulla & C. Borgemeister, 2020, p. 149; Glasbergen, 2011, p. 193).

A key aspect of meta-governance development comes from non-state actors, including civil society, the private sector, and epistemic communities. Civil society organizations serve as monitoring entities and regulatory agents, while also providing services to society depending on levels of institutional openness (Sénit, 2020, p. 702; Nasiritousi et al., 2014, p. 111). Public-private partnerships and corporate sustainability practices from private sector entities offer resources and innovation but can lead to regulatory capture when accountability mechanisms are inadequate (Eweje et al., 2020, p. 284; Rashed & Shah, 2020, p. 6).

Table 3 demonstrates the diversity of meta-governance through its typology which combines two factors: inclusiveness levels and centralization degrees.

Table (3): Typology of Meta-Governance Modes Based on Inclusiveness and Centralization

	Decentralized Coordination	Centralized Coordination
Low Inclusiveness	Technocratic Meta-Governance	Fragmented Governance
High Inclusiveness	Fragmented Governance (with consultations)	Participatory Meta-Governance

This typology explains how regime type, institutional traditions, and stakeholder dynamics shape governance models. Technocratic meta-governance tends to dominate in authoritarian regimes, while pluralistic systems allow for more participatory governance models.

The process of meta-governance functions as an adaptive mechanism that depends on specific contexts. The success of this approach requires balancing coordination and inclusiveness while making long-term institutional collaboration standard practice. Countries that develop shared norms, trust, and adaptive capacity will achieve better results in using meta-governance to reach the SDGs.

VI. Discussion

1. Interpretation of Results

The research demonstrates that meta-governance serves as a vital framework for unifying different stakeholders in SDG implementation efforts. Meta-governance acts as a reflexive mechanism that enables strategic steering and coherence among sectorally fragmented systems with varying institutional capacities, without requiring hierarchical control (Meuleman, 2018, p. 1983).

Meta-governance operates through three main mechanisms: inter-ministerial committees, stakeholder platforms, and legal mandates that promote policy integration and performance monitoring (Allen et al., 2023, p. 1251; Meuleman & Niestroy, 2015, p.

12306). Central governance actors serve as mediators to facilitate institutional coordination between independent entities.

The SDG governance process demonstrates meta-governance through an iterative cycle of four stages that strengthen strategic planning and adaptability through continuous coordination and learning mechanisms (Table 4).

Table (4): Meta-Governance Cycle: Stages of Adaptive SDG Coordination

Stage	Function
Strategic Framing	Define priorities, set SDG targets, establish institutional mandates
Stakeholder Alignment	Involve ministries, private sector, civil society, donors
Feedback & Reflexivity	Monitor outcomes; evaluate progress; public reporting and dashboards
Recalibration & Learning	Adjust policies, reform institutions, integrate lessons into planning cycles

The meta-governance cycle shows how it promotes learning cycles and responses that become crucial in weak or mixed political environments. When incorporated into established laws and institutional systems, this method helps build two essential qualities: performance legitimacy and inclusiveness (Glasbergen, 2011, p. 194).

However, misalignments persist. The hybrid regime faces structural obstacles that prevent authentic collaboration due to power inequalities and structural inertia, resulting in procedural compliance rather than transformative outcomes (Gissel, 2022, pp. 859–884; Cooke & Corbo-Perkins, 2018, p. 175). Market instruments and jurisdictional conflicts create additional barriers to reform activities (Macdonald et al., 2024, p. 9).

The implementation of local SDG actions is made possible by bridging institutions, which include regional councils and CSO coalitions. Without these mechanisms, top-down initiatives encounter bureaucratic opposition and institutional inertia (Yankson, 2023, p. 341).

The power structures of organizations remain intact, as meta-governance modifies rather than abolishes them. Successful meta-governance depends heavily on strong political leadership and an appropriate institutional culture. Through inclusive leadership, organizations build trust, which leads to alignment among actors and distributes ownership responsibilities (Ottens & Edelenbos, 2018, pp. 2–6). An exclusionary leadership style risks turning meta-governance into a tool for centralization and legitimation (Luong Binh Nguyen Vo, 2021, p. 24).

Meta-governance is a context-specific approach that does not offer solutions for every situation. Its effectiveness depends on three essential factors: institutional design, political will, and a governance culture that supports dialogue, experimentation, and learning. When the necessary conditions exist, meta-governance helps organizations achieve better coordination and legitimacy; however, when these conditions are absent, meta-governance becomes ineffective symbolic action.

2. Theoretical Contribution

The research confirms that meta-governance serves as both an analytical tool and a practical methodology for analyzing coordination within fragmented governance systems. Meta-governance acts as a connecting mechanism that links hierarchical governance, market systems, and networked structures, and brings together actors who operate across

institutional barriers and political systems (Meuleman, 2018, p. 1993; Pahl-Wostl, 2019a, pp. 356–357; Sørensen & Torfing, 2005, pp. 203–204).

Through meta-governance, a reflective governance process emerges that integrates deliberation procedures with procedural rationality and adaptive learning abilities. The flexibility and legitimacy of meta-governance are essential for managing the complex and fragmented systems characteristic of Nordic countries and the PCT value chain (Lindström, 2024, p. 145; Meuleman & Niestroy, 2015, pp. 12304, 12314).

The research shows that meta-governance blurs the line between theoretical frameworks and practical applications. The study supports constructivist governance theories, as institutions emerge from social processes and governance arises from collective narrative construction (Sørensen, 2006, p. 101). According to Glasbergen (2011, p. 196), limited state capability constrains the transformative potential of meta-governance.

Meta-governance enables the exercise of power through rule design, the framing of legitimate actions, and the establishment of interaction arenas. Peters (2010, p. 38) describes meta-governance as "soft power" that shapes how problems are defined and who participates, according to Ottens and Edelenbos (2018, p. 7).

China's multi-order meta-governance system allows state authorities to maintain centralized control while permitting local flexibility within the state framework (Wang et al., 2024, p. 188).

This study presents meta-governance as a theoretical framework that unites institutional theory, network governance, and deliberative democracy. The research provides essential groundwork for investigating how meta-governance affects sustainable development across various political and institutional settings.

3. Policy Relevance

The research findings demonstrate significant policy value for development planning, international cooperation, and institutional reform, especially when implementing SDGs in complex multi-actor systems. This framework serves as both a strategic approach and a set of operational methods for achieving interest alignment while promoting coordination and inclusive governance.

Meta-governance enables national development planning to achieve horizontal inter-ministerial coordination and vertical alignment with subnational entities. SDG councils, along with roadmaps and cross-sector indicators, help prevent policy fragmentation by enabling coordinated planning that considers trade-offs and leverages mutual advantages (Meuleman, 2018, p. 1976).

At the international level, meta-governance supports structured cooperation between global and local actors. The United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank serve as instruments to unite stakeholder goals while maintaining national control (Wehrmann, 2018, p. 10). The framework establishes standards that allow global standards and local diversity to coexist and creates accountability mechanisms between different actors (Allen et al., 2023, p. 1251).

Meta-governance supports institutional transformation through participatory learning that drives adaptive change. Sustainability task forces, foresight units, and stakeholder

dialogues demonstrate this approach to increase both resilience and democratic legitimacy (Wicher & Frankus, 2023, pp. 738–764).

However, risks remain. The creation of complex coordination structures causes two governance problems: either governance overload or confusion about accountability. When private meta-governance arrangements lack proper regulation, they tend to increase power imbalances, leading to reduced democratic oversight (Glasbergen, 2011, p. 191). Reforms that achieve efficiency must also establish a fair balance with legitimacy standards.

Meta-governance offers a transformative set of policy instruments that promote adaptability, strategic alignment, and inclusion. The success of meta-governance depends on intentional institutional planning, continuous stakeholder participation, and awareness of specific local environments. Achieving sustainable development governance requires strong connections between theory and practice.

VII. Conclusion

This research examined meta-governance as a coordinative framework that enables different actors to work together to achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Through analysis of network governance and institutional theory, this study demonstrated that meta-governance functions as a framework that produces effective coordination between sectors and governance levels when properly implemented. The literature shows that SDG acceleration is more effective in governance environments that maintain structure while adapting to needs through national coordination mechanisms and inter-agency cooperation models.

The study addressed its central question about meta-governance coordination functions for SDG implementation collaboration through three established dynamics. Through its reflexive steering function, meta-governance enables state and non-state actors to operate under decentralized rules. The framework provides guidance that allows institutions to hold each other accountable and engage in collaborative problem-solving. It supports adaptive learning, which is essential for SDG contexts because these require policies that can adapt to uncertainty and innovation.

The research identified several constraints that hinder both the generalization and clear operationalization of meta-governance. Most studies on this topic present normative approaches and focus on institutionalized contexts, which limits understanding of non-institutionalized settings and decentralized governance systems. The theoretical emphasis on network coordination is insufficient, as current meta-governance literature does not adequately analyze power imbalances between North-South institutions. Measuring the effectiveness of meta-governance is challenging because its outcomes unfold over time and depend on multiple factors and contextual elements.

Future research needs to focus on these three directions according to the study recommendations:

1. Analyzing the Connection Between Meta-Governance Mechanisms and Political Shifts in Transitioning Governance Systems

Research has not sufficiently examined the dynamics between meta-governance and political changes in non-democratic and hybrid systems that combine formal transparency with centralized control. Future academic studies should investigate whether meta-governance serves as a tool to promote democratic development or as a mechanism that legitimizes authoritarian control through sustainability rhetoric. Research in this area would reveal discrepancies between sustainability language at the global level and local political practices, showing how different types of governments use governance systems.

2. Analyzing Societal Values Together with Political Culture to Understand Meta-Governance Acceptance Patterns

The reception of meta-governance as a supposedly neutral framework depends heavily on local political culture, state-society relations, and established governance traditions. Future studies should evaluate how institutional trust, symbolic legitimacy, and tribal allegiance affect people's acceptance or rejection of meta-governance tools. Further research should explore whether autonomous meta-governance systems can develop from community-based initiatives rather than state-imposed or international frameworks to advance theoretical knowledge about local governance.

3. Research on Power Relationships Among Different Stakeholders within SDG Framework Partnerships

Despite increasing emphasis on public-private sector and civil society partnerships, there is little research on power distribution within these arrangements. Future research should examine the roles of agenda setting, decision-making authority distribution, and the implicit exclusion of participants from strategic processes. The analysis reveals how meta-governance operates beyond formal coordination by demonstrating its practice through complex discussions of legitimacy, resource distribution, and influence dynamics. Such analysis would provide a more realistic understanding of meta-governance beyond its theoretical and idealistic interpretations.

The paper establishes that meta-governance functions as a crucial framework for achieving SDG implementation by requiring institutional changes, technological development, and broad participation. Meta-governance serves as an adaptable framework that helps governance systems evolve through collaborative discussions while implementing coordinated regulations that respond to changing needs. The world's ability to direct collective action through intelligent governance systems that incorporate inclusivity and responsiveness will determine success in addressing multiple crises, including climate change, digital transformation, and inequality. The research presents meta-governance as a conceptual framework that also represents an essential practice for sustainable development in modern interconnected societies.

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