

The G20 and the Strengthening of the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development (SDG 17)

El G20 y el fortalecimiento de la alianza mundial para el desarrollo sostenible (ODS 17)

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Abstract

In this article, the author takes sustainable development as the starting point of his analysis of how the scope of the G20 has evolved to include sustainability, the environment, economic growth, international cooperation and finances, climate change and the Sustainable Development Goals, among other issues. He then describes the role of the G20 in the world and how international and national agendas are closely tied in with one another, underscoring the interaction between these in the case of Mexico.

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Resumen

En este artículo, partiendo de la noción de desarrollo sustentable, el autor describe la evolución de los ámbitos de intervención del G20, entre ellos, la sustentabilidad, el medio ambiente, el crecimiento económico y la cooperación y las finanzas internacionales, además del cambio climático y los objetivos de desarrollo sostenible. También describe el papel del G20 en el mundo y la relación tan estrecha entre las agendas internacionales y las nacionales, haciendo énfasis en la interacción entre ambas agendas en el caso de México.

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Keywords

G20, sustainable development, environment, SDG, Mexico, climate change

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Palabras clave

G20, desarrollo sustentable, medio ambiente, ODS, México, cambio climático

The G20 and the Strengthening of the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development (SDG 17)

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The concept of *sustainability* is polysemic.² It denotes a way of understanding humankind's relationship with nature and a concern for future generations. It implies a shift in the prevailing mindset that once separated environmental and socio-economic affairs and claimed that environmental problems were mainly local. It is the outcome of growing awareness of the cross-cutting nature of environmental problems, the connection between the environment and poverty,³ and a desire to create a better world for those who come after us.⁴ First used by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in 1980, it was not until 1987 that the concept took on importance with the publication of *Our Common Future* by the World Commission on Environment

¹ I would like to thank Norma Munguía, Amira Solano, Beatriz Acuña and Omar López for their collaboration.

² Giles Atkinson, "Sustainable Development and Policy," in Dieter Helm (ed.), *Environmental Policy. Objectives, Instruments, and Implementation*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 29-47.

³ Boris Graizbord, "Objetivos del milenio, pobreza y medio ambiente," in José Luis Lezama and B. Graizbord (coords.), *Medio ambiente*, Mexico, El Colegio de México (Los grandes problemas de México, vol. iv), 2010, pp. 295-336.

⁴ Bill Hopwood, Mary Mellor and Geoff O'Brien, "Sustainable Development: Mapping Different Approaches," in *Sustainable Development*, vol. 13, no. 1, February 2005, p. 39.

and Development. The Brundtland Report, as it is otherwise known, contains the most accepted definition of sustainable development: “Meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own”.⁵

Víctor L. Urquidi added the principle of *equity* to the notion of sustainable development.⁶ From this perspective, it is not deemed a fixed process, but an ever-changing one, in which each nation achieves its own development potential and, at the same time, maintains and builds on the quality of the resources on which its development is based. This ambitious goal requires, or rather *demands*, different ways of utilizing resources, investment patterns, decision-making processes, technological development and institutional changes. It is, essentially, a form of development that creates democracy hand-in-hand with growth and equality.

This article analyses certain economic, social and environmental aspects of the concept of sustainable development as the starting point for an overview of how the scope of the G20 has expanded to include issues like the environment, economic growth and climate change, among others, with particular emphasis on the Group’s institutional development, but also on its members—especially Mexico—, one necessarily being dependent on the other.

The sustainability issue

International preoccupation for sustainable development, as it is referred to in U.N. documents, is not new. In 1971, the secretary of the U.N. Conference on the Human Environment requested a report on the “state of the planet”. The report, *Only One Earth*, was presented in Stockholm in 1972. Twenty years later, in 1992, Río de Janeiro hosted the Earth Summit, which

⁵ U.N. General Assembly, Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development *Our Common Future*, A/42/427, August 1, 1987, p. 59.

⁶ Víctor L. Urquidi, “El desarrollo sustentable: un concepto multidisciplinario en un mundo complejo y cambiante,” in *Desarrollo sustentable y cambio global*, Mexico, El Colegio de México (Obras Escogidas de Víctor L. Urquidi), 2007, pp. 93-102.

was attended by representatives from nearly every country in the world.⁷ Here, it was proposed that progress towards sustainable development be measured taking into consideration economic, social and environmental aspects. These three dimensions make up the so-called pillars of sustainable development. The problem is that they have been studied in a mainly sectorised manner, with scant attention being paid to their multiple, but not always positive linkages and interdependencies. This summit produced the Agenda 21 directive containing recommendations for its implementation.⁸ In 2002, the Río+10 meeting was held in Johannesburg to assess progress on said agenda.⁹

During this period, international meetings on gender, population, habitat and other topics were organized and several global environmental agreements reached.¹⁰ In the 1980s, scientific research revealed that the problem was more serious than had been assumed at Stockholm in 1972. The world's nations understood that a new generation of international agreements needed to be negotiated on biological diversity, climate change, the battle against desertification and drought, and the control of chemical pollutants.

⁷ Andrew J. Jordan and Heather Voisey, "The 'Rio Process': The Politics and Substantive Outcomes of 'Earth Summit I' The 'Rio Process': The Politics and Substantive Outcomes of 'Earth Summit II': Institutions for Global Environmental Change," in *Global Environmental Change-Human and Policy Dimensions*, vol. 8, no. 3, April 1998, pp. 93-97.

⁸ The conceptual framework for the *Agenda 21* emerged from the U.N. General Assembly resolution 44/228. The 172 nations that attended the Earth Summit in Río de Janeiro in June 1992 agreed to draw up the *Agenda 21*, including a global action plan to promote sustainable development contained in the Río Declaration on the Environment and Development, among other measures. The topics on the agenda are covered in 40 extensive chapters divided into four main sections: I. Social and Economic Dimensions; II. Conservation and Management of Resources for Development; III. Strengthening the Role of Major Groups and; IV. Means of Implementation. See Programa para el Medio Ambiente de la ONU (PNUMA), "Agenda 21", at <http://www.rolac.unep.mx/agenda21/esp/ag21inde.htm> (date of access: February 27, 2023); United Nations, "Cumbre para la Tierra +5," at <http://www.un.org/spanish/conferences/cumbre&5.htm> (date of access: February 27, 2023).

⁹ For further reflections on the Agenda 21, see Gary C. Bryner, "Agenda 21: Myth or reality?," in Norman J. Vig and Regina S. Axelrod (eds.), *The Global Environmental: Institutions, Law and Policy*, 1st. ed., Washington, D.C., Congressional Quarterly Press, 1999, pp. 157-189.

¹⁰ Olga Ojeda, "La cooperación ambiental internacional en la era de la globalización," in Ricardo Valero (comp.), *Globalidad, una nueva mirada alternativa*, Mexico, Miguel Ángel Porrúa/Centro Latinoamericano de la Globalidad, 1999, pp. 97-150.

However, despite these initiatives, the Earth's ecosystems were damaged on an unprecedented scale in the last three decades of the twentieth century.¹¹ As the authors of *Environmental and Human Wellbeing*¹² reported, forests were disappearing at a rapid rate, greenhouse gases (GHGs) were accumulating in the atmosphere, air and water pollution were on the rise, species of flora and fauna were becoming extinct, vector-borne diseases of animal origin were on the increase and soil degradation had aggravated poverty and hunger, forcing people to migrate from the countryside to cities. This state of affairs continued into the early part of the present century¹³ and, judging from the reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and other institutions, continues today with the unrelenting deterioration of ecosystems and the reciprocal impact on global warming.¹⁴

Environment, economic growth and sustainable development

It is now accepted that economic activities are taking place on such a scale that they could potentially have an irreversible impact on the global ecosystem, with devastating results for the Earth's capacity to sustain human life. It is also acknowledged that, due to the complexity and close interrelatedness of the components of the Earth's ecosystem, it is difficult to address these issues individually or only on a local scale (as opposed to *the global*

¹¹ Peter M. Vitousek, Harold A. Mooney, Jane Lubchenco and Jerry M. Melillo, "Human Domination of Earth's Ecosystems," in *Science*, vol. 277, no. 5325, July 25, 1997, pp. 494-499.

¹² Don Melnick, Jeffrey McNeely and Yolanda Kakabadse Navarro (coords.), *Environmental and Human Wellbeing. A Practical Strategy*, London, Earthscan/U.N. Millennium Project Task Force on Environmental Sustainability, 2005.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 46-48.

¹⁴ According to a large group of scientists, five of the planet's boundaries operate intensely on regional scales and violations of these affect the Earth system on a global and, in a sense, reciprocally, on a local scale: biodiversity, altered biogeochemical cycles, land-system change, the use of water and GHG emissions in general. Will Steffen *et al.*, "Planetary Boundaries: Guiding Human Development on a Changing Planet," in *Science*, vol. 347, no. 6223, February 13, 2015, pp. 736-747.

commons), and that inequalities and disparities between countries pose a barrier to negotiations and exert pressure when it comes to addressing the environmental problems that affect both rich and poor (a distinction made by the Kyoto Protocol).

There are, to date, two opposing approaches to managing this state of affairs. The one put forward by the authors of *The Limits of Growth*¹⁵ states that certain thresholds should not be crossed in the exploitation of resources, while the Brundtland Report contends that growth is possible provided certain principles are upheld, which could be interpreted as a “soft” form of sustainability.¹⁶ The implications for policy strategy are far-reaching, depending which one of these two very different approaches you accept. In the first case, there is an ethical obligation to ensure future generations do not inherit less or inferior natural capital to that which the current generation has access to, while the Brundtland Report admits the possibility of substituting natural capital with other forms of natural, physical or human capital, provided the total natural capital stock is maintained. This is a view champions of “hard” sustainability do not accept, because they claim some forms of natural capital cannot be substituted.¹⁷ The Brundtland Report offers a way out: identify “critical natural capital” and respect minimum rules.¹⁸ On a practical level, this begs a few questions: “At what spatial level are the rules to be applied? Do they have to be applied at a

¹⁵ Donella H. Meadows, Dennis L. Meadows, Jørgen Randers and William W. Behrens III, *Los límites del crecimiento. Informe al Club de Roma sobre el predicamento de la humanidad (The Limits to Growth, A Report for the Club Of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind)*, Mexico, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1972.

¹⁶ Eric Neumayer, *Weak versus Strong Sustainability. Exploring the Limits of Two Opposing Paradigms*, 2nd. ed., Cheltenham, Edward Elgar, 2003.

¹⁷ It is acknowledged that the atmosphere and biodiversity cannot be substituted.

¹⁸ Richard C. Bishop suggests the following rules: natural resources should only be exploited at the same or at a lower rate as their renewal capacity; waste should be generated at a rate equal to or less than the environment's capacity to absorb it; non-renewable resources should not be exploited at a rate higher than stocks of these resources and their use can be substituted with renewable, technologically improved or recycled resources; ecological functions and the provision of facilities and vital spaces should be protected and the environment's carrying capacity maintained. R. C. Bishop, “Economic Efficiency, Sustainability and Biodiversity,” in *Ambio*, vol. 22, no. 2-3, May 1993, pp. 69-73.

local level? Does each individual forest have to meet the condition or can the felling of timber in one area or country be made good by the planting of new forest elsewhere? [...] Can urban development on agricultural land be allowed?”¹⁹ Politically speaking, as the authors of *The Limits of Growth* insist, “any deliberate attempt to reach a rational and enduring state of equilibrium by planned measures, rather than by chance or catastrophe, must ultimately be founded on a basic change of values and goals at individual, national, and world levels”.²⁰

This statement has permeated discourse on the international arena. However, there is another important aspect that the authors of *Beyond the Limits of Growth*²¹ point out: it is not merely a question of the limits imposed by the existence and use of resources. Because the Earth is both a source of resources and a sink that absorbs the waste produced by the manufacture and consumption of products, the physical limits of growth are determined by both the depletion of resources and the inability of the ecosystem to absorb the waste produced by human activities.

Reverting these two processes is indubitably a task that remains pending for States that have participated in Conferences of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), from the first one in 1995 in Berlin, to Paris 2015 and the last one in Sharm el-Sheikh in November 2022.²²

¹⁹ Ian Hodge, *Environmental Economics. Individual Incentives and Public Choices*, London, Red Globe Press, 1995, p. 55.

²⁰ D. H. Meadows, D. L. Meadows, J. Randers and W. W. Behrens III, *op. cit.*, p. 244.

²¹ D. H. Meadows, D. L. Meadows and J. Randers, *Más allá de los límites del crecimiento (Beyond the Limits of Growth)*, Madrid, El País/Aguilar, 1993.

²² The COP is the supreme decision-making body of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). All States party to the Convention are represented at the COP, which is where enforcement of the Convention and any other legal instruments adopted by the COP is analysed and the necessary decisions taken to promote the effective implementation of the Convention, including institutional and administrative arrangements. CMNUCC, “Conference of the Parties (COP),” at <https://unfccc.int/process/bodies/supreme-bodies/conference-of-the-parties-cop> (date of access: February 27, 2023).

International cooperation and finances in the context of climate change

Today, the matter of greatest concern to humanity and that is an incentive for all intergovernmental organizations, multilateral groups and national governments to take global action is unquestionably climate change. According to the IPCC, the main emission-producing countries urgently need to get more involved and adapt to a changing international scenario.²³

Published in 2022, the *Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*²⁴ on the mitigation of climate change leaves it clearer than ever that we need to address the problem because time is running out... and fast. To the question, is there still time to take climate action? the authors of *The Limits of Growth* had something to say three decades ago:

A sustainable society is still technically and economically possible. It could be much more desirable than a society that tries to solve its problems by constant expansion. The transition to a sustainable society requires a careful balance between long-term and short-term goals, and an emphasis on sufficiency, equity and quality of life rather than quantity of output. It requires more than productivity and more than technology; it requires maturity, compassion and wisdom.²⁵

²³ Working Group III Contribution to the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report (AR6), *Summary for Policymakers*, Geneva, Intergovernmental Group of Experts on Climate Change (IPCC), October 2021, at https://report.ipcc.ch/ar6wg3/pdf/IPCC_AR6_WGIII_SummaryForPolicymakers.pdf (date of access: February 27, 2023). (The report covers literature accepted for publication up until 11 October 2021).

²⁴ Priyadarshi R. Shukla, Jim Skea and Andy Reisinger (eds.), *Climate Change 2022: Mitigation of Climate Change: Working Group III Contribution to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, Geneva, IPCC, 2022, at <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg3/> (date of access: February 27, 2023).

²⁵ D. H. Meadows, D. L. Meadows and J. Randers, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

In the current context, this optimism would not appear to concur with the perception of the international community, which has serious concerns in this regard.²⁶

And for good reason. Global emissions continue to rise and the paths proposed in nationally determined contributions (NDCs) are not sufficient to keep the global temperature rise well below 2 °C, much less limit it even further to just 1.5 °C above preindustrial levels. To achieve this, global CO₂ emissions would need to reach their peak immediately and be halved by 2030, as indicated in the aforementioned reports.

It was in this scenario that the IPCC stressed the importance of cooperation, finance and innovation in its *Technical Summary*:

International cooperation [...] provides critical support for mitigation in particular regions, sectors and industries, for particular types of emissions, and at the sub – and trans-national levels (*high confidence*). [...] International cooperation will need to be strengthened in several key respects in order to support mitigation action consistent with limiting temperature rise to well below 2 °C in the context of sustainable development and equity (*high confidence*).²⁷ [...]

Finance to reduce net GHG emissions and enhance resilience to climate impacts is a critical enabling factor for the low-carbon transition. Fundamental inequalities in access to finance as well as finance terms and conditions, and countries' exposure to physical impacts of climate change overall, result in a worsening outlook for a global just transition (*high confidence*)²⁸ [...].

²⁶ According to the Global Risks Perception Survey conducted by the World Economic Forum (WEF), five of the ten main risks to the planet are perceived to be environmental: the failure of climate action; extreme weather; loss of biodiversity; continued deterioration of the environment; and resource scarcity. WEF, *The Global Risks Report 2022*, Geneva, WEF, 2022, at <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-risks-report-2022> (date of access: February 27, 2023).

²⁷ Working Group III Contribution to the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report (AR6), *Technical Summary*, Geneva, IPCC, November 2021, p. 120.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

Consistent with *innovation system* approaches, the sharing of knowledge and experiences between developed and developing countries can contribute to addressing global climate change and the SDGs. The effectiveness of such international cooperation arrangements, however, depends on the way they are developed and implemented (*high confidence*).²⁹

These three principles can be found in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)³⁰ of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development approved by the United Nations in 2015. An opportunity for countries and societies to set out on a new path and improve quality of life for everyone, “without leaving anyone behind”, the 2030 Agenda contains 17 SDGs,³¹ which range from “ending poverty in all its forms everywhere” (SDG 1) to “revitalizing the global partnership for sustainable development” (SDG 17). This goal states that “the SDGs can only be realized with a strong commitment to global partnerships and cooperation. A successful sustainable development agenda requires inclusive partnerships (global, regional, national and local) built upon principles and values, a shared vision and shared goals that place people and the planet at the centre”.³²

However, some of the targets of SDG 17 require greater specificity. For example, in target 17.1 “Strengthen domestic resource mobilisation, including through international support to developing countries”, no entities whose purpose goes beyond a sectorial scope and/or whose explicit function is to provide official development assistance are named. Conversely, other targets mention possible actions that cover areas of North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation in support of national plans

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.129.

³⁰ United Nations, “The Sustainable Development Agenda,” at <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/> (date of access: February 27, 2023).

³¹ United Nations, “Take Action for the Sustainable Development Goals,” at <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/> (date of access: February 27, 2023).

³² United Nations, “Objetivo 17: Revitalizar la Alianza Mundial para el Desarrollo Sostenible,” at <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/es/globalpartnerships/> (date of access: February 27, 2023).

for the implementation of all the SDGs. Does this mean it is up to national governments and multilateral organizations like the G20 to define who, how and how much?

The role of the G20 in the world

As regards the global strategy to address climate change and, in general, meet the SDGs, policy measures have yet to be adopted. Hence the importance of the G20 on the global arena, not just because of the economic, demographic and environmental clout of its members, but because of the role it plays in achieving the targets of SDG 17.³³

In terms of international cooperation, the G20 acts in key areas of the international economic and financial agenda. Created in 1999 by the world's leading advanced and emerging economies, the Group is comprised of 19 member countries³⁴ and the European Union. Together, these represent approximately ninety percent of global GDP, eighty percent of global trade and two-thirds of the world population. By the same token, these entities account for some seventy-five percent of global GHG emissions, including changes in land use and loss of forests.³⁵

The roots of the G20 can be traced back to the annual meetings the world's main economies began to organize in 1975, first as the G6 and, the following year, as the G7 when Canada came on board.³⁶ Originally, it was a forum of finance ministers and central bank governors who met

³³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs (SRE), "México y el Grupo de los Veinte (G20)", 1 June 2015, at <https://www.gob.mx/sre/fr/acciones-y-programas/mexico-y-el-grupo-de-los-veinte-g20> (date of access: February 27, 2023).

³⁴ In alphabetical order: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Republic of Korea, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Türkiye the United Kingdom and the United States.

³⁵ FAO, "Land Use," in FAOSTAT, at <https://www.fao.org/faostat/en/#data/RL> (date of access: June 27, 2022); Jos Olivier and Jeroen Peters, *Trends in Global CO₂ and Total Greenhouse Gas Emissions: Report 2019*, The Hague, PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency, 2020, p. 25.

³⁶ The original members were France, Italy, Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States, Japan and Canada.

to discuss global economic and financial matters, reach agreements and come up with solutions to problems in this area. In the 1990s, the threat of a crisis forced the G7 to acknowledge the need to include emerging economies not represented in the Group.³⁷ This gave rise to the G20, which met for the first time in Germany to oversee the state of the international economic system and coordinate the financial and trade policies of its 19 members and the European Union.

The collapse of the U.S. financial system in 2008, otherwise known as the Great Recession, had a severe impact on the international economic system and changed the makeup of the forum. The severity of the crisis made it necessary to convene heads of state and government, elevating the level of the G20 from a forum of finance and economy ministers to that of an annual leaders' summit. The strategy yielded results, because the G20 managed to revert the international recession via a series of fiscal and monetary policies.³⁸

Unlike G7 meetings, G20 summits bring together a heterogeneous group of countries. Differences and economic competition between participants have turned this common enterprise into an arena where power struggles are constantly being played out in a bid to influence decisions. For many, the private, informal meetings that take place at these forums have become a platform and an invaluable opportunity to discuss, face-to-face, the most pressing issues they and their countries face.³⁹

³⁷ It was thought that a broader grouping was needed to better represent the emerging-market economies at the centre of the 1997 and 1998 crises. Stephen Kirchner, "The G20 and Global Governance," in *Cato Journal*, vol. 36, no. 3, 2016, p. 487. But also, "many emerging countries seem to have taken the decision to join and make their presence felt at the greatest possible number of international policy forums". Günther Maihold and Zirahuén Villamar, "El G20 y los países emergentes," in *Foro Internacional*, no. 223, January–March 2016, p. 166.

³⁸ Center for International Research (CII), *Order, Containment, and Change: The Group of Twenty*, Mexico, CII-Matías Romero Institute-SRE, November 2019, p. 3-4.

³⁹ The G20 is organized around two pillars: finance and sherpas. The finance aspect is spearheaded by the finance ministers and central bank governors of member countries. Mexico is represented by the Finance Ministry (SHCP) and its central bank, Banco de México, in this area. Sherpas represent their heads of state in preparatory work for summit meetings. During the process, they identify possible agreements and results pertaining to non-financial issues on the Group's agenda, such as employment, trade, energy and

Since the 2008-2009 financial crisis, the G20 agenda had expanded to other topics.⁴⁰ At Hamburg 2017, in keeping with the Paris Agreement,⁴¹ debate focused on the NDCs and it was agreed cooperation between members would be increased with a view to facilitating the sharing of know-how and experiences, and for training purposes. Countries providing assistance would step up efforts to support their partners in the implementation of the NDCs. Actions covered energy and measures to encourage intergovernmental organizations and multilateral development banks to channel assistance funds into programs related to SDG targets. At that same meeting, the G20 Action Plan on Marine Litter was launched.

At the Ministerial Meeting on Energy Transitions and Global Environment for Sustainable Growth at Karuizawa in June 2019, the implementation framework was drawn up and signed that same month by G20 leaders at the Osaka Summit under the presidency of Japan. Here, sherpas prioritized climate sustainability, development, employment, energy, health, the digital economy, trade and investment, among other issues, although this working structure can change from one presidency to another.⁴²

At the 2020 meeting presided over by Saudi Arabia, the *circular economy*⁴³ concept was promoted, picking up on IPCC recommendations

development. In the case of Mexico, the sherpa channel is the responsibility of the SRE, with the undersecretary of foreign affairs acting as the Mexican sherpa to the G20.

⁴⁰ S. Kirchner, *op. cit.*, p. 488.

⁴¹ The Paris Agreement (signed in 2016) reaffirms the goal of limiting the global average temperature increase to well below 2 °C above preindustrial levels, while pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C above these levels.

⁴² Steffen Bauer, Axel Berger and Gabriela Iacobuta, "Figure 1. G20 working structure during the Japanese Presidency in 2019," in *With or Without You: How the G20 Could Advance Global Action Towards Climate-Friendly Sustainable Development*, Bonn, German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS) (Briefing Paper, 10/2019), 2019, p. [3]. This is reiterated in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)/United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *G20 Contribution to the 2030 Agenda: Progress and Way Forward*, Paris, OECD Publishing, 2019, p. 7, at <https://doi.org/10.1787/db84dfca-en> (date of access: February 27, 2023).

⁴³ "At its core, the circular economy is about striving 1) to reduce resource use intelligently by providing the same goods and services with fewer resources, 2) to reuse as much as possible, and 3) to recycle the elemental materials of products that cannot be further reused. Through the circularity of reducing, reusing and recycling, economic activity and

to avoid the consequences of exceeding a rise of 1.5 °C in global temperature. The next year, with Italy chairing the G20 and co-chairing the COP26 at Glasgow, the idea of incorporating financial debate into the climate agenda was put forward. Finally, in June 2022 in Jakarta, the importance of collective action and collaboration between G20 members was underscored, in line with what has always been the Group's main purpose. Having acknowledged that the pandemic impacted every aspect of society and that gaps between countries hindered joint action to address it, at Bali 2022, Indonesia proposed focusing on three areas: the architecture of global health, the transition to sustainable energies and the digital transformation. To this end, it was agreed more representative international cooperation was needed.⁴⁴

Links between international and national agendas

While the role of “emerging countries” has been to promote proposals in their interests and that help even out the balance of power, the fact remains that not all emerging countries were created equal. Some, like China and India, wield greater influence, while others, like Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, Indonesia, Türkiye and South Africa, have less leeway when it comes to getting their adjustment initiatives heard. Overall, however, the presence of emerging countries has been important for several reasons. For one, they have managed to introduce pressing issues and get other countries to back their proposals. For example, Mexico, along with Australia, France and Canada, has championed agreements on climate change, migration, sustainable development and gender equality. Also, non-state actors have

quality of life can be sustained and improved while keeping raw resource use and waste to a minimum.” King Abdullah Petroleum Studies and Research Center (KAPSARC), *CCE Guide Overview: A guide to the circular carbon economy (CCE)*, KAPSARC (Circular Carbon Economy, 00), 2020, p. 7.

⁴⁴ The motto of the Indonesian presidency at the Bali Summit of 2022 was in keeping with the times: “Recover Together, Recover Stronger”.

proven increasingly adept at influencing decision-makers as regards specific matters of importance to them.⁴⁵

In the case of Mexico, economic growth, free trade, food security, sustainable development, energy efficiency, the combatting of corruption and the mitigation of climate change are issues of national interest and G20 meetings are an opportunity to find solutions that can be shared on the international arena.⁴⁶ In this regard, international policies have been seen to incentivise the passage of climate change legislation by certain national governments, since countries tend to imitate one another.⁴⁷ This, in turn, is evidence of how global and national agendas are linked.

Recent studies insist that adopting climate change legislation helps reduce emissions,⁴⁸ although we have seen that policies do not always lead to substantial reductions.⁴⁹ Indubitably, the implicit potential for improving environmental policy in general and climate change policy in particular differs from one country to another. Research by Nascimento *et al.*⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Thomas G. Weiss and Rorden Wilkinson emphasise the role of non-state actors as the “missing middle” of global governance (and on the national scene). T.G. Weiss and R. Wilkinson, “Actores del ‘sector medio desconocido’. La Gobernanza Global entre Bastidores,” in *Foro Internacional*, no. 249, July-September 2022, pp. 469-509. According to Donald F. Kettl “Governance” is a way of describing the links between government and its broader environment—political, social, administrative”, while Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye Jr. say that governance gives rise to “social action occurs, which might or might not be governmental”. D. Kettl, *The Transformation of Governance: Public Administration for Twenty-First Century America*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002, p. 119.

⁴⁶ SRE, *op. cit.*

⁴⁷ Samuel Fankhauser, Caterina Gennaioli and Murray Collins, “Do International Factors Influence the Passage of Climate Change Legislation?,” in *Climate Policy*, vol. 16, no. 3, 2016, pp. 318-331, quoted in Leonardo Nascimento *et al.*, “Twenty Years of Climate Policy: G20 Coverage and Gaps,” in *Climate Policy*, vol. 22, no. 2, 2022, p. 159.

⁴⁸ Shaikh M. S. U. Eskander and Sam Fankhauser, “Reduction in Greenhouse Gas Emissions from National Climate Legislation,” in *Nature Climate Change*, vol. 10, no. 8, August 2020, pp. 750-756.

⁴⁹ Hugh Compston and Ian Bailey, “Climate Policy Strength Compared: China, the U.S., the E.U., India, Russia, and Japan,” in *Climate Policy*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2016, pp. 145-164; Jessica F. Green, “Does Carbon Pricing Reduce Emissions? A Review of ex-post Analyses,” in *Environmental Research Letters*, vol. 13, no. 4, April 2021, pp. 1-17.

⁵⁰ The goal of this research was to analyse the adoption of emissions policies per sector for G20 countries from 2000 to 2019.

revealed that more developed countries like Japan and Republic of Korea adopted multiple policy instruments before other nations, and that the hierarchical order *vis-à-vis* country categories according to the Kyoto Protocol was not clear. So we have Annex I countries like Russia and Türkiye adopting such policies later, whereas Mexico and Brazil, which were not listed in Annex I, took immediate measures,⁵¹ and, in the case of Mexico, incorporated these into its programs and regulatory and institutional frameworks ahead of others.

Graph 1 shows a positive correlation between compliance with the summit agenda and the quality of national institutions among G20 members.

From this it can be deduced that, rather than economic performance, it is the solidity, continuity and autonomy of a country's institutions that facilitates G20 compliance.

Nonetheless, if we look at the graph of changes in economic freedom between 2008 and 2015, we can see that, despite a high level of G20 compliance, the quality and/or strength of the institutions of Anglo-American economies declined in the period.⁵² According to Stephen Kirchner, this illustrates that “international economic and political cooperation is a symptom, not a cause, of domestic policies and institutions. Domestic policies and institutional settings contribute to advancing the G20's agenda, but these settings do not appear to depend on the G20 summit process in a measurable way”.⁵³

My interpretation leads me to conclude that, however important financing may be to compliance, weak domestic institutions are not likely to guarantee the efficient use of resources.

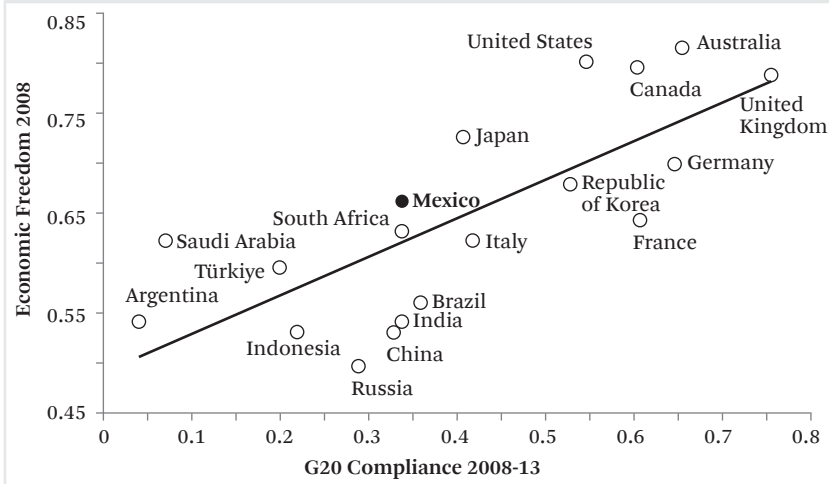
Mexico stands out in the context of the so-called emerging countries. The 2007-2012 National Development Plan included “environmental sustainability” as one of the pillars of federal government actions. And it was precisely at the Cancún Summit in 2012, during its presidency, that Mexico insisted G20 members address “sustainable growth” and food security issues. There can be no question that, since 2000, the development

⁵¹ L. Nascimento, *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

⁵² *Ibid.*, “Figure 3,” p. 495.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 495.

Graph 1. G20: Correlation between compliance and quality of member-country economic institutions in the 2008-2013 period



Source: Heritage Foundation, based on the Economic Freedom Index, quoted in S. Kirchner, *op. cit.*, "Figure 2", p. 494.

of the regulatory framework has been noteworthy (the General Law on Ecological Equilibrium and Environmental Protection was passed in 2004 and the General Law on Climate Change in 2012),⁵⁴ even though enforcement and compliance have been lacking.⁵⁵

Observers from international cooperation groups are sceptical as to the importance of domestic economic policies and the extent to which these can contribute to global economic stability.⁵⁶ In this context, the following

⁵⁴ OECD, *OECD Environmental Performance Reviews: Mexico 2013*, Paris, OECD Publishing, 2013.

⁵⁵ Progress continues to be made in the development of clean, renewable energies, although we are far from reaching the targets set forth in the NDC proposed by Mexico: fossil fuel emissions continue to rise and while forests are no longer disappearing at the rate we saw decades ago, illegal logging remains rampant.

⁵⁶ Joseph P. Daniels, "The Significance of the Economic Summits," in Wolfgang Hoppenstedt, Ronald W. Pruessen and Oliver Rathkolb (eds.), *Global Management*, Vienna, Lit Verlag, 2005, p. 84. Quoted in S. Kirchner, *op. cit.*, p. 488.

questions come to mind: How can Mexico effectively incorporate actions proposed by the G20 into its domestic strategies? How can it identify actions that offer co-benefits in multiple sectors? How can it ensure these strategies are properly implemented and that they are effective on a national and on a local level? And how can it persuade the G20 to incorporate priority domestic issues into its actions?

Experience gained in recent years since climate change and sustainable development appeared on the G20 agenda is a good starting point in attempting to answer these questions, but it requires accepting the vital role of diverse actors, including the “missing middle” and sub-national governments, as regards compliance with the NDCs, the improvement of SDG indicators and, not least, achieving the goal of net zero emissions by 2050.

As I mentioned previously, the strengthening of institutions—national, state and municipal—needs to be prioritised. In the case of Mexico, it requires greater awareness of the fact that this is a commitment that needs to be put above immediate and individual interests. But, as we have discussed here, within the framework of multilateralism and global governance, broadening partnerships and consolidating the leadership of the G20 is equally essential if we are to address the pressing issue of global warming, increase national and individual awareness, and effectively and efficiently achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.