

Greening of Industry Networks Studies

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Sustainable Development Goals and Sustainable Supply Chains in the Post-global Economy

 Springer

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Foreword

In September of 2015, world leaders adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This agenda includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to end poverty, fight inequality and injustice, and tackle climate change by 2030. The importance of the SDGs should not be understated, as it is the first time that all developed and developing countries agree on a common and comprehensive set of sustainable development goals and targets.

Corporations and their supply chains will be critical partners in helping to achieve these goals. Building sustainable supply chains is one of the major ways to contribute to SDGs. Particularly pertinent is SDG 12 with a theme of “responsible consumption and production.” The supply chain represents the distribution across the life cycle stages of goods and materials produced and consumed. It is a major dimension on how organizations can improve sustainability performance.

In recent decades, the world economy further internationalized and globalized. These events resulted in growth in cross-border supply chains and transnational production and consumption systems, which contributed to integrated economies. These forces also created political interdependencies facilitating collaboration between multiple stakeholders – including governments, civil society, communities, educational institutions, and industry – toward common goals in sustainability.

However, there is little guidance by the SDGs on how these global goals can be translated into corporate policies and practices. Almost two thirds of the targets are not quantified, they are aspirational, and when they refer to companies, they do it generically. For instance, SDG 12 Target 6 is to “Encourage companies, especially large and transnational companies, to adopt sustainable practices.” The only specific business target in SDG 12 is to encourage companies to publish corporate social responsibility (CSR) reports.

Companies will need to embark on a process of reflection and critical analysis to better understand social and political expectations and identify their own responsibilities to achieve these goals and – in particular – the impacts that their operations have on SDGs. This embarkation is a nontrivial task. Companies are struggling to define their role and develop a plan of action with a supply chain perspective for SDGs.

Political shifts such as the Brexit and United States federal administration policies are feared to be heralding a period of deceleration in global economic integration. These policies represent a drastic geopolitical shift that may result in a post-global economy with greater isolationism, less collaboration, and more trade and foreign direct investment restrictions. If so, these events will hinder efforts toward a global circular economy, which are key to SDGs. The impacts of slowed down or even reversed globalization in supply chains have yet to be conceptualized. The world economy may be heading toward more regionalization with these political changes which may be seen as opportunities for new supply chain partnerships.

Against this background, the Greening of Industry Network (GIN) organized an international symposium at the Royal Holloway, University of London, in 2017. The workshop called for contributions challenging state-of-the-art knowledge and encouraged scholars to thrive on trans-disciplinarity that encompasses multiple fields of knowledge and stakeholders in understanding and building knowledge on environmental and social sustainability. The editors of this book carefully selected contributions to provide an overview of issues and challenges from paradigmatical (e.g., degrowth) to theoretical, to practical viewpoints.

The scope of the book is wide because the research on sustainability in supply chains is challenging and the analysis of its political aspects still in early development stages. Sustainability in supply chains includes many dimensions that may be separable but are definitely systemic. For that reason, the book presents studies including those with very specific lenses for research and investigation. The interactions and relationships between chapters should be recognized to fully appreciate the complexities for addressing sustainability in supply chains issues. It pools knowledge from various disciplines to help advance theory and practice on sustainable supply chains, in a rapidly evolving global sociopolitical environment.

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