The Political Language of Multilateralism in the United Nations

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5 From Development to Sustainability

Addressing Climate Crisis in Multilateral Manner

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5.1 Multilateralism and the UN Development Pillar

Presented in a letter addressed to the Secretary-General at the 76th session of the UN General Assembly regarding the *Global Development Initiative* (GDI), the UN permanent representative of China, Ambassador Zhang Jun, speaking on behalf of Chinese President Xi Jinping, mentioned how "development is the eternal pursuit of human society." Further in the annex of the letter, *multilateralism* was referred to as "global development partnership":

> We need to put multilateralism into practice and support the United Nations in playing a coordinating role in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. We need to strengthen North-South cooperation, deepen South-South cooperation, and enhance the representation and voice of emerging markets and developing countries in global governance. We need to follow the principle of extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits, build an open world economy, and work together to create an open and interconnected global development environment.
>
> (A/76/345, 3)

This means that, similar to other UN pillars, as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, multilateralism in the development pillar is expected to be carried out in accordance with "the principle of extensive consultation, joint collaboration and shared benefit" (A/76/345, 3). The development pillar at the UN assumes international cooperation between states. Therefore, while the two previous empirical chapters have focused on maintaining peace and security and human rights, this chapter focuses on the third UN pillar, namely development, and explores it in connection with multilateralism. The concept of development includes many different aspects and has considerably changed over time. In terms of sustainable development, it connects the economic, social, and environmental aspects of development. In this chapter, our focus is on sustainable development, especially its environmental aspect, and more specifically climate change. The UN discussion on development in the 1990s was mainly carried out from the economic perspective, which we will discuss later in the chapter, and we will also show how development shaped into

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a sustainable one as the "pursuit of human society" linked to multilateralism, as stated earlier in a letter related to Global Development Initiative (A/76/345, 2).

The chapter will discuss what multilateralism means as a concept in the development pillar, mainly from the perspective of climate change and sustainable development, and it examines how development evolved in the UN from the 1990s until the 2020s. Development is considered one of the UN's priorities, and in 1997, when the UNGA passed the Agenda for Development resolution, the document mentioned how the UN has focused on "economic development, social development and environmental protection" and how they are "mutually reinforcing components of sustainable development" (A/RES/51/240, 2).

In the 1990s, the focus was very much on the "economic growth" of developing countries, and thus the need for funding and aid was discussed and negotiated, particularly in terms of multilateral trading, finance, investment, and technology transfer (Boilard 2019; Sachs 1992; Broms 1990). The UN conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 can be seen as a starting point for multilateral efforts to connect development more closely with the environment, although the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) was established already in 1972. The development discussion then slowly moved towards sustainable development.

Studying debates, resolutions, and discussions revolving around development (notably on the climate crisis and environment between 1990 and 2023) within the UN context for this chapter shows that the theme was often result-focused. This was apparent in how particular issues were highlighted as achievements of development, such as the agreements of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000 and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, in addition to the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 and the Paris Agreement in 2015. The empirical analysis also included examination of the meeting records of 60 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) sessions and 26 annual meetings of the UN Climate Change Conference, or Conference of the Parties (COP) meetings.

To study development, focusing mainly on the UNGA documentation was considered a better choice than focusing on the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), which mainly centers on three dimensions of sustainable development and hosts the High-level Political Forum on sustainable development, but overall ECOSOC's work is divided into subsidiary bodies and other UN entities. Additionally, the work of international organizations regarding development, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the development discourse led by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), was not included in the analysis either, as their focus is more on-site and state implementation which varies across the countries. UNCTAD focuses on "financing development" with the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (historically the Bretton Woods institutions), and World Trade Organization (see UNCTAD n.d). Specific work of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), which is focused mainly on the global environment institution but only as a normative body (Ivanova 2021, 7), was further excluded from the analysis.

It is mainly the UNGA that has provided global resolutions with orchestrated efforts *multilaterally* (Barkin 2006, 112). We can trace the origins of the MDGs

to the UNGA resolution "United Nations Millennium Declaration" in 2000 and the SDGs to the UNGA resolution "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development." Thus, the UNGA is the most interesting forum to be examined in more detail considering this volume's thematic focus. The UNGA has also served as a "universal forum for debate and action on development issues affecting all states" (A/48/935, 26), as remarked by then UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, when delivering the report *An Agenda for Development* in 1994. The resolutions of the MDGs and the SDGs have been only two of many multilateral resolutions agreed upon in the UNGA, portraying their importance. Even when the Kyoto Protocol and Paris Agreement and other accords were agreed upon by the IPCC and COP, they were also discussed in the UNGA. Thus, the collection of materials (reports, resolutions, letters etc.) in the UNGA gives a representative view on the stances of the UN (as an embodiment of the UN member states, experts, and the secretariat) itself on the development issue, and also an effort to use the UN's own data, which has been claimed to be understudied (Weiss and Daws 2018, 33).

To highlight the political language of multilateralism in the UN development pillar, this chapter has been divided into three parts. First, with respect to multilateralism in development towards the MDGs and then the SDGs, the chapter discusses the historical trajectories of the development issue, which led to the concept of "sustainability." Using materials from the 1990s, namely the 1992 Conference on Environment and Development, the *Agenda for Development* documents, and both the MDGs and SDGs, this section draws upon the dichotomy between high- and middle/low-income countries (often referred to in the meeting records as "developed-developing" countries) that highlights development as economic growth and developing countries' need for funding, aid, or technical assistance. In this section, we can see that the discussion in the meeting records also focused more on sustainability and environmental issues, notably on tackling climate change. Second, on practicing multilateralism in the context of the climate crisis within the UN, the section shows the discussion of opening paths to tackle climate crisis in a more inclusive manner of multilateralism, from the Kyoto Protocol to the Paris Agreement (as seen in the discussions in both the IPCC and UNFCCC), involving all member states, as also exemplified earlier in the context of the MDGs to the SDGs. Third, the attention to multilateralism in practice in tackling the climate crisis is exemplified from one specific region: Southeast Asia and ASEAN, notably Indonesia. Southeast Asia, ASEAN, and Indonesia are relevant for this chapter as examples of the Global South facing challenges in sustainable development issues, especially in tackling the climate crisis. Through this example, we can also track the continuation of global discussions at the level of regional multilateralism. This can be seen as a positive response to the UN-coordinated global multilateralism, but emphasizes more the process side of multilateralism rather than seeing it as a mere norm indicating that the climate crisis should be multilaterally addressed or as an outcome, giving an expectation of an agreement or a resolution.

The geographical situation as a tropical region makes Southeast Asia prone to the worst impacts of the climate crisis. Yet ASEAN, as the regional organization

often compared with the European Union (EPRS 2022), has struggled to respond effectively to issues faced by its members (e.g., the case of Myanmar coup in 2021). Indonesia, a founding member of ASEAN and the biggest country in the region, is also the fourth populous country in the world and held the presidency of the G20 in 2022 and ASEAN leadership in 2023, setting the agenda for the meetings. Although citizens in this region are notably aware of the impact of climate crisis, the reluctance of governments to change their economic behavior, even proudly continuing "business as usual" activities, has slowed action on mitigation (Adiputri 2023a). Moreover, the case study illustrated in the latter part of this chapter shows how countries in the Global South continue to do this, as there is not enough leadership from high-income countries; indeed, the effects of the climate crisis are uneven and less pressing for these developed countries (Ivanova 2018, 716). For this section, in addition to the UNGA documents, ASEAN resolutions, treaties, and meeting reports were also studied.

This chapter shows the political language of multilateralism as a norm, process, and outcome in the UN development pillar. So far, what has been stated by representatives at assemblies, such as UNGA or ASEAN plenary meetings, has shown the "high" policy language, and it would be more significant if the agreed actions could be transformed into everyday climate language that the public understands in their daily lives (Adiputri 2023b).

5.2 From Economic Development Toward Sustainable Development Goals

On its website, the UNDP stated "multilateralism [as] a quick primer on international cooperation" as "United. Determined. Resolved." The idea is to have "a new and reimagined multilateralism" (UNDP n.d.). The UN Charter signed in 1945 reminded us of the role of the UN in which "countries come together to maintain international peace, build friendly relations and solve global challenges." This view highlights the need to have consensus in tackling complex issues, but it also understands that reaching treaties and actions involving multiple actors and countries can lead to more powerful and lasting results because of the involvement and interest in the outcomes. In the development pillar, the two prime examples of multilateralism are the SDGs and the Paris Climate Agreement, both signed in 2015.

We will discuss multilateralism in the development pillar in the UN context, towards both the SDGs and the Paris Climate Agreement, but before that, let us trace back the evolution of the development pillar in general. If we type the keyword "multilateralism" in the *Journal of World Development*, between 1990 and 2021, the 803 results will rally around "[multilateral] aid, donor, financial, development loans, lending creditor, assistance and trading." The results show that development still often revolves around funding or economic activities, and indeed, within the UN, development issues have usually centered on development aid since the 1990s (Broms 1990), as part of states' foreign policy (Boilard 2019, 70). Environmental multilateralism has been seen through the framing of the North's wealth and the South's economic development (see Baumann 2024; Rajão and Duarte 2018).

International organizations in development were usually divided into three categories: development lending led by the World Bank, development assistance led by the UNDP, and development discourse led by the UNCTAD (Barkin 2006, 103). As we can learn from the history of the UNDP, its establishment was based on "the merging of the United Nations Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance, created in 1949, with the United Nations Special Fund, established in 1958" (UNDP n.d.), which revolved around funding and assistance. This was not surprising since the 1980s; there was a shift of balance in international funding and leadership from the UN to the World Bank, the IMF, business leaders, academics, and representatives from civil society organizations. Such discussions created activities of policy dialogues outside the UN's official proceeding, showing a sense of coherence or coordination in organizing world development through the economy (Fomerand and Dijkzeul 2018, 674–675).

Indeed, after the Second World War, in the 1950s, the term *development* itself connotated with escaping "from the undignified condition called underdevelopment" (Esteva 1992, 7); that was the "underdeveloped area" in the Southern hemisphere that needed to be intervened, as President of the United States Harry S. Truman stated in his inauguration speech on January 20, 1949 (Sachs 1992, 1). Truman's speech portrayed arrogance and hierarchies whereby developed or industrialized countries in the North appeared as advanced and superior societies, while their underdeveloped counterparts in the South seemed as though they were lagging behind and needed the Western countries' help to grow (Boilard 2019, 43). Indeed, historically, development in the early twentieth century was based on the idea of managing instability in the European industrializing society (Lewis 2019, 4), and thus the economic ideas were derived from Western scientific rationalism (Peet and Hartwick 2009, 21).

We can also see from the 1992 *Development Dictionary* (altogether 306 pages) that there was a shorter list of concepts (on development, environment, equality, helping, market, needs, one world, participation, planning, population, poverty, progress, production, resources, science, socialism, standards of living, state, and technology). Then, it expanded towards a more complex 779 pages of the 2022 *Routledge Handbook of Global Development* with more than 61 concepts. This latter book discusses development more broadly, including topics such as debt, deglobalization, sustainability, Anthropocene, gender-sexuality, extractivism, conflict, crisis in the global financial system, taxation, citizenship, and COVID-19, with inequality and poverty still included in the discussion. The broader conception of development does not seem to have escaped its economic framing.

Development is certainly a complex issue to discuss, involving many topics and member states of the UN, which are interested in shaping the global development agenda. The 2018 *Oxford Handbook on the United Nations*, in its development section, includes themes such as the UN development system, health, management, climate, democracy, human development, and the SDGs. This shows that "the bulk of the UN's staff and resources are devoted to activities designed to foster sustainable development" and to advance "human welfare" (Weiss 2009, 206–207). For the UN, as coined by Maurice Strong – the founder of UNEP and one of the world's leading environmentalists – it was important to fulfill the basic goal of

development, which is "to improve the lives and prospects of people in environmental and social as well as economic terms" (Strong 2000, 124).

When discussing the development pillar at the UN, Boilard (2019) studied the development debates and how they were connected to human rights. She also showed how development had been debated since the 1960s. It is worth raising the following quotation from the study:

> in the context of the International Development Strategy for the Second UN decade for development, "each economically advance country" had agreed to "progressively increase its official development assistance to the developing countries" and "exert its best efforts to reach a minimum net amount of 0.7 per cent of its gross national product at market prices by the middle of the Decade" (A/RES/2626(XXV) (1970)). Resolution 4 (XXXIII), however, moves to give the idea of international development assistance a more obligatory connotation.
>
> (Boilard 2019, 23)

This excerpt shows that development in the 1970s focused more on economic growth, financial negotiation, and technical assistance. It also shows that development was not equal among states, not only between developed and developing countries but also among developed countries themselves. *The Federalist*, a political review journal in the EU, noted that only four countries – Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden – dedicated 0.7% of their GNP to development policies as mandated by the UN in the 1970s (Spoltore 1994). The historical United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), founded in November 1943 and dissolved in September 1948, administered measures for the relief of war victims, providing aid, food, and medicine, and helping Europe – especially Eastern and Southern Europe – on the path to recovery. It showed the challenge of disputing the biggest funding contributor, in this case, the US. The UNRRA was financed by the US (72%), Great Britain (12%), Canada (6%), and the USSR (2%) (Spoltore 1994), highlighting the significant influence of the US as a great power and the biggest contributor. This example shows that the UN development pillar has been related to funding, disaster relief, and development aid, consequently connected with state power, contributions, and interests between countries. As such, it has created a dichotomy between "developed-developing countries" and a hierarchy in development.

Following the *Agenda for Peace*, explained in Chapter 3, we may also start examining the development pillar in the UN with the UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali's idea of the *Agenda for Development* (Boutros-Ghali 1995) discussed in the UNGA (A/48/935; A/RES/47/181). The Agenda for Development was stated to complement the Agenda for Peace, as both were "addressing the deeper foundations of global peace and security in the economic, social and environmental spheres" (Boutros-Ghali 1995, 12), perhaps because both documents were prepared by the same UN Secretary-General. The *Agenda for Development* was the implementation of the UNGA Resolution passed on December 22, 1992,

which reaffirmed the "unique" status of the UN as a forum for the promotion of "international cooperation for development." Cooperation was needed to "address effectively the issues of development, particularly of developing countries" (A/RES/47/181).

The Agenda for Development was produced out of concern that the UN placed more "emphasis on peace-keeping" rather "than on issues of development" (A/48/935, 4). This document was also one of the first attempts by the UN to give attention to "developing countries" that were "neglected" by development funding organizations as the IMF (Jolly 2007, 98). In the Agenda for Development, the concept of development was connected to efforts to "reduce poverty, illiteracy, disease, and mortality rates" (A/48/935, 4). It further covered the following five dimensions of development: peace as the foundation (A/48/935, 5), economy as the engine of progress (A/48/935, 9), the environment as a basis for sustainability (A/48/935, 13), justice as a pillar of society (A/48/935, 17), and democracy as good governance (A/48/935, 22). Three points came out from this Agenda, as stated by Boutros-Ghali (1995):

- "Development is the responsibility of Member States" (Boutros-Ghali 1995, 2);
- "Economic growth is the mainspring of development" (Boutros-Ghali 1995, 11);
- "Defining the purposes, goals, and role of the UN in development . . . to improved coordination with the UN system" [despite notifying the suffering of the UN "from unclear identity, insufficient visibility and credibility, and excessive fragmentation"] (Boutros-Ghali 1995, 9).

From here, we can derive that international cooperation was needed in the development, but the idea of development, mainly in terms of economic growth, required funding and assistance, which shaped the superiority of Western countries in development conception, leadership, and financial aid. Moreover, although development was important and could be coordinated by the UN multilaterally, implementation rested at the national level or according to the member states' needs. The following meeting, a report of the Secretary-General on the Agenda for Development, also emphasized multilateralism as "the international community to give renewed attention to the definition of development as a global issue" (A/48/689, 3) or "partnership among governments" (A/48/689, 4). It also highlighted sustainable development (A/48/689, 3), mostly in the context of the economy, market-oriented approaches, and financial institutions (A/48/689, 5–6). Overall, Boutros-Ghali's report (A/48/935) makes several references to multilateralism. It refers to the level of decision-making (as separate from national or bilateral) or the process of international cooperation (negotiations, action, agreements, and arrangements), to give a few examples. Multilateralism is also seen in the report as something causing resistance by those countries fearing the loss of national control (A/48/689, 44).

The terminology of "sustainable development" itself began to be discussed at the UN in the 1980s. In 1987, the *Brundtland Report* used this term for the first time, stating that sustainable development must ensure that "humanity meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability for future generations to

meet their own needs" (WCED 1987, 1). This report tried to link human development and environmental protection (Voget-Kleschin and Meisch 2019, 43) to address both the challenges of economic development and human well-being with better environmental policies in the future. The UN has been claimed to be "an agent of development" (A/47/PV.52, 3–5) since the Rio Conference in 1992, when it held a conference on Environment and Development. However, the historical trajectory of the UN's work on development shows that development has been discussed since the UN's establishment, running from the first to the third development decade from the 1960s to the 1990s, then focusing on human development in the 1990s to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (2000–2015) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (2016–2030).

Despite the categories that can be included within the development umbrella (poverty, women empowerment, economy, education, even good governance, to name just a few) – and following what was stated by the delegation of China at the beginning of this chapter on the connection between development for safeguarding world peace and protecting human rights – the UN always has mentioned *environmental protection* first among others notably during the first and second development decades (1960–1970 and 1971–1980). This theme continued through the third decade of development (1981–1990), followed by remarks from Secretary-General Kofi Annan in 1997, reminding us about the conventions on "climate change, biodiversity and combating desertification" (A/S-19/PV.1, 4). This marked the environment as a major theme in development.

Thus, after discussing development as economic growth and the importance of sustainable development, the UN has focused more on environmental preservation in multilateral events on development (Honkonen 2008, 3). The UN agency on development, such as the UNDP, highlights sustainable development and tackling climate change. The establishment of the IPCC and annual meetings of the UN Climate Change Conference (COP) also showed this tendency. The term *climate change* was advised to be changed to "climate crisis" in 2019 (see Carrington 2019), and the UN agreed to tackle climate problems and its mitigation plans/action multilaterally. Maurice Strong, the Secretary-General of the UN Conference on the Human Environment in 1972, believed that environmental issues were supranational and should be dealt with multilaterally (Strong 2000, 118). Since the UN Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm in 1972, the UN's efforts to manage development and environment have started, albeit at a slow pace.

As UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali said in respect to the Agenda for Development in 1994:

> The environment, like peace, the economy, society and democracy, permeates all aspects of development, and has an impact on countries at all levels of development. In the developing world, ecological pressure threatens to undermine long-term development. Among many countries in transition, decades of disregard for the environment have left large areas poisoned and unable to sustain economic activity in the long term.
>
> (A/48/935, 13)

His remarks emphasized the connection between development and the environment, as "not separate concepts, nor can one be successfully addressed without reference to the other" (A/48/935, 14).

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, multilateralism has been coined as a "global development partnership," and in relation to the environment, the UN discussion started to link environmental and development issues with sustainability, later becoming "sustainable development" as agreed in the Agenda 2030 on SDGs. The Chinese representative at the UN, Ambassador Zhang Jun, stated that the UN must act as "a coordinating role" in implementing the agenda for sustainable development or SDGs (A/76/345). This view is not new, because since the 1990s, multilateralism can be seen in expressions such as "the international community works collectively" or "principle of partnership and cooperation," like in 1996, from statements of the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Mahathir Mohamad, to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland, Tarja Halonen (A/50/PV.12, 3–6). China has been interested in leading the development pillar at the UN and becoming a key player in development assistance, especially when Western foreign aid has been decreasing (Lewis 2019, 15). Perhaps, not only because development ran slowly but also to add non-Western perspectives in the UN development pillar. Development discussions from the UN examined for this section show how they revolve around economic growth and attempts to connect the environment and the developed-developing country framing.

Multilateralism in development was stated to be in crisis because of the persistent division between high-income countries and middle-/low-income countries, often referred to as the "North and (Global) South" dichotomy. During the 12th plenary (September 27, 1996), reflecting on the UN's 50 years anniversary, the prime minister of Malaysia, Mahathir Mohamad, stated:

> The systematic abuse of power by the major countries has continued. They apply selective sanctions and double standards on the developing world to promote their narrow national interests. Clearly disregarding multilateralism, with its inherent qualities of mutual respect and shared interests, the North continues its vice-like grip on all spheres of international activity, including politics, international trade, development, the environment and the media to name a few.
>
> (A/50/PV.12, 7)

From this quotation, multilateralism was hindered by the division between "developing-developed" countries (stated as "major power," "North"). The UN materials examined for this chapter illustrate the terminology of "developing-developed," while ideally, the use of "high/middle/low-income" should be encouraged more to describe the economic division among countries (Rosling 2018). "Such division has always appeared when discussing development or any global challenges that required multilateralism action." This was remarked in the UNGA in 1997, but the division actually appeared back in the 1970s during the Second United Nations Decade for Development (Boilard 2019, 23). There was an obligation for

international development assistance to help other countries develop, meaning the high-income countries should be in charge. The consequence of the disbursement created such dichotomies of developed and developing countries, North and South, Global North and Global South, West and East/the rest, and the division kept reappearing.

This has always been an issue at the UN when discussing development, as reflected by Maurice Strong:

> Developing countries are contributing more and more to the larger global risks, such as climate change, ozone depletion, degradation of biological resources and loss or deterioration of arable lands. . . . Meanwhile, in Western countries, as these issues have receded somewhat from our own immediate experience, it has become more difficult to maintain the levels of public interest and commitment required to support the actions needed to deal with them.
>
> In other words, the planetary environmental future will be largely determined by what happens in the developing world. Yet how can we, who created the risks in the first place, and who benefited most, deny the right of developing countries to grow? How can we possibly be surprised that, in doing so, they emulate our model? It would not be fair or reasonable or practical for us to unilaterally impose constraints on them in the name of environment.
>
> (Strong 2000, 42)

Such tension between developed and developing countries led to suspicion among developing countries towards "the environment" as it was considered as another stick from the developed countries to dictate (Strong 2000, 2). Thus, with such a background, high-income countries became less concerned and did not lead by example, as there was no example to begin with. Meanwhile, middle- and low-income countries continued to do "business as usual" in the name of (economic) development, which endangered the environment. Indeed, the business-as-usual scenario also became a "recipe" for Indonesia, if not ASEAN, in tackling climate change, as discussed later in this chapter. A dichotomy between developed and developing countries was noted in the *UN in the 21st Century* book, stating that "even today, the UN is seen by some as a venue for the continuation of domination, intervention, and exploitation for the former colonial powers of the Global North" (Mingst et al. 2022, 13–14). Apparently, this issue has not been shaken off since the 1990s.

The meeting agenda in the UNGA has often focused on "environment and sustainable development" from the 1990s until today. For multilateralism in development, the issues have revolved around funding or aid towards developing countries, economic growth, tackling climate change (environment), and the dichotomy between developed and developing countries. In 1996, for example, Jaime Gama, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Portugal, said that the importance of multilateralism in development is

> to help developing countries, especially the more vulnerable ones, Portugal has gradually increased the funds it sets aside for development aid. . . . . At the multilateral level . . . we attribute to the Lomé Convention as a vital instrument of aid and cooperation between the members . . . [we have to] maintaining the principles of partnership and cooperation.
>
> (A/50/PV.12, 20)

While multilateralism – following the principles of partnership and cooperation – was needed, development, as highlighted in the quotation above, emphasized funding for developing countries and development aid being a matter of individual states.

This continued, for example, in the discussion of the follow-up of the outcome of the Millennium Summit, which focused on development in 2007. The acting president of the UNGA, Srgjan Kerim from Macedonia, stated that the ability (both partner and donor countries) to deliver on the promises "was a reflection" of their "commitment to effective multilateralism and to building greater trust among the global community" (A/62/PV.63, 2). The idea was continued by others linking multilateral discussions on development in efforts to tackle climate change, related, for example, to the ongoing COP in Bali at the time (see, e.g., Portugal's Lemos Godinho speaking on behalf of the EU, A/62/PV.63, 7). Or to express the need to have "good deal for poor countries." This could be done by "creating trade rules that are fair and based on multilateralism" so that the countries are equipped "to compete effectively and to integrate into the global marketplace," stated Sir John Sawers from the UK (A/62/PV.63, 12). He also brought up the aspect of climate change and the poor countries' possibilities to adapt.

Similar remarks can be found, for example, in November 2011, when the UNGA had a meeting on sustainable development. Then multilateralism was discussed in the context of obstacles and multiple crises in development. For example, Masot Planas from Cuba noted:

> Environmental and economic sustainability would remain an empty slogan without transfers of environment-friendly technology, cancellation of the foreign debt of developing countries, the elimination of market inequalities and changes to unfair patterns of income distribution worldwide.
>
> (A/C.2/66/SR.30, 3)

Here, the quotation shows how a multilateral response was needed. However, similar statements keep appearing at the UNGA, describing the lack of actions from the member states on conducting economic and environment sustainability or transfers of technological knowledge. Despite the efforts, it is hard to connect the issues of environment and economy. The need to have "multilateral response to climate change, environmental integrity, common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, equity and honouring of international commitments" was brought up by Thembela Osmond Ngculu from South Africa (A/C.2/66/SR.30, 4) during the discussion on agenda item 19, sustainable development, in the second

committee of the UNGA, showing how important and needed the multilateralism in environmental agreements is. Yamazaki Kazuyuki (A/C.2/66/SR.30, 6) from Japan also noted how "sustainable development required the promotion of integrated efforts at national, regional and international levels and a balance between economy, society and environment." This reflects the thematic content of development but also shows how action should take place at different levels to be successful. A representative from Algeria, Mourad Benmehidi, also specifically mentioned the role of the UN in promoting multilateralism in development, notably in terms of economic and financial governance in the context of the Rio+20 Conference (A/C.2/66/SR.30, 10).

As presented earlier, development, particularly in terms of tackling climate change, has become "a hallmark UN issue because its solution clearly surpasses the ability of any and all states to address on their own" (Ivanova 2018, 716). Multilateralism has been seen positively at the UN, and member states have mandated the UN to coordinate such global efforts, thus giving legitimacy for the UN to lead these efforts. However, as stated even in the Agenda for Development 1994, despite the importance of multilateralism and global efforts, the practices of development must be implemented nationally, depending on the states' priorities. Notwithstanding many resolutions and global agreements, national states "dictate" what they consider best for their development, which depends on their own interests (Weiss 2009, 48). In fact, what issues will be prioritized multilaterally within the UN depends on what powerful states are willing to do (Morris 2018, 64). Most states are committed to tackling environmental problems; however, when some of the great powers did not prioritize the issue, the multilateral agreement on climate change did not succeed, as happened with the Kyoto Protocol. As is well-known, the US did not ratify the Kyoto Protocol,[1] and has withdrawn from the Paris Agreement twice under Trump's presidency. Meanwhile, China, hiding under the cloak of a developing country, did not bind itself to limit certain emission targets, although it is the world's largest emitter of carbon today (Bland 2023). These examples show that a country may or may not commit to tackling global problems if it wishes to do so, especially when domestic issues are considered prior to international environmental law (Bland 2023).

So far, the climate crisis has been mainly considered an environmental issue. Indeed, the environment, along with areas such as "women and children, international public health, population issues, cultural diversity, and social freedoms," is often considered part of the UN's soft agenda (Jolly, 2007, 98). However, the issue has also been discussed in the UNSC when the UK first brought the climate security issue to the Council in 2007. Following Richard Gowan's (2022) words, "the climate crisis is a security crisis," there is a connection between climate and peace and security. The UNSC consideration of climate change vis-à-vis security, and discussing climate problem at the Security Council, has been seen as "superfluous and counter-productive" (AFP 2019). But it has been appearing on the agenda since then, and, for example, in 2023 the UNSC considered "Sea-level rise: implications for international peace and security" as part of the agenda item threats to international peace and security (see, e.g., S/PV.9260).

Apart from prioritizing national interests and the division between developed and developing countries, other problems of the UN noted in the previous studies include bureaucracy and the use of traditional approaches in decision-making in the hands of a few, with the veto power of the P5 members. Reforms of the UN have been discussed by many member states, and the Secretary-Generals of the UN, and this will be discussed more in Chapter 6. However, it is sufficient to state that this UN style of work would continue to challenge the harmonization of the development pillar, especially in the context of tackling climate change and related crisis, such as biodiversity loss, pollution, and waste (Global Governance Forum 2023, 4).

Through the lens of the politics of multilateralism, drawing inspiration from conceptual politics as explicated in Chapter 2, we see that the development pillar acknowledges all aspects of multilateral as a *norm*, *process*, and *outcome.* All 193 members of the UN ratified the Agenda 2023 on sustainable development goals, showing international cooperation in development and that protecting the environment must be conducted multilaterally as a *norm*. The commitment to meet, discuss, and gather to find agreements to tackle the global issues has also been seen from the long *process* of the IPCC, conducted since the first meeting in Geneva in 1988 to the 60th meeting (60 IPCC meetings) in early 2024 in Turkey, and also the meetings of the UN Climate Change Conference, Conference of the Parties, from the first meeting in 1995 in Berlin to the 29th session (29 COP meetings) of 2024 in Baku, Azerbaijan, at the time of writing this book. Such long negotiations and annual commitments show that the norms for multilateralism are respected through the annual process of practicing it. Finally, the *outcome* has also been seen in many resolutions, commitments, and legally binding treaties, the notable ones including the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 and the MDGs in 2000 to the Paris Climate Agreement and SDGs in 2015.

Multilateralism has been portrayed in most, if not all, UN outcomes and resolutions for tackling global problems, albeit the word "multilateral" could be exchanged with others. In the context of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC/1997/7/Add.1), the term "cooperate" (Article 10) was used. Also, "agreement" (Article 21) was referred to describe the importance of cooperation when discussing development and environmental issues. Yet, in these documents, the tone stated by the representatives giving the remarks was more about "division" than "cooperation," portraying the divide between "developed" and "developing" countries' geographical backgrounds, and income disparities. This hinted that these high-level meetings indicated that finding a consensus on the terms of international cooperation proved to be difficult. For example, in the case of the Kyoto Protocol, the US refused to sign it over disputes regarding both China and India (as the biggest emitters in the world) having developing country labels, only voluntary commitments for developing countries to reduce emissions, and grievances of high-income countries, such as Canada and Japan, about the target and result of emission reductions. Despite all the different terminologies for multilateralism in development, the 2001 second committee discussion on agenda item 98: environment and sustainable development (continued)

and more specifically (f) Protection of global climate for present and future generations of mankind (continued), showed, in the context of the Kyoto Protocol:

> Developments with regards to the climate strategy outlined in the Protocol would depend directly on the political will of other industrialized countries.
> (Remark of Michael Zammit Cutajar, Executive Secretary, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, A/C.2/56/SR.13, 3)

While multilateralism is not separately mentioned, the role of industrialized countries is considered essential in developing the climate strategy further. Similar to our findings in Chapters 3 and 4, the role of nation-states in international cooperation stands out.

The 2005 World Development Summit (A/RES/60/1) document was the only one including the reference to "multilateralism" by stating that (effective) multilateralism was needed to achieve progress in the areas of peace and security, development, and human rights (Article 6). It also enhanced international *cooperation* to promote three components of sustainable development: economic development, social development, and environmental protection (Article 48).

In the document of the Paris Climate Agreement of the United Nations 2015 (FCCC/CP/2015/L.9/Rev.1), the term *multilateralism* is not separately mentioned, although it still emphasizes "the intrinsic *relationship* between climate change actions, responses and impacts" and recognizes "the importance of the *engagements* of all levels of government and various actors, in accordance with respective national legislations." The adopted terminology of "relationship" and "engagement," however, entails a similar meaning to multilateralism or global cooperation among states and international organizations. We can see how the concepts evolved over the decades. Multilateralism in the 1990s could be seen more in terms of "cooperation" and "agreement"; then it moved towards "cooperation towards progress" in the 2000s and became deeply entrenched with the words such as "relationship" and "engagement," showing the idea that the development pillar through tackling climate crisis must be done by building *ownership* of the issue by each of the member states and the need to engage with one another.

Thus, ideally – as stated earlier – such a type of multilateralism indicates norms implemented into actions. Multilateralism is certainly needed in tackling environmental degradation, such as the climate crisis, and enhancing sustainable development, which requires cooperation and good management on a global scale (Carley and Christie 2002, vii–viii). Article 7 (point 2) of the Paris Agreement, for example, also stated:

> Parties recognize that adaptation is a global challenge faced by all with local, subnational, national, regional and international dimensions, and that it is a key component of and makes a contribution to the long-term global response to climate change to protect people, livelihoods and ecosystems, taking into account the urgent and immediate needs of those developing country, Parties that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change.

This excerpt is important, and we will discuss this further in the latter part of this chapter with the example of the Southeast Asian region and how the region adapted to this. As Strong (2000, 137) had reminded us to "ensure proper follow-up" after the conferences (in the context of the Earth Summit Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 1992), because what happens afterwards (certain policies, commitments, and local actions) is the vital one; otherwise "talk [in conferences] is just talk, resolutions just good intentions."

The UN has focused on development since its establishment (UN n.d. (a)), but the two biggest events have been the adoption of the 2000 United Nations Millennium Declaration (A/RES/55/2), later called the MDGs, and the 2015 Agenda on SDGs (A/RES/70/1). Both documents focused on public finance, indicating the importance of economic resources in development. The Agenda also stated the significance of *multilateral* bodies, *multilateral* environment agreements, and *multilateral* institutions, showing that cooperation in development, especially in the environment and efforts in tackling the climate crisis, must be multilaterally negotiated. Member states acknowledged the importance of multilateral agreements like this in tackling global issues and the need of action for "people, planet, prosperity peace, and partnership" (A/RES/70/1, 2).

These two resolutions laid the foundations for a shared future on one planet, sustainability, and thus inspired many communities to support the effort, from governments to NGOs and academics, to support sustainable development and planetary well-being. Planetary well-being has focused on the planetary environmental future, making it fully inclusive and equitable, despite people's diversity, notably for people in middle- and low-income countries, as stated by Strong (2000, 42). The fundamental values for such international relations, as stated in the MDG declaration, were believed to be built on freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature, and shared responsibility (A/RES/55/2, 2). While for the SDGs, right from the beginning, the resolution pledged to act for people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership by eradicating poverty and pledging with "no one will be left behind" (A/RES/70/1, 3). With 17 goals and 169 targets, the Agenda tries to integrate and balance three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social, and environmental.

In the MDGs, the resolution showed development in terms of occurred words, such as: developed or industrialized countries (Parties), low- and middle-income countries or least developed countries, small island developing states (see Barbados Programme for Action, vulnerability index), landlocked developing countries, including strengthening or reforming the UN. The MDGs were agreed upon in 2000 by the UN member states, at the dawn of the millennium era. Its eight goals were expected to be achieved by 2015, focusing on seven social goals and only one environmental goal (Brito 2012, 1396). After being adopted, the MDGs were criticized as a task only for the developing countries (or middle- and low-income countries) – not for all nations – and constructed in haste, without thorough analysis (Brito 2012, 1396).

After addressing the MDGs' weaknesses of construction and unfinished business, the SDGs show the word *multilateral* in the partnership section (goal #17), which entails cooperation among all member states. The SDGs were also set up

by the high-level panel of eminent persons on the post-2015 development agenda (UN n.d. (b)) – including the President of Indonesia, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, as co-chair – between 2012 and 2014, to commit for sustainable development, thus targeting all countries, including low-, middle-, and high-income countries. When looking into the SDGs, with 17 goals, 169 targets, and 232 indicators, the SDGs are expected to impact for "longer-term social and economic improvement," including the environment. Avoiding past mistakes made with the MDGs, which focused only on developing countries, covering seven social goals and just one environmental goal, the SDGs were set up, which apply to all nations, with "long-term social and economic improvement" for the environment, and include "deeper analysis of interconnections and synergies between goals, trade-offs, indicators, and targets" in its 17 goals (Brito 2012, 1396). As mandated by the UN General Assembly (A/70/684, 14 onwards), the SDGs recommended that each country review progress of development at the national and sub-national level voluntarily, based on its own targets and indicators in Voluntary National Review (VNR). This review is expected to be submitted regularly at least two times during the span of 15 years for discussion at the high-level political forum meeting under the UNGA. Despite this multilateral spirit to work together, countries' own commitments were appreciated and positively accepted by the member states, notably also developing states.

As previously mentioned, in the early period of discussing development towards sustainability, multilateralism was considered more as a norm. Member states and the UN Secretariat were clearly motivated to uphold multilateralism, especially coordinated by the UN. Multilateralism should be the foundation of international relations and cooperation, which the UN itself symbolizes. The following section will describe practices beyond the norm, showing the long process of multilateralism and resulting outcomes.

5.3 Practicing Multilateralism to Tackle Climate Crisis in the UN Context

As shown in the previous section, the discussion on development at the UN has moved from *development* to *sustainable development*, with a focus more on environmental and climate change – climate crisis – issues. Rachel Carlson's book *Silent Spring* (1962) has often been seen as the start of a discussion on the environment in the US in the 1970s. Not long after that, both the UNEP's establishment and the holding of the UN conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1972, indicated the UN's response to the world's environmental challenges. World leaders have since emphasized the importance of environmental issues discussed multilaterally at the UNGA.

5.3.1 Development and Environment Discussions in the 1990s, Rio Conference 1992

The UN Conference on Environment and Development was held in Rio de Janeiro, on June 3–4, 1992. This was a follow-up attempt to integrate the development

pillar with environmental issue at the UN since 1972 (Conference on Human Environment) and 1987 (World Commission on Environment and Development, which introduced the concept of "sustainable development"). Recalling the declaration of the UN on Human Environment, at Stockholm 1972, the members of Rio conference agreed to work "with the goals of"

> establishing a new and equitable global partnership through the creation of new levels of co-operation among states, key sectors of societies and people, Working towards international agreements which respects the interests of all and protect the integrity of the global environmental and developmental system.
>
> (A/CONF.151/26/Rev.1, 3)

Principle 4 even stated: "In order to achieve sustainable development, *environmental* protection shall constitute an integral part of the *development* process and cannot be considered in isolation from it" (A/CONF.151/26/Rev.1, 4, emphasis added). This showed that multilateralism was respected and upheld for achieving development and tackling environmental problems, through cooperation among states. Here, the terminology of "common but differentiated responsibilities" (CBDR) had been introduced (Principle 7, 4) – which will be explained later – and also important roles of actors from marginalized groups, such as "women" (Principle 20), "youth" (Principle 21), and "indigenous people and their communities" (Principle 22).

The declaration of Rio can be seen as one of the starting points of sustainable development. The seriousness to tackle environmental challenges has been more profound and made climate change the "true focus of international policy-making" (Korhola 2014, 25). The discussions of climate politics started in the 1990s, aiming to keep the level of emissions steady and low, backed by better data and statistics (Korhola 2014, 25).

Apparently, the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, or CBDR, has marked many international environmental treaties since then. It was acknowledged that not every state had the same responsibility in addressing environmental problems, meaning that most low- and middle-income (or "developing") countries did not share the same standards and practices as high-income (or "developed") countries. In fact, from an international law perspective, a study on this topic explained thus:

> CBDR differentiation implied varied obligations for states in international environmental cooperation, and/or entitled less developed countries to assistance in the implementation of their commitments.
>
> (Honkonen 2008, 3)

> [thus]. . .
>
> Developing countries' effective implementation of their commitment is made dependent on the effective implementation by the developed country parties

> of their commitments related to the transfer of financial resources and technology under several multilateral environmental agreements.
>
> (Honkonen 2008, 218)

This means that CBDR was set up not to design for "precise targeted rules" but was "often politically more convenient," giving the idea that something had been done or "the appearance of *doing something about that sort of thing*" (Honkonen 2008, 237, emphasis added). It depended on the respective countries to commit themselves to sharing their resources and knowledge. The fact that CBDR is stated many times in the Paris Agreement portrayed either that responsibility should not be burdened alone on the low- and middle-income countries, a mistake that the UN did not want to repeat, as in the MDGs, and must be shouldered by all countries; or that the UN truly cared about these "developing" countries in contributing to tackle environmental problems according to their needs. This is also an important aspect that when the principle of CBDR was already stated in the 1970s and kept being repeated in many environmental agreements and resolutions since the 1990s towards the Paris Agreement in 2015, it means that the principle was considered. However, this also means that the divide between North and South persisted, as noted by Strong (2000) earlier. The meeting records of the UNGA related to the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro showed a retained dichotomy between "developing and developed countries," and the need for "North-South dialogue," also regarding finance, and the "polluter pays principle" mentioned by the representative of the Republic of Korea, See-Young Lee, in 1992 during the discussion on the Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (A/47/PV.53, 12). The emphasis was likely that the program implementation of the low- and middle-income countries towards tackling the climate crisis should receive funding and technology from the high-income countries.

The Rio Convention also included Agenda 21 and the *non-legally binding* authoritative statement of principles for a Global Consensus on the Management, Conservation, and Sustainable Development of all types of forests. As stated in the Preamble of the Declaration, Sustainable Development Agenda 21, or known only as Agenda 21, is a program for action for preparing the world for facing the challenges of the twenty-first century. As reported by *Forbes* contributor Lauri Bell, the "global warming rubric has served as an ideal platform to enable the UN to advance large philosophical visions, wealth redistribution agendas, and world governance goals under the banner of environmentalism," yet "since Agenda 21 was a "*soft-law"* policy recommendation (not a treaty)," no ratification was needed from the parliament, in this case not from the US Congress (Bell 2011). Consequently, as the national governments did not have to compel the recommendation, even though the term of sustainable development had not yet been defined (e.g., the meaning, the focus and priorities), it is the UN which decides what the agenda on sustainable issue is best to discuss on a multilateral manner, like climate change or youth/gender empowerment, environment protection, et cetera (Bell 2011). The 81 multilateral-related terminologies found in the Agenda revolved around the trading

system, (technical) cooperation, environmental agreement, and (financial) institution (see A/50/PV.17; A/50/536; A/50/716; A/C.2/50/SR.34; A/C.2/50/SR.35; A/S 19/PV.2, A/C.2/52/SR.40; A/C.2/56/SR.18; A/C.2/57/SR.34; and A/C.2/59/SR.15). Also, in the Rio Declaration 1992, the heads of states supported "multilateral cooperation or negotiation on environment and development" (A/CONF.151/26/Rev.1–Vol.III) – see especially statements of Süleyman Demirel, prime minister of Turkey (A/CONF.151/26/Rev.1–Vol.III, 16); L Erskine Sandiford, prime minister of Barbados (A/CONF.151/26/Rev.1–Vol.III, 91), and Kiichi Miyazawa, prime minister of Japan (A/CONF.151/26/Rev.1–Vol.III, 162). Whereas most of the UN state members acknowledged the importance of working together, multilateralism was still seen as a normative move, with some "grievance" or dissatisfaction of stark disparities between low- and middle-income countries from high-income countries over finance and technology.

The Agenda 21 was discussed again after five years of implementation, in 1997, to have "the continuous dialogue and action inspired by the need to achieve a more effective and equitable economy." Further, it was mentioned how the idea was "to work together, in good faith and in the spirit of partnership to accelerate the implementation of Agenda 21" (A/RES/S-19/2, 3).

Reducing inequality has been one of the serious challenges in development. In the global environment, pollution, usage of fossil fuels, and nature degradation were rampant. Here, the definition by the UNCED that development was meant "to integrate environmental, economic and social objectives of decision-making by elaborating new policies and strategies for sustainable development" with some achievement of "the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in countries experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification" (A/RES/S-19/2, 6) is useful. It shows not only the different elements of development but also how the international community should adopt policies and strategies to address these questions. Thus, multilateralism is not only as a norm but also as an outcome in the form of treaties and resolutions.

Although the environment itself is not stated in the UN Charter, the idea of environmental protection can be linked to the efforts of "solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character" identified in Article 1 (3) of the UN Charter, which includes protecting the environment (White 2002, 63). Meanwhile, the sustainable development that the UN aimed to achieve, as illustrated in the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21, was about

> "integrating economic development, social development and environmental protection" [by] linking the national capacity so as to bring together priorities in social, economic and environmental policies [within the] framework of an integrated approach towards development, consisting of mutually reinforcing measures to sustain economic growth, as well as to promote social development and environmental protection.
>
> (A/RES/S-19/2, 9)

With this remark, the UNGA discussions on development often related to "trading system," "trade negotiation," "environmental agreement," "agreement on investment," and in finance, including (multilateral) "funds," "financial institutions," "development banks," "debt problem" creditors, and "donor agencies." All entailed financial issues and funding, aiming for economic growth.

5.3.2 IPCC and UNFCCC: Connecting Development With the Climate Crisis

As previously shown, the environment as an issue marked a major theme in the development pillar. UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali, in his *Agenda for Development*, circulated in 1994 (A/48/935) and reported in the UNGA 49th session of November, 11 1994 (A/49/665), emphasized more the dimensions of development in multilateralism. Multilateral action was acknowledged to portray the spirit of building peace and economy, and for enabling environment, justice, and democracy for society, multilateralism was essentially needed. It stated:

> (#50) This is not only a problem for developing or transitional economies . . . all countries are involved. . . . (#51) No nation, however successful, can insulate itself from the demographic, environmental, economic, social and military problems which exist in the world. The effects of deprivation, disease and strife in one part of the globe are felt everywhere. They will not be successfully managed until global development is underway. (#92) . . . . There are also global environmental resources, such as the atmosphere and the oceans, that must be a target of *multilateral* action.
>
> (A/48/935, emphasis added)

With "collaboration among sovereign states," "negotiation," "international cooperation," and "partnership" stated in the document, they entailed similar meanings to multilateralism. This emphasizes that the UN agenda of development could not run without multilateral or global efforts. However, multilateralism in development again during this period was more focused on economic and trade relations, expressed, for example, as "international cooperation within the framework of multilateral conventions and understandings" (A/48/935, 33) and "multilateral agreements [in] globally acceptable rules of trade, [according to] the General Agreement on tariffs and trade or GATT" (A/48/935, 35).

The role of the UN was also pointed out by noting how "the United Nations can act as facilitator and communicator, but it cannot substitute for the commitment of the individual states and their domestic and international partners" (A/48/935, 13). State governments must not think of other actors as competitors but as partners. As in the human rights field, discussed in the previous chapter, addressing questions related to development relies on both international and national, and thus domestic implementation.

When the 1994 Agenda for Development was discussed, recommendations for the *multilateral development system* recognized the following entities of "General

Assembly; Economic and Social Council; Bretton Woods Institutions; and other sectoral and technical agencies (such as the inter-agency program on HIV/AIDS)" (A/49/665). Again, development was seen mostly as *economic growth* (A/49/665, 3); it was not an option, but "it was imperative" (A/49/665, 3). The UNGA discussions relevant to multilateralism with respect to development and environment revolved around multilateral-debt, -framework, -mechanism, -trade, -system, -assistance, -lending, -negotiation, and -financial institution (see A/50/PV.17; A/50/536; A/50/716; A/C.2/50/SR.34; A/C.2/50/SR.35; A/S 19/PV.2, A/C.2/52/SR.40; A/C.2/56/SR.18; A/C.2/57/SR.34; and A/C.2/59/SR.15). This showed that "multilateral" served mainly as an adjective for another word, and the essence or norm for cooperation was appreciated.

During the 1990s, *multilateralism* was seen as positive. For example, it served as "a vital instrument of aid and cooperation between members, [with] the principles of partnership and cooperation," as the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Portugal, Jaime Gama, remarked (A/50/PV.12, 20). Here, we can see how the word *multilateral* in the documents were combined with "trade" and "financial" terminologies. For example, *multilateral efforts* or *cooperation* were usually combined with *assistance*, *aid*, *funds*, *mechanism*, *lending*, and *debt*. This reflected that financial framing for development and tackling the challenges of the global environmental crisis, such as biodiversity loss and combating desertification, was needed.

In the Agenda for Development, it was stated that the tasks of the UN were "to promote awareness, build consensus, inform policy in every dimension affecting development, and help to rationalize and harmonize the multiplicity of public and private efforts worldwide in the cause of development" (A/49/665, 8). Expressed like this, the UN (and all its agencies) coordinated global efforts to address development.

The efforts of the UNGA related to the environment, specifically to tackle climate change, were also followed up by the establishment of IPCC in 1988 and UNFCCC, which later produced the Berlin Mandate 1995 and the Kyoto Protocol 1997. The UNFCCC was set up in 1992 as a result of the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and the Rio Convention. Similarly, as mentioned, many of the UN agencies work on developmental issues, such as UNDP, UNCED, UNCTAD, and UNEP. Such diversity of institutions is remarkable, but this also shows the tendency of overlapping work and redundancy, even confusion.

The IPCC is a UN body, set up by UNEP and World Meteorological Organization (WMO), aiming to provide scientific information for governments to use for negotiating climate policies. It also provides "regular assessments of the scientific basis of climate change" through the works of three Working Groups and a Task Force. Working Group I works on the basis of physical science, Working Group II on the impacts, adaptation, and vulnerability, while Working Group III works on the mitigation of climate change. Meanwhile, the Task Force works on the national greenhouse gas (GHG) inventories in developing and refining methodologies, calculation, and reports.

The plenary session of the IPCC is held once a year, participated by 195 member countries, and from 1988 to 2023, there have been altogether 59 plenary sessions. When studying the meeting reports of the plenaries – because of its scientific nature – the topics are quite specific: measurement (methodologies), standardization, collection, and dissemination. The issues included ozone layer, carbon dioxide, fossil fuels, emissions, Greenhouse Gas Inventories, and many technical sciences. Robert Watson, the new chairman of the IPCC, in his speech replacing the previous chairman Professor Bolin, in the 12th session of IPCC, in Mexico in September 1996, stated that the work of IPCC of science and policy in climate change "evokes differences of opinion among many countries":

> The key to success of IPCC will rely on: trust, scientific credibility, policy relevant but not policy prescriptive, partnership, transparency, flexibility, inclusiveness, improved disseminated information.
>
> (Report 1996, Appendix J, 41)

Consequently, as science in climate policy is based on estimation and predictability, which has created uncertainty, negotiating climate policy has been a difficult task (Hulme 2009, 78–79). Due to its scientific nature and production of technical papers, multilateral words cannot really be found in its meeting reports. The nature of IPCC summary reports hindered a thorough discussion on what the participants had discussed together. Here, clearly the UN (represented by the IPCC) acted as a provider of various statistical measures and data for states, which are important for goal-setting and target development (Mingst et al. 2022, 353), but showed that multilateral response to climate revolved only around "identifying and documenting" and not inducing action (Romaniuk et al. 2024, 181).

The UN also has the Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), signed by the leaders in 1992 which became active in 1994. The parties have been convening annually since 1995. The 198 countries as members have ratified the Convention and are called Parties to the Convention, which get together in a meeting called as Conference of Parties, or COP. The aim of UNFCC, as stated on its website, is to prevent "dangerous human interference with the climate system" (UNFCCC 2024). Quoting the Montreal Protocol of 1987, the goal of the UNFCCC is specific: "to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations *at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic (human induced) interference with the climate system*" (UNFCCC 2024, original emphasis). However, as is common with UN conventions, they are not "legally binding and remained a mere political statement" (Korhola 2014, 25), thus relying on national state action and implementation.

The first COP of the UNFCCC was held in Berlin, and it seemed that the effectiveness of the results in COP depended on the chair, at that time, led by Germany's Environment Minister, Angela Merkel (Korhola 2014, 47). As already stated in Chapter 3, "multilateralism was described as something that needs both leadership and dialogue" in many aspects of the UN negotiations – whether in holding

peace and security or climate change discussion – leadership mattered. In fact, for example, in the EU, especially within climate policy negotiations, "it is not only important *what* is said about the subject, but also *who* said it" (Korhola 2014, 29, emphasis added).

Similar to the IPCC, COP meetings have been regularly held on an annual basis. When studying the official reports, notably the Proceedings of the meeting, from COP 1 Berlin 1995 to COP 26 Glasgow 2021 (the latest COP was in 2024 in Baku, Azerbaijan), it showed that multilateralism as a process was practiced, as every year, countries' representatives regularly attended the meetings. The documents contained many "multilateral" words, and when the word was not available, usually the word *cooperation* existed. These multilateral words occurred vis-à-vis "-bilateral" or combined with "consultative process," "environmental agreements," "activities," "channels," "negotiations," "treaties," and "sources," "funding institutions," "trading and financial system," and "response." These words showed the combination of words expressing the need to work together and for funding/aid related to addressing climate change.

Literature discussing the Kyoto Protocol had already listed the story behind the scenes of COP meetings from the first establishment in 1995 to 2012 as part of the political process in climate politics from the EU perspective (see Korhola 2014). Stories of "informal hallway discussion" during the COP gatherings, how nuclear power discussion was wisely avoided, or the tears during conferences (e.g., during COP13 in Bali 2007) will not be known unless an insider like the writer, then a member of the European Parliament, participated in the negotiations. She also wrote about the confusion in using climate terminologies, notifying:

> The IPCC goes on stating: "*The UNFCCC thus makes a distinction between climate change attributable to human activities altering the atmospheric composition, and climate variability attributable to natural causes.*" . . . This erroneous interpretation could be avoided, if the IPCC always used the term "anthropogenic climate change" when referring to human-induced climate change and "natural internal variability" when referring to natural variation. . . . when the IPCC refers to climate change using its own definition – i.e. climate change independent of its cause – it does not have a corresponding term under the UNFCCC.
>
> (Korhola 2014, 32 original emphasis)

Apparently, both the IPCC and UNFCCC use different terms when referring to similar issues, and this error has confused politicians and reporters studying the documents. The discussion in the next section, describing multilateralism in Southeast Asia, will also show the importance of language in both legitimatizing multilateral efforts and as part of the multilateral actions themself, when norms are negotiated, treaties are made, and declarations are written.

Efforts to limit carbon emissions, returning to the emissions level of 1990, have been discussed since COP 1 Berlin in 1995. This action was not imposed equally on

all countries, as portrayed in the CBDR discussion above. Since the COP 2 meeting, binding obligations with quantitative emission reductions only applied to high-income countries, while low- and middle-income countries were only required to take voluntary action. However, such a flexible mechanism did not satisfy high-income countries like the US and Japan (Korhola 2014, 48). The US wanted China to be considered not as a "developing country" at that time, to oblige China to reduce its emissions too. But this attempt failed, resulting in the US not ratifying the Kyoto Protocol, a convention resulting from the COP 3 meeting in Kyoto in 1997. We discuss both the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Climate Agreement in the following section, but the discussions at COPs showed that environmental issues in development moved to climate change issues, which is also natural considering the forum where they were discussed.

Both IPCC and UNFCCC are working with climate change issues, but IPCC's focus is more on providing scientific data, while the UNFCCC is the main forum for global commitment or multilateral efforts to tackle the climate crisis. While both panels will report to the UNGA, the UNFCCC tends to report to the UNGA directly, while the IPCC, due to its scientific contribution, reports to UNEP and WMO first, and part of the work of these two institutions is reported to the UNGA. Thus, many outcomes of the UNFCCC were reported to the UNGA and became part of environmental multilateral agreements. They are, for example, the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Climate Agreement, which we will discuss in the following sections.

5.3.3 Multilateralism in the Kyoto Protocol and Towards the Paris Agreement

The discussions on tackling the climate crisis started from the Kyoto Protocol agreement in 1997, during the COP 3 meeting. Although there have been numerous meetings discussing how to handle the climate crisis and the UNFCCC-COP meetings have gathered annually, this section only highlights the Kyoto Protocol (commitment period between 2008–2012) and the attempts to proceed with the second phase of the Protocol after 2012, including COP 13 in Bali 2007, COP 15 in Copenhagen 2009, and COP 21 in Paris 2015.

From the Kyoto Protocol case, we can see that different treatment for low- and middle-income countries was appreciated because the economic strength of countries was not considered equal. These developing countries could not prioritize environmental issues over their economic development to "catch up" with industrialized countries. This situation highlighted the dichotomy of "developing and developed countries" again and showed a classic reason for developing countries to tradeoff between the environment and the economy.

Agreed upon the 160 states during the meeting in Kyoto in December 1997, the Kyoto Protocol has probably been the most famous climate agreement. The Protocol planned to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 5% below 1990 levels (FCCC/CP/1997/L.7/Add.1, Article 3) but it applied only to 38 industrialized countries listed in Annex I, countries that historically were responsible for emissions (high-income countries). The year of adoption in 1997 was followed by

ratification negotiations until 2005, and it was enforced between 2008 and 2012 (Genovese 2014, 615). The common theme concerned the burden-sharing between countries on how much emissions they may reduce (e.g., the EU's target was to cut emissions by 8%, the US was assigned to cut 7%, and Japan 6%). In contrast, developing countries, including China and India, were not obliged to meet any targets (Bassetti 2022). The principle of common but differentiated responsibilities allowed many developing countries to continue their policies of not reducing emissions. China and India were exempted from this obligation too, as they were considered developing countries, although they were (and still are) among the biggest emitters in the world (Vidal and Adam 2007). As previously mentioned, because China was exempted from the obligation, the US did not ratify the Kyoto Protocol, starting from the time of President Bill Clinton (1993–2001), and the decision was not changed under President George W. Bush (2001–2008). Kyoto Protocol – and later the international climate regime developed from it – lacked enforcement mechanisms because it relied on voluntary self-enforcement and allowed countries to withdraw without penalty, or in other words, "it sets global targets for which everyone – and therefore no one – is responsible" (Layfield 2010, 658). The Kyoto Protocol was also treated as the only savior for emission reduction, despite the "warning" from the developing countries.

In the UNGA meetings related to the Kyoto Protocol, for example, the Minister of Justice from the Solomon Islands, Edmond Andresen, stated in 1998:

> The Kyoto Protocol . . . is a positive step within the climate protection process, but it must be understood to be only one of several. Crucial actions, besides the early ratification of the Protocol by all parties, include the strengthening of emission reduction targets and commitment to agreed time frames by industrialized countries and the development and transfer of appropriate, affordable and environmentally sound technologies.
>
> (A/53/PV.24, 3)

It seemed that while some countries were aiming to reduce the assigned target, other commitments for development and technology transfer to reduce emissions were not fulfilled.

Ideally, if the assigned countries stated in the Kyoto Protocol had committed to reducing emissions, a 55% target would have been achieved. However, as the US did not comply, and later Canada followed along with Russia, Japan, and New Zealand, which also withdrew their participation, the Protocol would be committed to by only a few countries, around 15% of emissions. On paper, the Protocol achieved its overall goal, agreed between 7 and 12.5%, exceeding the 5.2% that had been pledged (Bassetti 2022). However, by the year 2012, global emissions had risen 44% from 1997 levels, driven predominantly by emissions growth in the US, as well as in China and India (Bassetti 2022; Ritchie et al. 2023). Moreover, the Kyoto Protocol counted carbon emissions in production, not from consumption, which enabled the EU to claim dramatic reductions in carbon emissions, not by changing lifestyles or reducing consumption but by outsourcing its emissions

overseas (Layfield 2010, 659). The situation showed that the Kyoto Protocol failed to reduce global emissions; however, the world could have been worse without such a multilateral agreement (Bassetti 2022).

The following COP meetings, notably COP 13 Bali, 2007, and COP 15 Copenhagen, 2009, aimed to prepare another multilateral environmental agreement post-Kyoto in 2012 but failed. We knew later that only in 2015 did states finally agree to the Paris Agreement adopted at COP 21, years later than intended. This showed how public pressures motivated state leaders to address the climate crisis, resulting in another multilateral environmental agreement, after the Kyoto Protocol expired. However, the delay or failure of COP meetings in Bali and Copenhagen to yield another multilateral agreement showed the political interests and power plays involved (Baumann 2024, 241).

In Bali, Al Gore came straight from his Nobel Prize celebration and referred to the US as "the elephant in the room" for not being committed to reducing emissions multilaterally (Christoff 2008). At this point, China had become the largest emitter in the world, and the US insisted that developing countries must have binding commitments too (Christoff 2008). The arrival of a climate celebrity at the meeting did not help to reach any new commitment for addressing the global crisis, even when the UNFCCC Executive Director, Yvo de Boer, cried out due to frustration at the lack of states' commitments (Delgado 2007). Some diplomatic acts were presented by the host, Indonesia, and the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to avoid the collapse of a multilateral effort. After a day's delay from the planned schedule, the result document of the Bali Action Plan (or Roadmap) that the post-2012 global agreement (after the Kyoto Protocol ended) was agreed to be negotiated at the COP 15 Copenhagen meeting (Bali Action Plan 2008, 3).

Meanwhile, at COP 15 Copenhagen in 2009, Denmark's first Minister for Climate and Energy, Connie Hedegaard, wrote a blog post titled "Time is up – the Deadline is Copenhagen," originally published on December 7, 2009 (Hedegaard 2010), to remind COP participants of the importance of the multilateral agreement they planned to achieve. It was an anticipated event, fulfilling what had been agreed in Bali: that in Copenhagen, the global agreement would reach binding goals, targets, and measures for the time beyond 2012, when the Kyoto Protocol's first commitment period ended (Christoff 2010). As one of the largest historical events at the UN, with 119 participating heads of state, COP 15 was expected to result in the awaited climate agreement to save the Earth, ideally with a concrete solution to tackle climate change, but it appeared to be a complete failure (Dubash 2009).

Such disappointing multilateral discussion revolved around the same pattern as in Bali: the competing parties, namely the US and "the crucial group of major emergent emitters, the BASIC group (Brazil, South Africa, India and China)" (Christoff 2010, 639), the non-binding political agreement, and the decision in the Copenhagen Accord, which extended the negotiations to the next COP meeting in Cancun, Mexico (Christoff 2010, 637). Not only the result but also the arrangement was considered a failure in practical terms (Korhola 2014, 72). Theoretically, 120 parties agreed to the Accord; thus, it looked like a successful COP event, but

essentially, Copenhagen showed a failure in terms of agreeing on "a timely, effective, binding agreement to reduce global emissions" (Christoff 2010, 651).

The failure of COP meetings, as shown in Bali and Copenhagen, demonstrated the chaotic process of multilateralism in practice. As Ed Miliband, the British Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, described for the Copenhagen meeting, due to the self-interests of developing countries and especially China, a legally binding commitment was not reached (Miliband 2009). Negotiating global challenges through a multilateral process – marked also with "walk-outs and procedural filibustering" (Christoff 2010, 638) – was not easy. Yet in the end, state leaders signed the outcomes, even with minimal targets and results, showing that the meeting produced an outcome. In addition, negotiations are expected in international cooperation, sometimes aiming at higher standards than at other times.

Finally, the UN climate negotiation at COP 21 Paris 2015 resulted in a better negotiation outcome compared to the Kyoto Protocol. It was considered a success in diplomatic terms and showed that the UNFCCC gave hope as a forum for "dynamic multilateralism" (Christoff 2016, 765). Learning from the previous mistakes in Bali and Copenhagen, COP 21 was "carefully and theatrically managed" to avoid losing the legitimacy of the UN (Christoff 2016, 765). As reported on the UN Climate Change (UNCC) website, the Paris Agreement is "a *landmark* in the multilateral climate change process because, for the first time, a binding agreement brings all nations together to combat climate change and adapt to its effects" (UNFCCC 2024). Adopted by 196 countries (including China and the US), the goal is "to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels," based on countries' own climate targets for contributing to collective mitigation efforts known as "nationally determined contribution" (NDC) and addressing different country circumstances (FCCC/CP/2015/L.9/Rev.1, 3–6, Article 3–4). The document calls for each country to update its achievements in its efforts to reduce national emissions, to be submitted every five years to the UNFCC secretariat, in the spirit of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR). While the Kyoto Protocol set up certain targets for specific countries (notably high-income countries), the Paris Agreement applies to all countries, based on the targets and commitment decided by the country itself. This is a bottom-up approach, compared to the top-down one applied in the Kyoto Protocol (Christoff 2016, 767).

Studying these events by addressing the complexity of climate negotiation in a multilateral setting from the Kyoto Protocol to the Paris Agreement, we can derive two interesting points about multilateralism from environmental agreements.

First, the UN cannot work by itself, and the agreements resulting from UN meetings cannot serve as the only way to "save" the world. Multilateralism needs cooperation from UN member states. The success of the Paris Climate Agreement, for example, was preceded by a series of diplomatic efforts prior to the UNFCCC annual conference, involving governments and non-state actors, and included momentum from the UN Climate Summit in 2014 with the major businesses and companies (as Nike and IKEA), and the Pope's encyclical letter on climate in 2015, *Laudato Si', On Care for Our Common Home*, addressing global environmental deterioration (Christoff 2016, 769). Additionally, other multilateral efforts outside

the UN, such as those by BRICS, the EU, and the G20, along with civil-society organizations, also addressed the climate crisis. Thus, as stated in the previous quotation, the Kyoto Protocol and Paris Climate Agreement should amplify the diverse efforts in tackling the global climate problems in a multilateral way.

Second, as stated by the editors of the *Global Governance* journal, multilateralism today reflects "states' tactic and strategy to advance their national interests," notably from those in the Global South, describing that the unequal established liberal international order failed to serve the interests of all states (Romaniuk et al. 2024, 181). The complexity of reaching multilateral environmental agreements, shown in the COP meetings, with individual states negotiating their contributions in emissions and the binding or non-binding nature of the agreement (as seen in the US, China, and India cases), has shown how power influenced international expectations of leadership in climate talks (Christoff 2016, 770–771).

In relevance to multilateralism, during the 2000s, it no longer became only an "adjective" word (such as multilateral-forum, -action, -framework, -commitment, -agreement, -cooperation, -initiatives, -system, -action, -funds, -agenda, -context, etc.). However, multilateralism needs adjectives, such as, new multilateralism – also, "effective multilateralism," as stated by the President of Mongolia Elbegdorj Tsakhia, during the high-level week of UNGA in 2009:

> No nation, no country is immune to the ruthless grip of the multitude of global crises: economy and finance, fuel and food, flu pandemics and climate change. These and other global challenges require global solutions underpinned by a new multilateralism. Multilateralism that is effective, proactive and commensurate with today's demands. Never has the world needed an effective multilateralism as much as we do now.
>
> (A/64/PV.8, 11)

Another term, *coordinated multilateral action*, was found in the note by Secretary-General Kofi Annan for the Millennium Summit, November 20, 2006:

> Because the impacts are global and felt disproportionately by the poor, coordinated multilateral action to promote environmental sustainability is urgently required.
>
> (A/61/583, 14)

After the adoption of the Paris Climate Agreement, "effective multilateralism" was often used in the UNGA. For example, Lyonpo Damcho Dorji, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Bhutan, stated in 2016, when the session on SDG was the theme:

> Effective multilateralism requires an effective United Nations – one that is fit for the purpose. Since the founding of the United Nations, the world has undergone profound changes. Its membership has increased fourfold, and the challenges we face have become more complex. Institutions cannot be

> static. They must evolve and adapt, so as to remain relevant and effective. The United Nations and its principal organs must be reformed in keeping with contemporary realities.
>
> (A/71/PV.21, 24)

Throughout the years after the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol, and more pronounced after the 2015 agreements of Paris and SDG – in which low- and middle-income countries are more aware of sustainable development and climate change issues – multilateralism has become noticeable and voiced at the UN. While the achievement of the Kyoto Protocol was considered a small gain, contributing insignificantly to emission reduction, it opened an important step towards a carbon-neutral world and left a legacy of "mechanisms such as the adaptation fund, carbon markets, and other tools designed to raise ambition and speed up global decarbonization" (Bassetti 2022).

5.3.4 Development in 2015 and Beyond

The Paris Agreement, along with its multilateral process, was accepted positively by the member states and acknowledged the role of the UN in coordinating it. It was followed by the acceptance of the Agenda 2030 for SDGs. During the meeting for reporting the work of the UN as an organization, UN Secretary-General António Guterres stated:

> Multilateralism is not optional. It is the most effective vehicle, whether regional or global, for achieving the goals of peace, inclusive sustainable development and human rights for all.
>
> (A/72/1, 6)

While the conventions of the Kyoto Protocol and MDGs were intended for certain countries, highlighting different targets and tasks among developed and developing countries, this also created "division" among the countries. Both the Paris Agreement and the SDGs adopted in 2015 addressed such previous mistakes. By upholding multilateralism to tackle global problems together, these conventions finally acknowledged each state's commitments to contribute to solving global problems. Countries must submit their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) as agreed in the Paris Agreement regularly. Addressing the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR), a country may decide its own target and commitment, the priorities of development, and the amount of national emissions reduction. For the SDGs, documents or reports to review progress of development at the national and sub-national level are expected in the Voluntary National Review (VNR). These reviews are further expected to be submitted regularly at least twice during a span of 15 years for discussion at the high-level political forum meeting under the UN General Assembly, as mandated in the resolution (A/70/684, 14 onwards).

It was expected that multilateral efforts will advance developing countries into a better condition, as portrayed in the statement of Jeremiah Mamabolo, the

representative from South Africa, representing the Group-77 and China at the General Assembly meeting at the end of December 2015. The plenary agenda was discussing follow-up actions after the UN major conferences and summits in the fields of economy and social. He said:

> The future of developing countries lies in a strong and robust multilateral system, and the Group of 77 and China pays particular attention to crafting international economic policies and relations and to narrowing the gap between developing and developed countries. In the past year, we have built a global consensus on a number of issues that are critical for the developing world, including the Addis Ababa Action Plan and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (resolution 70/1), as well as the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.
>
> (A/70/PV.82, 22)

The statement mostly refers to economic policies and finance, as the Addis Ababa Action Plan on transforming finance for women's empowerment, but the idea of "narrowing the gap between developing and developed countries" continued to be the center of attention in multilateral efforts to address global questions. A "strong and robust" multilateralism, as stated earlier, was similar to what President Tsakhia of Mongolia stated about new multilateralism:

> [That did not continue] the marginalization and inadequate representation of the developing world in global decision-making constitute another drawback to the strength of the new multilateralism.
>
> (A/64/PV.8, 12)

The quotation shows that new multilateralism must be effective and proactive and should correspond to global challenges, while including representation from developing countries. Such positive acceptance of multilateralism, particularly for developing countries (in this UN context stated as "the Group of 77"[2]), also legitimizes the role of the UN to coordinate multilateral efforts, especially if the UN is reformed. It is also interesting to note that the Group of 77, when speaking at the UNGA, notably on the sustainable development issue, also included China. This showed that China liked to be associated with the developing countries and possibly also lead the effort of the UN development pillar.

Apart from two important achievements in 2015 mentioned earlier, the UN also produced remarkable outcomes of documents, namely *The Future We Want* (A/RES/66/288) in 2012 and *Our Common Agenda* (A/75/982) in 2021. *The Future We Want* was a UN document resulting from the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012, Rio+20, marking the 20th anniversary of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, which established the UNFCCC. It aimed to address the global challenges of sustainable development, covering social and economic aspects, along with the environment. Multilateralism from this development conference opened the commitment,

which later became the SDGs after the MDGs expired. Policies on "green economy in the context of sustainable development" became the highlight of this document (A/RES/66/288, 10). Meanwhile, *Our Common Agenda* was a document from the 75th session of the UNGA, as an "action agenda" for the implementation of the SDGs (A/75/982, 2). It also contained the commitment for "inclusive and effective multilateralism" (A/75/982, 3):

> now is the time for a stronger, more networked and inclusive multilateral system, anchored within the United Nations. Effective multilateralism depends on an effective United Nations, one able to adapt to global challenges while living up to the purposes and principles of its Charter.

Secretary-General Guterres continued to advocate for UN reform towards the Summit of the Future in September 2024, with the resolution *The Pact for the Future* – a new pledge of multilateralism to deliver a better future for people and planet (A/RES/79/1, 2) – which we will discuss in Chapter 6.

The evolving language of multilateralism in the development pillar, as examined through the meeting records of UNGA, IPCC, and UNFCCC, but also from the treaties and resolutions related to the topic, showed that it has been about cooperation and partnership, but also about the states' national interests. Practicing multilateralism in development from the UN conferences and resolutions on the environment and efforts to tackle the climate crisis showed that the language of multilateralism shifted throughout the periods of the study between 1990 and 2020. As listed in a previous study (Adiputri 2023b), the tone of the language at the beginning (1990–1999) showed attempts to build awareness of climate change, then in the middle (2000–2009), it transformed into planning actions to tackle the climate crisis, and towards the end of the study (2010–2020) prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate issue became more urgent, with the usage of the terminologies "climate emergencies" and "climate disaster."

The *Global Sustainable Development Report* 2019 studied sustainable development, from the Brundtland Report to MDGs, and highlighted the need for systematic connections between different actors and institutions, at national, regional, and global levels. This means focusing on collaborative actions by various stakeholders. Gro Harlem Brundtland, a former prime minister of Norway and a former director general of WHO, herself in this report (in the prologue) emphasized "the need for a collective holistic approach" (UNDESA 2019, xvi).

In this report, the UN marked the occurrence of four trends in the country reports: "rising inequalities, climate change, biodiversity loss, and the increasing amount of waste from human activity," and it showed that "no country was on track to meet all of the Goals by 2030" (UNDESA 2019, 12). Moreover, for the Paris Agreement, there was nothing the UN could do unless individual countries, for example, China, India, and the US, as the biggest emitters in the world, committed themselves in their NDC report (Asia Society 2024a).

Indeed, the true transformative potential for development to achieve the goals of the SDGs and Paris Agreement depended on the common interests of all. The

COVID-19 pandemic illustrated us that no one is safe until everybody is safe. Common challenges crossing borders affect all of us, not just one or two countries, and thus, the UN member states need to find ways to act and implement multilateral agreements for the common good.

Practicing multilateralism, as seen in these discussions, still reflected how disorganized the UN has been, a critique that has been pointed out earlier with "overlapping mission" and "the desire to keep abreast of what is popular" or anything in global trends (Weiss et al. 2019), as seen with climate change discussions. Climate change and sustainable development have been discussed since the 1990s, but as Strong (2000) stated earlier, there were no significant actions nor new ideas that came up from these many UN-set-up agencies. Even when the world knows that the emission rates need to be tackled, the long, winding discussions at the COP meetings regarding the Kyoto Protocol, targets, and measurements did not satisfy all parties, and divisions over developed and developing countries have, to some extent, persisted. The Paris Agreement also relies on each individual country's commitment to reduce emissions. The debates on the climate crisis (under the development pillar) showed that multilateralism is practiced in the mode of norms, process, and outcomes. Meanwhile, when zooming in on the case study of Southeast Asia and how regional multilateralism has been practiced in ASEAN, an example of "diminished multilateralism" (Rüland 2012) will be shown as illustrated in the following section.

5.4 Politics of Multilateralism Viewed From Southeast Asia

Climate change has been discussed constantly at the global level, at least within the UNGA since the 1990s, whether within the development pillar or as an individual discussion, such as in the IPCC and UNFCCC. As we learned from the previous sections, multilateralism as a norm conducted the process of discussion by attending regularly to the annual meetings, all the way to the outcomes throughout the decades at the UN discussions. Multilateralism also changed from an adjective to a terminology that needs an adjective. How about the discussion and practices of multilateralism at the regional level, notably multilateralism on development and in tackling climate crisis? How did countries "translate" multilateralism from the global to a regional or national level? The tendency to repeat what the UN did was obvious, for instance, as seen below, an example from Southeast Asia, mainly referencing ASEAN and Indonesia.

We chose the region, Southeast Asia, because it is important to hear and acknowledge the voices and practices from the low- and middle-income countries, also for the Global South, such as the states in Southeast Asia. It is also important to note that "Southeast Asia could suffer bigger losses [of economic impact] than most regions in the world due to climate change" (Prakash 2018), with examples such as rising sea levels, reduction of rice crops in Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam due to hotter weather, dependence on fossil fuels and coal, and deforestation (Prakash 2018). Similar impacts are also relevant to Small Developing Island States (SDIS).

Such a massive impact of climate change on the Southeast Asian region was stated by representatives at the UNGA meetings, speaking on behalf of ASEAN (e.g., the remarks of Md. Jaini from Brunei Darussalam, A/72/PV. 69, 7). The heat wave that hit Southeast Asia hard in 2024, even resulting in the closing of schools in the Philippines with temperatures soaring to 38.8 degrees Celsius, also in Cambodia with temperatures reaching 43 degrees Celsius in many parts of the country, and at least 30 people died of heatstroke in Thailand when the temperature hit 44 degrees Celsius (Aljazeera, 2024). ASEAN has acknowledged its region's vulnerability to climate change (Letchumanan 2009). Moreover, in the context of development, environment, and tackling the climate crisis, efforts are better conducted at home, specifically within the nearby region, as stated by the UN bureaucrat Margaret Joan Anstee: "development is home-made" (quoted in Weiss 2009, 104–105). ASEAN must address its task of implementing climate action among its members, as the impact of natural disasters will hit harder in ASEAN countries than in other places. By 2050, climate change will reduce the annual gross domestic product (GDP) of ASEAN by up to 6% per year (Anbumozhi and Kojima 2022). The Southeast Asia survey in 2024 also shows 53.4% of respondents worrying over climate change and more extreme weather events (ASEAN Studies Centre 2024, 4). Discussing the UN development pillar in the context of the climate crisis from Southeast Asia is also an attempt to disengage from "homogenizing worldview of Western universalism" (Acharya 2018, 793) and hear the voices from the Global South. Perhaps regional multilateralism, such as from ASEAN, contributes nuances from low- and middle-income countries to reformulate the UN vision of multilateralism in the future.

Generally, ASEAN is perceived as the most successful regional organization in the Global South (Stubbs 2019, 941–942). Indonesia, as the biggest country in the region, held the presidency of the Group of Twenty (G20) in 2022 and the chairmanship of ASEAN in 2023. This meant that Indonesia had opportunities to set up an agenda to be discussed on multilateral levels for both G20 countries and to other ten countries in the Southeast Asian region. While the governments and ASEAN are aware of the magnitude of the threat, for ASEAN, "the challenge is always in orchestrating mechanisms to actions" and moving from ceremonial measures (Adiputri 2023a). Indeed, seeing from the criteria of effectiveness, legitimacy, and efficiency, the "ASEAN Way" – of conducting regional relations, which emphasizes, among other things, "consultation, consensus decision-making, informality, a nonconfrontational bargaining style and non-interference in the affairs of other countries" – makes ASEAN incapable of getting its members to act in concert (Stubbs 2019, 928). The concern about ASEAN was also shown by the 2024 public survey, where 77% (reduced from 82.6% in 2023) of respondents thought that "ASEAN is slow and ineffective and thus cannot cope with fluid political and economic developments, becoming irrelevant in the new world order" (ASEAN Studies Centre 2024, 14). However, as regional stability serves as an important factor, ASEAN's initiated forums and organizations, such as ASEAN Regional Forum ARF, ASEAN Plus Three, with China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea (APT), and the East Asia Summit (EAS), upholding peace and stability, also bringing foreign

direct investment (FDI) and other benefits to members at a low cost, deserve appreciation (Stubbs 2019, 942). China's active involvement in ASEAN has also been regarded positively in Southeast Asia.

Multilateralism in ASEAN, since its establishment in 1967 (which was only shaped in the late 1980s and early 1990s), has revolved around economic cooperation from Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), ARF, APT, and EAS stated earlier (Teo 2023). Here, ASEAN has acted as the "hub of regional multilateralism," which embraces a model of "inclusive, big-tent engagement" with its diversity of political and economic systems of its members (Teo 2023). So far, such a model of multilateral cooperation has worked, despite its ineffectiveness in tackling many challenges in regional issues such as the 2008 Asian financial crisis and the 2021 Myanmar military coup. The weakness of the regional organization also revealed Indonesia's approach of "quiet diplomacy" for meetings through backchannels or "coiled diplomacy" for its lack of transparency, as the members remain uncertain about the progress and the goals of Indonesia's approach in the context of the Myanmar crisis (Tucker 2023). A scholar focusing on Southeast Asia labeled this as "diminished multilateralism," with newly emerging countries like Brazil, India, South Africa, and Indonesia claiming more power and access in the international system, but achieving multilateral agreements of "non-binding" and "imprecise" results "based on the lowest common denominator" (Rüland 2012, 259). This type of multilateralism was about power struggles and not action. However, the rise of BRICS, which stands for Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, with the expanded membership of ten members, all from emerging economies, and Indonesia joining in January 2025 (Reuters 2025), might be interesting to observe. BRICS' informal way sets a new form and alternative to multilateralism; not including Western countries (meaning funding without American dollars) would likely transcend "traditional power dynamics" that the UN cannot provide (Papa 2024).

We learned from the previous section how the language of multilateralism evolved since the 1990s in terms of development and environment. It also showed how words mattered and could request a vote at UNGA (see, e.g., A/C.2/75/SR.7, 3 when the US representative, Courtney Nemroff, asked for "replacing the wording" when speaking in connection to agenda item sustainable development and more specifically draft resolution on "protection of global climate for present and future generations of human kind"). Mostly, for discussing the common global challenge, such as tackling climate change, multilateralism is relevant to "collective global response," such as "promoting the implementation of the Paris Agreement, adhering to the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and advancing climate mitigation and adaptation measures," as remarked by a representative from China, Xing Zhisheng (A/C.2/75/SR.7, 5). In ASEAN, the evolving language of multilateralism in declarations and statements[3] has not been similarly happening. The documents from ASEAN usually use the same pattern of addressing the theme of the events (with the words: "noting," "recalling," "reaffirming," and "recognizing"), or expressing the state commitment (with the words: to "work," "urge," "support," "commit," or "adopt"). The documents are usually written in English

and signed by ministers or state leaders, but they lack follow-up action. The documents are also rarely translated into the local languages of member states.

In many ASEAN meetings and mainly in Southeast Asia, the political culture is dominated by the executive (president and prime minister with the cabinet), and thus discussion on the climate crisis has usually been conducted at the state (national) level, and not at the sub-national government. It is likely that multilateralism entails the work of foreign affairs, thus more relevant to the national-led government and not the local one, although for development and environment, the citizens at the local level are impacted directly by the adopted policy. Parliament (or the legislative leg of state) has found interparliamentary diplomacy at both the global and regional levels as a new field of activity (Adiputri, 2024) and may serve as the citizens' voices, but the government still plays a bigger role in determining the policies attached to questions of the global level.

For the cooperation between the UN and ASEAN, regular annual meetings were planned; however, the cooperation related to these two organizations was shrunk into meetings with "the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the States members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations for their efforts" (A/RES/59/5, 1). Legitimacy yielded from such meetings would be in question because "effective multilateralism can only be put in place when it is seen as legitimate by the peoples of the United Nations" (Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen and Dahl 2022, 1), but perhaps the result of such meetings could also be reported publicly at UNGA or ASEAN Summits. Such limited participation was added to the lack of representation from civil society organizations (CSO), which are usually more up to date with global issues and more engaged with citizens at the local level. However, even when the members of parliament have participated in global summits or meetings on climate change and sustainable issues, they rarely relay information and results to their constituents or the public. They mostly echoed what the executive had done and mostly showed that participation in global events highlighted trips or travel abroad.

As the political language of multilateralism transformed from building awareness of climate change (1990–1999) to tackling the climate crisis (2000–2009) and climate emergencies and climate disasters (2010–2020) – as studied in the previous section – the climate issue has become more urgent. Reading the UNGA meeting reports also revealed interesting characteristics: most representatives liked to boast about their own countries' achievements and tended to use "high language" (or fancy words) with "ambitious language for the climate crisis" (Adiputri 2023b, 250) rather than the language the public would understand. In the Southeast Asian region, though, discussion on the environment and climate change has been intensified only after supporting the SDGs and the Paris Climate Change Agreement, although ASEAN has its first Environment Report, funded by UNEP, in 1997 (Sunchindah 1998).

Issues related to the environment in ASEAN are discussed, but "buried," under the Committee of Socio-Culture, instead of having its own committee. ASEAN also does not produce meeting reports, only (Joint) Statements, as its multilateral agreements within the region. Thus, the empirical sources for this section (added

from the previous UNGA meeting reports) were also included, reading statements about the environment since 2016, despite only a quarter of the total documents, and literature review from previous research on ASEAN/Southeast Asia. Culturally, Southeast Asia favors political elites and executive government; the participants of ASEAN meetings are usually the heads of state and ministers. Thus, the joint statement by the ASEAN member states on climate change was signed by the ministers responsible for the environment. Meanwhile, when looking at the ASEAN website, more statements are produced in the "economic" folder and not the "social" one, in which the environment or development issues are discussed.

Empirical sources mentioned in the previous paragraph showed that the Southeast Asian style of multilateralism has portrayed passivity and ineffective collaboration. Actions from the joint statements were not well-known to the public. If any, usually the national team (or ministry) would claim the work and not be part of ASEAN's work. Multilateralism is still "elitist" – meaning the use of bureaucratic words, like "green/circular economy," "nature conservation," "transboundary pollution," or "environmental management" in formal documents without further definition and how they are implemented in action. This kind of language "does not touch upon the citizens' needs" (Adiputri 2023a).

The Indonesian presidency of G20 in 2022 and ASEAN Chairmanship in 2023 highlighted Indonesia's essential role. Indonesia is also acknowledged as one of the biggest contributors to ASEAN's long-term development (with Singapore), according to the survey in 2024 (ASEAN Studies Centre 2024). However, with the style of holding the "events for elites" (for ministers and bureaucrats only) and a policy that "does not touch upon the citizens' needs" nor prioritizes issues for low- and middle-income countries, these events were not that successful. For example, by choosing topics that were suitable for high-income countries, such as themes of the Global Health Architecture, Sustainable Energy Transition, and Digital Transformation for the G20, Indonesia missed the opportunity to voice problems of the Global South (Adiputri 2022) even in an informal setting of multilateral cooperation.

Moreover, Indonesia's ASEAN Chairmanship in 2023 focused on the "epicentrum of growth" and aimed for industrialization, which would continue the tradition that "only big industrial countries, such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam are likely to follow," and the meetings only touched upon elites gathering in Jakarta and holding Senior Official Meeting in Labuan Bajo – a new growing tourist destination after Bali – Indonesia. The least developed state members (or LDCs), such as Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Timor-Leste, are likely to be left out of discussions, only participating in the meetings (Adiputri 2023a). This was also noted in ASEAN regionalism that in creating one community, ASEAN is constrained by member states' nationalistic priorities and has no role in providing development assistance to their fellow members, especially to LDCs (Bae 2023, 53–54).

Dewi Fortuna Anwar has stated that while the previous Indonesian President, Joko Widodo (2014–2024), was not interested in foreign policy and focused more on transactional economic diplomacy, the newly elected President Prabowo

Subianto (2024–2029) is cosmopolitan and will be more active in geo-politic and geo-strategic issues, planning to have his legacy in global politics (Asia Society 2024b).

Both experts on India and Indonesia have agreed that the middle powers and BRICS countries, usually seen as "anti-Western platform," actually have a close relationship with the West (e.g., both Indonesia and India are applying to be OECD members). BRICS has also aimed to reform the UNSC to increase representation from developing countries (Africa, Asia, and Latin America), specifically stating that Brazil, India, and South Africa should be members of the UNSC, emphasizing more inclusive multilateralism, as declared in the BRICS Summit in 2023 (BRICS Summit XV Johannesburg II Declaration, 2023, 2–3 para 7). These three countries have been vying for permanent membership in UNSC for ages, and BRICS accommodated such a request in the 2023 BRICS Summit as an added criterion, so that the new membership for the group should support Brazil, India, and South Africa in reforming the UN (BRICS Information Centre 2023, 2).

However, as stated at the beginning of this chapter, China is interested in discussing and leading multilateralism in the UN development pillar, and China (with India) has shaped the discussion at COP meetings to voice views from the developing countries. China also has a high influence in the ASEAN and with respect to individual states in Southeast Asia. In 2013, China proposed a vision of a "global community of common destiny," and over the years, China has promoted different global initiatives, including the Belt and Road Initiative, the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative, and the Global Civilization Initiative (ASEAN Studies Centre 2024, 45). It has visions to build diverse multilateral initiatives, "Community with a Shared Future for Mankind," and seven ASEAN member states (Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam) signed China's "community of a shared future" in January 2024 (ASEAN Studies Centre 2024, 45).

Following the presentation of GDI at UNGA in 2021 (A/76/345), China initiated a high-level meeting to endorse the GDI and to expand the "circle of friends for cooperation, enriched the 'resource pool' for development, and built a 'toolkit' for joint development" (UN Office for South-South Cooperation 2023). For such development efforts, held online in 2022 and in-person meetings in 2022 and 2023, China worked in partnership with the UN office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC) and emphasized the commitment to multilateralism of the international community and the SDG Agenda, ensuring "that no country and no one is left behind, and [. . .] consistent pursuit to meet people's aspirations for a better life," as the representative of Chinese mission for the UN remarked (Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the UN 2024). The seriousness of China is also shown in the establishment of the Global Development Promotion Center and the Secretariat of its Network for GDI in Beijing. Despite China's efforts in development, not many countries – notably Indonesia and India – are ready to fully join China-led institutions, such as the Belt and Road Initiative or Wuhan Summit (Asia Society 2024b).

Meanwhile, China also asserted cooperation with ASEAN, and at the 44th and 45th ASEAN Summits in Vientiane, Laos, in October 2024, China and ASEAN agreed to many Joint Statements in development areas (ASEAN 2024). Although GDI was not stated in any of these documents, sustainable development and multilateral aspects were visibly seen as the focus. Yet, for foreign policy in a multi-polar world – despite China's effort to lead – it is unlikely that many countries would let China take the credit for multilateralism in the development pillar. China (compared to the US) remained the undisputed influential economic power in ASEAN, according to 72.3% of respondents to the survey on ASEAN in 2021 but declined to 59.9% in 2024 (Seah 2023), and this growing economic influence was seen as worrying (ASEAN Studies Centre 2021, 2). Moreover, the EU and Japan were still seen as ASEAN's "most favored and trusted strategic partners in the hedging game against US-China rivalry" (ASEAN Studies Centre 2021, 2). Also, the UN still has the legitimacy to lead multilateral practices, with mostly high-income countries in the West, or the EU, providing funding for development and tackling global challenges.

The signed documents between China and ASEAN, and most of the ASEAN agreements and joint statements, showed the "high" language with words like "enhancing connectivity," "integrating economies," or "connected and resilient ASEAN Community" without further definition. Indonesia serves as one example of the ASEAN members. Despite Indonesia's constant participation in international forums (including the UN, ASEAN, COP meetings, and others), the public did not see the results of such participation widely. The commitment at the global and regional levels was slowly adopted into national regulation, usually through the ratification of global agreements, such as Kyoto Protocol, the SDGs, or the Paris Climate Agreement, but the actions and implementations were hardly connected to fulfilling the tasks of the SDGs or the Paris Agreement from the whole government, but only from ministries working in silo. Domestic news of participating in such global events was usually about the president or ministers attending the events for specific themes, but the results of the meetings were not known or publicly reported.

The 2022 *Multilateralism Index Report* analyzed the multilateral system between 2010 and 2020 and reported that for the environmental aspect, "most Participation and Performance indicators have deteriorated over the past decade, while all Inclusivity indicators have improved." However, the indicator of "Inclusivity" here means engagement and support from non-state actors to multilateral bodies, instead of *public* participation in many multilateral engagements. For the environmental aspect, obviously, the cause of the decrease in participation and performance indicators was due to the lack of robust climate change policies. Despite Indonesia being one of the seven major CO_2 emitters (along with China, the US, India, Russia, Japan, and Germany) (Mckay 2024), Indonesia must embrace an ambitious plan to tackle the climate crisis that it promised in its NDCs. Thus, while the Paris Agreement has only voluntary commitments decided by the member states themselves to reduce emissions, the NDC document committed by each country must be continuously upheld (International Peace Institute and Institute for Economics and Peace 2022).

The empirical materials from the ASEAN meetings and annual summits showed multilateralism as a process. In any subject discussion at this regional level, ASEAN members wanted to ensure that participants came, and the discussions used formal, diplomatic language. This means that instead of negotiating something to have a common solution, diplomatic language in Southeast Asia is conveyed in many of the formal agreements in ASEAN, showing that public diplomacy matters, but only in papers, such as the ASEAN Vision 2023 and 2040, Five-Point Consensus to cease violence, ASEAN Connectivity, ASEAN Communication Master Plan, and others (Anantasirikiat 2021).

ASEAN's style of multilateralism showed that the organization highlighted "passivity and ineffective collaboration," with the commitments discussed at the meetings hardly moving beyond the meetings and being slow in implementation (Adiputri 2023b). Previous research on the SDGs and Southeast Asia and ASEAN listed the apparent challenges with: (1) the work connection and coordination between international and national levels; (2) program implementation between states and across regions; and (3) actors' involvement, like stakeholders, civil society, and citizens (Holzhacker 2019, 5). Such challenges still exist, and there are no innovative actions or differences in conducting the meetings related to the SDGs.

In Indonesia, the business-as-usual scenario also became a "recipe" for tackling the climate crisis. Starting only in 2016 after ratifying the SDG agreement, Indonesia claimed to set its contribution to an "unconditional reduction target to reduce the effect of greenhouse gases and emissions of 29% with own efforts and up to 41% with international support, in business-as-usual approach, by 2030," according to Law no. 16/ 2016 point 2. The "business-as-usual" approach has been the mantra of the Indonesian government (Adiputri 2023b, 253), and this was echoed by the non-government organizations, despite its approach not solving anything, as discussed at the UNGA and ECOSOC (e.g., A/C.2/74/SR.13 or E/2020/SR.3). With the emphasis on multilateralism as a process, and somehow also as an outcome (with many ASEAN policies notably in environmental issues and development, mainly for economic cooperation), multilateralism in Southeast Asia and ASEAN is seen as a routine work. Regional meetings happen annually, with resulting documents as outcomes produced at the end of the meetings, but working towards the global or regional efforts was minimal and unseen. The *ASEAN Vision 2040* in building "a bolder and stronger" ASEAN Community was abstracted to be actually implemented. The previous *ASEAN Community Vision 2025*, which envisioned "one vision, one identity, and one community" (point 15), was too vague to realize because "ASEAN member states are too diverse in geographical size, economic power, social and cultural variance to become one" (Adiputri 2023a).

Multilateralism at the UN in the development pillar, shown from the ASEAN member states, usually stresses the importance of "effective partnership" between two institutions, as the permanent representative of Singapore to the UN, Burhan Gafoor, stated at both the UNGA and Security Council meetings:

> great importance to effective partnerships between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations, which often have a valuable

> understanding of the particular contexts and circumstances of individual regions. In South-East Asia (ASEAN) plays a critical role in securing regional peace and fostering regional economic integration. We are pleased that the United Nations concluded a new plan of action with ASEAN in 2016. The partnership must be strengthened.
>
> (A/72/PV.28, 6)

> When the multilateral system and the United Nations are vibrant and healthy, regional organizations like ASEAN can thrive and prosper.
>
> (S/PV.8395, 50)

Speaking on behalf of ASEAN, his expectation was that ASEAN and the UN continue to work together in terms of multilateralism.

From this section, it is likely that the chosen themes in the ASEAN meetings depended on the wishes of the leading country. In the case of Indonesia, it "dictated the organization's priorities and regional agenda" (Tey 2023). The chosen issues to be considered at that time, global health, sustainable energy, and digital technology, only benefited the big countries in the region, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam, and not the least developed state members, as Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Timor-Leste. Thus, the division also happened, although unintentionally. Translating the multilateral norms from the global level at the UN to the regional one, such as to ASEAN, or Southeast Asia, was not effectively working as the stirring wheels are still in the hands of the individual states. In this ASEAN case, the leading country (changing alphabetically) will impose its own interest in things that matter to discuss at the regional level or in ASEAN, not the things that matter to all the members.

ASEAN also likes to have partnerships with powerful countries, such as China and the US. Therefore, if China attempted to initiate and organize collective action with respect to development and tackling the climate crisis, including the Global Development Initiative and the Belt and Road Initiative, this could be appreciated. Also, any efforts to tackle the global crisis should not rely only on multilateral attempts led by the UN but also on minilateral or informal settings such as the G20, regional institutions like ASEAN, and bilateral cooperation between countries, as seen in Southeast Asia, amidst small changes happening.

5.5 Inclusive Multilateralism?

As the follow-up of the Millennium Summit in 2006 stated: "the world needs a coherent and strong multilateral framework with the United Nations at its centre to meet the challenges of development, humanitarian assistance and the environment in a globalizing world" (A/61/583, 17). Indeed, multilateralism is needed to tackle global challenges, ideally led by the UN. Multilateralism in the development pillar, as we discussed in this chapter, shows the interchangeable types of norms, processes, and outcomes, if not all mingling together.

Echoing the discussion already covered in Chapter 2, Ruggie's (1992) definition emphasizes not only international cooperation involving three states (or more) taking part in international cooperation but also that the principles guiding the cooperation among the states are important. Yet, it is likely that such "principled multilateralism" of Ruggie showed the tendencies of "diminished multilateralism" (Rüland, 2012, 2018). Such hollow cooperation of diminished multilateralism arose with the frustration of emerging powers such as China, India, and Indonesia, and other non-Western states in the G20. They wanted to contribute more to representation, access, and the decision-making process in the UN, and thus established and participated in many international forums, such as BRICS, which were redundant to the existing ones. The practices of the UN in discussing issues of development and environment listed in this chapter and conducted by many agencies, such as UNDP, UNCED, UNCTAD, UNEP, and UNGA, with the addition of discussing climate change in IPCC and UNFCCC, show such a tendency. Yet, the UN members agreed that "multilateralism remains the preferred approach to address the global challenges to move towards more sustainable development paths" (A/CONF.216/16, 72) with the UN as the leading institution, as remarked in the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro in 2012.

With the case of tackling the climate crisis and reducing greenhouse gas emissions using the Kyoto Protocol, the world learned that a multilateral agreement to solve global problems was hard to achieve. Despite most of the UN member states agreeing to the need to reduce emissions, the major emitters did not want to sign the Protocol, with the US as the leading example for refusing to ratify, and China not guaranteeing to commit. Indeed, the set-up requirement for targets in reducing emissions only applied to 38 high-income countries (called "Annex I" states in the Kyoto Protocol), and only voluntary contribution for low- and middle-income countries (called developing countries), where China, India, and Indonesia belonged, despite them being the world's biggest emitters (EPA 2024). This also portrayed that multilateral discussion in climate negotiations still revolves around the issue between developed and developing countries and the "arena of power struggles between established and rising powers," as described mainly in the development pillar of the UN. Yet, despite the failure, the Kyoto Protocol has set a path for better global agreements in the future. One hundred and ninety five parties of Convention are parties of the Paris Agreement despite the agreement still having non-binding commitments to reducing emissions.

The example of regional multilateralism in ASEAN also shows the use of environmental principles or tackling the climate crisis together as guiding principles for development. ASEAN examples, notably shown by Indonesia in leading the G20 in 2022 and ASEAN in 2023, illustrated that multilateralism must be conducted with a correct and proper process, from the invited members, and also from the issues/themes discussed. Here, economic growth is highlighted more. As in the UN, Indonesia showed the leading types of Southeast Asian multilateralism, resulting in recommendations and commitment for states to follow, but not stern enough to push actions, especially for tackling the climate crisis. This time, outcomes and certain

positions are seriously needed for development to flourish but without degrading the environment.

The example shows that Southeast Asia, and Indonesia's contribution, has the potential to drive the political trajectories of climate change discussions from cultural and ethnic differences, showing how multilateralism is practiced, notably for non-Western, middle-income countries. However, the Southeast Asia and ASEAN case also showed that they needed powerful partners, such as China, Japan, the EU, and the US, with Japan and the EU as the most trusted partners compared to China and the US, according to the Southeast Asia survey (ASEAN Studies Centre 2024). The challenge in Southeast Asia is the need for proper communicative mechanisms between government and citizens, so that the "high" policy language is transformed into everyday climate language that the public understands in their daily lives (Adiputri 2023a). Multilateralism should not merely belong to the political elites.

The struggle over decision-making procedure, representation, and institutional norms at the UN is likely to be seen more in the pillars of peace and security and human rights, but in the development pillar, most developing countries wanted to participate and contribute to such multilateral efforts. The UN policies in development, notably on the environment and tackling the climate crisis, would determine the fate of low- and middle-income countries; thus, China in its Global Development Initiative that was presented at the beginning of this chapter planned to lead the effort.

"The world was made up of interdependent countries and that no country could achieve peace, security and prosperity on its own," remarked the Secretary General of UNCTAD Rubens Ricupero (A/C.2/56/SR.13, 3). Yet it has not been easy to address the interface between environmental sustainability, social equity, and economic development for individual states. However, multilateralism from the UN or any international organization may give some hope. It is a portrayal of global governance in action (Mingst et al. 2022, 1). The ongoing climate crisis discussion as a global threat stated at UNGA by global leaders, public figures, and state representatives shows that the development issue is important. The time has come when we need to act both globally and locally, and that requires cooperation from individuals to grassroots groups to businesses, governments, and supranational organizations, especially in development and environment. *The onus falls on the United Nations to prove its worth* (A/72/1, 37 original emphasis). We will return to the theme of reforming the UN-centered multilateral system in Chapter 6.

Notes

1 Despite the attempts of President Clinton in 1998, the US Senate did not ratify the Kyoto Protocol.
2 Due its historical background, the Group of 77 retained its name, despite the growing members at the UN (in 2024 became 134 member); further information is at https://www.g77.org/doc/ accessed on December 10, 2024.
3 See the collection of public ASEAN statements at https://asean.org/category/statements-meetings/?_sft_classification=300–0-socio-cultural-senior-officials-committee-for-ascc-council-soca&post_date=01012016+13052024

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