Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: Newcastle University

Unit of Assessment: 19 Politics and International Studies

Title of case study: Shaping the Content and Review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the Global, National and Sub-National Levels
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2008 – 2020

Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:

Name(s): Graham Long	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Senior Lecturer	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 2001-present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 1 January 2014 – 31 December 2020		

Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N

1. Summary of the impact

In September 2015, 193 United Nations member states adopted the '2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development' with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at its core. Long's normative research on universal principles of global justice (i) directly influenced and enabled the advocacy campaign of an international coalition of 3,000 civil society organisations in the run-up to and during the UN negotiations on the 2030 Agenda; (ii) influenced the interpretation of the key normative principles and of their implications for the SDG review process in the final text of the 2030 Agenda and in UN official guidelines for Voluntary National Review processes; and (iii) had a significant impact on processes of review and accountability for the SDGs in the UK by changing the ways in which the UK has implemented the SDGs and reported on their progress, and by influencing how that reporting has been interrogated by parliament and stakeholders.

2. Underpinning research

The impact claimed in this case study is underpinned by Dr Graham Long's normative research in global justice. Since 2008 his research publications developed normative arguments related to benefits and burdens, rights and responsibilities in respect of obligations to the world's poorest people (PUB1) and of environmental justice (PUB2). This work was significant and distinctive in focusing on the tension between universal global principles and country-level difference (PUB1, 2), and specifically addressed how environmental and social objectives might be linked or traded-off (PUB1). Since 2013 Long applied this normative work to studying the emerging '2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development'. While much academic work concentrates on specific SDG targets, Long's research is distinctive in developing a holistic approach to both understanding and assessing SDGs. His research publications have argued that the Agenda has a 'justice-shaped hole' at its core, have proposed a distinct and original interpretation of the key normative principles underpinning the Agenda, and have suggested how these normative principles should be reflected in the SDG review processes undertaken by all UN member states in order to partially fill this 'justice-shaped-hole' (PUB3, 4, 5).

Key normative research insights underpinning the impact:

1) The SDGs have a 'justice-shaped hole' at their core: universal application has not been translated into a principle of fair or equitable application and burden-sharing. Since the SDGs allow discretion in how states translate and prioritise targets in country contexts, they offer no clear set of standards for assessing country efforts at implementation (PUB3, 4).

2) The normative principle of 'leave no one behind' should give substance to the formal universality of the SDGs by prioritising the most vulnerable and marginalised populations on the one hand, and by ensuring the applicability of SDGs to all states (and sub-state entities) regardless of their socio-economic and political context on the other hand (PUB3).

3) This 'justice-shaped hole' can be rectified, in part, through the design of a robust SDGs review process that should reflect and consistently focus on three normative underpinning commitments of leave no one behind, indivisibility, and universality (PUB4, 5), with implications for the national and global processes built around the UN's system of Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs).

4) The normative principle of 'leave no one behind' should demand the participation of the most vulnerable and marginalised populations in such processes of review and implementation of the

SDGs. The more that this normative principle becomes the focus of Voluntary National Reviews undertaken by UN member states, and the more scrutiny it will receive at state and global level, the greater potency it will have (PUB3, 4).

3. References to the research

PUB1. Long, G. (2011) 'Disagreement and Responses to Climate Change', *Environmental Values* 20(4), 503-525. DOI: https://doi.org/10.3197/096327111X13150367351294

PUB2. Long, G. (2009) 'Moral and Sentimental Cosmopolitanism', *Journal of Social Philosophy* 40(3), 317-342. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9833.2009.01455.x

PUB3. Long, G. (2015) 'The Idea of Universality in the Sustainable Development Goals', *Ethics and International Affairs* 29(2), pp. 203-222. DOI:10.1017/S0892679415000076

PUB4. Long, G. (2018) 'Underpinning Commitments of the Sustainable Development Goals' in D. French and L. Kotze eds. *Sustainable Development Goals: Law, Theory and Implementation* (London, UK: Edward Elgar), 91-116. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4337/9781786438768.00011

PUB5. McGowan, P. J., Stewart, G. B., Long, G., & Grainger, M. J. (2019) 'An Imperfect Vision of Indivisibility in the Sustainable Development Goals', *Nature Sustainability* 2(1), 43-45. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1038/s41893-018-0190-1 (Long's contribution is material and distinct in addressing the normative principle of indivisibility).

Note on quality: Publications 1-3 and 5 are articles published in international peer-reviewed journals. Publication 4 is a chapter published in a major edited volume on the SDGs.

4. Details of the impact

(i) Long's research directly influenced the advocacy campaign of 'Beyond 2015' (the largest international civil society coalition working on the SDGs) in the run-up to and during the negotiations on the 2030 Agenda in 2014-15. 'Beyond 2015' included 3,000 civil society organisations that ranged from large global NGOs (WWF, CAFOD, Save the Children) to small local NGOs in 142 countries, with 52% in the global South. Long's research enabled 'Beyond 2015' and its members to articulate a rigorous defence of their recommendations grounded in normative political philosophy, which they could not have done alone. At the coalition's invitation (based on Long's well-established research expertise in global justice), Long joined their advocacy campaign in 2014 as Joint Lead for their Universality Task Force, Lead for the Accountability and Follow-up Working Group, and a member of the Rapid Reaction Drafting Group and the Advocacy Working Group. This close collaboration led to Long co-producing key advocacy papers of 'Beyond 2015' (20 advocacy papers in total) and their accompanying statements at the UN negotiations. The advocacy papers were further used by member organisations in their local campaigns to influence the negotiating positions of their respective governments.

Long's research directly influenced the content of the coalition's advocacy papers. The coalition's key positional paper in the first stage of the negotiations in April 2014 ('Putting People and Planet First'), for example, explicitly adopts Long's interpretation of universality as 'leaving no one behind'. It calls for the Agenda to focus on the most vulnerable and marginalised ('special attention should be paid to the poorest and most marginalised', IMP1), emphasises the Agenda's relevance for all states regardless of their socio-economic position ('there is room for improvement in all countries, even the most developed', IMP1) and highlights robust multi-level review of the SDGs as a way to cement national responsibilities and ensure key principles are being upheld (IMP1). Long led in developing the campaign's proposal for a SDG review system reflecting these principles, which was launched as an input to inter-state negotiations in April 2015. The significance of this impact is evidenced in the testimonial of 'Beyond 2015' Advocacy Director: '[Long's] analysis helped to determine the content of the positions Beyond 2015 took and how we presented them to member states. Graham also contributed specific textual recommendations for the SDGs that reflected his research, and that went forward as part of our advocacy'. Furthermore, the testimonial states, '[Long's] research and support played a vital role in making these ['Beyond 2015's inputs into the negotiation process] as strong and rigorous as they could be' (IMP2).

(ii) Long's research influenced the final text of the 2030 Agenda and the UN official guidelines for Voluntary National Review (VNR), impacting on all global and national review processes of the SDGs since 2015. By directly feeding into the position papers of 'Beyond 2015', Long's research influenced the coalition's argument that the central normative commitments should be as important as individual goals and targets, and that they should be equally important in framing individual SDGs and review processes. This advocacy position of 'Beyond 2015' contributed to the explicit inclusion of the normative commitments in the follow up and review sections of the 2030 Agenda (paragraph 74).

Although the UN negotiations were a state-led process, 'Beyond 2015' influenced the outcome by targeting all Permanent Representatives and governments of UN member states, and by directly contributing to the sessions of the UN Open Working Group on SDGs, and subsequent round of interstate negotiations in 2014-15. Following the publication of the final 'Zero Draft' of the 2030 Agenda on 8 July 2015, the Co-Chair of the UN Negotiating Team Ambassador Donoghue (Ireland) directly asked civil society actors contributing to the final negotiations, including 'Beyond 2015', for their 'red lines' in the final text. Long's research (PUB3) informed his co-drafting of the coalition's 'Reaction to the "Final Draft of the Outcome Document for the UN Summit" and the joint civil society statement on the Review section of the Outcome document. This explicitly called for the insertion of 'leave no one behind' as a new guiding principle in the review section of the agenda and for 'the participation of the most marginalized' in the VNR processes (both absent in the previous Zero Draft). The coalition's suggestion was adopted in the final text: the adopted 2030 Agenda added new guiding principles for review in paragraph 74, explicitly calling for review processes to have 'a particular focus on the poorest, most vulnerable and those furthest behind' (IMP3, 74e) and to be 'open, inclusive, participatory' and to 'support reporting by all relevant stakeholders' (IMP3, 74d).

The significance of this impact is evidenced in 'The Report on the Impact of the Beyond 2015 Advocacy on the 2030 Agenda Outcome', written by an independent consultant, for 'Beyond 2015': 'Critical elements of Beyond 2015's advocacy which made instrumental contributions to the final outcome document include (…) the principles of "leaving no one behind" and of "no target can be considered until met for all segments of society' (IMP4, p. 9). According to an anonymous Member State Representative, 'we [UN Open Working Group] always took into account the views of the campaign. The fact that they were already the product of an agreement among different constituencies gave them credibility' (IMP4, p. 22). The 'Beyond 2015' Advocacy Director testified, 'this significant impact would not have been possible without Graham's work' (IMP2).

Following the 2030 Agenda's adoption, Long's research further influenced national SDG review processes by impacting on the UN guidelines for VNR submissions. The first VNR guidelines were published in 2016. Long closely collaborated with 'Together 2030' – 'a self-organized civil society initiative to promote national implementation and track progress of the 2030 Agenda' – to propose improvements. In 2017, Long drew on his research to co-draft (with World Vision) an advocacy paper entitled 'Guiding for Accountability: Together 2030 Recommendations for a Revised Set of Guidelines for Voluntary National Reviews'. This document, shared with governments of UN members and launched with the UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), called for a revised set of guidelines to include a dedicated section in the VNR submissions that would 'identify the poorest, most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in that country's context' and 'address how the principle of 'leaving no one behind' has been incorporated into policy-making and review processes' (p. 10). This recommendation was adopted in the updated 'Voluntary Common Reporting Guidelines' published by the UN in 2017: 'The review could also assess how the principle of leaving no one behind has been mainstreamed in the implementation' of the SDGs, 'detail how vulnerable groups have been identified', and clarify 'what policies and programmes are being implemented to address their needs and support their empowerment' (IMP5, p.3). At UN DESA's invitation, Long contributed key paragraphs on stakeholder participation to the official VNR Handbook (UN DESA, 2019, pp. 14,17; 2021, pp. 9, 12) that 'provides basic, practical information' for countries undertaking VNRs. By 2021, 246 national reviews will have been conducted by member states (130 states overall).

By influencing both the final text of the 2030 Agenda and the UN official guidelines, Long's research achieved a distinct and material impact on the implementation and the review of the SDGs by the 193 states that signed it in three ways. First, the inclusion of the normative principles urged participating governments to explicitly address how they identify the poorest, most vulnerable and marginalised in their states, and how their policies benefit them. Thus, it directly influenced how governments have reported on the implementation of the SDGs, particularly after the publication of the revised VNR guidelines in 2017. An *independent assessment of the 2019 VNR reports commissioned by Bond (t*he UK network for international development organisations) reported, 'countries are more consistently following guidelines for VNR reports'. Moreover, 'the most significant increase in reporting was in inclusion of a dedicated chapter or robust information on leaving no one behind – 81% in 2019 versus 61% in 2018'. Second, by influencing the explicit focus of the VNR submissions, Long's research indirectly benefitted the most vulnerable and marginalised populations in participating states. The changed focus of the VNR submissions meant these populations have received greater visibility in their national contexts and more opportunities to influence their national SDG agendas. Finally, Long's research has significantly benefitted civil society organisations in participating states by enabling them to publicly voice their concerns and to better advocate for policies benefitting their constituencies.

Long's ongoing work supports civil society stakeholders across the world in capacity-building aimed at more effective involvement in VNR processes. In 2018-19 Long (in collaboration with 'Together 2030') led a team of Newcastle researchers (Clough, Elstub, O'Flynn, Popa, Rietig, and Routley) to undertake and disseminate among civil society actors globally a survey of 'Stakeholder Participation in VNRs'. In 2018-19, Long was further commissioned by the UN DESA to produce a technical paper and report (together with Clough and Rietig) on stakeholder participation and SDG partnerships. The Chief of the Outreach and Partnerships Branch, UN DESA Division for SDGs, testified this work has 'helped to inform governments' deliberations' and provided 'insights to global policy dialogues' hosted by the UN (IMP6).

(iii) Long's research has had a significant impact on processes of review and accountability for the SDGs in the UK in three ways. First, Long's research directly influenced the UK's 2019 VNR submission. Long's normative argument that the universality of the SDGs should be understood as their applicability to all states and sub-state entities regardless of their socio-economic context, and the establishment of global principles and guidelines stressing vulnerable and marginalised populations and stakeholder participation (PUB3-5), influenced the ways in which the UK Government interpreted the applicability of the SDGs to the UK. The UK's SDG review shifted from a focus on   UK overseas aid to a greater emphasis on the SDGs *within* the UK, notably domestic inequalities. Long's work with UK Stakeholders for Sustainable Development (UKSSD) to assess the UK's domestic performance facilitated this impact. UKSSD's 'Measuring up to the SDGs' report, based on Long's research, is acknowledged in a letter from the Prime Minister (2018) as an important contribution to the VNR. Long's involvement in parliamentary work on the SDGs in 2016-2019, detailed below, extended and magnified this impact. *Furthermore, Long's research also directly influenced Scotland's contribution to the 2019 UK VNR.* In 2018-19, Long undertook a baseline assessment of Scotland's SDG performance for the Scottish Government. That report on 'The SDGs and Scotland' (2019), produced by Long and a team of mostly Newcastle-based scholars (Clough, Molloy, Muggleton, Hardacre, Bolam, Cansino, Luxton), drew on Long's normative insights on universality. Text and data from the report formed part of Scotland's contribution to the 2019 UK VNR (IMP7, sections on goals 6, 10, 15, 16, 17) and it became the 'point of reference' for Scotland's subsequent cross-government Supplementary National Review in July 2019 (p. 6).

Second, Long's research significantly strengthened parliamentary scrutiny of the SDGs in the UK. From 2016-2018 Long contributed evidence arising from his research to 5 inquiries by House of Commons Select Committees: International Development Committee (IDC) inquiries into 'The UK Implementation of the SDGs' (2015-16) and 'UK Progress on the SDGs' (2018-19); the Women and Equalities Committee inquiry on 'The Implementation of the SDG Goal 5' (2016-17); Environmental Audit Committee inquiries on 'The SDGs in the UK' (2016-17) and on 'The SDGs in the UK Follow-Up' (2017-18). Long's evidence prompted parliamentary questioning of ministers

around disadvantage within the UK (debates in 2018 and 2020) and UK processes for stakeholder engagement.

Long's appointment as Specialist Advisor for the IDC inquiry on the 'UK Progress on the SDGs' in 2018-19 meant he could shape the UK VNR critically during its construction. Long drew on his research insights (PUB3-5) to brief committee members and draft inquiry questions for officials from the UK's Department of International Development (DFID) (IMP8). The impact of Long's research is directly referenced in an official letter by the IDC Chair (Member of Parliament) to the Secretary of State, DFID (2 April 2019) urging that the UK VNR should include 'a focus on those furthest behind in the UK context' and ensure the 'presence of stakeholder perspectives' (IMP9, p. 5). Both recommendations were partially addressed in UK's 2019 final VNR submission (IMP7), that included a chapter on 'Leave No-one behind' and referenced a programme of stakeholder engagement events led by government departments. Lastly, Long co-led the drafting of the Committee Report on the UK's VNR process that was published on 16 July (IMP8). The report's significance for future UK implementation of the SDGs is evident in the Government Response which agreed or partially agreed with 11 out of 14 recommendations, including the recommendation *'to develop a formal mechanism for stakeholder engagement on domestic implementation of the SDGs' (IMP10).*

Finally, Long's argument that universality entails consistent inclusion of the 'most left behind' in the review process has benefited a large number of UK stakeholders representing the most vulnerable and marginalised populations through their voice and participation in these processes. Beyond the UK VNR report itself which acknowledges the value of a wide range of stakeholders including 'The SDG Network Scotland' (IMP7, p. 11) and UKSSD (IMP7, p. 13), UK CSOs (e.g. Shelter, Sightsavers, Women for Women International UK) have had new opportunities to pressure the UK government using the SDGs in national and global fora.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

IMP1. Beyond 2015 (2014) 'Putting People and Planet First', Position Paper.
IMP2. Testimonial by Beyond 2015 Advocacy Director.
IMP3. UN (2015) A/RES/70/1 'Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', adopted on 25 September 2015.
IMP4. Cardama, M. (2015) 'Beyond 2015 Campaign: Final Evaluation', Report Commissioned by Beyond 2015.
IMP5. UN (2017) 'Voluntary Common Reporting Guidelines for Voluntary National Reviews at the High-Level Political Forum for Sustainable Development'.
IMP6. Testimonial by Chief of Outreach and Partnerships Branch, UN DESA Division for SDGs.
IMP7. Government of the UK (2019) United Kingdom Voluntary National Review.
IMP8. House of Commons International Development Committee (2019) UK progress on the Sustainable Development Goals', 12th Report of Session 2017-19.
IMP9. Official letter by Member of Parliament, Chair of the House of Commons International Development Committee to Secretary of State, DFID from 2 April 2019.
IMP10. Government of the UK (2019) 'UK's progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Voluntary National Review: Government Response to the Committee's 12th Report'. 17 September.