PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES: MEDIATING THE INTERNALISATION OF GLOBAL LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS OF THE SDGs

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Abstract
This article examines the role of public administration in developing countries in internalising global legal and policy frameworks associated with the Sustainable Development Goals. The study employs a narrative literature review to synthesise research on administrative capacity, legal adaptation, and the influence of global political processes on national development strategies. The review shows that public administration provides the institutional means through which global commitments are interpreted and embedded in domestic policy. The ability of governments to coordinate sectoral institutions, manage information systems, and align national regulations with international norms shapes how far the SDGs can be translated into practical action. The literature also highlights variations in governance quality, regulatory coherence, and enforcement practices that influence the internalisation process. Global political developments such as development assistance and international monitoring further shape national responses, although their impact depends on the stability and capability of domestic administrative systems. The findings indicate that improvements in coordination, legal consistency, and accountability are important steps toward narrowing the gap between global frameworks and national implementation. These insights offer a conceptual foundation for understanding the institutional conditions that affect SDG progress in developing countries.

Keywords: *Public administration; SDGs; Global legal frameworks; Governance; Policy internalisation*

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A. Introduction

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by the United Nations marked a renewed global commitment to address poverty, inequality, environmental degradation, and institutional fragility through a shared set of goals known as the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015). These goals are universal, yet their realization depends largely on domestic institutions that plan and implement public policies. Public administration provides the institutional backbone for translating broad global aspirations into concrete programs and services that reach citizens in diverse territorial and political settings (UNDP, 2014). In this sense, the quality of public administration becomes a decisive factor for the extent to which the SDGs can move

beyond formal commitments and produce tangible changes in everyday governance (Kanie & Biermann, 2020).

A substantial body of literature has examined public administration reforms, governance quality, and state capacity in both developed and developing contexts. Many of these works discuss themes such as good governance, bureaucratic transformation, and public management reform, often with a strong focus on internal institutional dynamics within states (Hyden et al., 2004; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). At the same time, studies in international law and global governance have explored the rise of international regimes, environmental agreements, and human rights conventions that influence national policy spaces (Falk, 1964; Krasner, 1983; Kim & Bosselmann, 2013). However, these strands of literature are frequently treated as separate. The detailed ways in which public administration mediates between global legal norms, international political processes, and domestic policy implementation remain less systematically explored (Bäckstrand & Kuyper, 2017; Kanie & Biermann, 2020).

This gap is particularly visible in developing countries, where administrative institutions often confront multiple and overlapping pressures. On one side, governments are expected to align national development strategies with the SDGs and to report progress through increasingly sophisticated global monitoring instruments (Allen et al., 2019; Sachs et al., 2022). On the other side, many of these countries struggle with limited human resources, fragmented bureaucratic structures, and uneven legal enforcement, which complicate the internalization of international commitments into coherent domestic regulations (Kaufmann et al., 2011; OECD, 2017). Indonesia illustrates this dual challenge, since national planning documents such as the National Medium Term Development Plan already integrate SDG priorities, yet implementation still faces institutional and coordination constraints typical of many developing contexts (Bappenas, 2020; UN, 2023).

The tension between global commitments and national realities has been widely noted, but it is often described in general terms. The literature points to persistent implementation gaps, where formal ratification of international agreements does not automatically translate into effective domestic action (Falk, 1964; Hyden et al., 2004). Weak horizontal and vertical coordination inside government, overlapping mandates, and insufficiently integrated data systems can hinder the localization of SDG targets, even when political leaders express strong rhetorical support (Allen et al., 2019; OECD, 2017). Problems of corruption, low accountability, and limited citizen participation further erode the ability of public administration to act as a credible mediator between global norms and local needs (Kaufmann et al., 2011). These intertwined challenges indicate that understanding SDG implementation requires close attention to how administrative institutions operate within a broader web of legal and political constraints.

This article responds to these gaps by offering a narrative literature review that examines the interaction between public administration, the global legal framework, and global political processes in the context of SDG implementation in developing countries. Rather than treating these three pillars as separate spheres, the study reads them as a

mutually shaping configuration in which public administration serves as the key mediator. The review synthesizes insights from governance studies, international law, and global development policy in order to clarify how international norms are interpreted, adapted, or resisted within domestic administrative systems (Bäckstrand & Kuyper, 2017; UN DESA, 2018; UN DESA, 2021). By focusing on this trilogy of interactions, the article seeks to explain why significant gaps persist between international commitments and national outcomes, and to identify institutional and governance conditions that can strengthen the role of public administration in supporting the SDGs in developing settings, including but not limited to Indonesia.

B. Methods

This study adopts a narrative literature review approach to explore how public administration interacts with global legal frameworks and global political processes in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in developing countries. The narrative review is used because it allows the researcher to organize a diverse range of scholarly works, policy reports, and institutional documents into a coherent discussion that captures the complexity of SDG governance (Moundekar et al., 2025; Greenhalgh et al., 2018). The review focuses on identifying conceptual patterns, thematic connections, and recurring challenges that appear across studies in public administration, international law, and global governance.

The literature was gathered through an extensive reading of academic journals, book chapters, United Nations publications, and policy documents issued by regional and national institutions. The selection of literature was guided by its relevance to three thematic areas which are the role of public administration in development governance, the internalization of international legal norms, and the influence of global political dynamics on national policy spaces (Silva, Sánchez-Hernández & Carvalho, 2023). Priority was given to works that provide analytical insights or empirical observations related to institutional capacity, governance reform, legal harmonization, and SDG monitoring. Materials that only repeated general descriptions of the SDGs without offering conceptual or empirical depth were excluded during the review process (Rădulescu et al., 2023).

The analysis was carried out qualitatively through an interpretive reading of the selected publications. The researcher examined arguments, findings, and conceptual propositions in order to identify how the three pillars of public administration, global law, and global political processes intersect in shaping SDG implementation. The process involved grouping ideas into thematic clusters, tracing convergences and differences across sources, and evaluating how institutional and political factors influence the translation of global commitments into domestic action (United Nations, 2015; Fukuda-Parr & McNeill, 2019). This approach enables the study to produce an integrated narrative that highlights both structural constraints and enabling conditions faced by developing countries as they work to internalize the SDGs within their administrative systems.

C. Results and Discussion

1. Public Administration as a Mediating Institution in SDG Implementation

Research on development governance shows that public administration stands at the centre of efforts to turn international goals into national policy work. The SDGs provide direction at the global level, yet these commitments gain practical meaning only when administrative institutions organise them within national planning systems. Governments depend on public administration to interpret broad international goals and translate them into policies that address conditions within their own territories. This task becomes more demanding in developing countries where administrative structures often face resource constraints and uneven institutional performance (UNDP, 2014; UN DESA, 2018).

Many studies highlight the way public administration shapes coordination among ministries and between national and subnational levels. The SDGs require cooperation across sectors because progress in one area often depends on developments in another. When administrative units are able to work in a connected manner, policy planning becomes more coherent and avoids duplication. When coordination remains weak, ministries develop policies independently, which reduces the chances of achieving integrated results. The literature on public sector reform notes that fragmented mandates and overlapping responsibilities continue to challenge administrative systems in many developing contexts (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011; OECD, 2017).

Another recurring theme concerns the administrative capacity to generate and manage information for policymaking. Governments need reliable data to monitor SDG progress and identify areas that require policy adjustment. Countries with stronger administrative arrangements tend to maintain more stable data systems and regular monitoring practices. Where administrative tools are limited, monitoring becomes irregular, and governments find it difficult to form an accurate picture of SDG progress or identify gaps that require attention (Allen et al., 2019; Sachs et al., 2022).

Public administration also influences how the principle of leaving no one behind appears in national strategy. This principle requires governments to identify groups that face barriers to public services and to ensure their inclusion in policy decisions. Studies on governance and accountability show that administrative systems with clear rules, transparency mechanisms, and channels for citizen participation are more capable of addressing these disparities. In contrast, weak governance environments tend to overlook marginalised groups even when formal commitments to the SDGs exist in planning documents (Hyden et al., 2004; Kaufmann et al., 2011).

The literature shows that progress toward the SDGs is closely tied to the strength of public administration. International commitments alone are not enough. What matters is how administrative institutions interpret these commitments, coordinate actors, manage information, and maintain fairness in policy implementation. Differences in these capacities explain why countries with similar global obligations can experience very different outcomes in sustainable development.

2. Internalization of Global Legal Frameworks into National Regulations

Studies in international law and development policy show that global agreements rarely operate as self-executing instruments. Their influence depends on the willingness and capacity of national administrations to align domestic regulations with international commitments (Abbott et al., 2000; Bodansky, 2010). Many SDG targets are supported by established legal norms, including environmental conventions, human rights treaties, and agreements within specific policy domains such as climate governance (Shelton, 2000; Kingsbury et al., 2005). These agreements provide direction for national legislation, but their domestic application varies widely. Falk (1964) notes that formal ratification often marks only the beginning of a long process of adaptation in which governments must reshape legal and administrative procedures to ensure that international principles can function within national systems. This process can be demanding because it requires coordination among ministries, legal drafting skills, and mechanisms for compliance monitoring (UN DESA, 2018).

The literature indicates that developing countries frequently confront institutional and regulatory barriers when they attempt to adjust national laws to international standards. Some states face overlapping regulations that have accumulated over time and are not aligned with current global norms. Others struggle with limited legal expertise or weak enforcement institutions. These difficulties create a gap between the commitments made at the international level and the legal arrangements needed to support their implementation at home (OECD, 2017; Hyden et al., 2004). Studies on governance and public sector reform suggest that when administrative units lack clarity in their mandates or when coordination among them is limited, the process of legal harmonisation becomes slow and inconsistent (Kingsbury et al., 2005; UN DESA, 2018).

Research on SDG implementation also highlights the challenge of translating legal commitments into practical administrative routines. Even when governments succeed in adopting regulations that reflect international norms, enforcement often remains uneven. Weak monitoring systems, limited budget capacity, or corruption may hinder the application of laws that support SDG targets. Kaufmann et al. (2011) show that variations in rule of law and accountability significantly influence how legal commitments translate into action. This suggests that the internalisation of global norms is not only a legal exercise but also an administrative process that requires stable institutions and consistent political support. Countries that have more predictable legal and administrative environments can integrate global frameworks more effectively and are better positioned to incorporate SDG related principles into national programs.

The literature as a whole portrays the internalisation of global legal frameworks as an evolving negotiation between global obligations and domestic realities. Public administration stands at the centre of this process because it provides the institutional pathways through which international norms move into national legal and policy structures. Differences in administrative capacity, legal coherence, and enforcement practices explain why some countries are able to incorporate SDG related legal

commitments more smoothly than others. This variation also helps to clarify why similar global agreements produce different outcomes across developing countries.

3. Influence of Global Political Processes on National SDG Implementation

Studies in global governance show that national efforts to advance the SDGs are shaped not only by domestic administrative capacity but also by political dynamics at the international level. Global political processes affect the direction of national development planning through negotiations, diplomacy, development assistance, and the creation of international regimes. These processes expose governments to expectations that influence policy choices and resource allocation. Krasner (1983) explains that international regimes generate norms and procedures that guide how states behave within shared policy fields. Governments respond to these signals in different ways depending on their administrative capability and the stability of their political institutions.

Several works describe how development assistance and financing arrangements influence national strategies related to the SDGs. Developing countries often depend on external support to fund programs in health, education, climate adaptation, and institutional reform. These resources can strengthen domestic efforts, yet they may also come with expectations that shape the priorities of public administration. Such expectations appear in donor requirements, performance indicators, or reporting obligations. When administrative institutions have sufficient capacity, they are able to negotiate and align external support with national needs. When capacity is limited, external demands may dominate planning processes and create tensions with existing priorities. Research on development policy has documented these interactions and notes that the influence of global aid arrangements varies widely across countries (Bäckstrand & Kuyper, 2017).

Global political developments also affect SDG implementation through shifting geopolitical relations. Changes in diplomatic alliances, climate negotiations, or trade arrangements can alter the policy space available to national governments. For instance, climate commitments made through international agreements require public administration to adjust policies in energy, land use, and environmental management. Kim and Bosselmann (2013) argue that the role of international environmental law has expanded in recent years and now interacts more directly with national policy choices. These developments require administrative institutions to interpret global political signals and incorporate them into domestic planning. Where administrative systems are flexible and well coordinated, they are able to respond with strategies that maintain alignment between national priorities and global expectations.

The literature also notes that global monitoring of SDG progress influences how public administration structures its internal reporting and evaluation systems. Countries respond to international indices, peer reviews, and reporting platforms that compare progress across states. Sachs et al. (2022) show that governments track these global assessments and often adjust their planning documents in response to them. This process is not mechanical, yet the presence of comparative monitoring encourages governments

to demonstrate progress and to strengthen administrative routines related to data collection and evaluation. These pressures depend on domestic political conditions. In some countries, global scrutiny strengthens accountability and motivates administrative reforms. In others, it leads to symbolic compliance where reporting improves but policy performance changes slowly.

Across these strands of literature, global political processes appear not as external forces acting independently of domestic institutions but as influences that interact with public administration in shaping SDG implementation. The ability of governments to respond to global political developments depends on the strength of their administrative systems. Differences in negotiation capacity, policy coordination, and political stability help explain why countries that face similar global pressures often move in different directions in their pursuit of the SDGs.

4. Institutional and Governance Barriers and Their Theoretical Implications

Research in public administration and development studies often points to a set of institutional and governance barriers that influence the ability of governments to implement the SDGs. Many developing countries face administrative fragmentation where ministries and subnational authorities work with overlapping responsibilities and limited coordination. This condition weakens the planning process because policies are formed within separate units that do not always share information or align their objectives. OECD reports describe such fragmentation as a structural issue that can disrupt efforts to link national development plans with SDG targets, especially when administrative systems do not have mechanisms that support integrated decision making (OECD, 2017).

Governance challenges further complicate SDG implementation. Problems such as low accountability, limited transparency, and corruption reduce the credibility of public administration and weaken its ability to allocate resources effectively. Studies by Hyden, Court, and Mease (2004) and Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi (2011) show that when governance conditions are weak, public institutions struggle to enforce regulations, maintain consistent service delivery, or build trust with citizens. These weaknesses create gaps between the commitments made in national planning documents and the outcomes seen in practice. Administrative limitations in data collection and monitoring add to these problems because governments cannot track progress with sufficient accuracy or identify areas where performance is falling behind.

These barriers help illuminate how theoretical perspectives on governance, international law, and global politics interact in shaping national responses to the SDGs. Good governance theory emphasises accountability, participation, and transparency as foundations for effective administrative action. When governance conditions are weak, the principles that support coherent policy implementation become difficult to sustain. Regime theory offers another perspective by explaining how international norms influence states through shared expectations and rules. Krasner (1983) argues that states operate within frameworks shaped by international agreements, yet their ability to

respond depends on domestic institutions. This insight helps explain why the same international commitments produce different policy trajectories among countries that face similar development challenges.

Research in international law adds a further layer by showing that legal harmonisation requires both political will and administrative capacity. Falk (1964) and Kim and Bosselmann (2013) note that the movement of legal norms from international agreements into national systems is shaped by the quality of domestic institutions. Countries with stronger administrative and legal systems are able to internalise global norms with greater consistency, while those with weaker systems often adopt the language of international commitments without building the structures needed to enforce them. The interaction of these theoretical perspectives provides a more complete understanding of why SDG implementation varies across developing countries even when they share similar global obligations.

The literature suggests that institutional capacity, governance quality, and the influence of global norms form a set of interconnected factors that shape SDG progress. Administrative fragmentation, weak regulatory enforcement, and governance challenges hinder the movement of global ideas into national practice. Theoretical perspectives on governance, international regimes, and legal internalisation help clarify how these constraints operate and why reforms in public administration remain central to sustainable development. Countries that are able to strengthen their administrative coordination, improve legal coherence, and maintain transparent governance processes tend to show more consistent progress toward the SDGs. This connection between institutional capability and theoretical insight provides a useful foundation for understanding the complex conditions that influence national approaches to sustainable development.

D. Conclusion

The review shows that the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals depends strongly on the quality of public administration and on the ways national institutions interpret global ideas within domestic settings. International agreements and global political developments provide direction for national policy, yet their influence is mediated by administrative systems that vary widely in capacity and coherence. The literature indicates that countries advance more steadily when public administration is able to organise policies across ministries, maintain reliable information systems, and apply legal norms with consistency. Where administrative structures are fragmented or governance conditions are weak, the distance between formal commitments and actual outcomes becomes more visible and difficult to address.

The review also highlights that global legal and political frameworks do not operate in isolation. Their effects are shaped by domestic institutions, and this interaction explains the uneven patterns of progress found across developing countries. International norms are more likely to be internalised when governments have stable regulatory frameworks and sufficient legal and administrative expertise. External political pressures such as financing arrangements and global monitoring influence national policy choices,

but these influences become constructive only when public administration is capable of negotiating priorities and aligning external expectations with national needs.

These findings suggest that strengthening public administration remains an important requirement for countries that aim to integrate global commitments into national development strategies. Improvements in coordination, legal coherence, and governance practices can help narrow the gap between aspirations and implementation. The review also points to the value of using insights from governance theory, regime theory, and international law to understand how domestic institutions respond to global norms. Although the SDGs are global in scope, their realisation depends on institutional work that takes place within states. Future research may benefit from examining how specific administrative reforms influence long term SDG outcomes in different developing contexts, including Indonesia, where efforts to integrate global goals into national planning continue to evolve.

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