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Guest editors' introduction to the special issue: the contribution of multinational enterprises to the Sustainable Development Goals

Caroline Witte and John Dilyard*

1. Introduction

In December 2015 the United Nations (UN) General Assembly accepted a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to succeed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The goals encompass interconnected and actionable targets that address a broad range of development issues and represent the 5 Ps: people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership (see table 1) that were delineated in the 25 September 2015 UN resolution in which the SDGs were adopted. In contrast to the MDGs, the SDGs explicitly call for a wide range of actors, including the private sector, to be involved, and progress on many of the 17 SDGs will strongly depend on private sector contributions. For example, SDG 12, responsible consumption and production, urges MNEs to adopt sustainable practices and to integrate sustainability information into their reporting cycle. In addition, Goal 17 emphasizes partnerships for the goals, recognizing the need for cooperation between the private sector, public organizations and civil society for the achievement of all the SDGs.

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Table 1. The Sustainable Development Goals

1. No poverty
2. Zero hunger
3. Good health and well-being
4. Quality education
5. Gender equality
6. Clean water and sanitation
7. Affordable and clean energy
8. Decent work and economic growth
9. Industry, innovation and infrastructure
10. Reduced inequalities
11. Sustainable cities and communities
12. Responsible production and consumption
13. Climate action
14. Life below water
15. Life on land
16. Peace, justice and strong institutions
17. Partnerships for the goals

Whereas the mobilization of the private sector is repeatedly emphasized as a prerequisite for successful implementation of the SDGs – including in the UN resolution – academic work specifically linking the private sector to the SDGs or the MDGs is sparse. Even though much has been researched and written over the last decade or so on multinational enterprises' (MNEs') corporate social responsibility (CSR), how they conduct business in unstable nations, their (un)ethical practices, and private sector responses to public policy, little is known about how an MNE's

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