

Public participation in the drafting of the Sustainable Development Goals:  
Did it bring the worlds of development and environment closer together?

Otto Spijkers

Lecturer of public international law at Utrecht University<sup>1</sup>

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Engaging with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG): Gaps, Opportunities and  
Challenges

(298 words)

In his separate opinion to the judgment of 25 September 1997 in the case between Hungary and Slovakia relating to the Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros Project, then vice-president of the International Court of Justice, Christopher Gregory Weeramantry, famously wrote that the law of development and the law of the environment cannot coexist as two separate worlds, imposing conflicting obligations on the same legal persons at the same time. To avoid such a state of “normative anarchy”, the existence of a harmonizing principle is required. This harmonizing principle was, in his view, that of sustainable development.

Sustainable development thus functions as a balancing or reconciliatory principle, bringing the world of development and that of environmental protection closer together. And this concept of sustainable development is also at the foundation of the sustainable development goals (SDGs). We can thus assume that the goals have a potential to play a similar, harmonizing role, bringing the world of development and environmental protection closer together.

The focus on my paper will be on the influence of direct participation in the drafting of the SDGs by representatives of the development world and the world of environmental protection. Indeed, there exist entities active in the field of development – think of corporations – and entities striving to protect the environment – think of NGOs. These entities often appear to exist in two separate worlds. In my paper, I wanted to analyse how the drafting process of the SDGs has attempted to bring these two worlds together by allowing their active participation in the drafting, and to assess to what extent this participation of representatives of both these worlds has influenced the content of the SDGs.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For a brief CV and list of publications, see <http://www.uu.nl/staff/OSpijkers>.

<sup>2</sup> See also Spijkers & Honniball, “Developing Global Public Participation - Shaping the Sustainable Development Goals”, *International Community Law Review*, Vol. 17, No. 3, pp. 251-296.