

## The 2030 Agenda from the perspective of the peripheries: limits and impostures of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals

*A Agenda 2030 sob o olhar das periferias: limites e imposturas dos 17 Objetivos do Desenvolvimento Sustentável*

*La Agenda 2030 desde la perspectiva de las periferias: límites e imposturas de los 17 Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible*

*L'Agenda 2030 du point de vue des périphéries: limites et impostures des 17 Objectifs de Développement Durable*

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### ABSTRACT

The objective of this article is to evaluate, from a critical perspective and from the perspective of the peripheries, the geopolitical and ideological role of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In order to fulfill this aim, a geopolitical review of the main events that culminated in the publication of the document *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (UN, 2015). Finally, by evaluating reports from the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), it was possible to make some considerations about the real prospects for achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, especially in the world's peripheries.

**KEYWORDS:** environmental geopolitics; 17 Sustainable Development Goals; 2030 Agenda; sustainable development.

### RESUMO

O objetivo deste artigo é avaliar, sob uma perspectiva crítica e a partir do olhar das periferias, o papel geopolítico e ideológico dos 17 Objetivos do Desenvolvimento Sustentável. Para cumprir tal intento, foi feito um resgate geopolítico dos principais acontecimentos que culminaram na publicação do documento *Transformando Nosso Mundo: A Agenda 2030 para o Desenvolvimento Sustentável* (ONU, 2015). Por fim, mediante a avaliação de relatórios da *Sustainable Development Solutions Network* (SDSN), foi possível fazer algumas

considerações sobre as reais perspectivas de alcance dos 17 Objetivos do Desenvolvimento Sustentável, especialmente nas periferias do mundo.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** geopolítica ambiental; 17 Objetivos do Desenvolvimento Sustentável; Agenda 2030; desenvolvimento sustentável.

## **RESÚMEN**

El propósito de este artículo es examinar críticamente el papel geopolítico e ideológico de los 17 Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible (ODS) desde la perspectiva de las periferias. Para lograr este objetivo, se llevó a cabo una revisión geopolítica de los principales acontecimientos que condujeron a la publicación del documento “Transformando Nuestro Mundo: La Agenda 2030 para el Desarrollo Sostenible” (ONU, 2015). Finalmente, al analizar los informes de la Red de Soluciones para el Desarrollo Sostenible (RSDS), se realizaron consideraciones sobre las perspectivas reales de alcanzar los 17 Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible, especialmente en las regiones periféricas del mundo.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** geopolítica ambiental; 17 Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible; Agenda 2030; desarrollo sostenible.

## **RÉSUMÉ**

Vue depuis les périphéries, cet article analyse le rôle géopolitique et idéologique des 17 Objectifs de développement durable. Pour ce faire, on a repris de façon critique les principaux événements géopolitiques associés à la parution de Transformer notre monde : le Programme 2030 pour le Développement Durable (ONU, 2015). Finalement, face à l'évaluation du Document Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), on a fait quelques considérations sur les réeles perspectives d'atteindres ces objectifs – surtout dans les périphéries du monde.

**MOTS-CLÉS :** géopolitique environnementale ; 17 Objectifs de développement durable ; Agenda 2030 ; développement durable.

## INTRODUCTION

The art image (Figure 1) of Sustainable Development Goals, or simply 17 SDGs is currently a common print on T-shirts, posters, webpages, supermarket bags. It is practically a contemporary iconic image of the commitment to building a better world. In academic projects, advertisement actions, governmental policies, executive plans, or documents in both the public and private spheres, it has been an undisputed recipe for socially and environmentally correct action. The 17 SDGs have been consolidated as a calculation table, an inscrutable justification, and a statement of good actions. After all, who could be against the *eradication of poverty and hunger, reduction of inequalities or the promotion of peace and justice?* (Goals 1, 2, 10 and 16, respectively).

**Figure 1** – Goals of Sustainable Development



Source: <https://www.globaleducationmagazine.com/sustainable-development-goals-global-goals-2030.png>.

Once more, we are before a set of ambitious global strategies that include the center and periphery, rich and poor, businesspersons and workers, and different spheres of governments and civil society. But, contrary to the Agenda 21 (1996[1992]) which envisioned a whole century for the construction of

sustainable development on a global scale, the 17 SDGs encompass a 15-year plan, the fruit of a document signed in September 2015 by 193 countries, re-structured in 169 goals and titled “*Transforming our world: the 2030 agenda for sustainable development*” (UN, 2015). The 2030 Agenda was adopted at the United Nations Summit on Sustainable Development, held in New York, in the United States, at the United Nations building.

It is interesting to understand the geopolitical context of the enactment of the 17 SDGs. We will set out, therefore, from two analytical assumptions:

- (i) The decade of 2011-2020 had important setbacks in the global environmental agenda: it started with the aftermath of the profound economic crisis of 2008, and it witnessed the adoption of more economic rather than ecological terminology such as the case “green economy”, and also saw the emergence of expressive public figures with strong anti-environment discourse, such as the case of Donald Trump, in the United States and Jair Bolsonaro, in Brazil and wound up with a deep ecological-sanitary crisis, the fruit of the atrocious Covid-19 pandemic (OLIVEIRA, 2022a);
- (ii) There has been, since at least the turn of the century XX-XXI, an evident sharpening of an explicit cooptation process of the environmental issue by the capital, whether through international agreements that progressively increased private funding for global environmental actions or by the massive incorporation of the goals, interests, methodologies, conceptions, and strategies of the universe of a great corporation regarding ecological management. The so much aimed-for economy-ecology balance, nowadays, occurs through the principles of a veritable *corporate sustainability*, based on the advancement of clean technologies, free trade, and the protagonist of great corporations (OLIVEIRA, 2022b).

Therefore, the main goal of this article is to assess, from a critical perspective and the vision of the periphery, the geopolitical and ideological role of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. In order to fulfill such role, a geopolitical reassessment was done of the celebration of *sustainable development* at the Rio-92 to the defense of the *green economy* model at the Rio+20, and the *8 Millenium Goals* to the *17 Sustainable Development Goals*, promulgated respectively in 2000 and 2015. Furthermore, based on the methodological reading of the document *Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, (UNITED NATIONS, 2015a) and through the evaluation

of some reports of the *Sustainable Development Solutions Network* (SDSN) – a non-profit organization created in 2012 by the United Nations to internationally promote the Sustainable Development Goals – it was possible to make some considerations about the actual perspective of the spread of the measures and analyze the reality of nations of the periphery of the world.

## FROM SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AT THE RIO-92 TO THE GREEN ECONOMY AT THE RIO+20

The concept of sustainable development has its origin in large international conferences aimed at settling the environmental anathemas based on the dominant economic principles. Fruit of the publication of the report *Our Common Future*, 1987, sustainable development is defined as the model in which “*Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*” (WCED: 1988 [1987], p. 46). *Our common future* is the result of a four-year effort by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), chaired by Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland, which elected the need for the obtainment of sustainable development as a basis for a more adequate use of nature to meet human needs.

This proposed model of adjustment of present-future needs did not preach the disruption of the dominant development structures. Contrary to the report *The Limits of Growth* (MEADOWS et. al., 1972), which envisaged a glum future in case the current industrial growth continued, and the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm, in 1972, marked by the dissent between the central and peripheral countries in the solutions for the destructive model of global life, sustainable development was presented as a rational standard, ecoefficient which would combine economical growth and environmental protection.

At The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, sustainable development was institutionalized by the signature of Agenda 21(1996[1992]), by which all the central and peripheral countries should adopt its principles and implement their strategies to implement these principles. The Rio de Janeiro Conference was the great responsible event for the agreement that elected the sustainable development model for the globe, through a diplomatic, social and ideological operation of great magnitude to overcome the contradiction between development and the environment (NOBRE, 2002).

In 2012, the city of Rio de Janeiro once more held an environment of great magnitude: the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, known as a Rio + 20, which took place between the 13th and 22nd of June and left as a legacy *The Letter of Rio*, which became *The Future we want* (UNITED NATIONS, 2012). The conference aimed to discuss the legacy of Rio-92, mainly regarding the implementations of the proposals contained in the *Rio Declaration* (ONU, 1992), in the *Agenda 21*, in the *Framework Convention on Climate Change* (UNITED NATIONS, 1992a), and in the *Convention on Biological Diversity* (UNITED NATIONS, 1992b).

Rio+20 reinforced the role of sustainable development through a strong economic approach but using *green economy* terminology. By privileging the economy, Rio+20 generated disinterest, distrust and skepticism. The veritable showroom that took place at *Parque dos Atletas* (Athletes Park), where all the participant countries presented pavilions with stands containing the various possibilities for the adoption of sustainable principles, caused even a stronger impression that Rio+20 was a great “business fair” (OLIVEIRA, 2019).

On the other hand, the NGOs and the environment-focused social movements were divided between those that take up businesslike practices and those that adopt a naive and little effective discursive radicalism. Therefore, by hoisting the flag of *environmental* profit the ideological enchantment of “protection of nature” was further worn out”. The notion of a green economy revealed how much the international geopolitical organizations regarded nature as a great productive warehouse, with valuable present and future raw materials (OLIVEIRA, 2019). A setback, undoubtedly, in strong ideological themes which should produce consensus.

## FROM THE 8 MILLENIUM GOALS TO THE 17 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The UN general-secretary, Ban Ki-Moon, had already indicated that after Rio+20 that he would indicate a high-level panel to look into the details of the after-2015 goals, for a new round of global goals. The Rio+20 launched the basis for the creation of Sustainable Development Goals, which would only be later approved by a special session of the UN General Assembly (SACHS, 2012).

Hence, three years after Rio+20 was held, in 2015, The Summit on Sustainable Development occurred between the 25th and 27th of September at the United Nations in New York in which a new agenda called *Transforming our world: the 2030 agenda for sustainable development* (UNITED NATIONS, 2015a)

was approved, agreed by the 193 Member-States of the United Nations and it included the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nation, n/d). The efforts for building this document started at Rio+20, but they were the result of great and multiple diplomatic efforts and celebrated in a much less symbolic than the great environmental conferences.

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) would substitute the series of goals with a determined deadline at the end of 2015, known as the *Millenium Development Goals* (UNITED NATIONS, 2015). The Millennium Development Goals were: (1) to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; (2) to achieve universal primary education; (3) to promote gender quality and empower women; (4) to reduce child mortality; (5) to improve maternal health; (6) to combat HIV / AIDS, malaria, and other diseases; (7) ensure environmental sustainability; and (8) develop a global partnership for development (UNITED NATIONS, 2015b) (See: Figure 2). The Millennium Summit was held from the 6th to the 8th of September of 2000, at the United Nations in New York, and there were 149 Heads of States and Governments and high officials of over 40 other countries; its main document was the Millenium Declaration (UNITED NATIONS, 2000), a statement of values, principles and goals of the international agenda for the XXI century.

**Figure 2** - Millennium Goals



Source: <http://www.lem.seed.pr.gov.br/modules/galeria/uploads/33/13732853101millen.jpg>

It is notorious that in the *Millenium Development Goals*, sustainability is relegated to goal 7; once the established time term is over and with the subsequent construction of the *17 Sustainable Development Goals*, one more time,

sustainability is highlighted, not only included in the title but also in several of its goals: (1) end the poverty in all its forms, in all its places; (2) end hunger and achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote a *sustainable* agriculture; (3) ensure a healthy life and promote well-being for all ages; (4) ensure inclusive and equitable quality education, and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all; (5) achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls; (6) ensure the availability *sustainable* management of water and sanitation for all; (7) ensure reliable, *sustainable*, modern and at an affordable price access to energy for all; (8) promote *sustainable* and inclusive economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all; (9) build resilient infrastructure, promote *sustainable* industrialization and foster innovation; (10) reduce both within-and between-country inequality; (11) make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and *sustainable* ; (12) ensure *sustainable* consumption and production patterns; (13) take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts; (14) conserve and *sustainably* use the oceans, seas and marine resources for *sustainable* development; (15) protect, recover and promote the *sustainable* use of terrestrial ecosystems, *sustainably* manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss; (16) promote peaceful and inclusive societies, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions in all levels; (17) strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for *sustainable* development (See: Figure 1).

Suppose the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) reveal that sustainable development, such as proposed by the UN, became an oxymoron and it has been much more used as greenwashing, hence, a great illusion (ALVES, 2015a). In that case, we understand its new application as a global agenda as symptomatic. After a resurgence of the usage of such conception of the *Millennium Goals*, once the wager is broadened for 2030, indicating a series of goals anchored on the environmental issue. How to apply them? How will they be funded? How will they be measured?

## **17 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS: APPLICATION METHOD AND FUNDING MEANS**

*Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (UN, 2015) summons all to contribute to the full implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals through what is called the *Global Partnership*. That



is the terminology for intensive global engagement which gathers governments, civil society, the private sector the United Nations System, and other players and it is able to mobilize all the available resources (UN, 2015). The revitalized Global Partnership for sustainable development has the support, according to the document itself *Transforming our World*, of the policies and concrete actions outlined in the Adis Ababa Action Agenda.

Furthermore, if the goals are set to build sustainable development, the evidence that core debate is consolidated on the economic field may be expressively verified by the results of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (3FfD), held in Adis Ababa, Ethiopia, between the 13th and the 16th of July of 2015. Carried out before the Sustainable Development Summit, the Third International Conference on Financing for Development was summoned at the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization on the 20th of December of 2013 (UNITED NATIONS, 2013) and afterwards at the General Assembly on the 30th of June 2014 (UNITED NATIONS, 2014). The Third Conference followed the First International Conference on Financing for Development in 2002 which resulted in the Monterrey Consensus (MONTERREY CONSENSUS, 2002), and the Second International Conference on Financing for Development in 2008 which produced the Doha Declaration (DOHA DECLARATION, 2008).

In the city of Adis Ababa, the secretary-general of the Conference, Wu Hongbo, celebrated the historical agreement in a decisive moment of international cooperation for the necessary investment for a new agenda based on sustainable development (UNITED NATIONS BRAZIL, 2015).

Adis Ababa would form the basis for countries to fund the sustainable development of the New York Summit and of the negotiations about climate promoted by the United Nations in Paris in December of the same year. In the document, it is stated that all the countries must mobilize and use their national resources to seek common sustainable development. In the same manner, private commercial activity is elected as the development engine, after all, investments and innovation found within these companies are the main productivity factors that boost inclusive economic growth and job creation.

The Adis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA, 2015), resulting from the 3FfD, did not agree on the mechanisms to reduce the inequalities of asymmetric relations of financial power, and neither did it point to additional sources to finance the SDGs: the renewal of the commitment that 0,7% of the developed countries GDP be used for the Official Development Assistance, a

1969 agreement and today is complied with by just five countries: Norway, Sweden, Luxembourg, Denmark and the United Kingdom, is something with little expression (NILO, 2015). The Adis Ababa Action Agenda was unable to face the violent force differences in the global economic-financial system and ensure funding for development focused on environmental protection, being almost totally deprived of implementable results. A real and profound abyss between the financing sources and the actions to be implemented (ALVES, 2015b).

Likewise, the twenty-first edition of the Conference of the Parties (COP-21), the main organ of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), held in Paris in 2015, also did not mean great advances in environmental issues. Since the COP-15, countries sought to negotiate the possible responsibilities and volunteer actions that would be effective for the mitigation of caused by climate change (NOVAIS, 2016). This international treaty which was adopted in France in 2015 and signed in New York, in April 2016, proposes that through the NDCs (Nationally Determined Contributions) the signatory countries do not have individual quantitative goals regarding their emissions of greenhouse effect gases (GEGs), and neither does it resent specific obligations for the central countries. The Paris Agreement (UNITED NATIONS, 2015c), with all its limits, still could have been something more promising. However, it suffered a hard blow on July 1st, 2017 when the President of the United States announced that the country would completely abandon the signed pact (HOLDEN, 2019). It was something symbolic for a decade that proved to be environmentally lost. According to the 2015 Millennium Development Goals report (UNITED NATIONS, 2015b), the results achieved were favorable across the eight priorities: global poverty rates were reduced by more than half, with a decrease from approximately 1.9 billion people living in extreme poverty in 1990 to about 836 million people in 2015 (Goal 1); there was an improvement in basic education access indicators, with an increase of about 8% between 2000 and 2015, and a reduction in the lack of access to education, from 100 million children out of school in 2000 to 57 million in 2015 (Goal 2); gender disparity in education decreased in developing countries, and there was an increase in women's political participation in 174 countries over the past 20 years (Goal 3); the child mortality rate was reduced by more than half, from 90 to 43 deaths per 1,000 live births (Goal 4); maternal mortality rates decreased by 45% (Goal 5); there was a reduction in the number of new HIV infections

and an increase in access to treatment from 800,000 people in 2003 to 13.6 million in 2014 (Goal 6); there was also an increase in global internet access from 6% in 2000 to 43% in 2015, along with a 66% increase in development assistance funding, totaling US\$ 135.2 billion (Goal 8).

However, the objective regarding environmental protection (Objective 7) had timid results compared to the emergence of the ecological crisis today. The report states that the results, according to the proposed goals, were: increase in terrestrial and marine areas of environmental protection, especially in Latin America and the Caribbean; significant improvement in access rates to drinking water and basic sanitation; virtual elimination of pollutant substances that increased the hole in the ozone layer, determining a projection that the problem could be fully recovered by the middle of the 21st century.

Although the results regarding the objective of environmental protection could be properly analyzed in the annual reports on the *Millennium Development Goals*, Other reports revealed contradictions in the effectiveness of these results just a few years later. Regarding the climate issue, recognized as the most determining issue of the ecological crisis in recent years, the report from the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), entitled *WMO Statement on the State of the Global Climate in 2019*, pointed out that levels of polluting gases in the atmosphere reached a historic record in 2018 and that, as a consequence of anthropogenic action in the greenhouse effect, the planet has already exceeded its level of warming by 1.1° Celsius (WORLD METEOROLOGICAL ORGANIZATION, 2020).

The past decade ended with the worldwide spread of COVID-19, the largest pandemic in history, which insists on persisting without abating, which, among many lessons, revealed to us that the spread of infectious agents such as the coronavirus is the result of a model of life environmentally violent and inconsequential. There is no longer any doubt that forest devastation is an ecological-sanitary anathema, capable of unveiling problems never before imagined. In times of crisis, let us remember that nature suffers, pillaged as a resource for unbridled accumulation and left without adequate defenses.

## **OBJECTIVES ACHIEVED? PERSPECTIVES FOR THE DECADE 2021-2030**

People: We are determined to end poverty and hunger, in all their forms and dimensions, and to ensure that all human beings can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment.

Planet: We are determined to protect the planet from degradation, including through sustainable consumption and production, sustainably managing its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change, so that it can support the needs of the present and future generations.

Prosperity: We are determined to ensure that all human beings can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives and that economic, social and technological progress occurs in harmony with nature.

Peace: We are determined to foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies which are free from fear and violence. There can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development.

Partnership: We are determined to mobilize the means required to implement this Agenda through a revitalised Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, based on a spirit of strengthened global solidarity, focussed in particular on the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable and with the participation of all countries, all stakeholders and all people

(UN. Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 2015, p. 02).

At the end of 2021, the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), SDSN Europe and the Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP) published the third edition of the Europe Sustainable Development Report. This is an important document that quantifies the degree of adoption of the *Sustainable Development Goals*, which, according to the report itself, for the first time presented setbacks explained especially by the Covid-19 pandemic (VOIL, 2021). The highest scores were from Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Austria, Norway, Germany and Switzerland, in that order (SDSN, 2021), and the expectation is the implementation of a European “Green Deal”, the recovery of the European Union and the development goals (SDG). In the ranking used, Turkey came in last place, with 55.7 points, in penultimate place, Bulgaria, with 57.6. The report highlights that, compared to the rest of the world, Europe is the most egalitarian continent, with few people facing extreme poverty and malnutrition and widespread access to essential services such as healthcare and education (SDSN, 2021).

The same report is also carried out on the African continent. Despite suspicions regarding strictly quantitative and universalizing methodologies, especially when constructed by institutions located in large centers, the report reveals a great discrepancy on the subject. Obviously, Türkiye and Bulgaria would be among the twenty best placed countries if they were located in Africa. But the discrepancy between the last placed – Eritrea, Somalia, Chad, Central African Republic and South Sudan – with the European reality is very

significant: South Sudan achieved only 32.36 points (AFRICAN UNION et. al., 2022, p. 09). The report itself stated that almost 40% of all Africans still live in extreme poverty, just over 50% of the population is connected to an energy source and armed conflicts have increased across almost the entire continent. Along with urbanization, age pyramids with broadened bases, unequal access to resources, increased unemployment, the encouragement presented is Africa's "vast natural capital", capable of guaranteeing long-term inclusion in economic growth (AFRICAN UNION et. al., 2022, p. 09).

As the 2030 deadline is unthinkable from any point of view, the African Union created Agenda 2063 in 2015, in the city of Niamey, Niger, with the eternal objective of economically developing the continent. With the motto "*The Africa we want*", the 14 goals include the dream of "*A prosperous Africa, based on inclusive growth and sustainable development*"; "*an integrated, politically democratic and united continent based on the ideals of Pan-Africanism*"; "*Democracy, Respect for Human Rights, Justice and the Rule of Law*"; "*A peaceful and secure Africa*", among others. Among the outlined promises, it is stated that by 2020 all traces of colonialism should be eliminated and "*all weapons must be silenced*" (AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION, 2015, p. 07).

Since 2015, weapons have been used a lot on the African continent. In Mali, Colonel Assimi Goita overthrew Bah Ndaw, on May 24, 2021. The coup colonel reaffirmed the Armed Forces' "infallible" commitment to defending the country's security, suspending the elections<sup>1</sup>. In Chad, the government is currently exercised by General Mahamat Déby, who became president without elections and appointed fifteen generals to the Transitional Military Council, including some relatives. Mahamat Déby is the son of Marshal Idriss Déby, who ruled Chad for more than 30 years<sup>2</sup>. In Guinea, President Alpha Condé was deposed and arrested by Colonel Mamady Doumbouya, who dissolved the Constitution and institutions after the capital, Conakry, was dominated by the military, with the promise of creating a "Government of National Unity", always an alibi to criminalize those who think differently (TIASSOU, 2021).

In Sudan, the coup involved the arrest of Abdalla Hamdok, then prime minister, and the invasion of the main broadcaster, Sudan TV, under the orders of General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan. Sudan was already a dictatorship in

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1 "We came to defend the Republic," Goita said at the time, something that is generally said by those who want to destroy it. CASSIANO, 25/05/2021 [In Portuguese].

2 To find out more about this Armed Services heavy hereditary, consult: AFP, 2022.

which Marshal Omar al-Bashir was President from 1989 to 2019. Al-Bashir became the first sitting president to be indicted at the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity, such as mass murders, rapes and looting against civilians in Darfur<sup>3</sup>. In Burkina Faso, on January 23, 2022, Lieutenant Colonel Paul Damiba led the coup d'état alongside the Army, removing Roch Kaboré from power and keeping him captive, with the usual excuses: patriotism, combating internal enemies and accepting "fair elections", that is, those whose results please the dominant forces<sup>4</sup>. Something not very different occurred in 2023 in Gabon, where President Ali Bongo was arrested after being deposed by the Army, following the election results. It is worth noting that Bongo was elected for the first time in 2009, shortly after the death of his father, Omar Bongo Ondimba, who governed the country for 41 years. The current president is General Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguema, known for being a multimillionaire, involved in an embezzlement case and having links with the drug circles of the South American-Ivorian cartels.

Mali, Chad, Guinea, Sudan, Burkina Faso and Gabon are countries with serious social problems, disregard for democracy and public affairs, commanded with profound ineptitude based on a mix of military, political, family and religious interests, which use authoritarian devices and belligerent against most of their own inhabitants. It is not just a question of comparing countries that intend to electrify their vehicle fleet in the coming years<sup>5</sup> with others where there is no basic sanitation structure for the majority of their population. Thinking of the 17 SDGs as a single integrated structure for economic, social and environmental development to be adopted by all UN Member States is either too utopian or deeply cynical given the difficult political, economic, environmental and social scenarios in the world's peripheries. For peripheral nations, the objectives remain, although modest, very distant.

Furthermore, it is a set of proposals that are unrealizable in the world's peripheries, especially within 15 years. An unenforceable international agenda does not mean placing environmental justice on the horizon and moving

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3 Consult: President of Sudan is deposed, and military council will take command of the country. G1, 11/04/2019 [In Portuguese].

4 Consult: After coup d'état, Lieutenant Colonel Damiba is declared president of Burkina Faso. R7, 10/02/2022 [In Portuguese].

5 The reference is to Germany, whose government promises the nation will become carbon neutral by 2045. To achieve this, the goal is to have 15 million electric vehicles (or at least hybrids) by 2030. Consult: GLOBALDATA, 2022.

towards it by taking important steps, as in the words spoken by Argentine filmmaker Fernando Birri to Eduardo Galeano and cited in the book *“Las palabras andantes”* (GALEANO, 1993), But the opposite: it reveals the ineptitude, hypocrisy, and misalignment of global measures, actions, and interests on the issue.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In 2022, to celebrate the jubilee of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm, the United Nations organized the meeting *“Stockholm+50: A Healthy Planet for the Prosperity of All – Our Responsibility, Our Opportunity,”* held on June 2-3, aiming to call on the countries of the world to fulfill the Sustainable Development Goals.

However, just two days after the meeting in *search of prosperity for all in a healthy world*, precisely on June 5, 2022 – “environment day” – the Brazilian indigenist Bruno Pereira, aged 41, a licensed FUNAI “National Indian Foundation” (*Fundação Nacional dos Povos Indígenas*) official, was brutally murdered in Brazil., and the English journalist Dom Phillips, aged 57, who collaborated with several newspapers abroad, such as The New York Times, The Guardian and The Washington Post. Both were environmentalists, defenders of indigenous communities and worked towards environmental sustainability, and were killed in the Vale do Javari Indigenous Land, located in the western part of the state of Amazonas.<sup>6</sup>

In the government of Jair Bolsonaro (2019-2022) – whose election has roots in the Legal-Parliamentary Coup and deposition of Dilma Rousseff, in 2016, and follows the phenomenon that began with the election of Donald Trump, in the United States), in 2016 –, belligerent anti-ecology and the rape of nature have become the rules in Brazil. The deposition of Dilma Rousseff and the election of Jair Bolsonaro, and the rise to power of Donald Trump in the United States, not only occurred in the context of the promulgation of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, but also reveal the limits of the global agenda in disagreement with political interests. The following summary table recovers the facts discussed in this analysis and retraces the tragic end of the century for the contemporary environmental issue.

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<sup>6</sup> Consult: Bruno Pereira and Dom Phillips’ activities were legal, contrary to what the post says. Folha de São Paulo, 22.jun.2022. And also: DOWNIE, BARRETTO, PHILLIPS, 2022 [In Portuguese].

**Summary table** – Environmental Geopolitics and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals

Historical / (geo)political fact	Month/ year
Publication of “Limits to Growth”	1971-1972 <sup>7</sup>
United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (Stockholm, Sweden)	June 1972
Publication of “Our Common Future”	1987
United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil)	June 1992
Millennium Summit (New York, USA)	September 2000
First International Conference on Finance and Development (Monterrey, Mexico)	March 2002
World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg, South Africa)	August-September 2002
Second International Conference on Finance and Development (Doha, Qatar)	November-December 2008
Financial Crisis (from Subprime, USA)	2007-2008
United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development – Rio + 20 (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil)	June 2012
Third International Conference on Finance and Development Addis Ababa, Ethiopia	July 2015
Sustainable Development Summit and creation of the 17 SDGs – Agenda 2030 (New York, USA)	September 2015
United Nations Conference on Climate Change – COP 21 (Paris, France)	November-December 2015
Legal-Parliamentary Coup in Brazil and deposition of Dilma Rousseff (Brazil)	August 2016
Election of Donald Trump (United States)	November 8, 2016
Election of Jair Bolsonaro (Brazil)	October 28, 2018
World Health Organization declares covid-19 pandemic	March 11, 2020

Organization: Leandro Dias de Oliveira, 2024.

<sup>7</sup> The study’s findings were initially presented at international meetings in Moscow and Rio de Janeiro in the summer of 1971.



As Fabrina Furtado (2020, pp. 61-62) states, explicitly anti-environmentalist and discriminatory narratives against indigenous, traditional and rural populations have led to an increase in deforestation, fires and violence in the countryside in Brazil. Even in times of pandemic, where hundreds of thousands of Brazilians could not resist the contamination of Covid-19, the government, mining and agribusiness companies did not stop, maintaining the circulation of goods and money. As the author reinforces, the advance of the agricultural and mining frontier and land concentration – with related conflicts, land grabbing, invasion of indigenous spaces and environmental crimes of all kinds – led to the deaths of workers, indigenous people and other vulnerable populations.

It does not surprise us that both the most regressive sectors of our economy, which combine the obliteration of nature's riches with violent forms of work, territorial control and political action, and the actions of Jair Bolsonaro, elected through an authoritarian project, prejudiced and persecutory of any ideological difference, are anti-ecological. Resistance to environmentalist ideas, even when fully suited to the current economic model such as sustainable development, is a hallmark of the monoculture agricultural production, mineral extraction, weapons production and other businesses whose model is ecologically exploitative. What still causes astonishment is the fact that the destruction of natural resources, even when explicitly carried out and documented – as in the case of the recent, large-scale Amazonian fires – no longer receives the attention and scathing criticism from a large part of civil society.

How did a consensus agenda like defending the environment become secondary for such a large number of people? How did the ineptitude, stupidity and aggressiveness towards the environment of prominent political figures not become a reason for general rejection? Why did the environment stop being fashionable for so many millions of voters, who applauded real indigenous and quilombola communities<sup>8</sup> genocides for the invasion and use of their lands by miners and loggers, and relativize big fires and pollution in its various forms? In addition to a certain conservative turn in a country that never abandoned its slave-owning instincts (SOUZA, 2017), the rise of Bolsonaroism also revealed a deep disbelief in environmental actions, international conferences, political interests in the cause, the viability of vague and elastic and the real possibility of change in the current scenario of environmental destruction.

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8 Translator note: Descendants of Afro-Brazilian slaves who escaped from plantations and created communities in different regions of Brazil.

Even with the end of the nightmare experienced by Brazil between 2019 and 2022, it was clear that the environmental issue requires concrete, feasible and sincere actions. An agenda whose deadline is 2030 and which brings unenforceable promises to most countries in the world is not only a great disservice to the cause, but the faithful portrayal of policies that are constructed oblivious to peripheral realities. Whether on the African continent or in Brazil, there is no point in just filling projects, t-shirts and bags with images of good intentions, but it is urgent to dialogue with the populations whose cries for environmental justice remain inaudible or disregarded. ●

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