Towards an Indicative List of FDI Sustainability Characteristics

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BIT bilateral investment treaty
CSR corporate social responsibility
ESG environmental, social and governance
FAO Food and Agriculture Organization
FDI foreign direct investment
GRI Global Reporting Initiative
ICC International Chamber of Commerce
ICMM International Council on Mining and Metals
IIA international investment agreement
ILO International Labour Organization
IPA investment promotion agency
MDG Millennium Development Goal
MNE multinational enterprise
MOFCOM Ministry of Commerce of the People’s Republic of China
NCP National Contact Point
NDRC National Development and Reform Commission of the People’s Republic of China
NGO non-governmental organisation
OECD Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OHCHR Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
SADC Southern African Development Community
SDG Sustainable Development Goal
UK United Kingdom
UN United Nations
UNCTAD United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
US United States
USAID US Agency for International Development
WAIPA World Association of Investment Promotion Agencies
WBCSD World Business Council for Sustainable Development

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Table 1: The dimensions of sustainable FDI and their sustainability characteristics
Meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and climate change commitments requires a tremendous amount of investment. Foreign direct investment (FDI) can make an important contribution to meeting these investment needs. However, the effectiveness of FDI flows in this regard does not only depend on their sheer quantity, but also on their capacity to drive sustainable development.

The challenge taken on in this paper is to identify and consolidate an indicative list of “sustainability characteristics” of FDI. Such an indicative list would be of use to various stakeholders, including negotiators of international investment agreements; international investors seeking to maximise the benefit of their investments; host country governments seeking to attract sustainable FDI; home country governments supporting their firms to invest abroad; arbitrators in international investment disputes; intergovernmental organisations seeking to develop their own sustainable FDI guidelines; and private institutional investors and industry associations seeking to provide guidance regarding sustainable FDI to their clients.

Sources and Identification of Sustainability Characteristics

What qualities can make an investment “sustainable”? An approximation of a definition is “commercially viable investment that makes a maximum contribution to the economic, social and environmental development of host countries and takes place in the framework of fair governance mechanisms.” This definition goes beyond “do no harm” and calls for efforts on the part of foreign affiliates to make an active contribution to sustainable development. In other words: sustainable FDI for sustainable development.

To identify possible sustainability characteristics, 150 instruments, ranging from international investment agreements (IIAs) to non-binding intergovernmental instruments and voluntary global business codes, were examined to determine what kinds of contributions stakeholders expect international investors to make to the sustainable development of host countries, or international investors (or associations of enterprises) themselves envisage as their contribution to the sustainable development of their host countries.

These instruments were analysed in terms of their provisions concerning the four dimensions (economic, social, environmental and governance) identified in the definition of “sustainable FDI”. For each of these four dimensions, a number of sustainability characteristics were identified (some representing an aggregation of various more specific characteristics).

The dimensions of sustainable FDI and their sustainability characteristics

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Growing Expansion and Coherence of Sustainable Investment Characteristics

Among these sources where sustainable development issues in relation to investment are raised, there is a growing expansion and coherence of sustainable investment characteristics. It emerges that there are a number of sustainability characteristics that have 50 percent or more coverage in at least four out of the eight categories of stakeholders/instruments. In the table, these “common FDI sustainability characteristics” are marked in bold.

Beyond this group of common FDI sustainability characteristics, there are also a number of characteristics that are labelled here “emerging common FDI sustainability characteristics.” These are characteristics that are present in at least one-third of the instruments examined in at least three of the eight categories of stakeholders/instruments. These “emerging common FDI sustainability characteristics” are italicised in the table.

Movement Beyond Environment to Social and Economic Development

What is noticeable is that none of the FDI sustainability characteristics in the economic sustainability dimension make it into the group of common sustainability characteristics, though they figure more prominently among the emerging common FDI sustainability characteristics. This may reflect the fact that the sustainable development discussion was previously particularly driven by developed countries and their civil societies, which have a particular interest in environmental sustainability and governance, and, in the case of social sustainability, by trade unions.

On the other hand, a great number of IIAs, most of which involve developing countries, make general references to the furtherance of economic development.

The list of sustainability characteristics suggests that, de facto, an international consensus exists across a range of stakeholder groups as to what sustainable FDI is, reflected in these common and emerging common sustainability characteristics of FDI. By providing broad-based precedents—and a common language—across stakeholder groups, the most widely accepted sustainability characteristics, in particular, provide not only guidance as to what is acceptable, but they also confer a certain amount of legitimacy to those stakeholders that use and promote them, especially if they are contained in widely accepted international instruments endorsed by governments.

Applying Sustainability Characteristics

In what contexts and through what mechanisms can one envisage the FDI sustainability characteristics being used and applied? Again, the focus is on indicative examples: there is, in some senses, no limit as to the types of specific mechanisms or contexts that can be suggested or developed in this regard. Equally, it will be important in many instances for mechanisms to be developed for very case-specific circumstances.

It is important to consider critical temporal issues or phases for the application of the characteristics (and especially the common and the emerging common FDI sustainability characteristics), generally defined here as (1) before specific investments are made; (2) decision-making at the stage of entering a host country; (3) decision-making while investments are operating; and (4) reviews of those decisions or operations after they have been made and implemented (whether investments continue to operate or not).

FDI sustainability characteristics can be relevant in designing international FDI policies long before governments consider any particular investments, for example in elaborating sustainable investment frameworks and facilitation programmes, when legislating nationally on FDI to include national admission criteria to particular proposals that may require approval, in the development of local sustainable development benefit agreements where these are needed to enhance an investment, or in adjudicating government regulations impacting FDI. FDI sustainability characteristics ought, therefore, to be understood as relevant to the entire life-cycle of a given investment and its relationship with a host country government and local communities.

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* For example, at least half of the instruments categorised as home country, intergovernmental organisation standards, private institutional investors, and company codes mention the characteristic “low carbon footprint.” The eight categories are: international investment agreements; voluntary/intergovernmental instruments; host country; home country; intergovernmental organisation standards; voluntary global business codes and industry codes; private international investors; company codes.
THE RATIONALE

The amount of investment needed to meet the global challenges of the future is tremendous: meeting the Sustainable Development Goals and climate change commitments alone requires trillions of investment dollars. Foreign direct investment can make an important contribution to meeting these investment needs. But to make a real difference, FDI flows would have to increase significantly. In 2016, they were US$1.8 trillion (UNCTAD 2017) — but there is no reason why they could not be double or triple that amount.¹

However, the issue is not only more FDI, but the right kind of FDI — what is referred to as “sustainable FDI” in this paper.

This issue concerns the quality of FDI. On balance, most FDI can contribute to both growth and sustainable development, at least if the conditions surrounding an investment encourage such a result. But a number of countries distinguish between different types of inward FDI on the basis of various considerations. For example, some governments submit some types of inward FDI — typically mergers and acquisitions,² but also greenfield project³ (sometimes over certain size thresholds) — to various tests, such as net benefit tests or national security tests. The former tests are used, for example, by Australia and Canada.⁴ The latter, for example, are used by the United States. Many governments limit, or entirely restrict, inward FDI in certain services, manufacturing industries, natural resources, and infrastructure. Many developed and developing countries have adopted this approach for a variety of reasons, including to encourage the development of domestic firms in the industries concerned, for strategic security reasons, or to protect certain cultural industries, public services or small and medium-sized firms.

Almost all governments apply criteria to proposed large-scale or ecologically sensitive investments in the form of environmental and social impact assessments, now including also human rights assessments. And maximising the positive economic and social benefits to a community is now a standard metric in many natural resources sectors, epitomised, for example, by the notion of “shared value” in the mining sector.⁵

Finally, many governments consider that some types of investment, especially when supported by national and international policies, can make a particular contribution to the development objectives of their economies. This is reflected, for instance, in the fact that more and more investment promotion agencies (IPAs) in developed and developing countries alike focus their efforts on attracting certain types of projects and FDI in certain industries that they consider as contributing most to their own development priorities. By way of examples of certain types of projects, the United Kingdom determines the value of an FDI project — and hence its eligibility for government support — by examining quantitative and qualitative indicators. Quantitative indicators (e.g., total value of an investment, number of new jobs created) relate mostly to larger projects that are expected to deliver higher economic and social benefits and capture other multiplier benefits. The government also reviews qualitative indicators, namely the salary level of new jobs created, research-and-development focus, whether or not an investment is a global or regional headquarters, the quality of the investor, and export potential.⁶ The Republic of Korea’s IPA mentions the enhancement of domestic economic competitiveness as a very desirable attribute.⁷ By way of examples for an industry approach, Nigeria provides incentives for, inter alia, telecommunications, electricity and transport industries.⁸ The Chilean IPA’s targets include the food, infrastructure and tourism industries.⁹ Hungary’s IPA provides targeted services for, among others, the automotive and electronics industries and shared service centres.¹⁰ Vietnam, meanwhile, provides

¹ It needs to be recognised that “FDI” is an imperfect measure of the tangible and intangible assets associated with the activities of multinational enterprises, as it does not capture, among other things, various non-equity forms. To put it differently, ownership (as reflected in FDI data) is only one way through which the headquarters of firms can influence or determine the actions of their affiliates.
² In the United States, the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS) screens investments that would result in foreign control of a US business for national security concerns. See US Department of the Treasury 2012.
⁴ The Investment Canada Act identifies the following factors to be considered in its net-benefit test:
  a) the effect of the investment on the level and nature of economic activity in Canada, including . . . the effect on employment, on resource processing, on the utilization of parts, components and services produced in Canada and on exports from Canada;
  b) the degree and significance of participation by Canadians . . . ;
  c) the effect of the investment on productivity, industrial efficiency, technological development, product innovation and product variety in Canada;
  d) the effect of the investment on competition within any industry or industries in Canada;
  e) the compatibility of the investment with national industrial, economic and cultural policies . . . ;
  f) the contribution of the investment to Canada’s ability to compete in world markets.
⁵ See, generally, Porter and Kramer 2011; see also Shared Value Initiative, at http://sharedvalue.org/.
⁶ Interview with a staff member of the Department for International Trade about the DIT Investment Playbook, an internal non-published document setting out the operating principles for delivering FDI into the United Kingdom.
⁹ Invest Chile, at https://investchile.gob.cl/keys-industries/
¹⁰ Hungarian Investment Promotion Agency, at https://hipa.hu/main
incentives for investments in new technologies, agriculture and forestry, and environmentally friendly technology.  

Countries that pursue a targeted investment approach (and regardless of whether or not they, for example, review incoming mergers and acquisitions) may or may not hold that there is “desirable” FDI and “non-desirable” FDI within the sectors that are open to FDI. At a minimum, however, they consider that investment with certain characteristics is particularly desirable and, therefore, might benefit from various policy measures to encourage it. In this sense, the approach is not different from the approach taken by some countries towards encouraging, for example, renewable energies or providing value-added tax exemptions in the mining sector to encourage socially desirable but privately insufficiently profitable investment.

USES OF SUSTAINABILITY CHARACTERISTICS

What, then, is “sustainable FDI” (or, for that matter, sustainable investment in general, be it foreign or domestic)? An approximation of a definition is “commercially viable investment that makes a maximum contribution to the economic, social and environmental development of host countries and takes place in the framework of fair governance mechanisms.” This is a definition that goes beyond “do no harm” and calls for efforts on the part of foreign affiliates to make an active contribution to sustainable development. In other words: sustainable FDI for sustainable development.

The challenge taken on in this paper is to identify and consolidate in an indicative list certain “sustainability characteristics” of FDI. Such an indicative list would be of use to various stakeholders:

- Arbitrators in international investment disputes wanting to take the development impact of investment projects into account.
- Intergovernmental organisations seeking to develop their own guidelines to further the sustainable development impact of FDI.
- Global business associations seeking to provide guidance to their members regarding sustainable FDI for sustainable development.
- Private institutional investors (which often control substantial pools of funds) seeking to provide guidance to their clients regarding sustainable FDI for sustainable development.
- Industry associations seeking to do the same.
- International investors seeking to maximise the benefit of their investments not only for themselves, but also for the sustainable development of their host countries.
- Civil society organisations or communities seeking to monitor particular FDI projects or responsible business conduct in more general terms.

Naturally, such an indicative list would also be of use to governments seeking to encourage sustainable domestic investment.

The role of host country governments and their IPAs is particularly important in the framework of an overall development strategy, as IPAs are, in many countries, the main gatekeepers of incoming investment. This role, however, requires a substantial reorientation in the direction of paying attention to sustainability characteristics of the investment they seek to attract. IPAs also have a role to play, as part of their after-investment services, in encouraging existing foreign affiliates to strengthen the sustainability characteristics of investment in new technologies, agriculture and forestry, and environmentally friendly technology.

Countries that pursue a targeted investment approach (and regardless of whether or not they, for example, review incoming mergers and acquisitions) may or may not hold that there is “desirable” FDI and “non-desirable” FDI within the sectors that are open to FDI. At a minimum, however, they consider that investment with certain characteristics is particularly desirable and, therefore, might benefit from various policy measures to encourage it. In this sense, the approach is not different from the approach taken by some countries towards encouraging, for example, renewable energies or providing value-added tax exemptions in the mining sector to encourage socially desirable but privately insufficiently profitable investment.

As in the case of the International Labour Organization’s Tripartite Declaration of Principles Concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy, the intention here is not to introduce a distinction between multinational and domestic enterprises: “5. These principles do not aim at introducing or maintaining inequalities of treatment between multinational and national enterprises. They reflect good practice for all. Multinational and national enterprises, wherever the principles of the MNE Declaration are relevant to both, should be subject to the same expectations in respect of their conduct in general and their social practices in particular.” See ILO 2017, 3.

For a discussion of the support given by countries to their outward investors (including cases in which such support is linked to certain conditions), see Sauvant et al. 2014, ch. 1.

See in this context the practical proposals advanced by Loewendahl, Kollinsky and van den Berghe 2017.
their investments in the course of their operations, potentially turning them into transformative investments (especially in the natural resources sector).

Currently, the single most important evaluation criterion for most IPAs is the amount of investment that is attracted. In this respect, the situation has probably not changed much from five years ago, when a survey was undertaken to determine to what extent IPAs pay attention to sustainable FDI (see Annex I). At that time, the economic dimension (followed by the environmental dimension) of sustainable FDI, and especially employment creation, received most attention compared to the social and governance dimensions. However, the economic development and environmental sustainability dimensions of sustainable FDI had risen in prominence compared with the five years prior to the survey, and they were expected to acquire a bigger role in investment promotion strategies. This is perhaps not surprising as IPAs, especially if they target investors, should keep economic development in mind (perhaps further sensitised by the international community’s adoption of the Millennium Development Goals), even if the quantity of FDI they attract might be the overall performance criterion. An indicative list of FDI sustainability characteristics would further help IPAs in the future evolution of their efforts to attract FDI and benefit from it as much as possible. Embracing the sustainability characteristics would also help IPAs with their image within some host countries, where, at times, they are considered as representing the interests of investors more than those of host countries.

At a time when the SDGs have become the lodestar for policymaking, it is important for national and international efforts in the investment area to contribute fully to the achievement of these goals as well. An indicative list of sustainability characteristics of FDI that are SDG-supportive provides guidance to such efforts, helping to ensure that investment law and policy play an important role in this regard.

### SOURCES OF SUSTAINABILITY CHARACTERISTICS

What could be the sources to identify sustainability characteristics, and hence the methodology that can be used to establish an indicative list? In the end, it is the stakeholders that need to identify those characteristics most relevant or applicable to any given project, in particular governments (including their IPAs), but also various other stakeholders. In doing so, they can draw on a great number of instruments that already reflect various desirable FDI characteristics. These characteristics need to be seen through the lens of the sustainable FDI definition provided earlier and, most importantly, they need to respond to the breadth of the 17 SDGs themselves and their 169 targets and be supportive of them. Foreign direct investment that is characterised by appropriate sustainability characteristics facilitates the attainment of the SDGs. These instruments include:

- International investment agreements (IIAs) that lay out the contributions the treaty partners involved expect international investors to make to host countries and/or to mitigate or avoid possible negative impacts of their investments. For example, the bilateral investment treaty (BIT) between Brazil and Malawi, the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement between Canada and the European Union, the Lomé Convention between the members of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group and the European Union, the Southern African Development Community Model BIT, and the Draft Pan-African Investment Code mention a number of contributions that could be considered as becoming part of an indicative list of sustainability characteristics. These include, by way of examples, the strengthening of local capacities through close cooperation with the local community and encouraging the development of local human capital; the protection

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1. But see the concept note by the World Association of Investment Promotion Agencies, which observes: “more recently, WAIPA has begun to coordinate with their long list of IPA members and have encouraged them to integrate sustainable development goals (SDGs) in their overall FDI framework” (WAIPA 2017, 1).

2. One could also consider whether there are criteria on the basis of which one might want to exclude specific projects as deserving a sustainability characterisation. Examples could include projects that violate fundamental labour standards as established by the International Labour Organization or those that cause substantial, irreversible environmental damage or loss (e.g., biodiversity). Environmental and social impact assessment processes commonly set a combination of criteria and related thresholds for such instances. Such sustainability baselines may vary depending on the type of investment as well. For a discussion of such criteria, see Kline 2012. See also Kline 2017, based on Klein 2012.

3. See UN Statistics Division 2017, SDG goals 7 (7.b.1), 10 (10.b.1) and 17 (7.b.1).

4. For the purpose of this analysis, no distinction has been made as to whether a characteristic is contained in the preamble of a treaty or the text itself. However, a distinction is being made between general recognition of a characteristic, for example the need to protect the environment, and more specific expressions of a characteristic, for example the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It has been argued that almost all international investment agreements—whether or not they explicitly reference sustainable development—have sustainable development as a long-term purpose. See Ortarino 2017.

of labour rights, including the prohibition of forced and child labour; respect for human rights; and technology transfer. Further, the Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement between Morocco and Nigeria mandates environment and social impact assessment screening and application of precautionary principles as ways to mitigate negative impacts.24

- Non-binding intergovernmental instruments that lay out the contributions foreign investors can make to host countries and/or to mitigate or avoid possible negative impacts of their investments. For example, the United Nations (UN) Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (endorsed by the UN Human Rights Council), the ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles Concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy (negotiated and adopted by governments of home and host countries of multinational enterprises (MNEs) as well as global representative bodies of employers and workers), the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (developed primarily by MNE home country governments to guide the behaviour of their companies in host countries), and the Investment Policy Framework for Sustainable Development, developed by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) Secretariat, mention a number of contributions that could be considered as becoming part of an indicative list of sustainability characteristics. These include, by way of examples, avoidance of human rights infringements (UN Human Rights 2011, para. 11); assurance of worker safety (ILO 2017, para. 44); diffusion of technology (OECD 2011, ch. IX(2)); and building local capacity (UNCTAD 2015, 41). In addition to recommending a risk-based due diligence for MNEs (OECD 2011, ch. II(10)), the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises also provide that MNEs refrain from seeking or accepting exemptions not otherwise contemplated in the regulatory framework with regard to such an issue as human rights (OECD 2011, ch. II(5)), as a mechanism to reduce possible adverse impacts.

- Criteria used by host countries that seek to attract particularly desirable FDI and/or to mitigate or avoid possible negative impacts of any investments. A few examples of types of projects and industries that some host countries consider particularly desirable were provided earlier, in the context of the quality-of-investment discussion. Net benefit tests or possible negative impacts of any investment — that must be mitigated or avoided — include by way of examples, avoiding prejudice and discrimination and respecting human rights (OPIC 2017, 2–3); promoting good health and nutrition (UK Department of International Development 2017, 13); and respecting working conditions and the rights of workers (Proparco 2017). The (China) Guidelines for Environmental Protection in Foreign Investment and Cooperation encourage MNEs to take into account the impacts of their activities on the environment and to take measures to mitigate possible adverse impacts (Ministry of Commerce 2013, Article 9).

- Standards of intergovernmental organisations that lay out the criteria — including to mitigate or to avoid possible negative impacts of any investment — that must be
met before such an organisation can provide support for a particular project. For example, the performance standards of the International Financial Corporation and the Safeguard Policy Statement of the Asian Development Bank mention, among other things, the following criteria that could be considered as becoming part of an indicative list of sustainability characteristics: protection of community health and safety (IFC 2012, Performance Standard 4); and the need for environmental impact assessments and managing/minimising involuntary resettlements as some specific safeguard requirements that must be satisfied during project preparation and implementation (Asian Development Bank 2009, Appendices 1 and 2). The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank’s Environmental and Social Framework goes further to include labour, gender equality, community engagement, and specific text on climate change (AIIB 2016).

- Voluntary global business codes of international business organisations that lay out the contributions foreign investors can make to host countries and/or to mitigate or avoid possible negative impacts of their investments. For example, the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) Guidelines for International Investment and the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights mention a number of contributions that could be considered as becoming part of an indicative list of sustainability characteristics. These include, by way of examples, to educate, train, and motivate employees to conduct their activities in an environmentally responsible manner (ICC 2016, VII(1)(g)); and respect for human rights in security arrangements for projects (Voluntary Principles 2000).

- Voluntary standards of private institutional investors that lay out the contributions clients of such institutions can make to host countries and/or to mitigate or avoid possible negative impacts of their investments. For example, Boston Common Asset Management, ACTIAM and Domini mention the promotion of economic development programmes that benefit women, minorities or economically disadvantaged groups (Boston Common Asset Management 2016, 3); pollution controls and prevention of biodiversity loss (ACTIAM 2017, 3.4); and commitment to workplace safety (Domini 2016, 25).

- Voluntary industry codes that lay out the contributions that their members seek to make to host countries and/or to mitigate or avoid possible negative impacts of any investments. For example, the International Council on Mining and Metals (ICMM) Ten Principles for sustainable mining, the Standard for Sustainable and Resilient Infrastructure, the Equator Principles, and the Principles for Responsible Investment supported by the UN mention the following contributions that could be considered as becoming part of an indicative list of sustainability characteristics: minimising involuntary resettlement and compensating fairly (ICCM 2015, Principle 3); environmental, social and governance reporting (Equator Principles 2013, 5–6; PRI 2017); lowering of greenhouse gas emissions (Global Infrastructure Basel 2016, para 3.1.1), and expectations relating to environmental and social governance issues for service providers (PRI 2017, Principle 4).

- Voluntary company codes that lay out the contributions that the firms involved seek to make to host countries and/or to mitigate or avoid possible negative impacts of their investments. For example, the codes of Apple (US), BP (UK), Tata Motors (India), China National Petroleum Corporation (China), and Petrobras (Brazil) mention a number of contributions that could be considered as becoming part of an indicative list of sustainability characteristics. These include, by way of examples, supply chain control and standards (Apple Inc. 2017); responsible tax practices and avoidance of artificial tax arrangements (BP plc 2016); the economic development of communities of host countries (Tata Motors Ltd 2015, Core Principle 3); development of local industrial development and preferential purchase and use of local products and services (CNPC 2017); and protection of labour rights (Petrobras 2017).

- Voluntary models and codes of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that lay out the contributions foreign investors can make to host countries and/or to mitigate or avoid possible negative impacts of their investments. For example, the International Institute for Sustainable Development’s Model International Agreement on Investment for Sustainable Development and Amnesty International’s Human Rights Principles for Companies mention, by way of examples, the following contributions that could be considered as becoming part of an indicative list of sustainability characteristics: contribution to the development objectives of host countries (IISD 2005, Article 11(c)) and promoting and upholding human rights standards (Amnesty International 1998, 4).

This paper seeks to identify key sustainability characteristics as mentioned in the types of instruments that have been listed. At the same time, one needs to recognise that it is important to continue to develop, especially through applied research, evidence-based insights into the extent to which FDI contributes to the wider sustainable development objectives of host countries, and the policies that can maximise the positive effects of FDI and minimise any negative ones. Governments, in particular, are interested in a deeper understanding of such issues as the role of FDI in advancing...
historically, the global development policy manifested itself in the UN programmes adopted for the Development Decades. Parallel to that, the discussion of environmental policies.
characteristics do not reflect watertight divisions. Indeed, many overlap and many are mutually interdependent. Nonetheless, they are useful for present purposes.

Human rights issues form a more unique challenge for categorisation purposes, given a broad overlap in many instances between human rights and social, economic and environmental development. Labour rights are human rights, as is non-discrimination, the right to fair wages, indigenous people’s rights, gender equality rights, and various rights related to resettlement and cultural heritage, the right to a clean environment, to economic development, and so on. In addition, human rights due diligence mechanisms have to cover many issues outside the human rights listed here. At the same time, not all of the sustainability characteristics fall within a human rights framework.

Those who approach responsible investment issues starting from a human rights perspective generally rely on a different type of categorisation in their analyses, often-time more legally based than based on a sustainable development analysis. But these approaches are not in any type of competition. Indeed, it is impossible to achieve sustainable development without advancing respect for human rights, or to advance respect for human rights without promoting the achievement of sustainable development. Thus, and bearing in mind that the categories used here are not meant to suggest water-tight divisions, these analyses are complementary and hopefully mutually supportive.

The quantitative analysis of the examination of the various instruments is summarised in Figure 1, "Matrix of sustainability characteristics of FDI," that maps the sustainability characteristics against groupings of instruments for each of the dimensions of the sustainable FDI definition presented in this paper.33

As an inspection of Figure 1(a–d) reveals, each of the four dimensions of sustainable FDI are strongly present in the great majority of the instruments that were examined, either by way of a general or specific reference. More specifically, at least two-thirds of the instruments of seven of the eight stakeholder groups mention economic and environmental sustainability, and at least two-thirds of the instruments of all stakeholder groups mention the social and governance dimensions. This shows a high level of awareness and inclusiveness of the various dimensions of sustainable FDI.

Moving from the level of the four dimensions of sustainable FDI to the more specific level of individual sustainability characteristics, Figure 1 reveals that every one of the sustainability characteristics listed in that figure is mentioned by at least one stakeholder group and, therefore, could be part of an indicative list of FDI sustainability characteristics. This may be helpful as, in the end, it is for stakeholders to decide which characteristics are most important for them to advance sustainable development in the context of specific projects.

Moreover, as Figure 2 suggests, it appears that additional characteristics have emerged and/or have become more frequent over time. As indicated earlier, this broadly tracks the evolution of global policies on development and the environment. This is particularly obvious for the environmental and social dimensions of sustainable FDI. Perhaps a surprising result is the attention given to employment, local linkages and technology transfer in instruments published prior to 2000.

In delineating the groupings for the quantitative analysis reflected in the subsequent tables, the two instruments prepared by NGOs were not included. The reasons are twofold: for one, there are only two broadly based NGO instruments in our sample; adding in more specific instruments would be a very broad exercise. Second, non-business NGOs are generally strongly supportive of the SDGs and, if anything, urge that foreign investors make a maximum contribution to the advancement of the SDGs (although they may focus on the subject matters of specific interest to them). Casting a broad net, therefore, would have risked distorting the findings from other instruments. The results reported here demonstrate empirically the growing extent to which all actors engaged in this area are adopting instruments that increasingly reflect what might previously have been seen to be simply NGO positions.

Furthermore, it should be noted that, in undertaking the analysis of the instruments, it might well be that some sustainability characteristics were overlooked in some of these instruments. If this occurred, it would make the results more robust.

33
TABLE 1: The dimensions of sustainable FDI and their sustainability characteristics

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<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Economic dimension</th>
<th>Governance dimension</th>
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<td>Employment</td>
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<td>Local management</td>
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<td>Equitable distribution of wealth</td>
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<td>Risk management systems</td>
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<td>Resource management</td>
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<td>Environmental management systems</td>
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<td>Pollution controls</td>
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<td>Environmental impact assessment/social impact assessment</td>
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<td>Human rights due diligence</td>
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<td>Waste reduction</td>
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<td>Corporate governance</td>
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<td>Biodiversity protection</td>
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<td>Resettlement</td>
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<td>Cultural heritage protection/diversity</td>
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</table>

- Bolded characteristics are common characteristics and italicised characteristics are emerging common characteristics, as defined in the text.
- Employment: Refers to all aspects of the health of communities and commitments on the behalf of MNEs to transfer technology to the host country, domestic partners in the host country, etc.
- Local linkages: Includes issues related to the minimisation of resettlement, this characteristic also includes other important elements about how to do so, establishing compensation levels, whose responsibility it is, etc.
- Technology transfer: Includes provisions that require MNEs to transfer technology to the host country.
- Infrastructure: Includes among others, skills development of workers so as to allow them to access better work opportunities.
- Community development: Includes among other things, the use of renewable energy in products and services or promotion of use of renewable energy in its activities.
- Equitable distribution of wealth: Includes issues relating to women's access to utilities, etc.
- Tax accountability: Includes among others, freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining, the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour, and the effective abolition of child labour.
- Promote research & development (R&D): Includes, among others, job creation in the host country.
- Resource management: Includes aspects related to disclosure of information (relating to tax payments, supply chain due diligence, contracts, corporate governance practices, human rights, etc.) by MNEs.
- Pollution controls: Includes aspects such as transparency, accounting practices and corporate accountability. Does not include aspects related to board processes or executive compensation.
- Low carbon/greenhouse gases footprint: Includes aspects related to protection/preservation of local culture, cultural artifacts, etc.
- Waste reduction: Includes aspects related to disclosure of information (relating to tax payments, supply chain due diligence, contracts, corporate governance practices, human rights, etc.) by MNEs.
- Biodiversity protection: Includes aspects related to protection/preservation of local culture, cultural artifacts, etc.
- Climate change: Includes aspects related to protection/preservation of local culture, cultural artifacts, etc.
- Water: Includes aspects related to protection/preservation of local culture, cultural artifacts, etc.
- Renewable energy: Includes aspects related to protection/preservation of local culture, cultural artifacts, etc.
- Labour rights: Includes aspects related to protection/preservation of local culture, cultural artifacts, etc.
- Skills enhancement: Includes aspects related to protection/preservation of local culture, cultural artifacts, etc.
- Public health: Includes aspects related to protection/preservation of local culture, cultural artifacts, etc.
- Workplace safety: Includes aspects related to protection/preservation of local culture, cultural artifacts, etc.
- Non-discrimination: Includes aspects related to protection/preservation of local culture, cultural artifacts, etc.
- Fair wages: Includes aspects related to protection/preservation of local culture, cultural artifacts, etc.
- Benefits: Includes aspects related to protection/preservation of local culture, cultural artifacts, etc.
- Human rights: Includes aspects related to protection/preservation of local culture, cultural artifacts, etc.
- Indigenous rights: Includes aspects related to protection/preservation of local culture, cultural artifacts, etc.
- Gender: Includes aspects related to protection/preservation of local culture, cultural artifacts, etc.
- Resettlement: Includes aspects related to protection/preservation of local culture, cultural artifacts, etc.
- Cultural heritage protection/diversity: Includes aspects related to protection/preservation of local culture, cultural artifacts, etc.

Source: Independent research conducted for this paper.
a. Economic dimension of sustainable FDI

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<th>Home country</th>
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<th>Voluntary global business codes &amp; industry codes</th>
<th>Private institutional investors</th>
<th>Company codes</th>
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b. Environmental dimension of sustainable FDI

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FIGURE 1:

Matrix of sustainability characteristics of FDI: by dimension, group of instruments and characteristic

KEY:

- 0%
- 1% - 33%
- 34% - 66%
- 67% - 99%
- 100%

*Bolded characteristics are common characteristics and italicised characteristics are emerging common characteristics, as defined in the text.*
c. Social dimension of sustainable FDI

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KEY:

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- 67% - 99%
- 100%

Source: Independent research conducted for this paper.

d. Governance dimension of sustainable FDI

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KEY:

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- 67% - 99%
- 100%

Source: Independent research conducted for this paper.
The document contains a matrix of sustainability characteristics of FDI, categorized by dimension and characteristic over time. The matrix is divided into four sections: Economic, Environmental, Social, and Governance dimensions. Each section is further divided into Pre-2000, 2000-2005, 2006-2010, 2011-2015, and 2016-2017 time periods. The characteristics are indicated by numbers from 0% to 100%, with key indicators representing general or specific indicators.

**Source:** Independent research conducted for this paper.

* This analysis excludes all company codes because most do not identify the date of publication. Similarly, Proparco (a home country standard) and Domini (a private investor standard) are excluded because they do not identify the date of publication. Because nine of the ten United Nations Global Compact principles were adopted in 2000, this year is used for that standard. The ICMM Ten Principles revision date of 2015 is utilised.

* Bolded characteristics are common characteristics and italicised characteristics are emerging common characteristics, as defined in the text below.
Going beyond this broad analysis, it emerges that there are a number of sustainability characteristics that have 50 percent or more coverage in at least four out of the eight categories of stakeholders/instruments (for example, at least half of the instruments categorised as home country, intergovernmental organisation standards, private institutional investors, and company codes mention the characteristic “low carbon footprint”). These “common FDI sustainability characteristics” (which can thus be seen as a core set of characteristics) are the following:\footnote{34}

- Low carbon footprint
- Labour rights
- Workplace safety
- Non-discrimination
- Human rights
- Resettlement
- Transparency
- Supply chain standards
- Stakeholder engagement
- Legal compliance

Any stakeholder including any of these common sustainability characteristics in any of their instruments could feel confident that these are widely accepted FDI sustainability characteristics. This conclusion is bolstered by the fact that different types of instruments — relating to different stakeholders in the field — included these common characteristics.

Beyond this group of common FDI sustainability characteristics, there are also a number of sustainability characteristics that are labelled here “emerging common FDI sustainability characteristics” (again in the sense of being increasingly widely accepted). These are characteristics that are present in at least one-third of the instruments examined in at least three of the eight categories of stakeholders/instruments. For example, 33 percent or more of the voluntary intergovernmental instruments, home country instruments and company codes identify “local linkages” as a desirable FDI characteristic. As can be seen from Figure 1, there are quite a number of other sustainability characteristics that meet this threshold of being mentioned in at least one-third of the instruments by at least three of the stakeholder groups.

More specifically, these “emerging common FDI sustainability characteristics” are the following:\footnote{35}

**Economic**
- Employment
- Local linkages
- Community development
- Equitable distribution of wealth

**Environmental**
- Resource management
- Pollution controls
- Waste reduction
- Biodiversity protection
- Renewable energy

**Social**
- Skills enhancement
- Public health
- Fair wages
- Benefits
- Indigenous rights
- Gender
- Cultural heritage protection

**Governance**
- Anti-corruption
- Risk-management systems
- Environmental/social assessment

Interestingly, this threshold of one-third or more of the instruments by at least three of the stakeholder groups is reached most frequently in the social and environmental sustainability dimensions, followed closely by the economic dimension. Even this lower threshold indicates a relatively high awareness and broader acceptance of certain FDI sustainability characteristics by various stakeholder groups.

What is noticeable is that none of the FDI sustainability characteristics in the economic sustainability dimension make it into the group of common sustainability characteristics (Figure 1), though they figure more prominently among the emerging common FDI sustainability characteristics. This may reflect the fact that the sustainable development discussion was previously particularly driven by developed countries and their civil societies, which have a particular interest in environmental sustainability and governance, and, in the case of social sustainability, by trade unions. On the other hand, a great number of IIAs, most of which involve developing countries, make general references to the furtherance of economic development. Since only a very small sample of these instruments (although especially recent ones) has been included in the present analysis, the overall picture may look different.

The general picture that emerges is of course influenced by a number of factors. To begin with, it needs to be recalled that only a sample of instruments was examined. Examining the full universe of instruments would likely yield additional characteristics and, therefore, a longer indicative list of FDI sustainability characteristics. Furthermore, additional instruments may also lead to a more frequent appearance of some of the characteristics already covered, potentially resulting in a higher percentage of instruments containing these characteristics and, therefore, moving the classification of these characteristics.

\footnote{34} It should be noted that this might well be a minimum list of common FDI sustainability characteristics as the present list is based on the examination of 150 instruments only. If additional (especially recent) instruments were examined and these contained a number of the characteristics already identified, more common characteristics could appear. Note, however, that the opposite could also occur (especially if older instruments were added), namely if the additional instruments do not contain the characteristics.

\footnote{35} The consideration mentioned in the previous footnote applies here as well.
characteristics from, say, the 1–33 percent range of coverage to the 34–66 percent range. This is especially likely if additional instruments were tilted more towards newer instruments, given the general trends shown in Figure 2. Finally, a number of the instruments examined are not of a general nature but rather issue specific, industry specific or company specific. For example, the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights are focused on safety and security principles that encourage respect for human rights and are designed specifically for extractive sector companies. In these instances, certain sustainability characteristics may not be relevant to the industries or companies involved and, therefore, skew the picture in favour of one sustainability dimension or another.

This last consideration is particularly obvious if one looks at the three instruments adopted by the United Nations on business and human rights, the ILO on social policy and the OECD on responsible business conduct in general (Figure 3). Among these three, the first two are subject specific (i.e., they deal, respectively, with human rights and social issues), while the third one spans the entire range of expectations that governments have vis-à-vis foreign investors, providing, in a sense, cross-cutting standards that constitute a chapeau for various other standards. The most substantial overlap among these three instruments can be found in the economic, social and governance dimensions. Importantly, the three instruments together complement and supplement each other; they cover a wide range of sustainability characteristics; and they are relatively strong, as they reflect a broad consensus among governments. Interestingly, moreover, there is also a substantial overlap with the International Chamber of Commerce Guidelines, suggesting a broad-based consensus between governments on the one hand and the global business community on the other as regards the contributions FDI and MNEs can make to sustainable development.

More generally, what emerges from this analysis is that there is a remarkable overlap in the types of contributions stakeholders expect international investors to make to the sustainable development of host countries, and international investors (or associations of enterprises) envisage themselves as making, to the sustainable development of host countries. And these contributions typically go beyond “do no harm” and call for efforts on the part of foreign affiliates to make an active contribution to sustainable development. Moreover, these expected contributions have become more specific over time. This suggests that, de facto, an international consensus exists across a range of stakeholder groups as to what sustainable FDI is, reflected in the common and emerging common sustainability characteristics of FDI. In addition, given the evolutionary trajectory of these characteristics, a number of the “emerging common FDI sustainability characteristics” might well “graduate” to become “common FDI sustainability characteristics” themselves in a few years. This could occur when new instruments are being formulated, including because such new instruments will most likely build on existing instruments or complement them. Also in light of the developments in the recent past and the saliency of the SDGs, it is quite possible that, in the future, additional characteristics will be added and existing characteristics will become more specific. It is also possible that there will be a broader movement on what might be called the intensity of some characteristics, from voluntary to mandatory, as is already occurring in some sectors and in relation to the national implementation of business and human rights standards.

In fact, the “common” and “emerging common” sustainability characteristics reflect what there is already in various instruments (i.e., what is current practice)—they are the result of a stock-taking. But the question needs to be raised whether, in light of the SDGs, one should think about what there should be, in a forward-looking manner, to help advance sustainable development. This may become particularly relevant as countries pursue their national SDG priorities and, in their light, add specific characteristics that are particularly important for them, for example, hiring and skilling young people; contributing to vocational skill training; or the formalisation of workers in enterprises linked through business relationships.

In short, the consensus that is emerging is strong, as it includes a wide range of stakeholders and geographic regions, and it is underpinned by intergovernmental instruments that are based on a broad consensus of governments.

This convergence, in turn, has a strong signalling effect for all stakeholders seeking to promote sustainable FDI for sustainable development. By providing broad-based precedents — and a common language — across stakeholder groups, the most widely accepted sustainability characteristics, in particular, provide not only guidance as to what is acceptable, but they also confer a certain amount of legitimacy to those stakeholders that use and promote them, especially if they are contained in widely accepted international instruments endorsed by governments. The convergence also constitutes a basis on which the interaction between international investors and host countries can build, for example, in the case of countries with weak legislation and in the negotiation of contracts.

Beyond that, the challenge is: how can one actively encourage the use of an indicative list of sustainability characteristics by the various types of users identified earlier and what mechanisms would be available to promote their implementation? This will be addressed in the next section of this paper.

36 It is possible that the result, as far as MNEs are concerned, is influenced by the selection of the firms involved, namely firms that are among the largest MNEs worldwide (measured by their foreign assets) and that, by virtue of being members of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development and/or the United Nations Global Compact, are leading-edge companies as regards attention to sustainability issues.


38 Not every characteristic may be relevant for every user group, or some may be more relevant for some than for others, but some may be relevant for all (e.g., the observance of human rights). This reality is part of the observation that one size does not fit all, but rather depends on a number of factors mentioned in the text.
FIGURE 3:
Matrix of sustainability characteristics of FDI: three intergovernmental instruments, by dimension and characteristic

Source: Independent research conducted for this paper.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>a. Economic dimension of sustainable FDI</th>
<th>b. Environmental dimension of sustainable FDI</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>employment</td>
<td>resource management</td>
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<tr>
<td>local linkages</td>
<td>pollution controls</td>
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<tr>
<td>technology transfer</td>
<td>low carbon footprint</td>
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<tr>
<td>infrastructure</td>
<td>waste reduction</td>
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<tr>
<td>community development</td>
<td>biodiversity protection</td>
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<td>equitable distrib. of wealth</td>
<td>climate change</td>
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<td>tax accountability</td>
<td>water</td>
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<tr>
<td>promote R&amp;D</td>
<td>renewable energy</td>
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<td>general and specific indicator</td>
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<td>general or specific indicator</td>
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<tr>
<th>c. Social dimension of sustainable FDI</th>
<th>d. Governance dimension of sustainable FDI</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>labour rights</td>
<td>general reference only</td>
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<tr>
<td>skills enhancement</td>
<td>transparency</td>
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<tr>
<td>public health</td>
<td>local management</td>
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<td>workplace safety</td>
<td>supply chain standards</td>
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<td>non-discrimination</td>
<td>consumer protection</td>
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<td>fair wages</td>
<td>stakeholder engagement</td>
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<td>benefits</td>
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<td>human rights</td>
<td>legal compliance</td>
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<td>indigenous rights</td>
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<td>gender</td>
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<td>environ./social assessment</td>
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<td>cultural heritage protection</td>
<td>human rights diligence</td>
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<td>general and specific indicator</td>
<td>corporate governance</td>
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<td>general or specific indicator</td>
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General reference only
ILO MNE Declaration
OECD Guidelines
UNGPs
Memorandum: ICC Guidelines

General reference only
ILO MNE Declaration
OECD Guidelines
UNGPs
Memorandum: ICC Guidelines

FIGURE 3: Matrix of sustainability characteristics of FDI: three intergovernmental instruments, by dimension and characteristic

Source: Independent research conducted for this paper.
Given this list of FDI sustainability characteristics, in what contexts and through what mechanisms can one envisage them being used and applied? Again, the focus is on indicative examples: there is, in some senses, no limit as to the types of specific mechanisms or contexts that can be suggested or developed in this regard. Equally, it will be important in many instances for mechanisms to be specifically developed for very case-specific circumstances. For example, a community engagement process in a remote environment with indigenous peoples will be different from an engagement process in an urban environment. One-size-fits-all approaches will only go so far.

A second caveat to note is that measuring positive and negative sustainability impacts can be a difficult task. While environmental contaminants can be relatively easily understood and measured, all of the permutations of employment, taxation, local purchasing, and other social-economic benefits are more difficult to assess. The more varied the applicable characteristics, the more complex the measurements are likely to become. In many instances, however, simply addressing the issues in a deliberate and specific manner may help improve the sustainability outcomes compared to not addressing them because full measurements may not be accomplishable at the beginning of a project. Addressing the suite of measurement tools that may be useful is beyond the scope of this paper.

These caveats aside, there is still value in a discussion of user mechanisms and opportunities. This raises critical temporal issues or phases for the application of the characteristics (and especially the common and the emerging common FDI sustainability characteristics), generally defined here as (1) before specific investments are made; (2) decision-making at the stage of entering a host country; (3) decision-making while investments are operating; and (4) reviews of those decisions or operations after they have been made and implemented (whether investments continue to operate or not). In other words, the FDI sustainability characteristics can be relevant in designing international FDI policies long before governments consider any particular investments, when legislating on FDI, when designing and applying national admission criteria to particular proposals that may require approval, and in the development of local sustainable development benefit agreements where these are needed to enhance an investment. They may be equally relevant for reviewing the operation of investments, whether in environmental terms, employment terms or local linkages, etc., or related conduct of governments, in a dispute-settlement context. They ought, therefore, to be understood as relevant to the entire life-cycle of a given investment and its relationship with a host country government and local communities. They could be relevant, for example, in such activities as aftercare services for investments, for institutions such as ombudspersons and thematic working groups between host and home country governments (which can also invite international investors to participate in their deliberations), and corporate social responsibility (CSR) provisions in IIAs.

Within the context of applying the sustainability characteristics, one also finds different stakeholder perspectives. As previously identified, these include treaty negotiators; negotiators of voluntary intergovernmental instruments; host and home country governments (including their IPAs, both national and subnational, as well as communities); arbitrators; the business community; and civil society. Perspectives on the appropriate goals and balances in relation to any given investment may vary widely, and quite legitimately so, among stakeholders.

International investment agreements are a major element in today’s global FDI policy framework. One of the most controversial elements of these agreements is the lack of a clear linkage between sustainable development, and hence sustainable FDI, to the object and purpose of these agreements. This lack of a linkage is reflected in the

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40 These complexities can be seen in one sector, mining, in relation to employment, taxation and local purchasing in a recent study, Cosbey et al. 2016.

41 This is, however, important task — businesses and IPAs need metrics. As one roundtable participant said: “What gets measured, gets done.” There are, of course, various efforts to measure the performance of firms in regard to various indicators (such as, e.g., governance, due diligence, governance mechanisms, transparency); see e.g., the Corporate Human Rights Benchmark, https://www.corporatebenchmark.org

42 Measuring impacts on a life-cycle basis may also add complexity to the measurements processes already alluded to. To the extent this is achievable, a comprehensive understanding of the full impacts can be obtained. Even if it is not fully achievable, however, appropriate legal direction or policy guidance can be established to promote positive results.

43 Some of these mechanisms are contained in the recent Brazilian investment treaties.
definition of investment, the absence of provisions setting out investor rights and responsibilities, and the often weak provisions defining government rights to regulate. In each of these instances, the analysis set out earlier shows how more modern agreements have already begun to include some of the characteristics described, giving investors a clearer sense of the responsibilities they need to meet when planning an investment. This establishes some precedents to ensure that a clearer, holistic objective is articulated for investment agreements that could, expressly or by reference, promote investment for sustainable development. In pursuing this objective, governments can do so in the knowledge that a number of the common and emerging common sustainability characteristics are widely recognised among various groups of stakeholders. Indeed, the existing precedents already begin to scope out obligations for investors as well, crossing a legal threshold that invites them to be expanded upon in keeping with the broader set of characteristics.44

Including sustainability characteristics into a treaty can be done by implication (such as a provision on anti-corruption); by direct statement (such as seen in the so-called Salini test, to be discussed, which has since been referenced in fact in many bilateral investment treaty texts45); or by reference to a document that sets out a series of characteristics that the negotiating parties adhere to. Examples of such references are already seen in relation to, for example, the use of the OECD Guidelines as a source of CSR-type responsibilities of investors. Beyond that, a growing number of IIAs now include review mechanisms that either allow for, or require, the parties to review progress under their agreements in terms of investment flows and their impacts. The characteristics can provide assistance here as well, to assess impacts from a sustainable development perspective. Measurement tools would be most helpful in this task.

A major potential opportunity for investment negotiators that may or may not become available in the future concerns an international agreement on investment facilitation.46 Here, one can envisage the characteristics being used to answer the critical questions: for what purposes is investment being facilitated and, in particular, how can sustainable FDI be given preference? The characteristics can provide a strong, evidence-backed set of sustainability guidelines, or even expectations, for this purpose, moving investment facilitation into a more purposeful, development-oriented rather than purely investor-centric direction.

A number of international organisations, especially the ILO and the OECD, have a long history of addressing the expectations that are placed on investors and their investments. Although governments have adopted instruments in the context of these organisations, they are voluntary. Importantly, however, they include international compliance monitoring processes that allow their effective implementation. More specifically, the ILO’s MNE Declaration, as a result of its 2017 revisions, provides for a set of operational tools, including regional follow-up mechanisms, tripartite appointed national focal points to promote the instrument, ILO technical support in all its member states, ILO company-union dialogue facilitation, and a procedure for the examination of disputes concerning the application of the declaration (see ILO 2017, Annex II). The ILO MNE Declaration reflects many of the social sustainability characteristics identified earlier.

The OECD Guidelines set out a range of expectations regarding the behaviour of MNEs. The guidelines include a unique implementation and grievance mechanism, the National Contact Points (NCPs). Cases (known as "specific instances") can be brought to the National Contact Points by individuals, communities and civil society groups (particularly trade unions and NGOs) against MNEs and their affiliates for non-observance of the guidelines.47 The National Contact Points seek to find solutions via mediation. About half of the cases accepted for mediation since 2011 have led to some form of agreement between the parties. If agreement

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44 See, e.g., the Reciprocal Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement between the Government of the Kingdom of Morocco and the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. There are also examples of this dating back to the 1980s: Agreement on Promotion, Protection and Guarantee of Investments among Member States of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (Baghdad, 5 June 1981, entered into force 23 September 1986). The Morocco-Nigeria BIT specifies in Article 1.3: "Investment means an enterprise... which contribute sustainable development of that Party [host country] and has the characteristics of an investment involving a commitment of capital or other similar resources, pending profit, risk-taking and certain duration." And the Canada-EU Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), Article 8.1: "Investment means every kind of asset that an investor owns or controls, directly or indirectly, that has the characteristics of an investment, which includes a certain duration and other characteristics such as the commitment of capital or other resources, the expectation of gain or profit, or the assumption of risk." (Note, however, that this definition leaves out the contribution to the development/sustainable development element.)

45 An international agreement on this subject was proposed in Sauvant 2015. See also Hees and Cavalcante 2017.

46 While voluntary, the OECD Guidelines, when applied by National Contact Points, can have serious consequences. Thus, in an instance raised before the Canadian NCP regarding China Gold International Resources Corp., the contact point concluded: "As the Company did not respond to the NCP’s offer of its good offices, the Company’s non-participation in the NCP process will be taken into consideration in any applications by the Company for enhanced advocacy support from the Trade Commissioner Service and/or Export Development Canada (EDC) financial services, should they be made. As the goal of both the NCP and the [Canadian] CSR Strategy is to encourage improvement in terms of a company’s use and integration of CSR standards and best practices, should the Company wish to be able to access future support of this type, it will need to submit a Request for Review to the NCP, or show the Government of Canada it has engaged in good-faith dialogue with the Notifier." See http://www.international.gc.ca/trade-agreements-accords-commerciaux/nompcri/statement-pyama-valley.aspx?lang=eng
cannot be achieved, the NCPs make recommendations to the companies. Moreover, there is a provision in the Commentary on the Procedural Guidance allowing an adhering country, the Business and Industry Advisory Committee, the Trade Union Advisory Committee, and OECD Watch to make a substantiated submission about a National Contact Point not fulfilling its procedural responsibilities to the OECD’s Investment Committee. The same entities can also ask the Investment Committee for clarifications about the guidelines.

The sustainability characteristics may help provide a reference point for the interpretation of the ILO MNE Declaration and the OECD Guidelines (e.g., when general concepts need to be clarified as to what they cover), and assist in their periodic updating. This could include the interpretation and application of these instruments by NCPs when investigating complaints. Other organisations, too, like UNCTAD and the Commonwealth, may be able to utilise the set of FDI sustainability characteristics in ongoing work developing their investment and sustainable development frameworks. These in turn help provide a deeper policy-based bridge to formal negotiating processes.

Global business associations also operate in the pre-investment space, for example the World Business Council for Sustainable Development. The articulation of a growing consensus around the common FDI sustainability characteristics, and the ongoing emergence of additional characteristics, can help such organisations to continue to show a sense of leadership and progression towards a more holistic understanding of their objectives and work products. In turn, the further articulation by such organisations of general sustainable development standards in the FDI context, as well as sector-specific standards, can rely on the characteristics for assisting in their own evolution.

### INVESTMENT DECISION-MAKING AT THE STAGE OF ENTERING A HOST COUNTRY, BY GOVERNMENTS AND INVESTORS

In many cases, the critical point in setting the direction of an investment comes in the formation of the investment design by investors and admission of the investment within host countries’ FDI regulatory frameworks. In many instances, especially for larger-scale and natural resources projects, their governments may have set out criteria regarding the sectors in which investments may be made, and for the approval of these investments. It is thus important to canvass a range of issues in relation to which the sustainability characteristics may be useful in this context.

Moving closer to the decision point and operational issues for investors and governments, one can identify the role of **host country governments and investment promotion agencies** in promoting investments as part of the “life-cycle” of a government’s interaction with potential investors. Here, a significant opportunity for the use of the FDI sustainability characteristics arises for IPAs and ministers tasked with attracting FDI and benefiting from it as much as possible. First and foremost, of course, is the role they might play in solidifying the already growing move away from promoting simply the quantity of new investment towards focusing on the quality of such investment. The 2016 Namibia Investment Act, referenced previously, shows such an approach in action. The development of investment acts that set out such criteria is a trend that should be encouraged, whether in the form of an express sustainable FDI test or the more traditional form of a net benefit test. The FDI sustainability characteristics would assist in this respect.48 In fact “investment” in such instruments could be defined as “sustainable investment.”

A major element of formulating sustainable development-oriented investment policies, as well as related laws and regulations, involves seeking a broad consensus within countries on what should be considered as quality investment for sustainable development. Of course, doing so requires recognition that national development priorities and related FDI strategies might be different, depending on the specific situation of each country, including its opportunities to attract FDI. The structured FDI sustainability characteristics identified in this paper — and especially the common and emerging common characteristics — can help support a constructive dialogue towards such a consensus, by providing information on what is widely recognised in various instruments and contexts in this respect. They might also help support the identification of what background studies might be needed to promote better-informed choices that are specific to local needs.

Once the laws and regulations are set for general application in a national context, they can help IPAs attract the type of investment governments seek, by focusing not just on specific sectors, but on specific qualities of an investment.49 IPAs can, for instance, present projects to investors that meet the sustainability characteristics; they can designate (some of) the characteristics as required qualifications for investment support (including incentives); and they can assist investors that are already established in moving towards stronger sustainable projects (e.g., by moving them in the direction of more environmentally friendly operations or helping them to find suppliers). In turn, agencies responsible for assessing potential investors for admission (in some cases, these are the

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48 In fact, screening takes place in multiple forms in many countries today. This includes more limited tools like environmental impact assessments and social and environmental impact requirements, net benefit tests and economic development tests. The role of a broad set of characteristics that is made specific to each country’s individual needs can help create a more consistent approach to this process, while still ensuring that individual needs are addressed.

49 It would most likely be too ambitious to expect IPAs to switch from attracting all FDI to attracting only sustainable FDI. However, it may be possible for governments to establish a kind of quota system, i.e., require their IPAs to attract a certain percentage of FDI that is characterised by a certain combination of sustainability characteristics. See Loewendahl, Kollinsky and van den Berhe 2017.
IPAs, in many others these are specific ministers or separate ministers with specific decision-making powers, especially in natural resources) can verify the actual ability of investors to implement the characteristics in a manner consistent with national policy under relevant national laws. This can include rules to prevent harm, as well as rules to promote positive impacts. Moving towards a strategy that puts more emphasis on sustainable FDI is of course not easy. It requires strong direction based on a clear long-term commitment from the highest levels of government.

In any event, several of the sustainability characteristics are contained in national laws on environmental, social and economic impact assessments, and they can, and should, feed into a review and update of such processes when appropriate. This relates both to the content of these rules, and to thresholds and sectors that are often set for reviewing different types of projects based on the potential scale of impacts.

One can also foresee the role of the sustainability characteristics in amplifying certain issues, in particular, the use of the characteristics in national decision-making in relation to FDI. This would reflect the critical linkage of FDI to SDG 1, the reduction of poverty. This is something one already sees in the context of the extractives sector, where local purchasing and related economic issues are often part of the debate around new mines and oilfields, and in the agricultural sector. But it may be no less important in other sectors, such as retail, construction and infrastructure. Again, one sees this as an element already in net benefit tests and in large government procurement contracts. The characteristics can assist in supporting not just the legitimacy of this approach and acting as a basis for it, but also further the basic principle that this must be a cooperative relationship between investors, governments and local communities for such efforts to succeed.

One might also consider the role of the characteristics in assessing the nature and utility of investment incentives when these are used. While there is a growing body of literature that suggests the need for caution in the use of investment incentives, all governments use them to attract FDI and, often also, to improve its contribution to their economies. Hence, reorienting at least some incentives towards increasing sustainable development benefits, using the sustainability characteristics as a basis, could encourage more beneficial impacts.

When one moves from uses of general application of the characteristics, such as developing laws and regulations or setting inward FDI policy, to the specific application of the laws, regulations and policies to concrete proposed investments, the roles of different stakeholders are likely to become more defined. It is increasingly common practice for governments to make decisions approving the initiation of large investments with significant potential economic, environmental or social impacts dependent on the result of impact studies and public consultations in the locations where the investments are planned. The characteristics can provide a common basis for such processes, allowing the most pertinent local issues to be highlighted from a broad-based internationally accepted set of FDI sustainability characteristics.

In some cases (especially mergers and acquisitions), net benefit tests are undertaken not just to assess positive and negative impacts at the community level, but also in national economic terms. The nature and scope of these tests may vary from sector to sector, or they may be based on the potential size of impact. And the relevant laws may vary from environmental and other impact assessments to investment laws more broadly applying a net benefit type of test. The characteristics can create an opportunity for harmonising these types of screening processes with a more consistent set of characteristics that reflects the full scope of the issues raised within them.

Over the past five to six years, the scope of these assessments has been extended to human rights issues, following the issuing of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, which are being implemented through new regulations by many governments. Given this evolution, it is not inconceivable that in the future such assessments could be extended to a systematic and widespread consideration of the impacts of (at least large) FDI projects on economic development and, more broadly, poverty reduction. The OECD Policy Framework for Investment, for instance, raises the question of “poverty impact assessments” in the context of infrastructure projects (OECD 2015, 98). It may therefore well be that a comprehensive set of FDI sustainability characteristics will promote a growing emphasis on economic and social development issues, in addition to human rights issues. This has been mentioned with reference to local purchasing, but issues related to quality and equality in employment, for example, are also increasingly addressed.

In all these types of situations in which assessments are undertaken on whether or not to permit the entry of a potential investment (or under what conditions it may enter) governments leave themselves a significant degree of discretion as to the conduct of the process, public input into the process and final decision-making in the process. But investors provide the critical factual and analytical inputs in most cases, and the sustainability characteristics can assist in lining up the expectations of government, business and the local community in terms of the necessary breadth of an assessment in any given instance.

A key result of an assessment process may be the adoption of longer-term management plans for economic, environmental, social, and human rights impacts. These plans then become binding on investors and set clear (one expects) rules in place.

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See, for example, IMF et al. 2015.
for investors to comply with, often going beyond the generally applicable law. These plans will often reflect both sides of the sustainable FDI characteristics: avoiding harm and providing sustainable development benefits. The characteristics can assist in assessing what is needed in such plans, by way of amplifying or providing assistance to interpret the underlying legal requirements.

In all these cases, there are judicial or administrative review processes that can be engaged, and often are engaged, to review both positive and negative decisions by the appropriate authorities (see, e.g., OECD 2008; Abaza, Bisset and Sadler 2004). Indeed, for large projects with complex implications and impacts, it has become almost routine to see such challenges after a decision is made. As a result, the full process may take two to three years to complete, or more. For smaller investments (e.g., in the service sector), to take an opposite example, the assessment process will be likely to be much less demanding and the time frame much shorter, if it needs to take place at all.

Under these conditions, rules that seek to impose short decision deadlines on governments of 30-60-90-day periods, for example, may impose undue and unrealistic constraints on the ability of governments fully to assess and test the information provided for a large project prior to making an informed decision. Tight deadlines also may impact the role of informed public participation in these processes, a critical element in complex natural resource, infrastructure and other major projects. More generally, what may be appropriate for a small project in, say, the services sector, may not be reasonable for a large project in the natural resources sector — and vice versa. Ensuring that adequate human and technical resources are available to government officials reviewing investment applications is essential for objective and informed decision-making.

In many instances today there are, in addition to specific criteria for the admission of an investment, additional processes in place to encourage higher levels of contributions to the sustainable development of host countries. Tax incentives, for example, are increasingly used to support employment, local purchasing and related training programmes (Nigeria Investment Promotion Commission 2016). Local purchasing programmes that can increase multiplier benefits of investments may see tax credits attached to them, as may research and development projects in a host country. These programmes are often set out in performance agreements between governments and investors and/or communities and investors (often referred to as Community Development Agreements when the community is directly engaged in the process) that seek to engage cooperative processes to maximise the local development benefits of any given investment. Today, governments are including such requirements directly into their legislation, as part of the minimum entry criteria, with or without incentives to support them. Employment training and local purchasing of goods and services are frequent examples of this, especially in the natural resources sector. But these issues are no longer reserved just for the extractive industries: tourism, transportation, large retail investments, and others are equally likely to attract variations on this theme. All of these approaches could make use of the sustainability characteristics.

More generally, what is important here is for host country governments to define a clear decision-making role in a transparent process. No investors under a proper environmental impact assessment process or net benefit test or similar assessment are guaranteed the result they seek. The discretion to accept or reject a proposal subject to such tests rests with governments, and must be clearly expressed as such in the governing laws. The adoption of criteria is a first step in such a process.

For potential international investors, an indicative list of FDI sustainability characteristics can provide a checklist to assist them in identifying the sustainable development needs of the host countries in which investments might be made. “Assist” is the operative word here, as investors must also be sensitive to the specific needs and contexts of the individual countries and communities and physical environments into which they are proposing to invest. The costs of applying the characteristics may be a negative factor for some investors, unless those costs are generally evened out by a need to apply the characteristics to any investment made, regardless of whether at home or abroad. However, the knowledge that a company understands and seeks to apply the characteristics can also be a selling point for a company in terms of reputational benefits and reduced risks. In those instances in which a social licence to operate is essential, a company’s record in applying the characteristics will undoubtedly become a factor for host countries and local communities. The more extensive the potential impacts and benefits/costs of a proposed investment, the more relevant the application of a wider range of the characteristics will become.

When large investment processes are associated with community development agreements and/or community approval requirements or the right to “free, prior and informed consent of indigenous peoples,” the characteristics should assist investors in understanding the legitimacy of many types of cultural, environmental and social demands of these communities, and thus improve corporate understanding of the need to address such issues at all levels.

In addition, it is not far-fetched to consider here the use of the common (or even emerging common) sustainability characteristics in establishing a corporate certification.

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52 The Namibian Investment Act 2016 provides an example of this, with an explicit allowance for the Minister to negotiate a performance agreement with an investor when that potential investment is subject to a review by the Minister. These investments will be set out in regulations not yet made public.

This a step that could have a significant impact. The number of state-owned enterprises that are active global investors makes signpost for developing such an approach. The sustainability characteristics can serve as a criteria for government procurement or investment licensing, or government auctions for various natural resources investments. The obvious analogy here is the Forest Stewardship Council certification for certain goods and the ISO 9000 and 14000 certification standards for companies, as criteria.

Other actors in an investment decision-making context include financial institutions. In the finance sector, reference was already made to the Equator Principles playing a large role in financing decisions. The International Finance Corporation applies its own standards as well. In both instances, the characteristics may be of value in the periodic review of these standards, as well as in their application in any given context.

**Home country governments** — ranging from official outward investment insurance agencies to IPAs whose briefs include outward FDI — also could benefit from the use of the FDI sustainability characteristics. While home countries users such as these are ancillary to, and not determinative of the role of host country government processes in relation to a proposed investment, they can have major impacts on the design and bankability of projects. Indeed, home country governments are in a pole position to promote certain requirements that developing countries, especially least developed countries, may not be in a position to do. The role of home countries provides, therefore, an important potential opportunity to use the sustainability characteristics, and indeed could determine the fate of a project. Further, the multiplication of processes can assist in ensuring a robust and more independent result from a broad sustainable development perspective. Support by outward investment insurance agencies and by foreign embassies in host countries could well be made conditional on potential investors conforming with sustainability characteristics most germane to a given sector and location.

Home countries also have a direct role in setting operational rules for their own state-owned enterprises. This can be done relatively easily through policy and regulatory means. For example, the Council on Social Responsibility for Sustainable Development of Chile established a requirement of corporate sustainability reporting for state-owned enterprises in 2013. The sustainability characteristics can serve as a signpost for developing such an approach. The number of state-owned enterprises that are active global investors makes this a step that could have a significant impact.

**DECISION-MAKING WHILE INVESTMENTS ARE OPERATING**

Operation-oriented decision-making during the life-cycle of an investment is generally the responsibility of the investor. (This differs from the review of such decisions after they are made, which may involve various processes and stakeholders, as discussed in the next subsection.) It is during this part of the life-cycle of an investment that the characteristics and expectations for admission are translated into action by the investor. Several sources of law may apply to such action, including the generally applicable domestic law and (in the case of contracts) the agreed management plans flowing from the impact assessments or net benefit tests. Other sources may also provide reference points for corporate conduct, including codes promulgated by industry associations that tend to be more sector specific and operationally oriented.

In addition, as already noted, one sees an increase in the role of company–community agreements, particularly in the natural resources sector. These agreements often detail specific sustainable development related obligations of companies towards local communities, usually aimed at maximising the social and economic benefits — the critical economic development goals — of foreign investments.

Many instruments set specific legal obligations for investors during their operation and thus impact the scope or nature of investors’ decision-making. Accordingly, the key responsibility for any decisions rests with investors. Where sustainable development was until recently often seen as part of the (voluntary) CSR role of companies, sustainability characteristics are increasingly being turned into post-admission operational obligations on investors. These may come in the form of obligations under applicable investment laws or sectoral codes such as in the extractive sector, performance agreements with governments, community development agreements, or investment contracts with governments. Often thought of as mainly associated with the extractives sector, they are now moving to other large-scale projects in other sectors.

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54 Who, how and on the basis of what criteria such certification might be done are, of course, issues that would need significant discussion and development.

55 The issue is one of capabilities: it is not only home countries that may have better capabilities to promote certain characteristics, but also institutional investors (interested in making sure that their funds are as safe as possible) and business organisations vis-à-vis their members.

56 Included as a remedy for companies that fail to participate in processes to examine or redress community and civil society issues in Canada’s new policy on Canadian extractives companies operating abroad. See Global Affairs Canada 2016. As noted elsewhere, there is also an increasing reliance on the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the OECD Guidelines as mandatory requirements for financing by national and international development funding institutions and export credit agencies.

57 See further at http://consejors.economia.cl/
A globally recognised set of FDI sustainability characteristics will likely strengthen the expectations of CSR performance, whether in a voluntary or mandatory context. These characteristics add texture and longer-term depth to company decision-making and help set out expectations above and beyond the legal obligations on a company — expectations as set out by governments, investors and other stakeholders. This has been the traditional role of business standards, as well as international standards, such as the ICC’s Guidelines for International Investment, the ILO’s MNE Declaration and the OECD’s Guidelines. Today, some governments, such as Canada’s, take these voluntary processes further by removing consular and other support services from Canadian companies that do not meet, on an ongoing basis, the requirements set out in such instruments. And, as has been seen, governments are also incorporating more references in IIAs either to CSR generally (including references to, e.g., the OECD Guidelines) or to a range of specific CSR activities, thus enhancing their legitimacy while hardening purely “voluntary” conduct into legal obligations.

**REVIEW AND MONITORING OF INVESTMENT DECISIONS AND OPERATIONS**

The issue of the review and monitoring of decisions by governments or investors (or their investments) after investments have taken place and throughout their operational life-cycles is becoming more complex, as more stakeholders enter the investment and sustainable development arena. The review of decisions prior to an investment has already been discussed. The review and monitoring of government and company decisions during (or sometimes after) the operation of an investment is another matter.

Traditionally, the focus here has been on legal compliance and enforcement, managed by host country government enforcement agencies. These processes of enforcing compliance with the applicable law (or contract) will remain the predominant form of monitoring company decisions, and will remain the primary responsibility of governments. Without in any way limiting the importance of the agencies involved, it is a growing reality that the sustainable development requirements of investments are also being reviewed through additional mechanisms that supplement government enforcement processes. This is especially so for larger projects in the natural resources and infrastructure (including energy) sectors.

Importantly, these mechanisms increasingly include companies engaging in specified processes with communities and/or government agencies. Companies may engage communities through internal grievance mechanisms, a process made well known by the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, but are also included in other international standards such as the ILO’s MNE Declaration and the International Bar Association’s Model Mine Development Agreement. The concept of a “grievance mechanism” is simple: companies should have a defined process for ensuring that community complaints with respect to their operations can be brought to them by any member of the community. (“Community” can include individuals, local NGOs, local governments, and in some contexts also employee representatives or trade unions.) This allows for the resolution of complaints at the ground level, at the lowest cost to all concerned. While some of the first discussions of grievance mechanisms took place in relation to the process leading to the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, it was and remains widely understood today that effective grievance mechanisms cannot be limited to just one category of issues, but must capture the essence of the complaints between a community or individuals and the company involved; thus the mechanism must be broadly based.

Grievance mechanisms address specific complaints. However, grievance mechanisms do not currently necessarily address broader issues of companies’ compliance with their obligations to limit the negative impacts and maximise the positive sustainability impacts of their investments, although they could be expanded to do so. This can be approached as a narrow government enforcement issue, as noted. However, there is also a growing understanding of a role for communities in this process, supported directly by companies providing annual reports on the implementation of their obligations on economic, social, environmental, and governance issues, which one might expect increasingly to recognise the breadth of the sustainability characteristics. The characteristics can thus promote a stronger sense of the scope for reporting requirements in this regard as well.

The initial steps towards company self-reporting began with the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. Today, there is an expanding role for communities to review all of the sustainable development related obligations of large investors, in particular in the extractives and infrastructure sectors, ranging from training programmes for employees, to environmental management to gender equity plans. This “report-and-review” approach seeks to do two things. First, it makes compliance by companies a routine and observable process, that is, it does not wait until an official arrives from a capital to determine compliance. Second, it promotes active engagement between investors and communities, itself a positive contribution to the ongoing foreign investors’ social licence to operate within host countries and

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68 The policy set out in Global Affairs Canada 2016 provides that the government can withdraw supports for breaches of required standards.


70 See ILO 2017, paras 64–8 (part of the industrial relations chapter).


72 The International Bar Association’s Model Mine Development Agreement, for example, covers annual reporting on fiscal, employment, local purchasing, and environmental obligations of the investor.
communities. While many companies originally balked at such reporting requirements, and some undoubtedly still do, they are nevertheless a growing part of the implementation process in the natural resources sector, and could be expanded to other sectors. This is especially relevant for investments with larger economic, social, environmental, and governance footprints.

The Global Reporting Initiative provides a model for broad-based corporate reporting that could be attached to, or operate in conjunction with the sustainability characteristics. This is seen in its existing cooperative processes with the World Business Council for Sustainable Development and the Global Compact. This highlights the potential for both corporate reporting processes and global standardisation platforms for reporting to be harmonised. This would promote comparability among its users, offering common benchmarks.

Self-reporting to the local community may not be appropriate for smaller companies and those in sectors with low levels of local impacts, though recent evidence suggests that doing so can improve sustainability performance higher up the supply chain. Besides, having hundreds of companies reporting to the local community would likely overwhelm community capacities to monitor the reports. In these instances, reporting to industry associations based on their sectoral codes might be considered, or the associations involved could undertake compliance monitoring of randomly selected small and medium-sized firms. Industry codes are also more directly relevant to assessing which of the sustainability characteristics are most germane to a given sector. In addition, industry associations could include periodic reporting of sustainable development based standards for their members, including as a condition of membership.

Finally, it has already been noted that a rising number of IIAs include a stronger focus on sustainable development, and it is likely that there will be a growth in provisions on investor obligations as well. There is also a growing recognition of the specific rights of host country governments to maximise the benefits of FDI for their economies. An indicative list of sustainability characteristics can contribute to a harmonisation of these processes over the coming years.

In this context, the dispute settlement process also deserves attention. To date, a number of international arbitrations convened under investment treaties have already brought various aspects of the sustainability characteristics out in this paper into their decisions. This has been done largely in the absence of a specific focus on sustainable development. Some examples of this include Salini v. Morocco, Biwater v. Tanzania, Inmaris Perestroika Sailing v. Ukraine, and Alpha Projektholding v. Ukraine, which include references to contribution to infrastructure, transfer of technology, local employee training, and the generation of government revenue as characteristics associated with the notion of investments contributing to development. Indeed, “development” is often discussed by arbitrators in the application of the “Salini test,” which mentioned “the contribution to the economic development of the host State of the investment as an additional condition” in determining whether an investment is covered by a treaty.

With the growing trend expressly to reference sustainable development in investment treaties, the role of arbitrators and other dispute settlement processes at the national and international levels in relation to understanding what this means in practice is likely to grow. This is especially likely to be the case if a future dispute settlement mechanism is opened to other stakeholders in a more meaningful way. For example, it has been suggested that an expanded concept of an international investment dispute settlement process should be open to governments, communities affected or specific individuals who have been harmed to initiate proceedings for alleged breaches of a broader array of obligations on investors under domestic or international law in exchange for the investor’s right to initiate proceedings against a government.

See IISD 2016. See also Sauvant 2016, 31, envisioning the investor–state dispute settlement mechanism being turned into an investment dispute settlement mechanism to which various stakeholders have access. It is important to distinguish here the investor from the investment. The investment, as a legal entity, can easily be subject to a suit in the host country. However, a significant incident may leave the investment inoperative and/or bankrupt. An investor is often more difficult to sue in a host country, as compared to in its home jurisdiction, where barriers to a suit such as forum non conveniens often exist. An internationalised process could ensure such barriers are abolished.

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83 The International Bar Association’s Model Mine Development Agreement provides a good example of intensive reporting and review requirements for all company sustainable development obligations.

84 For more of the work of the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) and its broad-based approach to reporting on the SDGs, see https://www.globalreporting.org/information/SDGs/Pages/SDGs.aspx

85 Indeed, the International Integrated Reporting Council is coordinating an effort called the Corporate Reporting Dialogue that involves the major financial reporting standard setters plus GRI, the Sustainability Accounting Standards Board and the Carbon Disclosure Project, in an effort to move towards harmonisation in the reporting process.

86 See GRI and IOE 2016, showing how reporting can be of benefit to small and medium-sized enterprises.

87 The Mining Association of Canada (MAC) does this for its members under its Accountability programme: “Accountability: Participation in TSM [Towards Sustainable Mining] is mandatory for all MAC members. Assessments are conducted at the facility level where the mining activity takes place—the only program in the world to do this in our sector. This provides local communities with a meaningful view of how a nearby mine is faring.” See http://mining.ca/towards-sustainable-mining. Industry associations in other sectors could replicate this approach.


89 Biwater Gauff (Tanzania) Ltd. v. United Republic of Tanzania, ICSID Case No. ARB/05/22, Award, para. 320 (24 July 2008), http://www.italaw.com/cases/1517


91 Alpha Projektholding GmbH v. Ukraine, ICSID Case No. ARB/07/16, Award, para. 330 (8 November 2010), http://www.italaw.com/cases/71

92 Salini Costruttori, para. 52. For a further discussion of the definition of an “investment” under international investment law, see Mortenson 2010, Gaillard 2010, García-Bolívar 2012.

93 See IISD 2016. See also Sauvant 2016, 31, envisioning the investor–state dispute settlement mechanism being turned into an investment dispute settlement mechanism to which various stakeholders have access. It is important to distinguish here the investor from the investment. The investment, as a legal entity, can easily be subject to a suit in the host country. However, a significant incident may leave the investment inoperative and/or bankrupt. An investor is often more difficult to sue in a host country, as compared to in its home jurisdiction, where barriers to a suit such as forum non conveniens often exist. An internationalised process could ensure such barriers are abolished.
Even without this, however, there are evident needs for investment treaty arbitrators to consider whether an investment has contributed to development and, more specifically, sustainable development. One such requirement flows from the need for an investment to contribute to development, as seen in the Salini test mentioned earlier. If one can imagine a simple extension of this approach to a definition of “investment” that requires an investment to make a contribution to sustainable development (i.e., “sustainable investment”), then the utility of an indicative list of FDI sustainability characteristics will rise even more. This would further be enhanced if there were investor obligations included in IIAs, or a broader statement on the right of governments to regulate to promote sustainable development benefits from the investments they receive.

In addition, even without such reforms, the characteristics could be used to support the legitimacy of a broader array of government measures in the context of challenges to laws and regulations under investment treaties. This role in legitimising expectations of governments’ rights to regulate would potentially then be juxtaposed against possible arguments of investors’ legitimate expectations not to be regulated in certain ways. These potential developments open the door to thinking afresh about how sustainable development may be reflected in a new generation of investment treaties, and the related dispute settlement changes that may arise.

But there are also growing calls for the use of mediation in investment treaty disputes. Mediation in this context is about finding solutions, not imposing decisions. And in the course of such efforts, the characteristics — and especially the common and emerging common characteristics — could provide a widely accepted basis for finding solutions to issues, especially those that are most directly related to sustainable development issues.

## CONCLUSIONS

Flows of foreign direct investment to developing countries have to rise significantly to help meet the SDGs. However, the issue is not only more FDI but sustainable FDI, that is, investment that has certain sustainability characteristics. An indicative list of FDI sustainability characteristics constitutes a checklist that can help interested parties determine what sustainable FDI is. In fact, the very process of seeking to identify such sustainability characteristics can make an important contribution to the international investment debate, including by highlighting particular desirable characteristics of FDI and outlining how these can be promoted and encouraged.

Translating this process into changed action by principal stakeholders, while not always easy, is increasingly being done and becoming ever more doable. Many of the IPAs, at both the national and subnational levels (and there are literally thousands of them), as one of the main actors (and gatekeepers) involved in attracting FDI, are largely interested in obtaining more FDI — and not necessarily sustainable FDI — and they are involved in fierce competition with each other to attract investment. However, where in the past this has led to some stagnation in promoting sustainable investment, this is now changing in a more sustainable direction. A broad adoption of sustainable characteristics can help reverse the competition from a negative one to a more positive, higher-level one. This can increasingly become the case as many IPAs move to target specific types of FDI that they consider particularly useful to advance the development of their economies. Hence, they are becoming more familiar with the instruments and techniques that are required for a targeted purpose.

Moreover, as discussed, there are also a number of other — important — stakeholders whose actions are directly relevant to increasing the flow of sustainable FDI, in order to meet the SDGs. The analysis in this paper has shown that there is a broad set of increasingly agreed parameters of what sustainable FDI means, with all stakeholder groups showing a growing propensity to recognise and accept them.

The interplay of these various actors can be expected to continue to grow into a virtuous cycle that changes the mindsets of the principal stakeholders towards promoting sustainable FDI for sustainable development. A broadly accepted indicative list of sustainability characteristics of FDI, constructed around the common and emerging common FDI sustainability characteristics, is helpful in this respect, as it lends credibility to such an effort and gives it direction in terms of both legal and policy-oriented development. The current paper outlines some of the issues, complexities and challenges that this difficult process has encountered to date. It is a process that promises rewarding results.

[74] Such an extension is not unreasonable, as many agreements have begun using the term “sustainable development” in preambular and other treaty language; the logic behind the Salini requirement was that the treaty mentioned the promotion of development in its preamble. More than 75% of IIAs concluded between 2008 and 2013 referenced “sustainable development” or “responsible business conduct.” See Gordon, Pohl and Bouchard 2014, 10–11.
5. The majority of IPAs require social and environmental assessments for at least certain types of projects (infrastructure, natural resources), typically prior to entering into contracts, but a substantial number do not require such assessments.

6. For IPAs, the governance dimension translates in the transparency of contracts and the public disclosure of information. The majority of IPAs disclose a variety of information as required, although a significant number does not; that has not changed much compared with five years ago.

7. As regards investment incentives, IPAs favor those applied in support of specific economic development objectives, followed by environmental sustainability goals. An important share of IPAs also states explicitly that they do not offer specific incentives for any sustainable FDI dimension. Going forward a new approach is needed as regards the structure of incentives to cover all dimensions of sustainable FDI.

8. As regards their assessment of investment incentives, IPAs feel that those supporting economic development are the most successful, followed by those in support of environmental sustainability.

9. On the whole, the majority of IPAs report that foreign investors pay attention to sustainable FDI, though it is not entirely the case that they do so equally for each of the four dimensions.

10. Going forward, IPAs see themselves in a position to play a greater role in shaping policies of governments conducive to attracting sustainable FDI because their policy advocacy function is expected to become more important for the overwhelming majority.

11. To assist IPAs in attracting sustainable FDI, governments have an important role to play in several areas that include: training IPAs to increase awareness of sustainable FDI overall; establishing clear procedures for assessing and monitoring sustainable FDI projects; training IPAs in assessing projects from a sustainable FDI perspective; adjusting incentive structures to promote sustainable FDI, to the extent that these are needed; removing legislative obstacles that inhibit IPAs from tackling sustainable FDI issues; and rewarding IPAs for success in this area. (VCC and WAIPA 2010, 4–5)
ANNEX II: LIST OF INSTRUMENTS CONSULTED FOR THIS STUDY

A. INTERNATIONAL INVESTMENT AGREEMENTS


B. NON-BINDING INTERGOVERNMENTAL INSTRUMENTS


2. African Union Commission (AUC), the African Development Bank (AfDB), and the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), Guiding Principles on Large Scale Land Based Investments in Africa, [https://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/PublicationFiles/guiding_principles_eng_rev_era_size.pdf](https://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/PublicationFiles/guiding_principles_eng_rev_era_size.pdf)


C. HOST COUNTRY STANDARDS

Developed countries


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It should be noted that the Guidelines (which are voluntary) are backed up by the Investment Declaration and an OECD’s Council Decision that is binding in terms of the legal obligation to create National Contact Points.
D. HOME COUNTRY STANDARDS


E. INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS STANDARDS


F. VOLUNTARY GLOBAL BUSINESS CODES


G. VOLUNTARY PRIVATE INSTITUTIONAL INVESTOR STANDARDS


H. VOLUNTARY INDUSTRY CODES


I. VOLUNTARY COMPANY CODES

Developed countries

5. Honda (Japan), http://csr.honda.com/
7. Royal Dutch Shell plc (UK), http://www.shell.com/sustainability.html
8. Total SA (France), http://www.total.com/en/commitment

Emerging markets

1. América Móvil SAB de CV (Mexico), http://www.americamovil.com/about-us/sustainability
5. Gold Fields Ltd (South Africa), https://www.goldfields.co.za/sustainability-reporting.php
12. Tata Motors (India), http://www.tatamotors.com/about-us/sustainability-approach-reports/

The Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil issued RSPO Next (2016), which is a voluntary add-on certification standard that members can apply for. The RSPO Next was not reviewed for this study.
J. NGO MODELS AND CODES


ANNEX III: METHODOLOGY

NOTE

1. In order to develop an indicative list of sustainability characteristics of foreign direct investment, a variety of instruments were reviewed to ascertain what kind of contributions governments have indicated that MNEs can make to host countries, what kind of contributions MNEs themselves have indicated they can make to host countries, and what others expect from MNEs in this respect.

2. The scope of this paper is limited to a review of instruments that deal with issues relating to FDI, the regulation of MNEs and the relationship between the two. Furthermore, the research and findings in this paper are limited to sustainability characteristics of FDI from the perspective of host countries.

3. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development were used as the core guiding principles to contextualise the discussion on sustainable FDI and to develop the various characteristics identified in this paper.

4. The following is the list of types of instruments reviewed for the purposes of this paper:

   (a) International investment agreements (IIA)

   (b) Non-binding intergovernmental instruments (Intergovernmental instruments)

   (c) Criteria used by host countries that seek to attract particularly desirable FDI and/or to mitigate or avoid possible negative impacts of any investments (Host country FDI standards)

   (d) Criteria used by home countries that support their firms investing abroad and make such support dependent on companies seeking such support meeting certain conditions (Home country standards)

   (e) Standards of intergovernmental organisations that lay out the criteria—including to mitigate or to avoid possible negative impacts of any investment—that must be met before such an organisation can provide support for a particular project (Intergovernmental organisation standards)

   (f) Voluntary global business codes of international business organisations that lay out provisions the
6. Instruments devised as issue-specific tools, i.e., non-prescriptive instruments aiming to provide MNEs with a checklist to undertake a specific type of investment etc., were not reviewed for the purposes of this paper. For example, the OECD Risk Awareness Tool for Multinational Enterprises in Weak Governance Zones, a tool addressed to MNEs that includes “a list of questions [for companies] considering actual or prospective investments in weak governance zones…” (OECD 2006) was not reviewed for the purposes of this paper.

7. Instruments that exclusively deal with sustainability characteristics with respect to trade and do not include sustainability characteristics with respect to FDI were not reviewed for this paper.

8. The instruments reviewed for this paper are generally the primary or flagship document of an organisation on issues relating to FDI, the regulation of MNEs and the relationship between the two. It should be noted that these organisations might also have other additional instruments that bear upon the characteristics discussed in the matrix. These additional instruments were not reviewed for this paper.

9. In reviewing the corporate social responsibility/sustainability codes and policies for the MNEs selected for review (as described in the following), the review was as a rule restricted to the global codes and policies and did not extend to a review of codes and policies applicable to specific regions. For example, in reviewing the corporate social responsibility/sustainability codes and policies of Toyota (Japan), the global policies of the Toyota Group were reviewed and the specific codes and policies adopted by the group of companies in different geographical regions, such as North America, were not reviewed.

10. With respect to the company codes, best efforts were made to ensure that all relevant materials/corporate policies that were readily accessible on the relevant companies’ websites were reviewed within the parameters identified for the review.

11. Generally, only those instruments available in the English language were reviewed for this paper. However, for example, in the case of MOFCOM’s Opinions on Constructing Composite Assessment System for Foreign Merchant and Investment Selection (China) and the NDRC’s 12th Five Year Plan on Foreign Investment Utilization and Outbound Investment Plan, translated versions of the respective texts were reviewed.

12. The various characteristics identified in the matrix are integrated and interrelated. This means that if an instrument is identified as dealing with one of the characteristics, one can also make the argument that such instrument also covers other characteristics. Illustratively, human rights encompass within their ambit a broad range of rights, such as economic, labour, social, and environmental rights, where each of these rights is often both individually valid and interdependent. Accordingly, it

5. With respect to intergovernmental organisations, such as the International Labour Organization or the OECD, to the extent such organisations have specific instrument(s) relating to FDI and MNEs, more comprehensive instruments issued by such organisations were reviewed. For example, with respect to the ILO, the review was focused on the 2017 revised version of the Tripartite Declaration of Principles Concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy and did not extend to the various ILO conventions that may become applicable in the context of MNE conduct. With regard to other instruments issued by the OECD with a narrower scope, these instruments were reviewed only to the extent such instruments elaborated on the principles/guidance set out in the comprehensive governing instrument.

6. Instruments devised as issue-specific tools, i.e., non-prescriptive instruments aiming to provide MNEs with a...
can be deduced that recognition of any of the economic, labour, social, and environmental characteristics in an instrument may contribute to the advancement of human rights as well. While acknowledging this relationship, it is recognised that not all the social, labour, economic, or environmental characteristics are necessarily defined as human rights. Similarly, if an instrument advances employment (which is included as one of the economic characteristics), it can be argued that such instrument also advances the social characteristics, as it is plausible that employment is the basis for or a facilitator of a number of social characteristics identified in the matrix.

13. A number of the instruments reviewed for this paper do not address each of the subcharacteristics identified in the matrix expressly. Instead, these instruments contain general statements that could include the specific economic, environmental, social, and governance characteristics identified in the matrix. Lack of specific language regarding a more specific subcharacteristic should, therefore, not necessarily be interpreted to mean that an instrument does not include them in its general language. In part, this is as a result of an evolution from broader language to the express inclusion of more specific issues as various types of documents have evolved and matured over time. For this purpose, the text of an instrument should be reviewed in its entirety along with an understanding of all attendant circumstances to establish the scope of the characteristics included in an instrument.

14. It is recognised that some provisions in the instruments reviewed for this paper imply an indirect expectation as to what MNEs can contribute to a host economy. For example, if an instrument allows certain exceptions from prohibitions on performance requirements, e.g., promotion of research and development, it can be inferred that promotion of research and development is a desirable contribution that MNEs can make to the host economy.

15. Selection methodology:

(a) IIAs

The IIAs reviewed for this research include all full-text English-language treaties between February 2015 and June 2017 available (as of 19 June 2017) on the UNCTAD website (Investment Policy Hub). They are a mix of multilateral and bilateral instruments, as well as model investment treaty framework(s) from different geographic regions in the world.

(b) Intergovernmental instruments

With respect to the selection of the intergovernmental instruments, the following factors were taken into account: (i) the reach and scope of the instrument, (ii) a broad group of international government stakeholders, and (iii) the impact or effect of such instruments.

(c) Host country standards

A small selection of FDI and MNEs related laws and policies from host countries in the world’s different geographic regions were reviewed for this paper. They indicate the criteria adopted by these countries to attract particularly desirable FDI to meet their sustainable development goals and targets.

(d) Home country standards

With respect to home country standards, the term “home country” as used here refers broadly to countries that are still the most important sources of outward FDI. In this regard, while the countries reviewed for this paper are primarily developed countries, it is recognised that there is an increasing number of MNEs from countries that have traditionally been primarily host countries. In addition, on account of the increasing outward FDI by Chinese MNEs, a few laws and policies for outward FDI by Chinese MNEs were also reviewed.

(e) Intergovernmental organisation standards

Guidelines of leading intergovernmental organisations/institutions were reviewed for this paper since these institutions are leaders in providing project development and implementation support.

(f) Voluntary global business codes

The most important in this group are the International Chamber of Commerce Guidelines, as they reflect the views of the global business community.

(g) Voluntary private institutional investor standards

For identifying the private institutional investor standards, the list of the top 20 active signatories of the Principles for Responsible Investment (as identified in its Annual Report 2016) was relied upon. Further, out of this list, four of the private institutional investors with specific standards with regard to responsible investments were reviewed. The Principles for Responsible Investment (PRI) are internationally recognised principles for responsible investments, and among its signatories are leading asset owners and asset managers. While the PRI represent an independent effort, they are supported by two United Nations agencies: the United Nations Environment Programme Finance Initiative and the Global Compact. Given its universal recognition among institutional investors, the PRI was used as a frame of reference to identify the most active institutional investors for this paper.
(h) Voluntary industry codes

For identifying the industry codes to be reviewed for this paper, reference was primarily made to the instruments and initiatives relevant to the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, as included in a resource document compiled by the OECD (2012). Further, additional industry codes and initiatives (including to account for the passage for time since the OECD compilation) were also reviewed.

(i) Voluntary company codes

i For this paper, based on the process as detailed in the following, a subset of 60 MNEs (selected MNEs list) was derived to ascertain their codes and policies relating to corporate social responsibility and sustainability.

ii The following two lists included by UNCTAD in its *World Investment Report 2016* were used as the primary reference lists to prepare the selected MNEs list:

A. The world's top 100 non-financial MNEs, ranked by foreign assets, 2015

B. The top 100 non-financial MNEs from developing and transition economies, ranked by foreign assets, 2014

These lists are hereinafter collectively referred to as "UNCTAD list(s)."

iii As a first step, the companies in the UNCTAD lists were compared against the members of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD). The World Business Council for Sustainable Development is a global CEO-led organisation comprised of leading MNEs in the world working together to promote sustainable development. The WBCSD members "come from all business sectors and all major economies, representing a combined revenue of more than US$8.5 trillion and with 19 million employees" (WBCSD 2017). The list of WBCSD members was used to refine the UNCTAD lists in light of the fact that the WBCSD members are leaders on issues relating to sustainable development strategies for MNEs. By reviewing the codes and practices of MNEs adopting high impact business practices to address key issues relating to sustainable development, the best practices of MNEs leading the field on issues relating to corporate social responsibility and sustainability were identified.

iv Upon such comparison of the members included in the UNCTAD lists and the WBCSD members, a total of 44 companies were identified and included in the selected MNEs list.

v Because the comparison of the lists as mentioned did not identify sufficient MNEs from Africa, Asia and Latin America, the UNCTAD lists were further compared with the list of participant companies of the United Nations Global Compact (Global Compact participants). The Global Compact is an international platform that provides a universal framework for responsible business practices. By becoming a participant of the Global Compact, a MNE makes a statement about its commitment to corporate social responsibility and sustainable business practices. The Global Compact has widespread representation in terms of participants, both from developed and developing countries. As such, the list of Global Compact participants served as an important reference point to identify companies from developing countries, i.e., the geographic regions mentioned earlier. In this fashion, 13 companies were added to the selected MNEs list.17

vi Finally, in addition to the 57 MNEs so far identified, three companies — namely, Petróleos de Venezuela SA (Venezuela), Sonatrach (Algeria) and Ternium SA (Argentina) (which are neither WBCSD members nor Global Compact participants) — were included in the selected MNEs list. This was done to ensure a better regional distribution and to include more companies from Asia, Africa and Latin America. These three companies are part of the UNCTAD lists.

vii The regional distribution of the companies included in the selected MNEs list is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REGION</th>
<th>NUMBER OF COMPANIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North America</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australasia</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

viii The sectoral distribution of the companies included in the selected MNEs list is as follows (the classification is as used in the UNCTAD lists):

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Finally, the selected MNEs list was further refined in the following manner: the top five companies from each of North America, Latin/South America, Europe, Asia, and Africa were selected for review of their corporate social responsibility/sustainable development policies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECTOR CLASSIFICATION</th>
<th>NUMBER OF COMPANIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aircraft</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemicals and allied products</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer and data processing</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer equipment</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity, gas and water</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food and beverages</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metals and metals products</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining, quarrying and petroleum</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor vehicles</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petroleum refining and related industries</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharmaceuticals</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail trade</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stone, clay, glass, and concrete products</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telecommunications</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale trade</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

REFERENCES


Implemented jointly by ICTSD and the World Economic Forum, the E15 Initiative was established to convene world-class experts and institutions to generate strategic analysis and recommendations for government, business, and civil society geared towards strengthening the global trade and investment system for sustainable development.