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Global Environmental Governance and the Accountability Trap

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Global Environmental Governance (GEG) refers to the vast network of entities that embrace and support international cooperation based on the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. As defined by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), GEG is the overarching concept that unifies the organisations, policies, financial mechanisms, rules, procedures and norms that regulate the activities of environmental stakeholders worldwide.

The remarkable evolution of global participation in environmental governance has given rise to a complex network of treaties, secretariats, conventions, intergovernmental organisations and non-governmental organisations, working in partnership with public and private-sector actors. On 25 September 2019 a conference was held at Columbia University to discuss the Global Pact for the Environment. This effort demonstrates ongoing efforts to strengthen the foundations of environmental governance and sustainable development, making explicit the human right to the environment and establishing the correlative features of the U.N. Agenda 2030 for sustainable development and international law.

This is the forum of interests navigated by editors Susan Park and Teresa Kramarz in their collection of essays, *Global Environmental Governance and the Accountability Trap*. As the title suggests, the eight chapters present focused topics on the strengths and limits of traditional accountability methods and best practices as instruments to capture the multi-dimensional relationship of the environment to the interests of stakeholders representing public and private entities. On 25 September 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted seventeen sustainable development goals (SDGs), which are the building blocks of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Mechanisms that hold decision-makers to account when acting on behalf of a larger group are essential to the follow-up and review process at all levels of governance. As members of the Task Force on Accountability in Global Environmental Governance in the Earth System Governance project, a subsidiary venture of the international research programme Future Earth, hosted by Utrecht University, Park and Kramarz created a community of environmental scholars to conduct a comprehensive study of accountability across the GEG landscape. This volume of essays is the culmination of a carefully researched effort to document current modes of accountability across public, private, voluntary and hybrid institutions and their effectiveness in meeting environmental goals.

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The intent of this inquiry into global environmental accountability is presented in the first introductory section and chapter, 'Identifying Multiple Accountabilities in Global Environmental Governance'. Kramarz and Park address the paradox that while accountability measures are operational across the spectrum of institutions and organisations serving as environmental advocates, nevertheless critical environmental indicators continue their worrisome decline. This statistical 'trap' makes apparent the influence of authoritative, higher-level objectives on the implementation and measurement of an institution's programmes over time. Goal-setting strategies and their proposed outcomes establish the priorities that determine how environmental conditions are calculated, if at all.

To effectively capture the cascade of inputs affecting the decision-making processes of various types of institution, each individual study is structured to address a core set of questions. Each chapter begins with a preliminary review of the goals that determine the design of an institution, how the selected goals influence the accounting process, and to what extent the accounting mechanisms create an effective feedback loop to hold authority accountable for the institution's effects on environmental indicators. This system of observation lays the groundwork for an analysis of goals and their outcomes, and a description of alternative choices that could yield stronger benefits to the environment. It also highlights the limits of accountability standards for strengthening environmental governance.

Public, private, voluntary and hybrid environmental institutions have 'distinct logics of action' that determine their accountability standards and practices. These unique factors are parsed by the contributing authors in the second and third sections, with a conclusion by the editors in section four. In sections two and three, three groups of scholars in each group address sub-topics related to particular threads of analysis. Section two authors pose the challenge, 'Analyzing the Goals of Accountability in Global Environmental Governance', and section three authors continue with 'Analyzing the Means of Accountability in Global Accountability'. In conclusion, the editors ask the question, 'Does Accountability Matter for Global Environmental Governance?'

Section two opens with an introduction to the complex reporting and review systems governing the multilateral climate regime established by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). This convention was adopted in 1992 as an outcome of the historic June 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), or Earth Summit, held in Rio de Janeiro. The UNFCCC, the Kyoto Protocol of 1997 and the Paris Climate Agreement of 2015 are the foundations of what is known as the international climate change 'regime', supporting a network of rules, procedures and assessments that guide the international effort to mitigate climate change. Authors Aarti Gupta and Harro van Aselt address the unprecedented challenges of establishing 'Transparency and Accountability in Multilateral

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Climate Politics'. Transparency is a key dimension of critical state-to-state negotiations and is tagged in a detailed review of the UNFCCC, the Kyoto Protocol, the Cancun Agreements and the Paris Agreement. Accountability 'lapses' are considered as an outcome of the critical differences that divide developed and developing countries, confounding efforts to determine 'who is accountable and to whom' and 'for what?'

Chapter three shifts to another transnational arrangement, the corporation. Global value chains have become important loci for environmental critique. Points of accountability include the environmental impacts of a corporate venture on the local community that supports it; the customers, shareholders and employees invested in a company; and the '... nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), trade unions, political groups, social movements, communities, and any other group with an interest in the corporation' (p. 64). These are the concepts that underscore Hamish van der Ven's essay, 'Private Accountability in Global Value Chains'.

This section concludes with an overview of 'Participation versus Performance: The Crisis of Accountability for Environmental Nongovernmental Organizations' by Cristina M. Balboa. She examines how accountability relationships in volunteer organisations are constrained by conflicting messages regarding the mission of an organisation, and its implementation strategy. The concepts of multiple accountabilities disorder (MAD) and single accountability disorder (SAD) are used to categorize the pressures that influence the effectiveness of ENGOs, whose increasing participation, power and public presence in GEG contribute to the desire for more effective accountability instruments.

Section three, 'Analyzing the Means of Accountability in Global Environmental Governance', introduces the dynamics of hybrid institutions representing both public and private interests. Authors Oscar Widerberg, Phillipp Pattberg and Lieke Brouwer consider 'Hybrid Accountability in Cooperative Initiatives for Global Climate Governance'. As they state in their introduction, climate change is a lodestone for cooperative global governance initiatives. Current climate change activism has broadened the original multi-level response of the United Nations Framework Conventions on Climate Change (UNFCCC) as public and private institutions create a dense polycentric web of influence. These new configurations of authority pose unique challenges for the creation of accountability and compliance mechanisms. The authors present a series of case studies and a comparison of the means of accountability across the four cases presented.

In chapter six, Lars H. Gulbrandsen and Graeme Auld present an extended case study of transnational nonstate certification programmes in their essay, 'Navigating Contested Accountability Logics in Nonstate Certification for Fisheries Sustainability'. Following the research design presented in the introductory chapter, the authors highlight an extended analysis of the entanglement

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of first and second tier governance logics. While authority holders take their cues and are evaluated by external audiences, second tier players confront the complexities of implementation within a broad landscape of competing interests. Lorraine Elliott and William H. Schaedla present another timely case study in chapter seven, ‘Accountability in Public-Voluntary Governance: The Case of Illegal Wildlife Trade’. Like the previous essay, the authors focus on the second tier of GEG: the execution and enforcement of environmental interventions and sanctions.

Does accountability matter for global environmental governance? At the conclusion of their work, Park and Kramarz comment, ‘... accountability is a means to an end, and as such must be measured against its dual promise: improving environmental outcomes and being responsive to stakeholders affected by environmental problems’ (p. 199). Further, they highlight the need to shift the focus of accountability processes ‘... to who, what, and why questions of environmental action, which informs the design of interventions and underpin any subsequent effort of implementation’ (p. 217).

A comprehensive list of acronyms is included in the introductory materials of this collection, and a generous bibliography of resources, a topic index, and an acknowledgement of the contributing authors are provided for further inquiry into the landscape of GEG literature and scholarship.

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